Solipsismo, Solidão e Finitude

Algumas lições de Strawson, Wittgenstein e Cavell sobre metafísica e método filosófico

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul
Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Filosofia

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Tese apresentada ao Programa de Pós Graduação em Filosofia da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul como requisito parcial à obtenção do grau de Doutor em Filosofia.

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Para Karina

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I have heard the key

Turn in the door once and turn once only

We think of the key, each in his prison

thinking of the key, each confirms a prison

T. S. Eliot[1]

Philosophy's virtue is responsiveness. What makes it philosophy is not that its response will be total, but that it will be tireless, awake when the others have all fallen asleep.

Stanley Cavell[2]

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

Ludwig Wittgenstein[3]

... and everything in philosophy is provisional ...

Peter Strawson[4]

1 *The Waste Land*, sec. III: 'The Fire Sermon'.
2 Cavell, 1989, p. 74.
3 CV, p. 16.
4 SN, p. 24.

Resumo

O presente estudo é constituído de cinco ensaios relativamente autossuficientes, mas redigidos tendo em vista um objetivo comum, que será perseguido por várias vias—a saber, a exploração de um núcleo de problemas filosóficos relacionados com a possibilidade, e com a própria inteligibilidade, do solipsismo. Os resultados obtidos nesses ensaios, assim como os caminhos que levam a eles, pretendem servir como *exemplos* para a extração de lições mais gerais sobre o método filosófico, e sobre a própria natureza humana. O procedimento adotado para esse fim consiste na leitura de um conjunto de escritos de filósofos contemporâneos que refletiram profundamente sobre o solipsismo—sobretudo Peter Strawson, Ludwig Wittgenstein, e Stanley Cavell. A tese central à qual procuro fornecer suporte por meio dessas leituras é que o solipsismo é uma resposta intelectualizada, e *radical*, a um conjunto de dificuldades práticas ou existenciais relacionadas com a finitude da condição humana. (Essas mesmas dificuldades originam respostas menos radicais, que são manifestas por meio de outras "posições filosóficas"—ou, pelo menos, é isso que tentarei mostrar.) Estar sujeito a essas dificuldades implica estar permanentemente sujeito à ameaça da solidão, da privacidade e da perda de sintonia em relação ao mundo e aos demais sujeitos. Reconhecer e levar a sério a possibilidade dessa ameaça implica reconhecer que somos, individual e imprevisivelmente, responsáveis por superá-la (um ponto que é notado, mas superestimado, pelo cético, que interpreta nossos limites como limitações), bem como reconhecer a força da tentação (demasiado humana) de tentar reprimi-la (como faz o dogmático/realista metafísico) ou sublimá-la (como faz o idealista/solipsista). Buscar uma filosofia aberta ao reconhecimento de que nossa experiência é essencialmente limitada e condicionada—em especial, pelo fato de que temos *corpos,* e com eles vontades, desejos, temores, fixações e sentimentos *que não escolhemos*, e que informam nossa racionalidade e moldam nossas atitudes em relação ao mundo e aos demais sujeitos—é parte da tarefa contínua de aceitação de nossa finitude, em direção à qual o presente estudo pretende ter dado os primeiros passos.

Abstract

This study consists of five essays which are nearly self-contained, yet written with a common goal, which will be pursued by various routes—namely, the exploration of a core of philosophical problems having to do with the possibility, and the very intelligibility, of solipsism. The results obtained in these essays, as well as the paths leading to them, are intended to serve as *examples* from which some general lessons about the philosophical method, and about human nature itself, are to be drawn. The procedure adopted for that end consists in reading a set of writings by contemporary philosophers who have thought deeply about solipsism—most notably Peter Strawson, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Stanley Cavell. The central thesis to which I seek to provide support through those readings is that solipsism is an intellectualized response, and a *radical* one at that, to a set of practical or existential difficulties related to the finitude of the human condition. (Those same difficulties may as well promt less radical responses, which are expressed by other "philosophical positions"—or so I shall try to show.) Being subjected to those difficulties implies being permanently subjected to the threat of loneliness, of privacy, of loosing attunement with the world and others. To acknowledge and to take seriously the possibility of that threat means to acknowledge that we are responsible, individually and unpredictably, for coming to grips with it (a point which is noted, but overrated, by the skeptic, who takes our limits as limitations), as well as acknowledging the strength of the (all-too-human) temptation of trying to repress it (as does the dogmatic/metaphysical realist) or to sublimate it (as does the idealist / solipsist). To seek an attitude open to the acknowledgement that our experience is essentially limited and conditioned—in particular, by the fact that we have *bodies*, and with them wills, desires, fears, fixations and feelings *that we do not choose*, and which inform our rationality and shape our attitudes toward the world and others—is part of the continuous task of accepting our finitude, a goal toward which I claim to have taken some preliminary steps with this study.

Apresentação

A presente tese é composta (como faculta a Resolução nº 093/2007, da Câmara Pós-Graduação da UFRGS) de cinco capítulos redigidos em inglês, os quais serão posteriormente submetidos a publicação como artigos separados. O título, esta Apresentação e o Epílogo estão redigidos em português, respeitando as exigências para uma tese nesse formato. Apesar de serem relativamente autossuficientes, os capítulos que compõem esta tese foram escritos tendo em vista um objetivo comum—a saber, a exploração de um núcleo de problemas filosóficos relacionados com a possibilidade, e com a própria inteligibilidade, do solipsismo. Os resultados obtidos, assim como os caminhos que levaram a eles, pretenderam servir como exemplos para a extração de lições mais gerais sobre metodologia filosófica, e sobre metafísica—compreendida como uma investigação das condições de possibilidade do ser, senão *enquanto ser*, pelo menos enquanto ser *para nós*, isto é, para sujeitos finitos capazes de se tornarem conscientes da própria finitude. O procedimento adotado para esse fim consistiu na leitura de um conjunto de escritos de filósofos contemporâneos que refletiram profundamente sobre questões relacionadas com a possibilidade do solipsismo—sobretudo Peter Strawson, Ludwig Wittgenstein, e Stanley Cavell. A tese central à qual procurei fornecer suporte por meio dessas leituras é que o solipsismo é uma resposta intelectualizada, e *radical*, a um conjunto de dificuldades práticas ou existenciais relacionadas com a finitude da condição humana. Uma tese secundária, defendida em alguns contextos, foi que essas mesmas dificuldades originam respostas intelectualizadas menos radicais, que são manifestas por meio de outras "posições filosóficas", tais como o ceticismo, o idealismo, e o anti-individualismo.

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Peter Hacker define o solipsismo como "a doutrina de acordo com a qual nada existe além de mim mesmo e de meus estados mentais"[5]. Essa definição parece clara e direta—mas será mesmo? Afinal, o que se quer dizer quando se diz que o solipsismo é uma "doutrina"? Qual pode ser o *propósito* de se aplicar essa denominação, uma vez que—ao contrário de outras assim chamadas "doutrinas filosóficas"—não parece ter existido nenhum filósofo

[5] Hacker, 1986, p. 216.

disposto a defendê-la? Uma razão potencial é que a mera possibilidade lógica ou conceitual dessa posição possa ser de interesse, visando a uma espécie de "estudo comparativo" com outras doutrinas filosóficas. Mas essa resposta pressupõe justamente o que está em questão—a saber, que doutrinas filosóficas sejam essencialmente *impessoais,* e que, como tais, possam ser caracterizadas e identificadas de maneira puramente abstrata*,* independentemente de sabermos quais sejam as motivações concretas que poderiam levar alguém a defendê-las. Se abandonarmos esse pressuposto, pode começar a parecer intrigante que o solipsismo tenha essa função peculiar no imaginário filosófico, de servir como uma espécie de *anátema universal*—algo de que os autores tentam afastar-se, de maneira mais ou menos consciente, ou que eles simplesmente não levam muito a sério.

Visando a investigar quais poderiam ser as reais motivações por trás dessa atitude, sugeri que considerássemos algumas dificuldades que, se intelectualizadas, poderiam levar alguém a sentir-se pelo menos *tentado* por uma "doutrina solipsista". O resultado foi a apresentação de um conjunto essencialmente aberto de fatos característicos da experiência de seres conscientes finitos, e cuja atestação pode, pelo menos em alguns estados de ânimo e em algumas circunstâncias, gerar uma sensação de insatisfação em relação ao próprio caráter condicionado de nossa experiência—em particular, a nossa separação do mundo e dos demais sujeitos—fazendo-nos ver nossos *limites* como *limitações*, ou seja, como algo que gostaríamos de *transcender*, em vez de *aceitar*, *testar* e *explorar*. Dentre esses fatos encontram-se os seguintes: (i) que não podemos ver o mundo como um todo, mas apenas parcialmente e a partir de uma perspectiva particular, de modo que somos obrigados a reconhecer que o nosso estatuto como seres corpóreos finitos simplesmente exclui a possibilidade da onipresença; (ii) que não podemos mudar o passado ou prever o futuro, de modo que podemos nos sentir simultaneamente impotentes e sobrecarregados ao termos de escolher um curso (presente) de ação que pode resultar desastroso; (iii) que podemos, assim como as pessoas à nossa volta, dissimular e esconder nossos sentimentos e pensamentos, ou simplesmente sentirmo-nos incapazes de exprimi-los e compartilhá-los, de modo que nossos corpos e nossos comportamentos podem acabar sendo vistos como *barreiras* separando nossas mentes; ou ainda (iv) que podemos observar que aquilo que expressamos por vezes escapa ao nosso controle, de modo que nossa própria identidade, ou auto-concepção, pode parecer estar em risco.

Um ser cuja experiência é caracterizada por condições como essas está sempre sujeito a sentir-se só, isolado, fora de sintonia com o mundo e com os demais—seja porque pode sempre acabar fechando-se para os outros, ou evitando aceitar o mundo como ele é, ou porque os outros podem sempre deixar de reconhecê-lo, ou de aceitar que o mundo em que habitam é o mesmo que ele habita. Chamei essa possibilidade de ameaça da solidão, e argumentei que ela pode estar na origem de pelo menos duas espécies de reações intelectualizadas que poderiam levar alguém a sentir-se tentado por uma "doutrina solipsista". A primeira reação seria ela própria uma *versão* intelectualizada da solidão—um deslocamento da dificuldade de aceitarmos nossa separação metafísica do mundo e dos demais sujeitos, que pode levar à conclusão de que é simplesmente impossível *darmos sentido* à ideia de que possa existir alguma coisa além de nossas próprias experiências privadas. A segunda reação seria uma tentativa intelectualizada de *superar* a ameaça da solidão—resultando, na verdade, em uma espécie de repressão, que substituiria a nossa finitude e a nossa separação metafísica por uma fantasia filosófica onde toda a realidade resultaria "coordenada com o sujeito", de modo que a experiência desse sujeito abraçaria *tudo o que existe*, e ele próprio desapareceria (o solipsismo como a forma mais pura e mais direta de realismo).

Pode-se dizer que essas reações correspondem, respectivamente, ao copo "meio-vazio" e ao copo "meio-cheio" do solipsismo. Ora, se eu estiver certo ao indicar que as dificuldades que estão na base dessas reações são possibilidades permanentes para qualquer ser humano, o solipsismo (em ambas as interpretações) pode ser visto como uma tentativa radical de suprimir ou de reprimir a nossa própria humanidade. Se for assim, o confronto com a tentação solipsista se apresenta como uma estratégia metodológica privilegiada: embora a *resposta* solipsista possa não parecer satisfatória para a maioria de nós, ela ao menos aponta para o verdadeiro *problema* que é suscitado pelo confronto com nossos limites, e que pode estar na base de outras reações filosóficas menos radicais. E é isso que explica, pelo menos em parte, o interesse dos autores estudados nesta tese pelas dificuldades relacionadas com a finitude e com a possibilidade do solipsismo.

Uma maneira sucinta de indicar a importância dessas dificuldades na filosofia de Strawson é chamando atenção para a seguinte passagem de *Individuals*, que estabelece uma diretriz metodológica fundamental para seu projeto de metafísica descritiva:

> Nossos métodos, ou critérios de re-identificação devem tolerar fatos como estes: que o campo de nossa observação é limitado; que dormimos; que nos movemos. Ou seja, eles devem tolerar o fato de que não podemos, em nenhum momento, observar a totalidade da estrutura espacial que usamos, que não há nenhuma parte dessa estrutura que possamos observar de forma contínua, e que nós mesmos não ocupamos uma posição fixa dentro dela. (IN 32)

A preocupação com a finitude ilustrada nessa passagem perpassa a obra de Strawson; mas ela por vezes parece entrar em conflito com o ideal kantiano de fornecer uma descrição *geral* da *estrutura conceitual* que usamos para dar objetividade à nossa experiência. Esse conflito é expresso de maneira particularmente perspícua no capítulo 3 de *Individuals*, onde Strawson analisa a noção de um "sujeito de experiência", e as condições para se alcançar uma "consciência não-solipsista" do mundo. Como procurei mostrar em minha reconstrução dessa análise (ver seção 1.2), Strawson acena para a ideia de que exista um importante papel a ser desempenhado por uma atitude engajada em relação aos outros na constituição de uma consciência não-solipsista; contudo, dado o nível de generalidade em que essa análise é perseguida em *Individuals*—com escassa referência às *práticas* que dotam os nossos conceitos de significado—o resultado mostra-se demasiado esquemático, e fica muito aquém do fornecimento de uma representação *realista* dos temas centrais daquele capítulo—especialmente a noção de "pessoa", e as condições de atribuição de predicados psicológicos.

Strawson fornece alguns elementos para complementarmos esse esboço em seus escritos posteriores, começando com o ensaio "Freedom and Resentment", que trata de uma variedade de atitudes reativas que caracterizam nossos relacionamentos interpessoais. Em comparação com a postura asséptica de *Individuals*, a metodologia ilustrada nesse ensaio certamente representa um avanço, na medida em que aponta mais claramente para as possíveis consequências *práticas* da adoção de uma atitude distanciada em relação aos outros. Mas há uma limitação importante nessa abordagem, sintetizada na alegação de que

nossas atitudes de envolvimento e de participação não seriam suprimidas "nem mesmo se alguma verdade geral fornecesse uma base teórica para isso" (FR 12). Ao tratar a adoção generalizada de uma atitude distanciada como uma *mera possibilidade lógica*, mas que seria *humana e praticamente impossível*, Strawson mostra-se comprometido com uma concepção limitada das possibilidades acessíveis a seres como nós, e das consequentes *responsabilidades* que essa situação nos impõe, e é isso que finalmente lhe permite evadir a verdadeira dificuldade colocada pelo "problema do solipsismo"—a saber, o fato de que cabe *somente a nós* reconhecer a humanidade dos outros. Não há *nada* que possa garantir que esse reconhecimento estará sempre *disponível*—em particular, não o garante uma descrição do uso de nossos conceitos, e tampouco um apelo às nossas crenças e disposições naturais.

Essa reação otimista de Strawson em relação ao problema do reconhecimento do outro encontra um estreito paralelo em sua intransigente reação "naturalista" ao ceticismo sobre o "mundo exterior", que analisei na parte final do capítulo 1 (seção 1.4). A principal lição que extraí dessa análise é que, visando a evitar a espécie de evasão que essas reações ilustram, precisamos de uma metodologia alternativa, ou pelo menos melhorada, que leve *ainda mais a sério* as dificuldades colocadas pela atestação de nossa finitude, e que, *nesse sentido*, seja mais sensível às práticas em que a nossa "estrutura conceitual" está imersa—particularmente ao substrato afetivo da nossa vida cognitiva. Embora Strawson tenha dado alguns passos importantes nessa direção, penso que ele ficou aquém do que seria o ideal. Para seu crédito, o próprio Strawson foi o primeiro a salientar que é difícil obtermos um quadro completo da "verdade em filosofia", e é justamente por isso que acredito que a sugestão metodológica apresentada em minha conclusão possa ser vista como uma proposta de *continuação* do projeto de metafísica descritiva.

Essas considerações me trazem a Wittgenstein—um filósofo que, de maneira um tanto incomum para um membro da (assim chamada) tradição analítica, estava realmente ciente dessa exigência metodológica, e engajou-se de maneira sistemática em uma tentativa de reconhecer e de dar voz às insatisfações que estão na base da tentação solipsista. Nos capítulos 2 a 4—que lidam, respectivamente, com o *Tractatus*, as *Observações Filosóficas*

e o *Livro Azul*[6]—procurei fornecer ilustrações e aplicações da metodologia wittgensteiniana para lidar com a tentação solipsista. Cada um dos escritos analisados possui importantes peculiaridades, e minhas leituras procuraram manter-se fiéis a elas, acompanhando de perto o seu desenvolvimento textual e argumentativo. Como não seria possível indicar essas peculiaridades aqui, partirei de uma visão retrospectiva mais abrangente, tentando apenas indicar alguns traços metodológicos comuns a esses escritos, bem como aquele que me parece ser o mais importante desenvolvimento ocorrido durante o período em que eles foram redigidos.

O primeiro desses traços, expresso de modo um tanto polêmico, é este: nos escritos que analisei, Wittgenstein não esteve engajado nem em uma tentativa de *refutar* o solipsismo, nem em uma tentativa de *defendê-lo*; em vez disso, o que ele pretendeu fazer foi *dar voz* a essa "posição"—bem como a outras, por vezes antagônicas, que são por ela suscitadas—de modo a representá-las da maneira mais vívida e realista possível, visando a explorar *dialeticamente* os limites de sua própria inteligibilidade. Por terem sido pensados para funcionar assim, dialeticamente, esses escritos colocam uma responsabilidade incomum nas mãos de seus leitores, dos quais se espera que internalizem e que deem vida aos diálogos esboçados por Wittgenstein. Uma condição para o sucesso desse procedimento é a obtenção daquilo que por vezes chamei de *ressonância* entre o leitor e o texto—ressonância essa que pode ocorrer de maneira intermitente, alternada e até mesmo conflitante, variando de acordo com as tendências do leitor, bem como com as aspirações, tentações, dúvidas, questionamentos, pressuposições e preconceitos filosóficos alternadamente expressos no texto.

O fim último desse engajamento dialético é justamente uma "cura" por nossos próprios meios, passando pela demonstração sistemática de que, ao contrário do que fomos inicialmente tentados a supor, nossas variadas tentativas de fornecer sentido às "teses" e às "posições" filosóficas expressas no texto—e com as quais, se tudo tiver corrido bem, teremos por vezes nos identificado—acabam produzindo um de dois resultados igualmente insatisfatórios, do ponto de vista de nossas aspirações originais—a saber, (1) proferimentos *aparentemente* "substanciais", que embora estejam superficialmente de acordo com as

[6] A principal razão para concentrar-me nesses escritos é que eles constituem os contextos mais importantes onde Wittgenstein trata explicitamente de questões relacionadas com o solipsismo; no epílogo do capítulo 4 fornecerei algumas considerações sobre como a leitura perseguida nesses capítulos pode ser estendida ao tratamento da privacidade nas *Investigações Filosóficas*.

regras lógico-gramaticais, finalmente se mostram *vazios e sem sentido* (engrenagens rodando soltas); ou (2) proferimentos *significativos mas triviais*, isto é, que expressam fatos cotidianos completamente desprovidos de qualquer interesse metafísico especial. O que se mostra, em ambos os casos, é que as supostas "teses" e "posições" que somos tentados a expressar não constituem, como gostaríamos, descrições privilegiadas da "essência da realidade" (em oposição, digamos, a descrições *empíricas* de um conjunto de fatos contingentes), tratando-se, antes, de reações evasivas a certas dificuldades práticas que surgem em nosso confronto com essa realidade.

Mas para que esse (auto-)diagnóstico e a correspondente (auto-)terapia sejam realmente bem sucedidos, devemos estar preparados para contrariar velhos hábitos filosóficos, que podem estar profundamente arraigados. Face a esse desafio, é quase impossível não retrocedermos, tomando os lembretes gramaticais apresentados por Wittgenstein como novos caminhos, ou desculpas, para evadirmos essas dificuldades, reforçando a repressão das verdadeiras questões que estão na origem de nosso embaraço filosófico. Como o meu próprio engajamento com os escritos de Wittgenstein visou a ilustrar, não há instâncias externas e finais às quais possamos recorrer com o intuito de encontrar uma resolução para essa complicada situação (que é a um só tempo exegética, filosófica, e ética). Assim, cabe a cada um de nós a decisão de tomar as observações gramaticais de Wittgenstein como expressões finais e inquestionáveis de certos limites (metafísicos, lógicos ou gramaticais), ou como meros degraus em (grandes ou pequenas) escadas que deveriam ser jogadas fora, uma vez que o progresso terapêutico estivesse (ainda que momentaneamente) terminado.

Do modo como *eu* leio Wittgenstein, simplesmente não há resultados definitivos em sua filosofia. Isso explica, pelo menos em parte, por que seus escritos pós-tractarianos não têm —e, até onde sei, jamais foram destinados a ter—uma conclusão propriamente dita, sugerindo que a "última palavra" é "última" apenas contingentemente, e que o convite está sempre aberto para continuarmos o diálogo. É verdade que, como tentei mostrar, Wittgenstein ele próprio só veio a reconhecer tardia e gradualmente que não existe um procedimento *geral* para *evitarmos* as "doenças do intelecto" às quais estamos constitutiva e imprevisivelmente expostos—um papel que ele inicialmente atribuiu à "notação perspícua" desenvolvida no *Tractatus*, e depois, durante um curto período de tempo, à versão aprimorada dessa notação, a "linguagem fenomenológica" das *Observações Filosóficas*. Entretanto, como também sugeri, parece que Wittgenstein estava ciente, pelo

menos desde o *Tractatus,* de que a *cura* para doenças *já existentes* demanda um procedimento bastante complexo, que deve levar em consideração não apenas as dificuldades intelectuais e as confusões lógicas do interlocutor, mas também as dificuldades relativas à sua vontade. Para tanto, faz-se necessária uma ferramenta muito mais poderosa do que o suposto "método correto em filosofia" apresentado na proposição 6.53 do *Tractatus*—faz-se necessário o domínio de uma certa "arte", a qual Wittgenstein buscou incessantemente melhorar e desenvolver em seus escritos.

No capítulo final procurei pôr em prática algumas das lições metodológicas descritas acima, explorando as possíveis motivações compartilhadas por posições anti-individualistas sobre significado e conteúdo mental (representadas nos escritos de Saul Kripke, Hilary Putnam e Tyler Burge) e pela "solução cética" para o problema do significado proposta por Kripke no estudo sobre regras e linguagem privada, tomando como pano de fundo a crítica de Stanley Cavell àquilo que chamei de "modelo impessoal da normatividade". Uma maneira de tentar resumir o resultado dessa exploração é dizendo, em primeiro lugar, que assim como para Cavell haveria uma "verdade no ceticismo"[7]—tendo em vista que muitas vezes a insatisfação com nossos critérios não estaria exatamente injustificada, posto que eles realmente não podem *garantir* (impessoalmente) o nosso acordo, e, portanto, o significado do que dizemos—penso que há uma "verdade no solipsismo"—na medida em que, como tentei mostrar nos capítulos anteriores, essa posição se apresenta como uma intelectualização de dificuldades *reais* relativas à nossa condição finita; ora—e este é meu segundo ponto—o tipo de dificuldade que está na base da insatisfação cética e da reação solipsista também parece motivar os projetos dos anti-individualistas e de "Kripkenstein", na medida em que os primeiros visam ao restabelecimento de um vínculo direto entre, por um lado, nossos conteúdos mentais e o significado de nossas palavras, e por outro, o nosso "ambiente", e o segundo visa a promover uma análise "comunitarista" das atribuições de significado em termos de condições de asserção justificada. O que há de problemático em ambas as propostas é o compromisso tácito com uma imagem ou ideal *impessoal* da normatividade, que inverte o ônus da correção linguística, atribuindo-o exclusivamente a algo "externo"—seja ao

[7] Ver, por exemplo, 'Knowing and Acknowledging' (reimpresso em *Must We Mean What We Say?*), *The Claim of Reason e The Senses of Walden*, apenas para indicar os pricipais contextos onde essa ideia é defendida.

"ambiente" físico ou social, seja às "convenções" de uma comunidade—e dessa forma desconsidera a *responsabilidade individual* dos usuários da linguagem em estabelecer *juízos* compartilháveis, e, nessa medida, em criar e manter acordos linguísticos.

Visando a esclarecer essas alegações, vale recordar que, para Cavell, nossos critérios baseiam-se tanto nos interesses e nas necessidades humanas quanto na posse de uma "história natural" em comum; ora, dado que essa base está em constante mutação, nossos critérios devem estar permanentemente abertos a revisão, e, *nesse sentido*, devem estar sempre *sujeitos* ao repúdio favorecido pelo cético. Dada essa concepção da natureza dos critérios, Cavell é levado a concluir que Wittgenstein jamais pretendeu ter *negado* a possibilidade de uma "linguagem privada"; em vez disso, seu objetivo teria sido mostrar que a privacidade é uma *possibilidade humana permanente*—portanto, que a *superação* da privacidade deve ser sempre uma *conquista*, algo pelo qual cada um de nós tem de assumir pessoalmente a responsabilidade. A implicação é que, contrariamente ao que não poucos wittgensteinianos pensaram, descrever e arrolar nossos critérios não pode ser uma maneira de *refutar* o ceticismo; na verdade, o resultado mais provável dessa estratégia seria justamente o oposto—isto é, o reforço da atitude cética—dada a indicação da real fragilidade dos fundamentos de nosso acordo linguístico. Mas isso não significa que o ceticismo deveria ser simplesmente *aceito*: o cético pode ter razão em apontar (contra um adversário dogmático) que a existência do "mundo externo" ou de "outras mentes" não pode ser conhecida com inabalável certeza; entretanto, ele erra ao interpretar esse resultado como uma demonstração de que o mundo e as outras pessoas podem não ser *reais*; tudo que o ceticismo mostra é que a realidade do mundo e dos demais seres humanos não são funções de nosso *conhecimento*, e sim de nossa *aceitação* e de nosso *reconhecimento*—portanto, que os verdadeiros custos envolvidos no abandono cético do consentimento não são (apenas) epistêmicos e teóricos, mas sim afetivos e práticos, relacionados com um conjunto muito grande de tarefas e de compromissos, cujos limites não podem ser previstos por uma especulação *a priori*.

Tomando essa visão cavelliana como pano de fundo, procurei oferecer um contraponto à "imagem impessoal" do significado que parece estar na base tanto do anti-individualismo quanto da "solução cética" de Kripkenstein, tratando de lançar luz sobre nossas responsabilidades individuais, permanentes e imprevisíveis na busca de significado e de sentido—um resultado que não é exatamente cético, mas que reconhece e até mesmo

simpatiza com as motivações que estão na base do ceticismo, e que têm a ver com o reconhecimento de nossos *limites*, particularmente de nossa real separação e distância em relação ao mundo e aos demais sujeitos. Não fosse *possível* o ceticismo, teríamos justamente uma situação (solipsista) de total absorção do mundo pelo sujeito, ou—o que finalmente *dá na mesma*, como notou Wittgenstein já no *Tractatus*—do sujeito pelo mundo.

Uma forma de resumir os resultados obtidos ao final dessa análise consistiria em dizer, portanto, que não obstante as (aparentemente colossais) diferenças entre as posições anti-individualistas e a posição de Kripkenstein, por um lado, e a doutrina solipsista de imersão total do sujeito no mundo, por outro, há um sentido em que ambas podem ser vistas como respostas intelectualizadas a uma dificuldade existencial comum—a saber, a ansiedade suscitada pelo fato de que somos, individual e pessoalmente, responsáveis por tentar *superar* a ameaça da solidão, ou da privacidade, tentando estabelecer *juízos* compartilháveis sobre o mundo e sobre os demais sujeitos, e, nessa medida, tentando *reivindicar* uma comunidade de falantes. Nesse sentido, pode-se dizer que o capítulo final consistiu em uma nova tentativa de explorar a ideia de que, possivelmente contra as expectativas que acalentamos (pelo menos em alguns estados de ânimo) o *sentido* (do mundo, de nossas experiências, de nossas palavras, juízos e ações—e finalmente de nossas vidas) não é impessoal e externamente imposto ou assegurado.

***

Como a apresentação precedente indica, o foco de minhas leituras serão as "fontes primárias", o que implica que as disputas exegéticas ficarão, pelo menos na maior parte do tempo, relegadas a um segundo plano. Parte da razão para isso é que acredito que ainda existam novos e importantes *insights* a serem obtidos através de uma reavaliação dos escritos aqui tratados, ainda que eles já tenham recebido uma quantidade enorme de atenção. Sentirei-me mais do que satisfeito se minhas próprias leituras puderem servir como convites para que outros leitores refaçam caminhos já familiares (ou talvez nem tanto), por vezes a passos bastante lentos, de modo a permitir que prestem atenção a uma

ou outra característica da paisagem que possa ter passado despercebida, ou que possa ter sido subestimada em visadas anteriores.

Jônadas Techio

Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil

Novembro de 2009

List of contents

List of Abbreviations

BB Wittgenstein, L. *The Blue and Brown Books*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958.

BS Strawson, P. F. *The Bounds of Sense.* London: Methuen, 1966.

BT Wittgenstein, L. *The Big Typescript: TS 213 (German-English Scholar's Edition)*. C. Grant Luckhardt and Maximilian A. E. Aue (Eds. And Trs.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

CHU Cavell, S. *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism*. Oxford and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990.

CR Cavell, S. *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy*. Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1979.

FR Strawson, P. F. *Freedom and Resentment and other Essays*. London: Methuen, 1974.

IN Strawson, P. F. *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*. London and New York: Methuen, 1959 (1971 reprint).

K Kripke, S. *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*. Cambridge and Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982.

MWM Cavell, S. *Must We Mean What We Say?*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

NAT Cavell, S. 'Notes and afterthoughts on the opening of Wittgenstein's Investigations'. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

NB Wittgenstein, L. *Notebooks 1914-1916*. 2nd. Ed.. G. H. Von Wright & G.E.M Anscombe (Ed.), G.E.M Anscombe (Tr.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984.

OC Wittgenstein, L. *On Certainty*, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (eds.), G. E. M. Anscombe and D. Paul (trs.). Oxford: Blackwell, 1969.

PDAT Cavell, S. *Philosophy The Day After Tomorrow*. Harvard University Press, 2005.

PG Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Grammar*. R. Rhees (ed.), A. Kenny (tr.). Oxford: Blackwell, 1974.

PI Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations: The German Text, with a Revised English Translation*. 3a. Edição. G. E. M Anscombe (Ed. & Tr.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001

PO Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Occasions, 1912-1951*. Klagge, J. C. and Nordman, A. (eds.). Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hacket Pub. Co, 1993.

PR Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Remarks*. Rush Rhees (Ed.), Raymond Hargreaves & Roger White (Tr.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975.

RFM Wittgenstein, L. *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. 3rd. edition, revised and reset. G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees, and G. E. M. Anscombe (eds.). Oxford: Blackwell, 1978.

RPP I Wittgenstein, L. *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, Volume I*. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (eds.), G. E. M. Anscombe (tr.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980.

RPP II Wittgenstein, L. *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, Volume II*. Luckhardt, C. G. and Aue, M. (eds.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980.

SN Strawson, P. F. *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

SRLF Wittgenstein, L. 'Some Remarks on Logical Form' (In: PO).

TLP Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.* D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (Tr.), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974

WE Cavell, S. 'The Wittgensteinian Event'. In: Crary & Shieh (Eds.), *Reading Cavell.* Routledge: London and New York, 2006.

WLC Wittgenstein, L. *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge 1932-1935.* Alice Ambrose (Ed.). New York: Prometheus Books, 2001.

WWK Wittgenstein, L. *Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: Conversations Recorded by Friedrich Waismann.* B. McGuinness (ed.) Oxford: Blackwell, 1979.

Z Wittgenstein, L. *Zettel*. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (eds.), G. E. M. Anscombe (tr.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967.

Introduction

1.

> And now, why does man philosophize?—That is to say, why does he investigate the first causes and ultimate ends of things? Why does he seek the disinterested truth? For to say that all men have a natural tendency to know is true; but wherefore?
>
> Philosophers seek a theoretic or ideal starting-point for their human work, the work of philosophizing; but they are not usually concerned to seek the practical and real starting-point, the purpose. What is the object in making philosophy, in thinking it and then expounding it to one's fellows? What does the philosopher seek in it and with it? The truth for the truth's own sake? The truth, in order that we may subject our conduct to it and determine our spiritual attitude towards life and the universe comformably with it?
>
> Philosophy is a product of the humanity of each philosopher, and each philosopher is a man of flesh and bone who addresses himself to other men of flesh and bone like himself. And, let him do what he will, he philosophizes not with the reason only, but with the will, with the feelings, with the flesh and with the bones, with the whole soul and the whole body. It is the man that philosophizes. (Miguel de Unamuno, *Tragic Sense Of Life*)

The passage above delineates two very distinct (self-)images of philosophy's—and man's—nature. According to one image, philosophy would be a purely disinterested and theoretical pursuit, seeking for knowledge and truth for their own sake, guided only (or at least primarily) by reason; moreover—since man's essence is supposed to lie precisely in rationality—that quest would be the ultimate aim of man. According to another image, philosophy would be an ultimately interested and practical activity, whose wherefore would be to satisfy the needs of a fleshed and boned human being—i.e., not of "man" (this *abstract* entity), let alone of man *qua* rational animal (a rather narrow conception of what can lead one to philosophize), but of a *concrete* man or woman, whose being involves not only (or even primarily) reason and thinking, but also will and feelings—hence desires, expectations, cravings, anxieties, fears, passions, and so on. Unamuno connects the former image with an ideal—I take him to mean: ideal*ized*—starting point sought by philosophers, in which contemplation would come first, and would ground man's conduct and attitudes toward the world and others. That idealized starting point is contrasted with the real—if

denied or repressed—starting point of *all* human work, which is again a concrete, fleshed and boned human being himself or herself, with his or her various (and often conflicting) needs, desires, aversions and fixations.

Now I do not think abstract dichotomies should ever replace the careful examination of details and differences of particular cases. Actually, that seems to be Unamuno's own considered view on the matter. Therefore, I think we should take the distinction he presents as a mere starting point, or frame, to guide such an examination of details. That said, I would like to highlight two interesting implications that seem to follow from that initial assessment. The first is that, notwithstanding the expectations created by the passage, we might be well advised not to *take for granted* that there is—or there must be—an answer to its opening question, in that perhaps there simply is no such a thing as a why and wherefore to "man's" need to philosophize[8]. The second implication is that, given the widespread and generally unquestioned acceptance of (some version of) that first image of philosophy's aims, a pervasive self-deception may be involved in our traditional philosophical (self-)assessments. If that is right, the question arises of why should us philosophers prefer to (have to?) deceive ourselves that way—to deny or to repress, perhaps to sublimate, the fundamental role played by our wills and feelings, by our embodied needs, indulging in such a fantasy of a purely contemplative pursuit of truth and knowledge? And how can we (how can *I*?) hope to be able to overcome that self-deception in our (my) own philosophizing? Again, what would a philosophy willing to acknowledge that (all-too-human) tendency to deny or repress our own humanity look like?

2. Those are important and difficult questions, to which I have no good—let alone final—answers to offer. Yet, as they will remain always in the horizon of my reflections in what follows, I hope some fragments of answers shall emerge here and there. My primary reason for voicing those questions in this Introduction is that they shall prompt me to try to make

[8] Actually Unamuno himself argues for an answer to that question in the book from which I quoted, identifying a 'personal and affective starting-point of all philosophy', which is precisely the 'tragic sense of life' alluded in its title—'the longing not to die, the hunger for personal immortality, the effort whereby we tend to persist indefinitely in our own being' (see the conclusion of ch. II). Although I find that answer rather engaging, it suffices for my limited purposes here to suggest that we should think seriously about whether it is (still?) possible to take *any* such answer for granted—in other words, whether it is possible to philosophize without first calling into question the very meaning, or purpose, of a philosophical enterprise, hence, without (re)thinking one's own relation to the whole tradition, in order to (hopefully) re-inherit and continue it.

clear—to myself, and to the reader—the purpose of the following philosophical exercises. I shall start at the beginning, giving some clues as to what I mean by the notions mentioned in the title of this dissertation—namely, solipsism, loneliness, and finitude—and explaining *why* and *how* I think one should care about them—as well as why I think philosophers have often not cared about them for the right reasons.

Starting with solipsism, here is a simple, rather unremarkable definition: 'Solipsism is the doctrine according to which nothing exists save myself and mental states of myself'[9].—I said unremarkable, because this is how philosophers *use to think* of solipsism—not that any of them really *hold* that position[10]. Yet, come to think of it, what could be *more* remarkable? Who, except a madman, would dare to subscribe to such a "doctrine"? And if there is no *real* philosopher—no concrete human being—willing to hold it, then what is the point of saying that solipsism is a philosophical "position" to begin with?

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[9] Hacker, 1986, p. 216. A more elaborate definition to the same effect is given by Stephen P. Thornton in the entry 'Solipsism and the Problem of Other Minds', in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:

> Solipsism is sometimes expressed as the view that 'I am the only mind which exists,' or 'My mental states are the only mental states.' However, the sole survivor of a nuclear holocaust might truly come to believe in either of these propositions without thereby being a solipsist. Solipsism is therefore more properly regarded as the doctrine that, in principle, 'existence' means for me *my* existence and that of *my* mental states. [...] For the solipsist, it is not merely the case that he believes that his thoughts, experiences, and emotions are, as a matter of contingent fact, the only thoughts, experiences, and emotions. Rather, the solipsist can attach no meaning to the supposition that there could be thoughts, experiences, and emotions other than his own. In short, the true solipsist understands the word 'pain,' for example, to mean 'my pain.' He cannot accordingly conceive how this word is to be applied in any sense other than this exclusively egocentric one. (Thornton [*online*] <http://www.iep.utm.edu/s/solipsis.htm>)

[10] Of course many philosophical attempts to elucidate the nature of our experience have been accused of, at the very least, tending to conclusions which are very close to that expressed by the solipsistic doctrine; this is particularly true of the modern epistemological tradition. In order to see that, recall how much discussion has been (and continues to be) generated by the reception of, say, Descartes's polemical proof of the existence of an "external world" in the *Meditations*, or Locke's harsh appeal to the 'material substance' to the same effect. In fact, it was partially because of the problems perceived in those positions that Berkeley ended up claiming that all we can know to exist are the ideas immediately given to our perception. A similar (epistemologically restrictive) position was held by Hume, whose theory of the 'bundle of perceptions' continued to exert influence in those empiricist positions entangled with *sense-data, qualia*, and other similar notions connected with "indirect realisms" of many sorts. Finally, let us recall how much of the discussions concerning the so-called German Idealism centred around the question of whether Kant could be freed of the accusation of solipsism (which was voiced by Jacobi and other critics only few months after the publication of his first *Critique*—a story I tell in Techio, 2005, ch. 1). Now, notwithstanding the reactions of critics in the history of philosophy, the fact remains that no philosopher seemed willing to really *draw* what those critics describe as the inevitable consequence of their initial premises. Why is it so? (I shall come back to this question)

Now we may start to get a better grip on Unamuno's point. For suppose one is convinced —as the self-deceived philosopher depicted in Unamuno's passage is—that philosophy is an essentially disinterested argumentative activity, which aims at obtaining truth—or at least clarity—by means of a dialectical contest of theses and counter-theses; given that general aim, the greater the diversity of positions the better; now—so our philosopher would continue—it suffices for something to count as a philosophical position in that sense that it can be characterized by some clear and distinct thesis, or a set of them—regardless of their being held by any real human being. And solipsism, as characterized above, entirely satisfies that requirement, in that it can be easily distinguished from, and, consequently, dialectically contrasted with, a series of other philosophical positions such as, say, realism, anti-realism, idealism, skepticism, and so on.

And yet, one can easily find *real* philosophers supporting any of the other sorts of philosophical positions mentioned above. Then why is it otherwise with solipsism? (Is it because solipsism is too far removed from our "pre-philosophical intuitions" even to be (seriously) envisaged as an actual conclusion of philosophical argumentation? But then again, pre-philosophical intuitiveness alone will not do, since many philosophers are rather proud to defend many sorts of (self-proclaimed) radically counter-intuitive views from time to time, no matter how far-fetched and even unlivable they might be.) I must again admit that I do not have a simple, uncontentious answer to that question—anyway none briefer than this whole dissertation itself. Actually, it also strikes me as remarkable that solipsism has this peculiar fate among philosophers of serving as a mere strawman, an imaginary adversary in the philosophical field to be (sometimes rather too quickly) knocked down, instead of being treated as a position worthy of serious consideration by itself[11].—What is so special—so disturbing?—about solipsism that makes it be seen as at most a temptation, a disease from whose infection philosophers try—more or less consciously—to escape?

In order to start answering those questions, let us suppose—as Unamuno asks us to do—that philosophical "problems" and "positions", as traditionally understood and presented, are actually intellectualized versions of perplexities and difficulties related to the human

[11] One here might ask: 'Is there *any* philosophical position which is exempt from "serving as a mere strawman" etc.?' To that I would answer: of course not. Yet that is not exactly my point; in saying that solipsism has 'a *peculiar* fate among philosophers [etc.]' I want to call attention to the fact that this position, contrarily to others, is virtually *universally* despised and not taken seriously in philosophy—an unanimity which is very hard to find concerning any other philosophical issue.

needs of each concrete philosopher. With that supposition in place, let us ask ourselves whether we can find a set of such perplexities and difficulties, which might be recognizably linked to the solipsistic "doctrine", as defined above. Here is my initial attempt at providing such an (essentially open-ended) list—amounting to a set of reminders of discontentments that can be caused in our ordinary exchanges, due to such facts as these: (i) that one cannot see the world as a whole, apart from a particular and partial perspective, so that one might realize that one's experience is not omnipresent, hence limited; (ii) that one cannot change the past or foresee the future, so that one might feel simultaneously powerless and burdened by having to choose a (present) course of action which might well turn out to be the wrong one; (iii) that people (including oneself) can (and often do) dissimulate their feelings, or simply hide them from others, so that one cannot point to someone's feelings as one can point to her behaviour; (iv) that one might feel unable to express (hence share) one's own feelings and experiences, thus finding oneself unknown, and unable to make oneself known, so that one's humanity is at stake; or again (v) that one might feel that what one expresses goes beyond one's control, so that it is one's identity, or self-conception, that is at stake.

Those are all facts related to the finite condition of a being who (at least in some moods and circumstances) might see its limits as limitations, thus becoming dissatisfied with its separation from the world and others, wishing (or even craving) not to be finite; now for someone—say me—to be in that condition means for me to be always exposed to the possibility of loneliness, of loosing my attunement with the world and others—be it because I can always end up closing myself to others, or avoiding to accept the world as it is, or because others can always fail to acknowledge me, or to accept that the world they inhabit is the same as the one I inhabit.

Now, there are at least two ways of (re)interpreting the "doctrine" of solipsism so as to recover its (possible) existential sources, thus allowing one to see that position as an intellectualized response to that which I shall refer collectively as the threat of loneliness. The first (re)interpretation is this: solipsism itself may be an intellectualized *version* of loneliness—a displaced reaction, say, to the realization that one is (metaphysically) separated from the world and others—which might lead one to conclude that it is simply impossible to make so much as *sense* of the idea of there being anything *outside* or *beyond* one's own (private) experiences. Here is the second possibility: solipsism may be an

intellectualized attempt at *overcoming* that sort of loneliness—actually resulting in a repression of it—replacing by it a fantasy in which *all reality* ends up coordinated with the self, so that one's experiences would actually embrace all there is to be experienced—as if with no rest—and the subject him/herself would, in a sense, disappear, thus allowing solipsism to coincide with the purest and more direct realism[12].

One might see each interpretation of that pair as (respectively) the half-empty and the half-full glasses of solipsism. Both are rather radically intellectualized reactions to a set of real (and, at least in some moods, threatening) difficulties which might be felt by finite beings like us, endowed with such capacities and burdens as we have of taking up our (limited and conditioned) experiences of the world and others, endowing them with meaning and purpose—or failing to. And since facing those difficulties seems to be a standing possibility for any (finite) human being, solipsism (on both interpretations) might be seen as a radical attempt at deflecting or repressing our very humanity; as such, solipsism contrasts *both* with the other, more common—precisely because less radical, hence less conspicuous—philosophical attempts at deflection[13], and with a more resolute attempt at acknowledging and accepting our finitude. And that seems to be part of the reason why—with few exceptions—philosophers have often displayed such uncommon anxiety in their dismissive attitudes toward solipsism, as if it alone could (should?) not be allowed the benefit of serious consideration.

3. That brings me to my subtitle, and thus to the philosophers whose proper names I therein cite—*viz.*, Strawson, Wittgenstein and Cavell—as well as to my reasons for going back to their writings, seeking for some lessons about the correct way to tackle the issues of solipsism, loneliness and finitude. As we shall see in due course, it is a common—if sometimes insufficiently acknowledged—feature of their works that they have paid a remarkable amount of attention to those issues (by any other names) in their respective attempts at coming to grips with the nature of human experience. Also—and, I take it, not

[12] I am in this paragraph echoing passages from Wittgenstein (esp. in section 5.6 of the *Tractatus*), as well as from Floyd's reading of those and other passages (1998, esp. p. 104). I shall examine the original passages from both authors at length in chapter 2.

[13] An implication which I shall explore later is that the remaining "positions" mentioned above—e.g., realism, anti-realism and skepticism, in their multiple manifestations—might also be seen as deflections, although more palatable (because less radical) ones, if compared to solipsism.

by chance—one can find in their approaches a central methodological concern with disclosing the ultimate sources and consequences of the philosophical problems and positions with which they engage—sources and consequences which, as we shall see, will include precisely those existential, non-cognitive, emotional, affective—in a word, embodied—difficulties and perplexities available to beings like us. Of course there are important differences among those authors's stances, and it is my hope that by contrasting and comparing them we may end up achieving a more perspicuous view of the options at our disposal in the task of understanding and making sense of our condition. What follows is a brief summary of a survey which is in itself only partial.

4. Peter Strawson's role in this dissertation is actually the most difficult to summarize. As it shall become clear in chapter 1, I have an ambivalent attitude toward his general stance: on the one hand, I take it that the methodological concern mentioned above is an important but relatively underestimated aspect of his philosophy; yet, on the other hand, I also believe that such an underestimation is partially to be credited to Strawson's own fault—that it is caused by his own conflicting philosophical interests, which include the "ordinary language philosophy"'s demand for 'a close examination of the actual use of words'[14] with the metaphysical (say Kantian) ideal of 'lay[ing] bare the most general features of our conceptual structure'[15]. (I must confess that I had very similar—and, as I *now* can see, similarly conflicting—interests in view for a while[16]. What that means is that my attempt to offer a diagnosis of the shortcomings of Strawson's stance is actually—perhaps even primarily—an attempt to come to terms with my own philosophical inheritance; so it is far from "disinterested"—as are, I am afraid, all the rest of my analyses.)

The conflict between those two trends in Strawson's philosophy becomes particularly salient when it comes to his analysis, as presented in chapter 3 of *Individuals*, of the notion of a 'subject of experience', and of the conditions for achieving a 'non-solipsistic consciousness' of the world—i.e., a consciousness capable of distinguishing between itself and its experiences, on the one hand, and that which is not itself and its experiences, on the other. As we shall see in due course, Strawson gestures at the idea that there is an

[14] See *Individuals*'s Introduction (1959, p. 9).
[15] *Id. ibid.*
[16] An important record of that being my Master's dissertation (see Techio, 2005).

important role to be played by a non-detached stance towards others in the constitution of a 'non-solipsistic' consciousness; yet, given the level of abstraction in which his analysis is pursued in *Individuals*—with scant reference to the lives which endow our concepts with whatever significance they have—the resulting picture is rather too sketchy, falling seriously short (or so, anyway, I shall argue) of providing a realistic representation of the main subjects of that chapter—in particular of the notion of 'personhood', and the conditions of ascription of psychological predicates.

Now Strawson himself provides some elements to improve on that picture in his later examination—most notably as presented in the essay 'Freedom and Resentment'—of the varieties of reactive attitudes and feelings toward other human beings which are characteristic of our interpersonal relationships. Compared to the thoroughly aseptic stance taken in *Individuals*, the analysis pursued in that later essay is surely an advancement, in that it points out more clearly to the practical consequences of adopting a detached attitude toward others—namely, the denial of their humanity, and, as a consequence, of our own. Nevertheless, there remains an important shortcoming in Strawson's general approach, which gets expressed in his unwarranted optimism toward the possibility just indicated, epitomized in his claim that our attitudes of involvement and participation would not be suppressed 'even if some general truth were a theoretical ground for it'[17]. I shall tackle that issue in the conclusion of chapter 1, arguing that Strawson's own detached perspective is what ultimately allows him to evade the real issue posed by the "problem of solipsism"—I mean the fact that it is up to us (as a challenge which may be resolutely faced as much as quietly denied) to acknowledge the humanity of others, as well as to accept the givenness of the world and its objects (a Cavellian theme, as we will see). I shall conclude by suggesting that in order for that kind of evasion to be avoided what we need is an alternative (or at least improved) methodology—a truly realistic and non-detached stance in philosophy—that will be more sensitive to the practices in which our conceptual structure is immersed, and, in particular, to the real burdens put upon its practitioners (i.e., us, finite human beings) by our lives in the world and among others, which may be what drives us to philosophize in the first place.

[17] See FR 12.

5. That is my cue to turn to Ludwig Wittgenstein—a philosopher who, somewhat uncommonly for a member of the (so-called) analytical tradition, was really aware of that methodological requirement, and has made great efforts to uncover the ultimate sources of the dissatisfactions lying at the basis of the solipsistic temptation. As Peter Hacker has pointed out, the solipsist is nothing less than 'the archetypal fly in the original flybottle' from which Wittgenstein wanted to show a 'way out' with his philosophy[18]. In fact, as we shall see, solipsism features among the most recurrent and central topics of Wittgenstein's reflections—that being a first reason why I think we should also agree with Hacker's judgement to the effect that '[t]he puzzles surrounding solipsism [...] became for Wittgenstein the paradigm of the diseases of the intellect to which philosophers are so prone'[19]. Yet that initial agreement hides a deeper disagreement, which gets perspicuously expressed in the conflicting answers we will consider to the following pair of questions: (i) How exactly the 'way out' of solipsism—and, consequently, of the other philosophical confusions for which it serves as a paradigm—is supposed to be shown in his writings? And (ii)—since there seems to be an issue about the very *continuity* of those writings—how are we to understand the historical development of Wittgenstein's views about solipsism?[20]

Starting with the latter question (ii), I take it that Hacker's answer can be summarized as follows: (a) for the 'young Wittgenstein' (by which he means, basically, the one who wrote the *Notebooks* and the *Tractatus*), 'there is a sense in which solipsism is true'[21]; (b) because he held solipsism to be, in some sense, true, we should conclude that '[young] Wittgenstein himself was not only tempted, but succumbed' to it[22]; (c) the particular sort of solipsism to which he would have succumbed is one of Schopenhauerian influence, which

[18] See Hacker, 1986, p. 215. (The passage alluded by Hacker is in PI §309.)

[19] *Id. ibid.*

[20] The main reason for contrasting my own reading with Hacker's at this point is that I take the latter as representative of a very general approach to Wittgenstein's philosophy—which, for historical reasons, deserves to be called 'received' or 'orthodox' reading. As is well known, that received reading has been strongly criticized in at least one front in the last few decades, by the so called 'resolute readers' of the *Tractatus*—among whom notoriously figure Cora Diamond and James Conant (see esp. Diamond 1991 & 2000, Conant 1989, 1990, 1993, 2000 & 2001, and Conant & Diamond 2004). Although my own reading is surely more aligned to the latter approach—as the analyses below shall clearly show—I am not willing—and, what is more important, do not think it is necessary—to *assume* its truth in order for my argument to be put forward. Needless to say, I would rather have my own approach to be judged by its own concrete results—hence, I will not try to characterize any of those readings in general terms until the end of chapter 4, and shall instead indicate some differences concerning *specific* issues as the argument advances, aiming at attaining a more perspicuous view on the *general* differences as a *result*. I mention that dispute here only in order to indicate that it has been always at the background of my own reflections.

[21] See *ibid.*, p. 81.

[22] See *ibid.*, p. 104.

Hacker dubs 'Transcendental Solipsism'[23]. (d) Against that young, sympathetic attitude toward solipsism, the 'later Wittgenstein' (i.e., the one who wrote during the 1930's, and ended up producing the *Investigations*) would have changed his mind radically, offering what Hacker describes as a 'detailed refutation of solipsism', which was later 'incorporated, in low key, in the *Investigations*'[24]. (I emphasize that 'refutation' is Hacker's preferred term of criticism to describe the 'way out' of solipsism intended by Wittgenstein in his mature phase, since that offers an important clue to understand Hacker's own view concerning question (i) above; more on this point in a moment.) (e) That 'refutation', in turn, has its own historical development, which Hacker summarizes in the following passage:

> [Wittgenstein's] refutation [of solipsism] comes in three phases. The first stage is to be found in the writings and reports of the transitional period from 1929 to the academic year 1932/3. The *Philosophical Remarks* is particularly important here, but the notes taken by Waismann and Moore are also significant. The second and most revealing phase of his concern with uncovering the errors of solipsism (in particular) and idealism (in general) is between 1933 and 1936. The *Blue Book* and 'Notes for Lectures' contain Wittgenstein's most important arguments in refutation of solipsism. The third and final phase finds its full expression in the *Investigations*, with some additional material in *Zettel*. Here the direct and overt interest in solipsism is diminished, and its place taken by the fully developed argument against the possibility of a private language, a brief sketch of which had already appeared in the 'Notes for Lectures'. Although solipsism is only indirectly alluded to, most of the arguments developed in the second phase reappear in highly condensed form in the *Investigations* and *Zettel*. (Hacker, 1986, pp. 215-216)

There is, in fact, much to be learnt from the summary presented above. Particularly remarkable is the way Hacker connects Wittgenstein's initial concerns with solipsism to the celebrated argument against the possibility of a private language in the *Investigations*. Again, I totally agree about the importance of that connection, except for the fact that I want to make it even tighter: in my view, and to the extent in which, for the young Wittgenstein, there is some truth in solipsism, the same holds of the later Wittgenstein's treatment of privacy; by the same token, I cannot agree that the way out of solipsism is correctly construed as a matter of refuting that "position", any more than I can agree that the later Wittgenstein provides a proof of the impossibility of a private language (i.e., a refutation of it). (This is not to say that there are no important philosophical differences between the accounts of the young and the later Wittgenstein—but I think the most

[23] See *ibid.*, p. 99.
[24] See *ibid*. pp. 81-82.

illuminating way to understand those differences is by looking at them against the background of their shared methodological assumptions, which in turn can only be made perspicuous after a careful analysis of his development, which is precisely what I shall try to offer, if in a limited way, in chapters 2-4.)

In effect, differently from the (rather self-indulgent) attitude commonly adopted by philosophers with respect to such topics as solipsism or privacy, Wittgenstein really made the pains of the solipsist / private linguist his own, systematically engaging in his reflections in an attempt to acknowledge and to give full voice to these philosophical temptations; it is not exactly surprising, then, that his attitude could be sometimes taken for a symptom of his own 'succumbing' to those temptations. Yet—so I shall argue—the truth is that for Wittgenstein (young and later), there is no effective treatment to 'the diseases of the intellect to which philosophers are so prone' except immunization (however momentary and partial) by means of one's own defences—something which is brought about only by being first infected oneself. (But notice that 'effective treatment' is not to be taken as equivalent to something like 'final cure'; this is just to point out that one of the things we have yet to understand is what exactly one should expect from the kind of therapy that Wittgenstein purports to offer in his writings.) And again, since solipsism, besides being a paradigm of those diseases, might also be seen as one of the most intense —an outburst or paroxysm, say, of philosophical anxieties which find more subdued expressions in other topics—that could account for the rather careful, aseptic handling which characterizes the standard attitude toward that particular case which is found among philosophers, few of whom would have the willingness to strictly follow out the implications of their own initial assumptions.

As I read Wittgenstein—and that applies particularly to the writings which are dealt with in the following analyses, namely: the *Tractatus* (chapter 2), the *Philosophical Remarks* (chapter 3) and the *Blue Book* (chapter 4)[25]—his is a text where solipsism, as one among so many instances of our all too human attempts to evade the 'problems of life'[26], is neither *refuted* nor *defended*; rather, it is *enacted*, and it is supposed to be *re*-enacted by the reader, with the ultimate end of being cured by one's own means, i.e., by its being systematically

[25] The reason for focusing on those writings is that they are the most important contexts where Wittgenstein deals explicitly with issues related to solipsism; I shall nonetheless provide some considerations explaining how I think the general reading I will pursue in those chapters can be applied to Wittgenstein's later treatment of privacy—particularly in the *Philosophical Investigations*—in my epilogue to chapter 4.

[26] See TLP 5.62.

shown that, contrary to what one is initially tempted to suppose, one's attempts at formulating that "philosophical position" end up producing one of two equally unsatisfying results—namely: *apparently* substantial yet *empty* and *pointless* statements (however superficially in accordance with logico-grammatical rules), *or* (b) *meaningful* yet *trivial* ones. What that shows is, in both cases, that resorting to solipsism (among many other such "positions") is not really a matter of presenting and defending logical, epistemological and / or metaphysical "theses" or "theories" about "the essence" of reality (as opposed, say, to empirical or scientific theses and theories about it); rather, it is a matter of deflecting the existential difficulties posed by (our reactions to) that reality—that which I referred collectively as the threat of loneliness. But in order for that (self-)diagnosis and the corresponding (self-)therapy to be successful, one needs to be ready to counteract old philosophical habits, which might be deeply rooted; faced with that challenge, it is all but impossible to fall back and take those very grammatical reminders presented by Wittgenstein as further paths, or excuses, to deflection, thereby only reinforcing the repression of the real issues at stake. As we shall see, it is ultimately up to each of us to find a resolution to that situation—to take Wittgenstein's reminders as laying down the (logico-grammatical) Law, or as mere rungs in so many ladders to be thrown away once the whole therapeutic progress is over.

6. The (admittedly shocking) claim I made about there being some truth in solipsism / privacy (see §5) has a Cavellian inspiration, which shall be brought to the fore in the final chapter. Stanley Cavell notoriously claims that there is some truth in skepticism[27]—in that one is often not exactly unjustified in becoming disappointed with (what Wittgenstein calls) criteria, since they actually cannot *ensure*—as it were impersonally—that agreement (and hence meaning) will be forthcoming. Given that view on the reach of our criteria, Cavell is constantly driven to emphasize that Wittgenstein does not exactly want to *deny* the possibility of a private language[28]; what he wants to show is rather that privacy is a standing human possibility—in that our criteria, being grounded only in our human interests and needs ('all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls "forms of life"'), and in our sharing of a common 'natural history' (see PI §415), must be always open to the kind

[27] See, e.g., 'Knowing and Acknowledging', in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, *The Claim of Reason* and *The Senses of Walden*, just to indicate the main contexts where this idea is put forward.

[28] See, e.g., CR, p. 329 & 344.

of repudiation favoured by the skeptic—hence, that the overcoming of privacy must be always an *achievement*, something for which each of us has to take responsibility. The implication is that—contrarily to what more than a few Wittgensteinian philosophers have thought—recounting our criteria simply cannot be a way to *refute* skepticism; in fact that can actually *reinforce* it, by showing how fragile and "subjective"—i.e., all-too-human—our grounds for agreement really are. Yet that does not mean that skepticism should be simply *accepted*: the skeptic may be right in pointing out (as against a dogmatic adversary) that the existence of the "external world" or of "other minds" cannot be known with unassailable certainty; yet (s)he errs if (s)he interprets that result as amounting to a demonstration that the world and others might well not be *real*; all that skepticism really shows is that the givenness of the former and the humanity of the latter are not functions of *knowing* them, but rather of *accepting* and *acknowledging* them—hence, that the true costs involved in the (always possible) skeptical withdrawal of consent are not (simply) epistemic and theoretical, but rather practical or existential—whatever might be the practical or existential costs of denying or repressing our acceptance of the world and our acknowledgement of others (I assume it is clear that this makes for a very large set of tasks and commitments, whose limits cannot be foreseen by *a priori* speculation).

The remarks above are meant to motivate my strategy in chapter 5, showing how it connects to the issues presented so far. What I will do in that chapter is to illustrate the relevance of that Cavellian-Wittgensteinian approach to criteria and skepticism—in particular, the relevance of acknowledging that agreement and meaning are not (as it were) externally and impersonally imposed, but are rather personal achievements—for assessing a somewhat distant debate involving contemporary anti-individualism about content, as exposed in the writings of Saul Kripke, Hilary Putnam and Tyler Burge. My initial aim will be to point out the existence of a common structure in the arguments employed by those philosophers in order to support their anti-individualistic views of content; with that structure at hand, I shall indicate a shared commitment to what I will describe as an 'impersonal' view of meaning and normativity, and then try to present some of the problems arising out of that commitment. In order to do that I shall adopt a somewhat complex argumentative strategy, whose next step will be to reconstruct the 'skeptical solution' for the 'skeptical paradox' of linguistic normativity famously presented by Kripke in his *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, showing that the latter

argument can also be seen as fitting the previously underscored structure (i.e. that which frames the arguments for anti-individualism about content). Having thus drawn a parallel between the anti-individualists's and "Kripkenstein"'s arguments, I will turn to the reconstruction of Cavell's criticisms against the resulting position, focusing on his diagnosis of the problems inherent to the impersonal model of normativity. That criticism shall eventually prompt me to present, in the concluding section, a sketch of an alternative picture of human language and normativity, which I think is free from the problems of the impersonal model—in particular, from the kind of evasion it implies—and which promises to represent our condition more faithfully.

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One final note seems in order. As the preceding recounting of the path I have followed in the dissertation indicates, I shall for most of the time—yet surely not for *all* the time—deal only with "primary sources", letting exegetical and other disputes aside (or at best mentioning them on parenthetical remarks or footnotes). The reason for that is, in part, that I believe there are still new and important insights to be reaped by freshly reconsidering such well-known works, even if they have already received a huge amount of attention. I would feel more than satisfied if my own readings, as presented in the chapters to follow, can serve as invitations to go back to those familiar (and perhaps a few not so familiar) paths—sometimes at a very slow pace—so as to attend to one or another feature of the landscape which might have (as yet) gone unnoticed or underestimated.

1 Solipsism and Resentment: Finding a Human Face for Strawson's Persons

[T]ruth in philosophy, though not to be despaired of, is so complex and many-sided, so multi-faced, that any individual philosopher's work, if it is to have any unity and coherence, must at best emphasize some aspects of the truth, to the neglect of others which may strike another philosopher with greater force.

P. F. Strawson

What I have written, and I suppose the way I have written, grows from a sense that philosophy is in one of its periodic crises of method, heightened by a worry I am sure is not mine alone, that method dictates to content; that, for example, an intellectual commitment to analytical philosophy trains concern away from the wider, traditional problems of human culture which may have brought one to philosophy in the first place. Yet one can find oneself unable to relinquish either the method or the alien concern.

Stanley Cavell

1.1 Introduction

1. Peter Strawson's *magnum opus*, *Individuals*[29], played a central role in the rehabilitation of metaphysics within the analytic tradition. In an often-quoted passage of the Introduction to that book, Strawson claims that metaphysics can be either 'descriptive' or 'revisionary': the former is 'content to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world', whereas the latter intends to 'produce a better structure' (IN 9). *Individuals*, as its subtitle makes clear, is envisaged as an 'essay in descriptive metaphysics'; its scope is rather restricted, however, in that it does not aim to describe *every single aspect* of our 'conceptual structure', but only its 'most general features' (ibid.).

That much is well-known and sufficiently acknowledged among *Individuals*'s readers and interpreters. Yet not every aspect of Strawson's investigation in that book has received as much attention as, say, his justly celebrated discussion of the conditions for identification and reidentification of physical particulars ('bodies' or 'material objects'), presented in

[29] Published in 1959.

chapter 1. One relatively underestimated feature of his account is the indication, near the end of chapter 3's analysis of the notion of a 'subject of experience', of an important condition for the constitution of an objective, 'non-solipsistic' consciousness of the world —namely, the role played by a 'non-detached' attitude toward other human beings (particularly, but not exclusively, in the contexts of ascription of psychological predicates). Although, as we shall see, such an attitude was already at work (however implicitly) in the argument of *Individuals,* its philosophical significance was not fully brought to light until the publication of the paper 'Freedom and Resentment'[30]. Perhaps unsurprisingly—given that this later essay seems to have received less attention from interpreters of Strawson's "theoretical philosophy", and also in part because Strawson himself did not make much to highlight its importance in *Individuals*—little or no reference to the role of such attitude is to be found in the reconstructions of his "anti-solipsistic" argument.

(Note that I am not suggesting that the argument of chapter 3 is *itself* underestimated among Strawson's readers. Let me recall that one of the main conclusions drawn in that chapter is that persons—besides 'material objects', or 'bodies', as described in chapter 1—are *basic particulars* of our conceptual scheme. That thesis, in turn, has two important consequences, namely: (i) that persons are *irreducible* to any other particular or combination of particulars, such as 'body + mind'; (ii) that the identification (and therefore identity) of other particulars (among which, as we shall see, are mental experiences and attitudes, as well as actions) is dependent upon a prior identification of persons. Now of course *that* argument—the argument, i.e., for the basic status of persons in our conceptual scheme—has brought about a lot of discussion during the decades following the publication of *Individuals*. Peter Hacker, for one, goes as far as saying that 'Strawson's investigations [in chapter 3 of *Individuals*] placed the unified concept of a person—the concept of a living human being—at centre-stage where it belongs', thus conferring to this topic 'the centrality it enjoyed in philosophical debate for the next decades' (2002, p. 22). In fact, I think we should agree with Hacker. Moreover, a number of important criticisms were presented in that debate against Strawson's account of the basic status of persons, some of which I also think are essentially right[31]. Yet my (initial) aim in this chapter will be to emphasize another, rather positive aspect of Strawson's whole account of the

[30] The paper was first delivered as a lecture to the British Academy in 1960, and published in the *Proceedings* (vol. XLVIII) in 1962.

[31] See especially Jones (1967), Williams (1973; cap. 5), Glock & Hyman (1994), and Hacker (2002).

conditions for a 'non-solipsistic consciousness' which does not seem to have received the attention it deserves.)

2. The task of providing a more accurate reconstruction of Strawson's position concerning solipsism is tackled in the first two sections below: section 1.2 deals with the argument as presented in chapter 3 of *Individuals*; section 1.3 starts as an attempt to improve on the emerging picture with materials borrowed from 'Freedom and Resentment' (in particular, its analysis of a variety of reactive attitudes and feelings toward other human beings). With the reconstruction thus finished, I go on to suggest that there remains an important methodological shortcoming in Strawson's general approach to the issue of solipsism—a shortcoming which has to do with what he himself describes in 'Freedom and Resentment' as 'our cool, contemporary style' which makes us 'forget when we are engaged in philosophy [...] what it is actually like to be involved in ordinary interpersonal relationships, ranging from the most intimate to the most casual' (FR 7). By achieving that negative, critical result, I hope to make an initial case for the need of an alternative methodology—a more realistic and non-detached stance in philosophy—whose main lines will be sketched in section 1.4, but whose completion will remain an open task. The basic suggestion will be that the very project of a descriptive metaphysics, as worked out in *Individuals*, suffers from just the same limitation, which is characteristic of many theoretical approaches insufficiently sensitive to some particular conditions of use of the concepts that constitute the 'massive central core of human thinking' (IN 10) Strawson went about to describe—conditions derived from our involvement in a fabric of practices and relationships that make up the background against which those concepts acquire life and meaning.

In presenting the diagnosis sketched above I hope to remain faithful to some of Strawson's best thoughts on philosophical methodology: I am happy to grant that favouring the analysis of the *general features* of our conceptual structure has an important function, which is to unveil something that 'does not readily display itself on the surface of language, but lies submerged' (IN 10); however, the price to be paid by not complementing the analysis of such structure with a more accurate description of its details—with careful enough attention to the *practices* in which that structure is immersed, and, in particular, to

the *real threats* faced by its practitioners (i.e., us, finite human beings)—is to end up with a bare skeleton, incapable of standing on its own due to the lack of the muscles and other tissues that can hold it upright and move it about.

1.2 Solipsism and Personhood: the argument from *Individuals*

3.

> Each of us distinguishes between himself and states of himself on the one hand, and what is not himself or a state of himself on the other. What are the conditions of our making this distinction, and how are they fulfilled? In what way do we make it, and why do we make it in the way we do? (IN 87)

Those are the questions with which Strawson opens chapter 3 *Individuals*, titled 'Persons'. Strawson refers to that group of questions collectively as 'the issue of solipsism' (IN 87). In order to understand his approach to that issue we have to step back and look at some of the results of the previous chapter, titled 'Sounds'. In that chapter, Strawson asks us to conceive a 'No-Space world'[32] in which all the possible objects of sensible experience are *sounds*—which, in turn, are to be identified essentially by means of the temporal relations they maintain with each other and their variation of volume, pitch, and timbre[33]. Having presented the basic conditions for the identification and reidentification of particulars in this auditory world (among which are the existence of publicly observable sounds, and an analogue of the structure of space-time coordinates—the 'master-sound' (IN 76)) Strawson goes on with his thought-experiment, examining what the conditions for a 'non-solipsistic consciousness' would amount to in such a scenario[34].

[32] Here is the passage where Strawson introduces his proposal, inspired (as elsewhere) by a Kantian thesis:

> Kant held that all representations were in inner sense, of which Time was the form; but only some representations were representations of outer sense, of which Space was the form. I suggest that we inquire whether there could be a scheme which provided for objective particulars, while dispensing with outer sense and all its representations. I suggest we explore the No-Space world. It will at least be a world without bodies. (IN 63)

[33] See (IN 65). It is of the nature of the case presented by Strawson that these objects (i.e., sounds) do not possess any intrinsic spatial characteristic. He offers some observations in support to this point in (IN 65-66).

[34] Notice that the mere fact that an inhabitant of the auditory world can identify and reidentify "sounds-as-experienced"—provided, i.e., that she is capable of employing the 'master-sound' in order to recognize the volume, pitch, and timbre of the sounds she hears, as well as of sharing and comparing her

We can easily imagine a way in which an inhabitant of the auditory world could "distinguish herself" from other items she experiences—she might, for instance, gradually learn to recognize the timber and other peculiar characteristics of her own "voice" (just like we actually do), thus becoming capable of distinguishing those particular sounds which she originates from the "external" sounds she just happen to perceive, without any active effort. But notice that the problem with this kind of "self-identification" is that it would be made on the basis of data which are themselves *internal* to one's experience, and, as such, would not (yet) have proven to have any objectivity—after all, the "data" themselves could be *made up*: to adapt from a very well known philosophy-cum-science-fiction illustration, they could be implants made by an "evil scientist", who uses some special apparatus (similar to our headphones) connected to a *matrix*, causing the subject to *think* that she perceives and distinguishes herself (i.e., her "voice") among the other sounds from the (auditory) "external world", when she is in fact only "experiencing" an (auditory) simulation, created by a computer.

The main point of pursuing this imaginary exercise is that it helps to raise a problem which is absolutely general, and which, according to Strawson, 'applies as much to the ordinary as to the auditory world' (IN 89)—the problem, namely, of how could a subject who perceives herself as an item *within* the field of experience possibly come to conceive herself also as something which *has* experiences, i.e., as an *observer*, something *distinct* from the other items which she experiences[35]. In spite of showing itself "too meagre"

experiences with those of (supposed) others—is not by any means a *sufficient* condition for ascribing her a non-solipsistic consciousness; in fact, ascribing that kind of consciousness to someone on this reduced basis would simply beg the question. To put it briefly: processes of identification and reidentification of particulars require, as a condition of objectivity, the idea of a non-observed existence of those particulars; that idea, in turn, implies a distinction between being observed and not being observed, which, finally, presupposes a distinction between an observer (a subject) and something observed (an object). But—as we shall see more clearly in a moment—none of those conditions can be granted on the mere basis of "intra-experiential" distinctions made by a subject.

35 Strawson presents the difficulty in more detail in the following passage:

> Would it not seem utterly strange to suggest that he [i.e., the subject of the auditory world] might distinguish himself as one item among others [...], that is, as a sound or sequence of sounds? For how could such a thing—a sound—be also what had all those experiences? Yet to have the idea of himself, must he not have the idea of the subject of the experiences, of that which has them? So it might begin to look impossible that he should have the idea of himself—or at any rate the right idea. For to have the idea at all, it seems that it must be an idea of some particular thing of which he has experience, and which is set over against or contrasted with other things of which he has experience, but which are not himself. But if it is just an item within his experience of which he has this idea, how can it be the idea of that which has all of his experiences? (IN 88-89)

(feature-wise) to provide a *solution* for this problem in the auditory world scenario[36], the thought experiment proposed by Strawson would have, according to him, 'a certain advantage', which is to give us 'a continuing sense of the strangeness of what we in fact do [in *our own* conceptual scheme, i.e.]; and this sense of strangeness we want to keep alive in order to see that we really meet it and remove it, and do not just lose or smother it' (IN 88)[37].

4. Strawson elaborates on that difficulty (and also provides a solution to it) in relation to our own conceptual scheme in chapter 3 of *Individuals*. He begins by drawing a distinction between two categories of predicates that we ordinarily ascribe to ourselves and to others: on the one hand, the category of predicates that 'we also ascribe to material bodies' (e.g., localization, colour, size, shape, weight, etc.), and, on the other hand, the category of predicates that 'we should not dream of ascribing' to material bodies (e.g., actions, intentions, sensations, thoughts, feelings, perceptions, memories, etc.) (see IN 89). Predicates of the first category are called 'M-predicates', predicates of the latter category are called 'P-predicates'.

Now, since our own bodies are *material things*, the (self-)ascription of M-predicates to ourselves (i.e., to our bodies) apparently do not raise any particular issue—after all, their

[36] There is a further step toward a solution for this problem still in chapter 2—namely, the indication of a *necessary* but *not sufficient* condition for the possibility of a non-solipsistic consciousness in the auditory world: the subject's capacity to (voluntarily) initiate an action, such as that of modifying a sound she is hearing (see IN 83-85). The suggestion is engaging, in that it indicates that our notion of a 'subject of experience' (endowed with a 'non-solipsistic consciousness') involves essentially a conception of the subject as an *agent*, and hence (I take it) as an *embodied* being (if in some extended sense), endowed with spontaneity and thus (supposedly) able to acknowledge her own decisions, intentions, and actions. Strawson himself goes (only) as far as to suggest that in order to make the conception of a subject *acting* in the auditory world minimally intelligible, we would need to pay attention to 'differences in the way he anticipates what he is going to do and what is going to happen to him—differences in the kinds of knowledge he has of these two things' (IN 83). Unfortunately he does not elaborate on the reach and importance of these observations in chapter 2, and, as we shall see, he goes over them rather quickly when they are resumed at the very end of chapter 3.

[37] The same 'sense of strangeness' is also evoked by Wittgenstein in many (if not all) of his characteristic employments of language-games; incidentally, evoking that sense seems to be precisely the role of the following questions, raised in the context of the so-called "private language argument": 'What gives us so much as the idea that living beings, things, can feel? / Is it that my education has led me to it by drawing my attention to feelings in myself, and now I transfer the idea to objects outside myself?' (PI, § 283). (Perhaps it is not too much to recall that that 'sense of strangeness'—if only by other names, e.g., 'wonder'—was already acknowledged by the ancients as the origin of philosophy. In this, as in other things, Strawson—and even Wittgenstein (of all people!)—are clearly heirs of a long tradition.) (Thanks to Paulo Faria for reminding *me* of this point in the first place.)

conditions of ascription were already dealt with in chapter 1 of *Individuals*, which was concerned with the conditions for identification and reidentification of material bodies *in general*. 'But', says Strawson, 'so long as we keep that for the present indispensable sense of strangeness, it can and must seem to need explanation that one's states of consciousness, one's thoughts and sensations, are ascribed *to the very same thing* to which these physical characteristics, this physical situation, is ascribed' (IN 89). And that is the reason why, according to Strawson, if we want to clarify the notion of a subject of experience in our conceptual scheme, we must find answers to the following pair of questions: (i) '*Why are one's states of consciousness ascribed to anything at all?*'; and (ii) '*Why they are ascribed to the very same thing as certain corporeal characteristics, a certain physical situation, etc.?*' (IN 90).

5. People not moved by the 'indispensable sense of strangeness' mentioned by Strawson might object that questions (i) and (ii) above are just pointless—after all, it seems simply *obvious* that this is the way our practices of ascription of P-predicates work; hence, to ask for a justification in this case would make as much sense as to ask why we call such and such tones of colour 'red' instead of 'blue'[38]. However, if we look at the multiplicity of historical treatments given to the notion of a subject of experience, or self, we will find many philosophers content to deny those (allegedly) "obvious" theses. Thus, for the tradition Strawson calls 'Dualist', question (ii) would not even arise, since it would be simply *false* to say that we ascribe P-predicates to *the very same thing* to which we ascribe M-predicates. On the other hand, for the tradition Strawson calls 'no-ownership theory'[39], question (i) would not arise, since it would be simply *nonsensical* to say that experiences expressed by P-predicates are 'had' by somebody (or something), and, therefore, it would be equally nonsensical to say that we 'ascribe' them to *any* kind of entity.

[38] I am here echoing a kind of "Wittgensteinian reminder" to the effect that 'explanations come to an end somewhere' (see PI §1)—namely, when the philosopher's spade reaches (and is turned by) the 'bedrock' of our practices (see PI §217). Strawson himself resorts to kindred (naturalistic) reminders in some contexts (more on this below). Confronted with them, one would surely like to ask: but *when* exactly have we reached the bedrock, and *how* do we tell it? I think these questions are legitimate and indeed very important. Although I will have something (critical) to say about the efficacy of this kind of naturalistic move still in the present chapter, I shall postpone a more detailed criticism of it to the next ones—particularly to the final one—where I will have the opportunity to question what exactly is the role of such reminders in Wittgenstein's own writings.

[39] Strawson ascribes this view (rather hesitantly) to Wittgenstein and (rather straightforwardly) to Schlick (see IN 95, n.1). I shall present my reasons against ascribing it to the former in chapter 4.

Strawson's well-known diagnosis is that both views ('Dualism' and 'no-ownership theory') stem from the same mistake, which is the lack of attention to an essential characteristic of our ordinary practices of ascription of P-predicates to people, *viz.*, that '[s]tates, or experiences [...] *owe* their identity as particulars to the identity of the person whose states or experiences they are' (IN 97)[40]. In other words, the failure of both positions is not to pay attention to the primitiveness of the concept of *person* in our conceptual scheme: it is a condition for the *self*-ascription of states of consciousness that we can ascribe them to *others*, and in order to do this we have to identify those others as *persons,* rather than as 'disembodied selves' or as 'soulless bodies'. ('From this it follows immediately', Strawson writes, that if those states and experiences 'can be identified as particular states or experiences at all, they must be possessed or ascribable in just that way which the no-ownership theorist ridicules; i.e. in such a way that it is logically impossible that a particular state or experience in fact possessed by someone should have been possessed by anyone else. The requirements of identity rule out logical transferability of ownership' (IN 97-98). In other words, the very *sense* (or content) of the predicates employed to ascribe states of consciousness would only be properly understood provided that we pay attention to *both* their first and third person uses.)

6. The problem with the analysis presented above, as Strawson himself quickly acknowledges, is that normally we do not need to observe our own behaviour in order to say *of ourselves* that we have (or are in) a certain mental state, contrary to what happens when we ascribe such a state to *someone else*; what would (apparently) follow from this consideration is that the *sense* of a predicate expressing a mental state would not be the same in (the predicate would be *equivocal* between) first and third person ascriptions.

[40] Strawson takes no great pains to justify his diagnosis concerning 'Dualism', suggesting that in this case the lack of attention would be manifest (see IN 94-95). Concerning the 'no-ownership theory', the suggestion is that it would also be a kind of 'Dualism'—a *degenerate* kind, one might say—which does not distinguish between 'two subjects' (as in the case of 'Cartesianism'), but rather between 'one subject—the body—and one non-subject' (IN 98). In both cases (i.e., 'no-ownership theory' and 'Cartesianism'), the 'Dualism' has to do with the attempt to establish *distinct* and *independent* criteria for the attribution of P- and M-predicates, respectively, to subjects. Now supporters of 'Cartesianism' would be rather confident of having established those criteria for both kinds of predicate (since they would be confident of having proved the existence of two completely distinct *substances* to which those predicates would refer*, namely,* the '*res cogitans*' and the '*res extensa*'), while the 'no-ownership' theorists would be rather convinced that the only *bona fide*, determinate criteria one can possibly establish must refer to *physical* properties (the *denotata* of M-predicates), thus concluding that the very idea of *mental* states, taken as particulars capable of being 'owned' or 'ascribed' to subjects, is simply nonsensical.

'How could the sense be the same', asks Strawson, 'when the method of verification was so different in the two cases [...]'? (IN 99).

The answer to that question depends on the understanding of the peculiar logic of P-predicates, which is presented in the following passage:

> [...] it is essential to the character of [P-]predicates that they have both first- and third-person ascriptive uses, that they are both self-ascribable otherwise than on the basis of observation of the behaviour of the subject of them, and other-ascribable on the basis of behaviour criteria. To learn their use is to learn both aspects of their use. In order to *have* this type of concept, one must be both a self-ascriber and an other-ascriber of such predicates, and must see every other as a self-ascriber. In order to *understand* this type of concept, one must acknowledge that there is a kind of predicate which is unambiguously and adequately ascribable *both* on the basis of observation of the subject of the predicate *and* not on this basis, i.e. independently of observation of the subject: the second case is the case where the ascriber is also the subject. If there were no concepts answering to the characterization I have just given, we should indeed have no philosophical problem about the soul; but equally we should not have our concept of a person. (IN 108)

Now, given that logical peculiarity of P-predicates—the fact that understanding their use implies understanding *both aspects* of their use—the preceding question—concerning the possibility of a univocal sense and a univocal ascription—amounts to the question 'How are P-predicates possible?', or 'How is the concept of a person possible?' (IN 110). At this point, Strawson admits that even 'when we have acknowledged the primitiveness of the concept of a person, and, with it, the unique character of P-predicates, we may still want to ask what it is in the natural facts that makes it intelligible that we should have this concept' (IN 111); and *that* question, still according to him, demands a 'non-trivial answer', i.e., 'an answer which does not *merely* say: "Well, there are people in the world"' (*ibid.*).

7. In the final part of chapter 3 Strawson purports to offer (what he himself describes as) the 'beginnings or fragments of an answer' to the latter question (IN 111). The basic idea is that in order to understand the role of the concept of a person (and of P-predicates) in our conceptual scheme we need to take into account a very general *fact* about this scheme as a whole—namely, that we live in a community of human beings whom, as such, share a certain *nature*. In order to highlight and further articulate that fact, Strawson will 'mov[e] a certain class of P-predicates to a central position in the picture'—namely, predicates,

which 'roughly [...] involve doing something, which clearly imply intention or a state of mind or at least consciousness in general, and which indicate a characteristic pattern, or range of patterns, of bodily movement, while not indicating at all precisely any very definite sensation or experience' (IN 111). Examples of such predicates are 'going for a walk', 'coiling a rope', 'playing ball', 'writing a letter' (ibid.). We can make up a special name for that sub-category of predicates—say, 'P_A-predicates' (the index 'A' indicating that these are *action* predicates).

The advantage of analysing P_A-predicates is that (i) they 'have the interesting characteristic of many P-predicates'—*viz.,* 'that one does not, in general, ascribe them to oneself on the strength of observation, whereas one does ascribe them to others on the strength of observation' (ibid.)—but, (ii) contrarily to the P-predicates, which concern 'inner' mental states, relative to P_A-predicates 'one feels minimal reluctance to concede that what is ascribed in these two different ways [i.e., based on observation and without observation] is the same' (ibid.). Since both *self-* and *hetero*-ascriptions of P_A-predicates are made without appeal to any kind of "distinctive experience"[41], 'they release us from the idea that the only things we can know about without observation or inference, or both, are private experiences' (ibid.). We can, Strawson argues, have knowledge 'about the present and future movements of a body'—*viz.*, our own—without appeal to observation or inference; yet, he continues, 'bodily movements are certainly also things we can know about by observation and inference' (ibid.)—just as it happens when we ascribe P_A-predicates to other subjects (and *sometimes* to ourselves—think, for example, of the case of a locally anaesthetized patient noticing that—what a relief!—his toes are moving after the surgery).

Strawson concludes the analysis of those predicates with the following considerations:

> It is important that we should understand such movements [i.e., the 'movements of bodies similar to that about which we have knowledge not based on observation', i.e., our own], for they bear on and condition our own [movements]; and in fact we understand them, we interpret them, only by seeing them as elements in just such plans or schemes of action as those of which we know the present course and future development without observation of the relevant present movements. But this is to say that we see such movements as

[41] In this context Strawson seems to be assuming as obvious a thesis which surely would deserve a more forceful defence; after all, nothing would be more natural for a 'Dualist' than to think of the self-ascription of P_A-Predicates that it is based on a kind of "distinctive experience", such as a desire, an intention, or a "pure willing", accessible by introspection, which would work as a *cause* of the action. (Wittgenstein indicated some of the problems of this kind of causal explanation of action in many contexts, an important instance being PI §§ 611-660.)

> *actions,* that we interpret them in terms of intention, that we see them as movements of individuals of a type to which also belongs that individual whose present and future movements we know about without observation; it is to say that we see others as self-ascribers, not on the basis of observation, of what we ascribe to them on this basis. (IN 112)

The passage above condenses what Strawson has to say in *Individuals* about that "fact" which would constitute the "bedrock" of our conceptual scheme, amounting to a fundamental condition for our practice of (first- and third-person) ascriptions of P-predicates. Briefly, the idea at work here is that we *see* (or, to use a phrase loaded with philosophical implications that should be looked at from closer up, we *react to*) other subjects as *persons*, i.e., as (other) *human beings*, who are capable of voluntary movements, i.e., *actions*, among countless other things; however, as Strawson himself emphasizes, ' "to see each other as persons" is a lot of things, but not a lot of separate and unconnected things' (ibid.); moreover, and in the same vein, he also urges that it would be a mistake to separate the 'topic of the mind' into a collection of 'unconnected subjects' (ibid.). What these claims are suggesting, I take it, is that the *logic* of P_A-predicates (i.e., their conditions of use or sense or ascription) cannot be correctly described and understood unless we analyse more carefully the role of those predicates within the fabric of human practices in which they are embedded. Now I think it is worth asking whether the same should not hold for the analysis of the (remaining) P-predicates, and equally for the analysis of M-predicates, and, ultimately, if that is not a sound methodological advice to follow in the analysis of our conceptual structure *as a whole*.

That question shall serve as a warning about the (possible) need for—or, in a more sympathetic reading, about Strawson's invitation to proceed in—a more inclusive and humanly engaged look at our conceptual scheme, which up to his point has been described abstractly and as it were "from the inside", with scant reference to the lives which endow those concepts with whatever significance they have. This, I submit, is indeed a crucial step to take if we want to achieve a more satisfactory analysis of the logic of our concepts. However, Strawson does not seem to follow up on his own (somewhat understated) advice, since he immediately moves on to other questions[42]. To be sure, one can argue that this attitude is coherent with what the author set out to do in his book—namely, to outline the *general conditions* for an objective experience. Nevertheless, there is a price to be paid for the simplicity of the resulting model—that of becoming a target for critics who insist

[42] Such as the possibility of a 'group mind' (see IN 112-116).

precisely on the need for a more detailed picture of 'personhood', and, what is more important, of human nature as such. Again, a more sympathetic attitude (which I think is also more faithful to Strawson's philosophical stance as a whole) would be to accept his invitation and to try to fill in the blanks left in the analysis pursued in *Individuals*. One way to do this is by bringing into play some of the important points made in his later essay 'Freedom and Resentment', as I proceed to show.

1.3 Resentment, skepticism, acknowledgement

8. The argument presented in the essay 'Freedom and Resentment' is framed by the dispute between Determinists and Libertarians on the issue of free-will. It might, accordingly, seem very distant from the topics examined above. We should not forget, however, that we are dealing with a systematic philosopher, in whose thinking connections between such apparently distant texts and topics should come as no surprise at all. But in order to see the connections which are relevant for the present case, we have better set the "frame" of the argument aside, and look directly at the centre of the picture. What we then find is an investigation—or rather a description, in the spirit of descriptive metaphysics—of the conditions of human action, which is in turn grounded on the analysis of some particular instances of interpersonal relations and attitudes—most notably those of gratitude, resentment, and forgivenness. One of the central features Strawson highlights about such attitudes is that they are apt to be radically modified according to the way the actions which bring them about are qualified. The following case illustrates this point:

> If someone treads on my hand accidentally, while trying to help me, the pain may be no less acute than if he treads on it in contemptuous disregard of my existence or with a malevolent wish to injure me. But I shall generally feel in the second case a kind and degree of resentment that I shall not feel in the first. If someone's actions help me to some benefit I desire, then I am benefited in any case; but if he intended them so to benefit me because of his general goodwill toward me, I shall reasonably feel a gratitude which I should not feel at all if the benefit was an incidental consequence, unintended or even regretted by him, of some plan of action with a different aim. (FR 6)

Reactions similar to those illustrated above (i.e., those of gratitude, resentment, and forgivenness) can be brought about in a large number of (very common) situations in our

human relationships, and the degree in which we feel them can also vary according to a vast set of conditions having to do with how the original actions provoking them are qualified. But there are also some less common situations in those relationships where our reactions would not only be *modified* but rather altogether *suppressed*, given the right conditions. This would happen, for instance, in those cases where one might be willing to describe an agent who performed an action that harmed her by using phrases such as: 'He wasn't himself', 'He has been under very great strain recently', 'He was acting under post-hypnotic suggestion', 'He's only a child', 'He's a hopeless schizophrenic', 'His mind has been systematically perverted', 'That's purely compulsive behaviour on his part', etc. (FR 8). By drawing our attention to the sort of excuses expressed by those phrases, Strawson wants to make us aware of situations in which someone's actions would invite us 'to suspend our ordinary reactive attitudes toward the agent', seeing him 'in a different light from the light in which we should normally view one who has acted as he has acted' (FR 9).

9. With a view to simplifying the analysis of such cases, Strawson presents (what he himself describes as) 'crude dichotomies' (FR 9) separating the kinds of attitudes that we can have in relation to other human beings. For the interests of this section, the most important such dichotomy is that which distinguishes 'the attitude (or range of attitudes) of involvement or participation in a human relationship', on the one hand, and the 'objective' or 'detached' attitude (or range of attitudes), on the other hand (see ibid.). About the latter sort of attitude Strawson has the following to say:

> To adopt the objective attitude to another human being is to see him, perhaps, as an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a wide range of sense, might be called treatment; as something certainly to be taken account, perhaps precautionary account, of; to be managed or handled or cured or trained; perhaps simply to be avoided [...]. If your attitude toward someone is wholly objective, then though you may fight him, you cannot quarrel with him, and though you may talk to him, even negotiate with him, you cannot reason with him. You can at most pretend to quarrel, or to reason, with him. (FR 9-10)

Now, just as it is possible (and sometimes even required) to adopt an objective attitude in relation to others, we also can (and sometimes are even required to) adopt it toward ourselves. Usually, there is no problem involved in reacting like that—on the contrary, in

some cases it can be sound and effective to detach oneself that way; as Strawson himself acknowledges, we can sometimes use that attitude 'as a resource', e.g., 'as a refuge [...] from the strains of involvement; or as an aid to policy; or simply out of intellectual curiosity' (FR 10). A problem would appear, however, if that attitude took complete precedence relative to that of involvement or participation in human relationships—if, i.e., we systematically stopped seeing others (and ourselves) as *persons*, as *human beings*, and started seeing them (ourselves) as mere 'objects of social policy', or 'mechanisms'. The problem posed by such an extreme change is, in short, that it would require a radical change in our very human nature—a change which, according to Strawson, 'does not seem to be something of which human beings would be capable, even if some general truth were a theoretical ground for it' (FR 12)[43]. Strawson concedes that it is not *logically* impossible for the objective or detached attitude to become the rule, instead of the exception. However, he claims, such a change would be 'practically inconceivable', since:

> The human commitment to participation in ordinary inter-personal relationships is [...] too thoroughgoing and deeply rooted for us to take seriously the thought that a general theoretical conviction might so change our world that, in it, there were no longer any such things as inter-personal relationships as we normally understand them; and being involved in inter-personal relationships as we normally understand them precisely is being exposed to the range of reactive attitudes and feelings that is in question. (FR 12)

Leaving aside the optimism expressed in the passage above for a moment[44], we can summarize Strawson's position concerning the 'practical impossibility' he describes in the form of a conditional: if (by whatever reason) the objective or detached attitude became the standard, our normal inter-personal relationships would be severely modified, and with them our very human nature; and the price of such change, as Strawson has it in another context, 'would be higher than we are willing, or able, to pay' (SN 34).

10. Pursuing this issue in more detail would lead us far beyond the centre of the picture, toward its frame, so I will step back to our main topic. The first thing I would like to do is to highlight a structural similarity between the argument sketched above (about the

[43] The main candidate to such a ground examined (and dismissed) by Strawson in this paper is, of course, the 'theoretical conviction of the truth of determinism' (see FR 14).

[44] For a cogent criticism of this 'optimistic attitude' by Strawson, see Sommers (2006). I return to this point briefly in n. 49 below.

consequences of generalizing the objective or detached attitude) and the anti-solipsistic argument presented in *Individuals*, in that both can be seen as instances of a peculiar form of *reductio*, which brings to the fore a peculiarly untenable (even if it is not a strictly absurd or irrational or self-contradictory) consequence that one would have to accept should a particular set of conditions of our conceptual scheme be left out, or suppressed, from the analysis.

Notice, however, that precisely because no contradiction is involved in that possibility, nothing prevents one of *rationally* consider it—perhaps as a reason for suspending a (supposedly) naive or unquestioned adhesion to a set of beliefs—or even to defend it—perhaps by way of proposing an *alternative* conceptual scheme, rearranged so as to fit aspects of reality that one deems important yet unacknowledged or underestimated in the ordinary one, while remaining internally consistent. Now those are precisely the kinds of philosophical moves that I suppose a skeptic or a solipsist (respectively) would like to propose, driven by a number of reasons, which might well have to do with dissatisfactions concerning that very conceptual scheme that (I suppose) they too could agree has the structure that Strawson is at pains to disclose, and notwithstanding the logical consequences of their choices.

The kind of consideration sketched above brings to the fore a crucial difficulty that I think Strawson's project of descriptive metaphysics has to face. In order to articulate that difficulty more clearly, let us assume, for the sake of the argument, that a skeptical or solipsistic philosopher could in fact grant Strawson all the conceptual connections he presented thus far (i.e., both those indicated in *Individuals* and in 'Freedom and Resentment'); now let us ask what would prevent such a philosopher of (nonetheless) wishing to suspend or even to deny—perhaps by finding naïve or inappropriate or simply nonsensical—such ordinary beliefs as that (e.g.) there are (other) *minds* (instead of, say, just bodies plus behaviour), or that there really are (other) *persons* (instead of automatons or zombies), or again that there really are any (external) *objects* (instead of mere appearances, contents of one's consciousness, computer-generated inputs, and so on). Of course, assuming that she is rational, our skeptic / solipsist would be (logically) forced to concede that her suspensions / denials would have just the "problematic consequences" indicated in Strawson's arguments—e.g., that one could not (anymore) objectively and coherently ascribe P-predicates to others and *hence* to oneself, or that non-detached

attitudes toward others would appear (at best) optional, because unwarranted or ungrounded in any firmer—i.e., more rational or objective—foundation, or that one could not (anymore) identify and reidentify external objects, thus becoming unable to publicly share the contents of one's experiences.—But again, what exactly would prevent our philosopher of biting *those* bullets? And if nothing would prevent it, what exactly would be the problem(s) involved in her suspensions / denials, and how could Strawson's argument hope to cope with them?

11. At least part of what is at stake in the questions presented above is the very nature of Strawsonian regressive or "transcendental" arguments. Strawson himself seems to have changed his mind about what one could hope to achieve by means of those arguments, initially thinking that they could provide a refutation of skepticism and (hence) a proof of realism[45], but then coming to believe that their role was simply to draw conceptual connections *within* a pre-existent (i.e., taken for granted) anti-skeptical conceptual scheme[46]. Now, according to the latter, more modest construal, a transcendental argument would not be aimed to *prove* (as against a skeptic or a solipsist) that our conceptual scheme accurately depicts any kind of "external" or independent reality (e.g., the Kantian 'things in themselves'); as far as a 'project of wholesale validation' of our conceptual scheme is concerned, Strawson thinks one is better advised to give it up (see SN 22), resorting instead to a version of Humean naturalism, which he describes as follows:

> According to Hume the naturalist, skeptical doubts are not to be met by argument. They are simply to be neglected (except, perhaps, in so far as they supply a harmless amusement, a mild diversion to the intellect). They are to be neglected because they are *idle*; powerless against the force of nature, of our naturally implanted disposition to belief. This does not mean that Reason has no part to play in relation to our beliefs concerning matters of fact and existence. It has a part to play, though a subordinate one: as Nature's lieutenant rather than Nature's commander. (SN 13-14)

Thus, according to Strawson the Humean naturalist, there is no legitimate (or even intelligible) need for *refuting* skepticism, since 'in order for the intelligible formulation of skeptical doubts to be possible or, more generally, in or order for self-conscious thought

[45] That at least was the aim of Strawson's influential 'analytical reconstruction' of Kant's position, as presented in BS.

[46] See SN, esp. ch. 1.

and experience to be possible, we must take it, or *believe*, that we have knowledge of external physical objects or other minds' (SN 21). Strawson himself acknowledges that a 'transcendental arguer' like the one he depicts will be 'always exposed to the charge that even if *he* cannot conceive of alternative ways in which conditions of the possibility of a certain kind of experience or exercise of conceptual capacity might be fulfilled, this inability may simply be due to lack of imagination on his part' (SN 23). Yet to that charge he responds by claiming that 'whether or not they are strictly valid, these arguments, or weakened versions of them, will continue to be of interest to our naturalist philosopher', for

> to establish the connections between the major structural features or elements of our conceptual scheme—to exhibit it, not as a rigidly deductive system, but as a coherent whole whose parts are mutually supportive and mutually dependent, interlocking in an intelligible way—to do this may well seem to our naturalist the proper, or at least the major, task of analytical philosophy. As indeed it does to me. (Whence the phrase, "descriptive [as opposed to validatory or revisionary] metaphysics.") (SN 23)[47]

Perhaps—but what about the rest of us? Are we convinced?—And if we are not, then what do *we* expect from (analytical) philosophy?

Before answering those questions—or better: in order to start answering them—let me highlight another aspect of Strawson's position. At a climatic moment in SN, Strawson claims that his proposal '[v]is-à-vis traditional skepticism' is that we adopt naturalism 'at least provisionally'—'and', he immediately adds, 'everything in philosophy is provisional' (see SN 24). Now I think we should happily grant that much. He then goes on illustrating the break that adoption of naturalism constitutes with other attitudes with a series of quotations, the last of which 'neatly sums things up from the naturalist [...] point of view' (ibid.). That quotation is Wittgenstein's, and goes as follows: 'It is so difficult to find the *beginning*. Or better: it is difficult to begin at the beginning. And not to try to go further back.' (OC, 471)[48]. Now the precise moral Strawson wants to draw from that quotation sounds anything *but* provisional to me; it goes like this: '[t]o try to meet the skeptic's

[47] The insertion in square brackets is Strawson's.

[48] The first quotation comes from Kant—'the first from the greatest of modern philosophers' (see ibid.)—and presents the 'scandal of philosophy' in not being able to *prove* the 'existence of things outside us' (CRP, B xi). The second comes from Heidegger—'a philosopher whose title to respect is less considerable, but who nevertheless seems to [Strawson] to be on the right side on this point'—who claims that the real scandal is 'that *such proofs are expected and attempted again and again*.' (*Being and Time*, I. §6)

challenge, in whatever way, by whatever style of argument, is to try to go further back. If one is to begin at the beginning, one must refuse the challenge as our naturalist refuses it' (SN 25-25). Actually, I take the refusal expressed in the last claim to be completely at odds with the general spirit *and* letter of Wittgenstein's work—not least with the spirit and letter of the particular warning, or confession, that Strawson has chosen to quote; perhaps I can express our difference by saying that while Strawson has found only (or primarily) *resoluteness* in that quote, I cannot help but sensing a humble recognition that in philosophy (as elsewhere) one should never be so sure about where to stop questioning one's own results—anyway, that if one decides to stop at a particular point (as one surely has to), one is better advised to remain open to reconsider that decision at any moment. So I take it that at least part of what Wittgenstein means in that quote is that the task of deciding where philosophy shall begin—and end—is really a difficult one. And since I do share that recognition, I think it is fair to formulate my dissatisfaction with Strawson's reading by saying that he does not seem willing to take Wittgenstein's warning seriously enough. (Philosophy, I would like to say, should be *always* provisional.)

12. So that is a first—call it a methodological—reason for being less than completely satisfied with Strawson's naturalistic stance[49]. Yet there are other, more specific reasons for that. To begin with, I take his allegiance to Hume on the particular issue we have been

[49] Another very general reason for dissatisfaction has to do with my existentialist qualms about Strawson's repeated (and again apparently unwarranted) appeals to certain (supposedly) *inescapable* (essential?) facts about our "human nature"; here is a representative claim: 'it is not open to us, it is simply not in our nature, to make a total surrender of those personal and moral reactive attitudes [...] which the reductive naturalist declares to be irrational' (SN 41). Actually, I take it that these appeals betray a commitment with a deeper assumption which is intimately connected with Strawson's "optimism" concerning the issue of freedom *versus* determinism: for there is an alternative way of thinking about "human nature"—one which, as far as I know, Strawson has done nothing to deny—according to which human beings are even more radically free than he seems willing to acknowledge—free to the point of being able to (choose to) change their (supposed—or rather unauthentically assumed) "natures"—in particular, by being able to choose to become completely "objective" and "detached" in their inter-personal relationships. (Are not Sartre's (early) Roquentin in *Nausea* and Camus's Meursault in *The Stranger* perfect (fictional) instances of precisely that attitude?) Now of course with such a radical freedom come big(ger) responsibilities—heavier burdens concerning one's stance toward the world and others (not only *human* others) and oneself—but again I find no room left for those burdens to be acknowledged in Strawson's work. (Note that I am *not* saying, or implying, that to *be* "completely detached" *à la* Roquentin and Mersault would amount to *be* more radically free; the idea of radical freedom I am pointing to has to do with the *radical choice* that I—but apparently not Strawson—find *available* to beings like us, provided that we think hardly enough about the (lack of) *impersonal* (categorical or absolute) constraints for defining the limits of what it means to be *human*. Again, authenticity lies not in *which* choice one makes, but in the resolute attitude of *taking responsibility* for one's choice; whether that choice is morally sound is a further question—needless to say, that are lots of immoral *human* beings.)

pursuing—that of the skeptical challenge for a 'wholesale validation' of our conceptual scheme—to be rather unwarranted—after all, there seems to be a crucial difference between the kind of (skeptical) problem that Hume intends to repudiate or dismiss with *his* brand of naturalism and the difficulty that I have been trying to articulate. The difference I have in mind is presented very clearly in the following passage, which I take from Anthony Rudd's analysis:

> [...] Hume's skepticism—which Hume had to dismiss as unlivable and unthinkable outside the philosopher's study—was an empiricist skepticism that dissolved reality into contingently connected sensory ideas. That reality would be unlivable. But skepticism about whether our happily substantial conceptual scheme really describes reality in itself is not a skepticism that would seem to impact directly on everyday life at all, and would therefore not be unlivable. And so a "Humean shrug" is not an appropriate response to *this* skepticism. (Rudd, 2003, p. 51)

Indeed. Actually, I would like to go further—following Stanley Cavell's steps—and contend that, concerning our knowledge of the "external world", it is *all but impossible* to become "accommodated" with our lack of final justification—hence, with (the possibility of) skepticism; as Cavell expresses this point: 'I have to "forget", or ignore, close my eyes to, somehow bypass, the presence of doubts that are not mine, of "possibilities" that I have not *ruled* out; I have to permit myself distraction from my knowledge that we do not know what we all imagine there is to know, viz., material objects' (CR 437-438). (Perhaps it goes without saying, but I shall nonetheless stress that 'permitting oneself distraction' from the *knowledge* of our epistemic limitations is a very different thing from *refusing* a skeptical challenge, as Strawson the naturalist urges us to do.) The situation gets even worse—I mean for Strawson, and his naturalistic dismissal of skepticism—where knowledge of "other minds" is concerned. What happens in this case is that I cannot *but* 'live my skepticism' (CR 437)—i.e., that, similarly to the situation concerning knowledge of the "external world", I simply cannot *wait* for (absolute) certainty or (complete) justification in order to act[50], yet *un*like the former case I also cannot resort to such an "easy" option as to "forget" and become "accommodated" with my doubts, since 'the surmise that I have not acknowledged about others, hence about myself, the thing there is to acknowledge, that each of us is human, is not, first of all, the recognition of a universal human condition'—as it *was* concerning the limitations of our knowledge of the "external

[50] In fact, to *wait* for that kind of justification is a possible cause of *tragedy*—that is precisely Othello's problem: no "evidence" of Desdemona's faithfulness is really lacking, yet acknowledgement is not forthcoming; that is the horror of his situation.

world"—'but first of all a surmise about myself' (CR 438). As a consequence, becoming 'accommodate' or 'permitting myself distraction' from my limitations concerning *acknowledgement* would be to compromise my own integrity as human being (see ibid.).

But what is precisely the alternative (to accommodation, i.e.) concerning (skeptical) doubts about "other minds"? What does it mean to 'live my skepticism' in this case? It means, first and foremost, to recognize—and, if one is to avoid tragedy, to accept—my *real separateness* from others—the fact, i.e., that there is no "metaphysical shortcut" to other's minds, or souls, or "inner lives"—thus realizing that it is always *up to me* to acknowledge the humanity in the other, and (thus) in myself. Of course acknowledgement might not be forthcoming, and *that* might incline one to think (or to fantasize) that this is because "the inner" is somewhat *hidden*—perhaps hidden by the human body. As I hope the considerations above shall suffice to suggest, Cavell would not exactly deny that in those cases the inner *is* hidden—surely Desdemona's faithfulness *is* hidden from Othello, in a limited but very real sense; yet, following Wittgenstein—for whom '[t]he human body is the best picture of the human soul' (PI II, iv)—Cavell would disagree as to the source of one's blindness:

> The block to my vision of the other is not the other's body but my incapacity or unwillingness to interpret or to judge it accurately, to draw the right connections. The suggestion is: I suffer a kind of blindness, but I avoid the issue by projecting this darkness upon the other. [...] The mythology according to which the body is a picture implies that the soul may be hidden not because the body essentially conceals it but because it essentially reveals it. The soul may be invisible to us the way something absolutely present may be invisible to us. [...] So we might say: What hides the mind is not the body but the mind itself—his his, or mine his, and contrariwise. (CR 368-9)

13. These considerations shall help me to state and assess some important shortcomings involved in Strawson's stance. Let me start trying to be very clear about one point: I really think we should grant Strawson that there would be something rather unwelcome or even untenable involved in the generalized adoption an objective attitude toward others—many of us would certainly prefer not to *live* in a world where that attitude became standard[51]; yet that is very different from saying that such change would be 'practically impossible', or unnatural, or inhuman.—And let us not go astray about the latter qualification: granted, we often do describe attitudes that we would rather not see other human beings taking as

[51] I cannot avoid recalling at this point Wittgenstein's vivid description (as in PI §420) of the 'uncanny feeling' that would be caused if I were to 'imagine that the people around me are automata'.

"inhuman"; yet, as Cavell correctly reminds us, 'only a human being can behave inhumanly' (CR 438). In other words, we cannot *but* acknowledge that such (outrageous) acts and attitudes are as human as any other—if, i.e., we are sincere in our assessment, and do not try to repress our knowledge about which possibilities are open to beings like us. Actually, I think that repressing that knowledge is really a dangerous thing to do. Yet Strawson seems to be doing just that when he says, e.g., that our attitudes of involvement and participation would not be suppressed 'even if some general truth were a theoretical ground for it' (FR 12). As I see these things, the real problem involved in the fact that we cannot but 'live our skepticism' concerning other minds is that it becomes an all too easy thing to do to find all kinds of "theoretical grounds" for "justifying" (in fact rationalizing) some (very practical and very detached) attitudes toward (some) others. (To go beyond Shakespeare's fiction, think about the "theoretical grounds" offered by European conquerors in order to enslave ("soulless") American natives, or again the "theoretical grounds" offered by Nazi officers in order to justify massive death of ("inferior") Jews at concentration camps.)

So part of what I am trying to get at here is that, *pace* Strawson—for whom, I recall, 'in order for self-conscious thought and experience to be possible, we must take it, or *believe*, that we have knowledge of external physical objects or other minds' (SN p. 21)—it is *not*, or not *simply*, knowledge or (ordinary) belief or (natural) inclination that *really* matters where the "ascription" of "human status" is concerned. As Cavell says: 'the alternative to my acknowledgement of the other is not my ignorance of him but my avoidance of him, call it my denial of him' (CR 389). (And as Wittgenstein said before him: 'My attitude towards [the other] is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the opinion that he has a soul' (PI II, iv).) What might be lacking when acknowledgement is not forthcoming is attunement—and again this is not, or not simply, a matter of belief or natural inclination, but rather something that, as Rudd says, 'may depend on one's willingness to be attuned; or to acknowledge one's attunement or to acknowledge the other' (Rudd, 2003, p. 155).—One might say: where acknowledgement (or its denial) is concerned, knowledge or belief come always too late—notwithstanding our self-indulgent rationalizations to the contrary.

Having stated those shortcomings in Strawson's position, I can try to explain what I take to be wrong with his response to skepticism—i.e., his quick dispensation, and his refusal to

pay attention to the force of that position (what Stanley Cavell would call its truth[52]). Sticking with the case of skepticism about "other minds": does not the fact that it is *possible* to abandon completely the non-detached attitude toward (some) others show that the ground for acknowledgement is as weak (or as strong) as our our capacities to take (or relinquish) interest on others and on ourselves—on that which is shared by us—hence, that it is (only) human after all? And does not that realization show that some instability, hence some doubt, hence the possibility of skepticism, are so to speak *internal* or *intrinsic* to our (finite) epistemic condition? Yet if our attitudes—both detached and non-detached—toward others are not grounded in anything beyond ourselves, then the burden and the responsibility for creating and maintaining inter-personal relationships, hence a community, is at least partially upon me, upon each of us[53]. Now *that* kind of burden can understandably make one anxious, and that anxiety might well incline one to avoid the real issue, by denying or repressing it—as Strawson the Humean naturalist seems inclined to do —or else by sublimating or rationalizing it—prefering, as Cavell would say, to transform 'a metaphysical finitude into an intellectual lack' (MWM 263), which is precisely what I take (some versions of) skepticism and solipsism as doing. (And yet notice that, as I see this dispute, a skeptic or a solipsist would have a clear advantage against their dismissive opponents, in that the former would at least recognize that there is a real difficulty, and one that simply cannot be solved by acquiring more *knowledge*—since there is no reason to suppose that we know something that the skeptic or the solipsist ignore—let alone by simply adducing our ordinary beliefs, or natural facts about us, or by describing our conceptual scheme.)

1.4 Descriptive metaphysics with human face: a methodological lesson

14. I hope the analysis pursued in the last section will suffice to indicate what awaits for supplementation or correction (or at the very least reinterpretation) in the argument of *Individuals*—and, by extension, in the very project of descriptive metaphysics, as

[52] Epitomized in the claim that 'the human creature's basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing, anyway not what we think of as knowing' (CR, p. 241).

[53] I shall explore this point further in chapter 5.

introduced and exemplified in that book. In order to show that, let me start by drawing attention to a fundamental difference—one which, with hindsight, might well appear primarily as a difference of emphasis—between the "reductions" presented in each of the texts analysed (i.e., respectively, chapter 3 of *Individuals* and 'Freedom and Resentment'). Recall that in the *Individuals'* argument, what Strawson presented as a problematic consequence of suppressing a set of conceptual connections from the analysis was *solipsism*, i.e., a *theoretical* (epistemological or metaphysical) impossibility of distinguishing (objectively) between the subject and her experiences. That consequence, we might also recall, was first and foremost a result of the lack of attention to the primitiveness of the concept of a person in our conceptual scheme; and that lack of attention, in turn, would be intimately connected to the neglecting of a certain 'natural fact' which would be at the bedrock of our practices of ascription of psychological predicates—namely, the conception of other subjects as human beings, as persons with whom we share a *common nature*.

Now, given the very terms in which this last step of the "anti-solipsistic" argument was delivered in *Individuals*, one might be left with the impression that the kind of neglecting it picks out would be (again) of merely *theoretical* interest, and it is precisely in order to counteract that impression that I think the analysis of 'Freedom and Resentment' is welcome—after all, what the argument presented in the latter essay shows is that, contrary to what Strawson seems to imply in *Individuals*, the real (or ultimate) "problematic consequence" of not acknowledging the humanity of others would not be only a modification of the "underlying logic" of our practices of ascription of P-predicates—the change or perhaps the suppression of the *concept* of a person; the problem would also not be just the *theoretical* impossibility of achieving a 'non-solipsistic consciousness' of the world; the real loss or change would be the suppression of *feelings* and *reactions* which are fundamental (given the way our *life* is—and not *just* the way our 'conceptual scheme' is) for the establishment of a variety of interpersonal relationships—involving affective, communicative and cognitive exchanges.

So that seems a good first step toward a better understanding of what is at stake when we describe the conditions of use of our concepts, or evaluate alternative ones. Yet I think we can do better. Strawson's (unwarranted) "optimism" in 'Freedom and Resentment' prevents him of noticing a still more important point—namely, that which seemed to be a

mere "thought-experiment" (indicating the *logical* possibility of not paying attention to or suppressing the *concept* of a person) may well take the form of a *practical* reality—the denial of the humanity of others, and, *as a consequence*, of ourselves. *Pace* what Strawson seems to suggest in *Individuals*, personhood and humanity are not just "predicates" that one "ascribes" or refrain to "ascribe" to somebody else, but rather something that one *acknowledges* or *refuses to acknowledge*. And as Stephen Mulhall says: the humanity 'of all human beings is in the hands of their fellows; their accession to human status involves their being acknowledged as human by others. They can fulfil all the criteria, but they cannot force an acknowledgement from those around them' (Mulhall [*online*[54]]).

The argument of chapter 3 of *Individuals* is still one of the most lucid examinations of the criteria for personhood in twentieth-century analytic philosophy. Yet if the "persons" described by Strawson are to be really recognized as *human beings*—and not just as *things* (however special) to which we can ascribe (special) *predicates* (those which 'we would not dream' to ascribe to physical objects)—it is necessary to go beyond the bare skeleton Strawson presents in *Individuals,* finding (or providing) a human face in (or for) them. (In point of fact, the general feeling I get when reading the argument of *Individuals* in the light of these concerns is that the 'basic particulars' which throughout the are called 'persons' fall completely short of displaying enough traits of full-fledged personhood, looking more like faceless automatons than as genuine *human beings*.) Now the argument of 'Freedom and Resentment' goes *some* of the way toward that aim, by showing that, beside being the loci of mind and action—which was essentially the characterization of persons in *Individuals*—persons are also the proper objects of resentment, gratitude, forgivenness, love, hatred, and a number of other feelings which are crucially important in our lives—in a word, they are the proper objects of *acknowledgement* (as well as its denial). Now the more we try to flesh out the notion of a person from that point onward*,* the more we see that problems which at first seemed to be 'solvable' from the thoroughly aseptic and abstract perspective of descriptive metaphysics acquire a practical dimension which not even Strawson took seriously enough.

[54] I quote from a paper originally published on the internet (see References). The paper underwent important changes and was published as a section of the book *On Film* (Mulhall, 2002). The revised version of the passage quoted above is on p. 35 of that book.

15. The analysis above provides the elements for a more general methodological lesson. Strawson claims in the Introduction of *Individuals* that '[u]p to a point, the reliance upon a close examination of the actual use of words is the best, and indeed the only sure, way in philosophy' (IN 9). Although the formulation of that thesis is not wholly satisfactory—as it suggests that philosophy should deal "with words only"—it might, with a different emphasis—the emphasis in the *practices* in which our use of words is embedded, in our *life with words*—stand for a good guiding principle for the philosophical task of achieving a better and clearer understanding of our condition. However, having stated that principle, Strawson goes on to say that 'the discriminations we can make, and the connexions we can establish, in this way, are not general enough and not far-reaching enough to meet the full metaphysical demand for understanding' (IN 9-10). The first question to ask here is what exactly is the nature of *that* demand, and then whether it is legitimate as it stands. For if it is of the nature of that demand to require a *simplified* model, an *idealization*, then why should we prefer it instead of a fuller—more realistic, even more descriptive—description of our 'conceptual scheme'?[55]—As I see things, if one wants to inherit and continue with the project of a descriptive metaphysics—turning it into a (still) worthwhile enterprise—one is better advised to make a conscious effort not to sweep unsolved existential difficulties under some intellectualized philosophical carpet (e.g., a naturalistic one), thereby relinquishing any excuse for evading the real demands and pressures put upon us by our lives in the world and among others, which might be what drive us to philosophize in the first place. (It should be noticed that, if Strawson's diagnosis is correct—if. i.e., the acknowledgement of other human beings is a condition for the possibility of a 'non-solipsistic consciousness', and this, in its turn, is a basic presupposition of the objectivity of our experience *as a whole*—the revision asked for here has wider consequences for his own philosophical project than would appear at first sight.)

I conclude with a general and still more speculative suggestion, which I do not claim to have established in any definitive way, and which I shall continue pursuing and illustrating in the next chapters. The suggestion is that we should always suspect that the (supposedly)

[55] Perhaps Strawson would be willing to argue that the kind of simplified model we get as the outcome of work in descriptive metaphysics would be justified in an analogous way to that of scientific models, i.e., by the *philosophical* or *theoretical* or *methodological* advantages it has for the task of elucidating concepts (e.g., *subject of experience*, *person*, *consciousness*, and so on) and (thus) getting rid of conceptual confusions (such as those supposedly underlying skepticism about other minds and solipsism). And if that is the case, then of course Strawson's justification can only be assessed according to the success of the argument presented in the book as a whole; yet, as I have been trying to show in relation to to a set of central issues, I do not think he has achieved that kind of clarification in a satisfactory way.

"purely philosophical problems"—such as that of solipsism—are intellectualized manifestations of perplexities and difficulties which are related to our human condition—the 'difficulties of reality'[56], to borrow Cora Diamond's phrase. A number of those difficulties—which when intellectualized might get expressed as reasons for becoming dissatisfied with our ordinary "conceptual scheme"—will be presented in the following chapters. Yet for the time being I shall only highlight that by claiming that philosophical problems are intellectualized expressions of existential difficulties I am not suggesting that they are in any way less important—rather the contrary. But what I am suggesting is that the proper way to deal with these problems—which is not exactly a way to 'remove them', since that would demand much more than conceptual elucidation—must involve a deeper diagnosis of their sources, and in order for that diagnosis to be possible we need to engage not only our intellects, but also (perhaps even primarily) our sensibilities. Now that is the kind of pursuit of understanding that I think would be a proper, or at least a major, task of philosophy—anyway of a certain heir of that family which we use to call 'analytical philosophy'—one which would perhaps deserve the title 'descriptive metaphysics with a human face'[57].

[56] Diamond, 2006, p. 99. Diamond attributes the phrase to John Updike (ibid., p. 114, n. 1), who would have used it 'in a *New Yorker* essay of his in the 1980s', which she cannot trace.

[57] I am greatly indebted to Paulo Faria, who read a couple of preliminary versions of the present text and made important suggestions of corrections, as well as to Drs. John Hyman and Stephen Mulhall, who read and commented a previous draft, and to Rogerio Passos Severo, who helped me with the translation of that draft to English.

2 The Lonely Eye: Solipsism and the limits of sense in the *Tractatus*

> *In philosophizing we may not* terminate *a disease of thought. It must run its natural course, and* slow *cure is all important.*
>
> (Wittgenstein, Z §382)

2.1 Prologue: on begining—and ending

1. The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* was the first (and actually the only) philosophical book Wittgenstein published during his lifetime. The first explicit reference to solipsism in that work occurs in a rather late context—namely, section 5.6; however, given the peculiar hierarchic ordering of propositions employed by its author[58], that very placing indicates that solipsism is a rather overreaching concern—in fact, I shall argue that there is a sense in which solipsism is present from the very beginning of the book.—But where exactly does the book begin? Is it in the first numbered proposition? In the first line of the Preface? In the *Motto* from Kürnberger? Or is the *real* beginning something that transcends the (physical) limits of the book itself—perhaps going back to Wittgenstein's first recorded philosophical reflections in his notebooks, or even further, to the philosophical texts he read and which influenced his own view in the *Tractatus*?—Well, does answering these questions really matter? After all, they can be asked in relation to *any* (any philosophical?) book; and yet, as we shall see, they are especially pressing when one is dealing with the *Tractatus*, since much of what one takes to be the results of this particular book will depend on how and where one decides to start reading it—as well as on how and where one takes the reading to end.

The last statement is admittedly opaque; in part, this is due to the difficulties I have to cope with in getting my own reading of the *Tractatus* started (I mean, to start it anew, to recount it in this very text): on the one hand, I would like to say enough about how I think the book should be read in order to account for my strategy in what follows; on the other hand, too much information about this may cause the most important lesson of the whole enterprise

[58] More on this point below (see esp. n. 57).

to be lost—as when a film trailer gives away most of its plot, thus completely spoiling our experience. Let me put the situation this way: I take it that because of the peculiar way in which the whole argument (if that is the right word) of the *Tractatus* is organized—call it the book's peculiar dialectic—there is a real risk of extracting conclusions too soon—before its ideas are ripe, so to speak. Now of course the process of "ripening" cannot possibly take place with dead formulations in a textbook—it must take place somewhere else; and this is precisely how I am inclined to describe *my experience* as a reader: it is as if the book worked as a mirror, whose reflected image changes according to the changes it produces in the perceiver. Moreover, these changes are not merely in details, but sometimes amount rather to (something akin to) *Gestalt* switches, whose alternating results are the impression that nothing makes sense anymore—that all the pieces of the puzzle are out of place—followed by the impression that everything is finally fitting together.

At this point one might ask: 'And how do you know what is the right time to stop the reading? How can you be sure that some particular configuration of the pieces is not yet another illusion?'—Well, I really cannot ensure you about this—not more than I can ensure myself. In fact, one of the greatest difficulties generated in the process of reading the *Tractatus* as I think it should be read—one which I had to learn how to live with—is precisely the increasing level of philosophical self-consciousness it produces, with which comes an equally increasing suspicion about the results one gets—or takes oneself as getting. This, in turn, is the reason why it becomes so difficult to write about the *Tractatus* after finding your way through it[59]—after all, how to combine the all but unavoidable self-subversiveness of the process—the awareness, acquired after each round, that the previous approach was in some important respect wrong—with the need to present a linear reconstruction of it? The answer I came up with after some reflection was that I should present my own development, including its phases of *Gestalt* reorganization, its self-questioning and self-suspicious moments, with some detail, so that it could be taken by others as an example—to follow, or to avoid. The idea, then, is not to record every single step in my journey—after all, it is not a diary that I expect you to read; rather, I had to pick out some of the points where the most important changes occurred, in order to make that gradual and evolving process somehow discrete. Some level of artificiality is implied by this choice, which, however ultimately unsatisfactory, seemed inevitable.

[59] A very telling enactment of that difficulty can be found in Conant (1989).

2. Going back to the question of where to start reading the *Tractatus*: I said above that one of the central lessons I learnt from my experience as a reader was that one should take seriously the dialectic character of the book; and that means, among other things, that one should never lose sight of Wittgenstein's own philosophical self-consciousness, which is reflected in the way he structured his work. And this, in turn, means that one is well advised (at least provisionally) to follow the path devised by Wittgenstein himself—i.e., start reading the Preface, go through the main body of the book, and then... well, then follow its own "self-undoing" last instructions, i.e., try to recognize its propositions as nonsensical, in order to overcome them, and see the world aright.—'But what does that exactly mean?'—That is precisely the question whose answer, or attempt to answer, will have to be postponed until the end of this reading. What I can advance here—with minimal amounts of spoiler—is that only after following this whole pattern can we find ourselves in a position to evaluate what the 'truth in solipsism' is (to the extent that there is one); I can also advance that the result which we will achieve is probably not the one orthodox readers of that book would expect.

2.2 Act one: reading the *Tractatus*

2.2.1 The Preface

3. The Preface—and, consequently, the *Tractatus* itself—opens with the following words:

> Perhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has himself had the thoughts expressed in it—or at least similar thoughts.—So it is not a textbook.—Its purpose would be achieved if it gave pleasure to one person who read and understood it. (p. 3)[60]

[60] Unless stated otherwise, all the quotations and page numbers in this chapter are from the revised edition of the English translation of the *Tractatus*, by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974).

These words, it seems to be, give us a particular picture of the experience of reading the book they introduce—about the kind of attitude which is expected from its readers, and the aims it is designed to achieve. For let us take its first sentence at face value (how else should we take it?): if it is true, then what could be the interest of reading such a book? Is not the reason for reading books to learn new things? Furthermore, what could be the reason to write it, if not to convince at least some readers—particularly, those who did *not* already had those thoughts—of the rightness or truth of its theses? Consistently enough, the second and third sentences just seem to testify that there is nothing to be *learnt* from this book—what else could we expect from reading (and understanding) thoughts we already had, except a kind of (narcissistic?) pleasure, i.e., something very distant from the kind of intellectual achievement we strive for when reading a technical book (or even a textbook)?

Needless to say, this is not an auspicious beginning for a book. In fact, so inauspicious and puzzling it is, that it has almost without exception elicited from the readers an attitude of quick dismissal, as if it was obvious—against the parenthetical suggestion I made above—that we should *not* take those introductory sentences at face value. This should remind us that, notwithstanding the attempts of an author to guide his readers through a well defined path, it is always our prerogative to accept or to reject the options at our disposal.—Now was Wittgenstein unaware of this fact? Or was he rather willing to elicit just that kind of dismissive attitude from his readers? And, if the latter, what is the use of it?—Regardless of how we end up answering these questions, there remains the fact that it is up to us—as an heuristic strategy, say—to decide to let this apparent difficulty aside, treating the introductory sentences of the Preface as some kind of rhetoric device. Of course such decision has a price, to the extent in which we are to take this reading seriously: it commits us to come back later, so as to make sure that the decision was sound. (Again, this is arguably a burden presented to *any* reading of *any* book whatsoever; nevertheless, books like the *Tractatus*—by which I mean, books written in such an ostensibly self-conscious manner—are peculiar, in that it is always an open possibility in such cases that this kind of (initially) dismissive attitude—which can in due course change into a more self-suspicious move—is just what they *intend* to elicit from their readers—or at least from some of them, i.e., the ones who have ‘read and understood’ it, i.e., the ones who, when are reading these

sentences from the first time, are *not yet* ready to become suspicious about their content—or with what they may take as their "rhetoric character".[61])

4. Assuming that we (provisionally) decided to let those difficulties aside, let's move to the second paragraph. Wittgenstein's tone at this point is slightly different: 'The book deals with the problems of philosophy and shows, I believe, that the reason why these problems are posed is that the logic of our language is misunderstood' (p. 3). Now I take it that one's first reaction to this claim might be very skeptical: are we *really* supposed to believe, first, that *all* the problems of philosophy (just stop to think of some!) have *one* and *only* source, or reason, and, second, that this source is *purely* and *simply* this: misunderstandings about the 'the logic of our language'? Even if we (rather radically) restrict our attention to the kinds of philosophies whose methods can in some sense be described as "linguistic", is not the opposite view more plausible—i.e., the view according to which 'posing' (and, hopefully, solving) philosophical problems leads us to a better understanding of the logic of our language? After all, however differently professed among its exponents, philosophy's self-understanding of its own goals has always included, at the very least, the pursuit of *clarity*.—Or are we supposed to believe that it is exactly the impulse to attain clarity—traditionally by means of 'posing' (and hoping to solve) 'philosophical problems'—which actually leads us astray? But then again, it is up to us at this point to give the author the benefit of doubt—since, arguably, we are just being presented with a thesis that the book as a whole is supposed to prove. Besides, the opinion according to which philosophers create their own problems—with the implication that those problems do not exist in our "pre-philosophical" life—is widespread enough, at least to provide some initial support to this view. (Notice, though, that before *proving* it, the book has yet

[61] Commenting on an early sentence of Emerson's 'Self-Reliance'—yet another highly self-conscious text—Cavell presents some considerations about the relation text / reader which are also applicable to our (difficult) situation facing Wittgenstein's opening remarks in the *Tractatus*. Emerson's sentence is: 'In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts. They come back to us with a certain alienated majesty.' Here are Cavell's comments on those words:

> If the thoughts of a text such as Emerson's (say, the brief text on rejected thoughts) are yours, then you do not need them. If its thoughts are *not* yours, they will do you no good. The problem is that the text's thoughts are neither exactly mine nor not mine. In their sublimity as my rejected—say repressed—thoughts, they represent my further, next, unattained but attainable, self. To think otherwise, to attribute the origin of my thoughts simply to the other, thoughts which are then, as it were, implanted in me—some would say caused—by let us say some Emerson, is idolatry. (CHU 57)

to clarify what is exactly the nature of those 'logical misunderstandings', and how they can be responsible for (all?) the 'problems of philosophy'.)

Now the next sentence of this paragraph can be so construed as to result very coherent with the general view formulated above: 'The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence'. Notice that this is only to be expected—after all, if the first sentence is true, then of course its positive counterpart shall be something like a good or sound understanding of the 'logic of our language', which (arguably) would be reflected in our talking clearly. The obvious question to be made at this point is how exactly can such a clarity be attained? In particular, how can it be achieved *philosophically*, given that we are supposed to dismiss philosophy's traditional methods as being themselves born from logical misunderstandings? Is Wittgenstein implying that those methods should radically change, or rather that philosophy is simply a hopeless confused enterprise, which should be just abandoned after we understand its true origins and fate?—Is it because of these reasons that the book we are reading is not (yet another) philosophical textbook?

5. The following two paragraphs seem designed to answer (at least some of) the questions made above:

> Thus the aim of the book is to draw a limit to thought, or rather—not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts: for in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of this limit thinkable (i.e., we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought).
>
> It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be drawn, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense. (p. 3)

So, we are told, in order to attain clarity, it is necessary to 'draw limits' separating sense from nonsense. This of course is again consistent with the idea expressed above (about the 'whole sense of the book'). But it is important to take notice of the modalities involved here[62]—the idea is *not* that our only options are *completely clear sense* or *no talk at all*; our human language is not tailored for such a clear, binary distinction—there are many "grey areas" between (absolutely clear) sense and (plain) nonsense. Wittgenstein himself testifies

[62] I owe this indication to Dr. Stephen Mulhall.

this by confessing, in the penultimate paragraph of the Preface, his own limitations concerning the *expression* of the thoughts which are contained in the rest of the book. Here is the passage in which he makes such a confession:

> If this work has any value, it consists in two things: the first is that thoughts are expressed in it, and on this score the better the thoughts are expressed—the more the nail has been hit on the head—the greater will be its value.—Here I am conscious of haven fallen a long way short of what is possible. Simply because my powers are too slight for the accomplishment of the task.—May others come and do it better. (pp. 3-4)

So, to summarize, what can be said at all *can* (ideally, i.e.) be said clearly, but it does not *need* to be so, and, as a matter of fact, it is far from being so—hence the philosophical problems. This is the reason why, notwithstanding his confession of having failed to attain perfectly clear expression, Wittgenstein still shows himself very confident about 'the *truth* of the thoughts that are here communicated', claiming, in the last paragraph of the Preface, that it 'seems to [him] unassailable and definitive' (p. 4). The paragraph keeps this self-confident tone in its second sentence, where Wittgenstein avows to take himself 'to have found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems'. This is not the first—and of course neither the last—time that a philosopher takes his own achievements in such a high account, so maybe *that* is not to be unexpected. What seems really surprising is the next sentence (the last of the Preface): 'And if I am not mistaken in this belief, then the second thing in which the value of this work consists is that it shows how little is achieved when these problems are solved'. Again, are we really supposed to believe that the 'final solution' to the problems of philosophy (if found) would be a *small achievement*? And even if this was true, then how could such a 'small achievement' be one of the most important—most valuable—results of the whole book? These are again difficulties that we can decide to put aside, waiting to see if the reading of the book can help to make things clearer.

2.2.2 The main body

6. Going to the main body of the book, the first remarkable aspect is the numbering system employed to organize its propositions. The impression a reader gets from this system—as

far as I am entitled to speak for other readers—is that of a perfectly well arranged logical order—so that again there seems to be no alternative except to follow the path chosen beforehand by the author. (I thrust you shall by now be suspicious enough of this kind of move[63].)

The second remarkable aspect is the very *content* of the propositions. The book begins with a simple (simple, indeed, to the point of raising more suspicions) *ontological* thesis about the constitution of 'the world'—*viz.*, that it is the totality of *facts* (i.e., *combinations* of objects) instead of *things* (cf. 1.*n*'s). Those facts, in turn, are said to be represented by *propositions*, which, consequently, would amount to kinds of *pictures* of the facts (cf. 2.*n*'s). The relation of propositions and facts is said to be (*at bottom*) a one-one relation between the constituents of atomic facts and the constituents of elementary propositions

[63] Just as an additional reason for suspicion, have you ever asked yourself why, if that decimal system was to be so perfect and clean and ordered, when we go to the 2*n*'s, what immediately follows proposition 2 is not 2.*1*, but 2.*0*1? What does that 'zero' mean? Notice that the initial footnote, which describes the numbering system, offers no word at all about propositions like *n.0*1—what it says is that 'propositions *n*.1, *n*.2, *n*.3, etc. are comments on proposition no. *n*', and that '*n.m*1, *n.m*2, etc. are comments on proposition no. *n.m*; and so on'. Of course Wittgenstein also states that 'the decimal numbers [...] indicate the logical importance of the propositions'; is it, then, that the use of 'zero' serves to indicate the (relative) logical *un*importance of some propositions? But if that is true, why would it be necessary to write those propositions in the first place? Perhaps the reason was exactly to show to the reader that those propositions were, possibly against her own expectations, (relatively) *un*important—yet another attempt to guide our reading in a well defined direction. Now if we try to apply that hypothesis to the case of the 2.0*n*'s (trying to understand what could be *un*important about those propositions), we get indeed a promising result: let us recall that proposition 2 is about *facts*, and its whole point is to indicate that what exists *by its own*—in an ontologically irreducible way, so to speak—are 'states of affairs' and not (as already noticed in 1.1) their 'atomic' constituents, *things*, or *objects*. So, even if it is the case, as 2.01 tells us, that 'a state of affairs (a state of things) is a combination of objects (things)', this is *not* really important—it does not, not really, matter for the purposes of the ontology being presented in the book; what *really* matters is the *combination* itself, the 'fact', and because of that the next *important* propositions, i.e., 2.1*n*'s, will resume just from that point. Now this hypothesis also seems to hold of the 3.0*n*'s, 4.0*n*'s, 5.0*n*'s, and 6.0*n*'s—just try it! And if I am right in thinking that this is yet another self-conscious attempt to guide the readers in a well defined direction—that of putting these propositions aside as unimportant—and, therefore, also an invitation for transgression, another interesting question arises: what if we decide that those propositions should be taken as really important? Take, for example, the propositions of section 4—which in fact contains much more *un*important propositions than the preceding ones, and, furthermore, also seems to contain some *very un*important ones (as indicated by the use of more consecutive 'zeros' in their numeration). Here are some of the claims which I found very interesting, and, therefore, whose insertion on the category of 'unimportant propositions' puzzled me: (i) that 'The totality of propositions is language' (4.001); (ii) that 'Everyday language is a part of the human organism and is not less complicated than it', and 'language disguises the thought' (4.002); (iii) that 'Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical work are not false but nonsensical' (4.003); (iv) that 'At first sight a proposition [...] does not seem to be a picture of the reality with which it is connected' (4.011); (v) that 'It belongs to the essence of a proposition that it should be able to communicate a *new* sense to us' (4.027), and in order to do so 'A proposition must use old expressions to communicate a new sense. A proposition communicates a situation to us, and so it must be *essentially* connected with the situation' (4.03); (vi) that '"logical constants" are not representatives' (4.0312). (The suggestion to be at least puzzled about the 'zero' in these propositions was made by Dr. Stephen Mulhall, during a seminar on Wittgenstein. My whole attempt to read the *Tractatus* owes much to the instigating remarks he made on that book during that seminar.)

(i.e., simple objects and names). A proposition 'applied and thought out' is a *thought;* thoughts themselves represent facts, and so they also can be described as (special) kinds of 'pictures'—*logical* ones. This 'application' (or 'thinking of') of a proposition is its *sense* (cf. 3.*n*'s and 4.*n*'s). Complex propositions are the results of the combinations among truth-functions expressed by elementary ones (elementary propositions are truth-functions of themselves—cf. 5.*n*'s); since there is a *general form* of truth functions (namely, $\overline{p}, \overline{\xi}, N(\overline{\xi})$), there is also a general form of propositions (proposition 6).

The reason why the results summed up above should be seen as *remarkable* is that, after reading the Preface, we should be waiting for anything *but* this kind of traditional philosophical enterprise—after all, the book was *not* supposed to be a 'textbook'! Anyway, we can perhaps speculate that this is the only way to fulfil the task presented in the Preface —that of clarifying the 'logic of our language', by 'drawing limits' separating sense from nonsense. So let's try to put this hypothesis to work.

7. To begin with, it is worth remembering that the Preface raises, but does not exactly answer, two questions which are fundamental to understand how such a task was supposed to be accomplished by the book, *viz.,* (i) *how* the limits separating sense from nonsense were supposed to be drawn, and (ii) *how* the drawing of such limits could solve the 'problems of philosophy'. As to the first question, the only additional clue offered in the Preface itself was the (somewhat opaque) claim that the limits should be drawn 'in language'. Now this is exactly the role of the presentation of a general form of proposition: provided that we have found such a form (which, N.B., was obtained solely by reflection of the 'inner workings' of language itself—see §6), we can understand how any *bona fide* proposition may be generated from the elementary ones, and, consequently, we can exclude from the category of 'proposition' all the strings of signs which do not satisfy that condition (cf. the examples of the pseudo-propositions of mathematics, science, and ethics, dealt with, respectively, in 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4).

Once we have understood the nature of the procedure (presented in a programmatic way in the Preface) for 'drawing limits' to sense from *within* language, we have the key to answer question (ii), about *how* the philosophical problems are supposed to be solved by the book:

as illustrated by the cases of 'scepticism' (6.51) and the 'problem of life' (6.521), we can use the procedure just mentioned to show that such (alleged) problems are in fact just *pseudo*-problems, which strictly speaking cannot even be '*posed*' (the word used in the Preface), since the kind of 'question' we try to formulate to express them, as far as it is supposed to have a definite sense, is simply made impossible by the rules of logical syntax (particularly the general rule of generation of propositions presented in 6), so that of course there are no possible 'answers' to them either (the general lesson of 6.5).

These considerations allow us to understand two further (puzzling) programmatic claims made in the Preface: (i) that all the (pseudo-)problems of philosophy are just consequences of 'misunderstandings of the logic of our language', and (ii) that 'little is achieved when these problems are solved'. After all, what we are left with upon applying the above-described procedure is not, strictly speaking, a 'solution' to any problem whatsoever, but rather a demonstration that there were no problems at all to solve, just products of logical confusion: 'Of course there are no questions left, and this itself is the answer' (6.52).

8. This general reading receives further support when applied to the two penultimate propositions of section 6.5, which are the following:

> 6.522 There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical.
>
> 6.53 The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e., propositions of natural science—i.e., something that has nothing to do with philosophy—and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. Although it would not be satisfying to the other person—he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy—*this* method would be the only strictly correct one.

Remember that the two propositions above are meant as clarifications of 6.5's thesis—according to which, basically, we should not search for answers when a (supposed) question 'cannot be put into words'. It may take some work to understand how proposition 6.522 could be said to play that role; as I am inclined to read it at this point, I would say that it does so in a rather peculiar and negative way: what it 'clarifies' is that the idea expressed in 6.5 is *not* (perhaps against our expectations—or were they just mine?) that

beyond the 'limits of language' (and sense) there is *nothing*; rather, there is 'something' (or some 'things'), about which we simply cannot *talk*. Now these 'things' are further said to be (i) ineffable (although 'manifestable'), and (ii) 'what is mystical'. So let us try to get a little bit clearer about those qualifications before we proceed reading the propositions in the list.

I will start with the later qualification—'mystical'. Its first textual occurrence is on 6.44, where it is said that 'It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists'. 6.45 further elaborates this view, identifying the 'mystical' with a kind of 'feeling'—the feeling of 'the world as a limited whole'. Trying to sum up the view being presented at this juncture, it seems that we can distinguish at least two claims: (ii.i) that the *fact* that the world exists is what is mystical, and (ii.ii) that we are *aware* of this fact when we 'view' the world 'sub specie aeterni'—or, what amounts to the same, when we 'feel' it 'as a limited whole'. This throws us immediately back to the talk about *limits* (of thought, language and world) presented in the Preface, and further clarified in section 6—a section of which the role, to repeat, is to indicate *how* such limits are supposed to be 'drawn', or 'expressed', *in* language. Now, two different ways of drawing such limits are presented in that section: one is *positive*—the unveiling of *limit cases* of propositions (tautologies), which (directly) display those very limits in themselves—and another is *negative*—the unveiling of *pseudo*-propositions (such as those of mathematics, science and ethics) which arise from the (hopeless) attempts to express something necessary about the world, and, to this extent (i.e., by trying to go *beyond* the limits of sense, and thus producing nonsense) make us aware of those same limits that tautologies (directly) make manifest.

Given that we know how these limits are supposed to be 'made manifest', and assuming that the equation between (the awareness of) 'the mystical' and (the awareness of) those limits is correct, we have an answer to the question of how the 'mystical' can be 'made manifest'—i.e., we can understand qualification (i). Notice, however, that this conclusion depends on a particularly "charitable" reading of proposition 6.522—which, taken at face value, is talking about *there being* 'things' (however ineffable) *outside* or *beyond* the limits of what can be said, or thought. Now this, by the very standards of the book, should not be *said* at all—after all, remember once again the Preface's programmatic claims about the need to trace the limits to the expression of thoughts 'in language', i.e., *from within*, and,

consequently, without having to 'find both sides of this limit thinkable', to 'think what cannot be thought'.

(But why in the world is Wittgenstein here going against his own advice of remaining *silent* about what is *beyond* such limits?—To be absolutely fair, he is not (in this or any other context) exactly *saying* that we can *express, think* or *talk about* what is beyond the limits of thought and language (which would indeed amount to a straightforward contradiction); the problem is, of course that he does not exactly *remain silent* either.—So, what is he doing after all?—Well, I have to admit that I do not have an answer to this question yet; it is a fair and important question, to be sure, in that it points to an important tension in this part of the book, to which we shall return. The best I can do right now is to mark it off for later treatment. Having done that, I suggest we continue with the reading.)

So let us turn our attention to proposition 6.53. Again, the first question we should ask about this proposition is how it can be said to 'clarify' 6.5. The answer seems more straightforward in this case: it does so by making explicit an (otherwise implicit) methodological *consequence* of 6.5 for the philosophical task itself—for the treatment of the (pseudo-)questions which originate philosophical problems. To this extent, 6.53 is clearly coherent with the programmatic claims made in the Preface, as well as with the illustrations of how that method was supposed to be applied (I refer to the analyses of 'scepticism' and the 'problem of life'). Now the (exegetical) trouble arises when we stop thinking about these circumscribed cases, and start to think about the *general* procedure followed in the book as a whole—after all, just ask yourself: has Wittgenstein followed his own advice in the preceding sections of the book? Has he in those contexts presented only 'propositions of natural science'? Of course the answer seems to be: *not at all*; as we saw, he voices *metaphysical* (ontological) theses from the very beginning in order to achieve the results indicated in the Preface. This provides a clue as to why, for the sake of coherence, the next message presented in the book would have to be "self-undoing".

2.2.3 The final instructions

9. This message of self-destruction occurs in the last proposition of section 6, and goes as follows:

> 6.54 My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.
>
> He must overcome these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.[64]

In acknowledging that his own previous propositions (all of them?) were 'nonsensical', and should be used as 'steps' in a 'ladder' to be 'thrown away', Wittgenstein at least makes some room for accommodating the difficulty indicated above—after all, in acknowledging that he is also conceding, however implicitly, that such propositions (but which ones?) were indeed 'metaphysical'.—Is this the reason why, in the preceding proposition (6.53), he spoke of what *would be* the 'correct method in philosophy'—instead of just saying what it *is*? But then again, why not follow the 'correct method' since the beginning, instead of going by such sideways? Is it because going by sideways can be in some sense more 'satisfying to the other person'?—In any event, to say that the difficulties above can be 'accommodated' in this way is not to say that they *cease* to be *difficulties*. The challenge remains that we have yet to understand: (i) *how* we are (were we?) supposed to use (to have used?) those propositions (which ones?) as 'steps' in such 'ladder'; (ii) how it is supposed to be 'thrown away'; and (iii) what exactly is the result of all that—what it means to 'see the world aright'.

Now, before trying to understand how the ladder works—or, better, *if* we really want to understand this point—I think we should try to sharpen our general reading by applying it to specific problems posed in the book, in between the path through which we have been walking in large steps up to this point. This is my cue to introduce the problem with which I shall be mainly concerned in the rest of the text—viz., that posed by the propositions dealing with solipsism and the limits of language (5.6*n*'s). By analysing these propositions, we shall

[64] The translation of the last sentence was amended, following a suggestion from Floyd, who in turn owes it to Goldfarb (see Floyd, 2007, pp. 187-8 & n. 29). Both (Floyd and Goldfarb) see Pears and McGinness translation of '*überwinden*' as 'to transcend' as tendentious; although this judgement depends on their particular interpretations, I think is uncontroversial that the verb 'to transcend' is less vague, and, therefore, less amenable to different interpretations, than the German one, and this is enough reason (at least by now—but see §21 below) to prefer the more literal rendition 'to overcome'. (Ogden uses 'to surmount', which I think would equally do.)

meet once again the tension indicated above, when we compared the reference to the 'things' which are said to be *outside* or *beyond* the limits spoken about in the Preface, with the programmatic claims made in that very same context; only this time we will see that the tension is also *internal* to the analysis presented in section 5.6. (The same goes to the analysis presented in section 6.4, which is concerned with 'the mystical' and the 'absolute value', although I will not attempt to drawn the parallel here[65].)

2.3 Intermission: from realism to solipsism, and back again

2.3.1 'The limits of my language *mean the limits of my world*'

10. As we saw above, the general idea of 'drawing limits' (to the world, language and thoughts) is always in the background of the book's argument. However, after its introduction in the Preface, it is only in section 5.6 that it will be brought to the foreground again. This occurs already in the first proposition of that section, which reads: '*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world'. Before reading the sub-propositions offered to elucidate this one, let us pause and think about how we have arrived at it—i.e., how the general analysis of the conditions for representation can have this seemingly solipsistic conclusion as its consequence.

With that aim in mind, let us recall that section 5 as a whole is intended as a kind of technical exposition of a general idea presented before in the book: the account of how complex propositions can be generated from elementary ones—or, to be more specific, the account of how the *truth-values* of elementary propositions can be combined by means of 'truth-operations' in order to generate the complex ones. Letting the technical details of that analysis aside, this reminder must give us a better sense of how difficult it is, indeed, to understand the role of proposition 5.6 as a *sub*-proposition of this whole section—after all, how can the idea of limits of (my) language be possibly related to the idea of propositions (in general) being truth-functions of elementary ones?

[65] Mulhall (2007b) presents an analysis of section 6.4 which I see as very congenial to my own approach in what follows; although I do not claim complete faithfulness to his reading strategy, I happily acknowledge that it was one of the main sources of inspiration for the subsequent analysis—a good illustration of how to produce a clarifying 'resolute reading' of particular stretches of the *Tractatus*.

In order to answer that question let us notice, first, that proposition 5 *itself* is already working (however implicitly—given the account previously presented in the book) with a relation between *language* and *world*: if *all* the propositions of our language are 'truth-function[s] of elementary propositions' (5), and if '[t]ruth-possibilities of elementary propositions mean possibilities of existence and non-existence of states of affairs' (4.3)[66], then of course the totality of our language must correspond to the totality of possibilities of existence and non-existence of states of affairs—i.e., to all the possible *facts* in the world. And by means of this reasoning we can at least understand in what sense the limits of *language* can be said to 'mean' the limits of the *world*: the idea is *not,* N.B., that of equating two "independently existing" limits (which, so to speak, "just happen" to be equal, or congruent), but rather that of calling our attention to an *internal relation*—if you want, a *necessary* congruence of these limits—in that they are "both" grounded on the *very same operation,* by means of which some "elements" (atomic facts / elementary propositions) are combined in order to generate new "complexes" (factual / propositional).

[66] By presenting 4.3's thesis alone here I intend to cut across a much longer path which was built up to this point since proposition 1, connecting the limits of language and world. It may be of some help to indicate some of the most important stops in this path, as follows: section 1 established that the world is the totality of *facts* (instead of *things*) in logical space; section 2 goes from this brief and very condensed ontology to an examination of the conditions for the *representation* of those facts which constitutes reality. The basic idea is well known: 'We picture facts to ourselves' (2.1); pictures are 'models of reality' (2.12), they are themselves 'facts' (2.141), whose (pictorial) elements 'correspond to' (2.13) or 'represent' (2.131) the objects which constitute the (other) facts which we want to depict. This form which is shared between the fact depicted and the depicting fact is the 'pictorial form' (2.17). When we abstract from the particular *medium* in which these pictures are conveyed (i.e., whether it is a 'spatial picture', or a 'coloured one'—see 2.171), and pay attention only to its *logical* aspect, we can also call this form a 'logico-pictorial form' (2.2). The next stop, section 3, deals with *thought:* 'A logical picture of facts is a thought' (3). Thoughts must be made manifest in some *perceptible* way (3.1), and that is exactly the role of propositions—more specifically (cf. 3.11-12), of the 'perceptible sign of a proposition (as spoken or written, etc.)'. 3.2 further specifies the conditions under which the expression of thoughts is made possible by propositions: since the (pictorial) relation between propositions and facts is ultimately dependent on a one-one relation between constituents of propositions ('simple signs' or 'names', cf. 3.201-3.202) and constituents of facts (objects), there must be some 'objects of the thought' corresponding to the elements of the 'propositional sign'. 3.3 testifies that what really *matters* in this whole account is the *combination*—of objects to generate *facts*, and of names to generate (articulated) *propositions*. In other words, 3.3 is the mirror image, at the level of language, of the ontological thesis expressed in section 1. (3.4 resumes the idea of a 'place in logical space', and clarifies it by providing an analogy with geometry—the idea being that, as in (analytical) geometry we can use mathematical expressions (e.g., Cartesian coordinates) to represent points in space, so in logic we can use propositions to represent 'points' in 'logical space'.) Section 4, in turn, makes more explicit and elaborates the account of how this connection between language and world ultimately obtains. The basic idea is this: 'elementary propositions' are comprised of names, and, names, in turn, refer to the constituents of facts; if there is an agreement between the way names are related in a particular elementary proposition and the way simple objects relate in the world, then the truth-value (the actualized 'truth-possibility') of that elementary proposition will be 'true'; otherwise it will be 'false'; now, to express this kind of "agreement" or "disagreement" is further identified (see 4.4) as the role of propositions *tout court* (i.e., regardless of being complex or elementary).

Strictly speaking, then, what we have are not *two* limits at all—the limits of language *and* the limits of world—but rather two *aspects*, say, of the *same* limits[67].

11. Notice, though, that this analysis has an important shortcoming, in that it does not explain the appearance of the first personal *singular* pronoun (in its possessive form—i.e., 'my') in 5.6's original formulation. But why is that pronoun necessary in the first place? After all, if we pay attention to the examination of the conditions for language to represent the world pursued since the beginning of the book, the maximum we will find in the direction of a "subjectivity" is the use of the first personal *plural* pronoun ('we' / 'our')—its first occurrence being in 2.1, where it is stated that 'We picture facts to ourselves' (2.1)[68]. Now, if are not to accept that the 'my' simply comes out "magically" into the scene, it would be reasonable to expect that it should be somehow already *implicit* in the analysis of the conditions of representation presented before. A case can be made for that hypothesis if we think about the conditions for applying the method of projection, which is introduced in 3.11, and further worked out in the remaining parts of section 3. For our

[67] As Cora Diamond (2000) has shown, one of the primary targets of this "solipsistic move"—i.e., that of equating the limits of (my) language and (my) world, hence showing that, in an important sense, there is only *one* limit instead of *two*—is precisely a Russellian 'two limits view', according to which, roughly, the limits of my experience—and so the limits of the objects which I can directly *name*, and be directly *acquainted with*—are narrower than the limits of the world—of all the objects that there are "out there"—so that, in order for me to reach out toward those ("external") objects, I would have to resort to descriptions (quantifiers), which refer to them only *indirectly*. According to Diamond:

> Wittgenstein's remarks about the limits of language and the world [...] are concerned with the difference between a Russellian two-limits view [...] and a one-limit view. [...] The world is *my* world in the sense that there is nothing [...] which is in *the* world and which *I* cannot name. The idea that the use of quantifiers enables me to reach beyond the limits of my experience to objects 'outside' experience is incoherent. (Diamond, 2000, n. 3, p. 282)

But Diamond has more to say about where exactly Wittgenstein's solipsistic move ends up leading us—and so do I (see section 2.4 below).

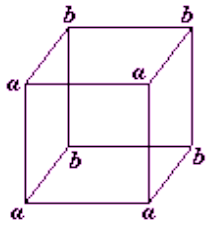
[68] Truly speaking, it is already noteworthy that such 'we' should appear at that point, given the over-impersonal, over-objective way in which the opening propositions of the book are formulated—the talk about 'the world' in the 1.*n*'s seeming to be completely perspective*less* and subject*less*. Of course there is a good *prima facie* reason for this first change, which has to do with the transition from the analysis of the *ontological* conditions for the world 'to be the case', to the analysis of the *logical* conditions for representing it—and there is nothing more natural than expecting that the first analysis should not include the representing subject as one of its conditions, *if*, i.e., the world is to *exist* independently of our representation of it. The question arises, however, whether after reading the rest of the book we can still have any confidence in the obtaining of the antecedent of this conditional.

present purposes, the list of propositions below shall be enough to summarize Wittgenstein's view about that point:

1. 'We use the perceptible sign of a proposition (spoken or written, etc.) as a projection of a possible situation. / The method of projection is to think the sense of a proposition.' (3.11)
2. 'A proposition [...] does not actually contain its sense, but does contain the possibility of expressing it.' (3.13)
3. 'What a proposition expresses it expresses in a determinate manner, which can be set out clearly [...]' (3.251)
4. 'A proposition has one and only one complete analysis.' (3.25)
5. 'I call any part of a proposition that characterizes its sense an expression (or a symbol).' (3.31)
6. 'A sign is what can be perceived of a symbol.' (3.32)
7. 'So one and the same sign (written or spoken, etc.) can be common to two different symbols—in which case they will signify in different ways.' (3.321)
8. 'In everyday language it very frequently happens that the same word has different modes of signification—and so belongs to different symbols—or that two words that have different modes of signification are employed in propositions in what is superficially the same way.' (3.323)
9. 'In this way the most fundamental confusions are easily produced (the whole of philosophy is full of them).' (3.324)
10. 'In order to avoid such errors we must make use of a sign-language that excludes them by not using the same sign for different symbols and by not using in a superficially similar way signs that have different modes of signification: that is to say, a sign-language that is governed by *logical* grammar —by logical syntax.' (3.325)
11. 'In order to recognize a symbol by its sign we must observe how it is used with a sense.' (3.326)
12. 'A propositional sign, applied and thought out, is a thought.' (3.5)

I think the list above presents in a sufficiently clear way the distinction between *sign* and *symbol,* as well as its role in generating the kind of 'logical misunderstandings' (to use the Preface's expression) of which 'philosophy is full'; so, I will add no further comments about these points now, except to highlight that they are of fundamental importance, given the general task of the book. The immediate purpose of the list is to help us see how the idea of a representing subject is at least implied—since it is not explicitly mentioned—by the analysis of the conditions for the method of projection. To put it briefly, the idea is that if we are to have propositions with a *determinate sense* (i.e., propositions, *simpliciter*), we need a representing subject who can *think* their sense, and, therefore, who can *project* their perceptible signs *in a particular way*, in order to signify *a particular situation*. Notice, however, that it is *not* being said (and not even implied) by the list above that this subject should *himself* proceed to a 'complete analysis' (supposedly making use of the 'sign-language' mentioned in 10) in order to give a determinate sense to his own propositions; such a 'complete analysis' has at most an *instrumental* role into clarifying possible misunderstandings (to an interlocutor, let us say), but what really marks off the sense intended by a particular subject, in a particular context, is the way the proposition is *projected*—i.e., *used, applied* and *thought out*—by him (11-12).

This general analysis is nicely illustrated later in the book, in a proposition which is often presented by commentators as providing the main reason for introducing the idea of a "representing subject" in the *Tractatus*. I refer to proposition 5.5423, where we are presented with the following figure:



There are, says Wittgenstein, 'two possible ways to see the figure [above] as a cube', depending on the order in which we look at its corners: 'If I look in the first place at the corners marked *a* and only glance at the *b*'s, then the *a*'s appear to be in front, and vice versa'. That is because, as the preceding comment makes clear, '[t]o perceive a complex means to perceive that its constituents are related to one another in such and such a way'—in other words, the combination of the constituents in a perceived complex is a matter of how the perceiving subject arranges those constituents, a matter, i.e., of the *method of projection* employed by him. Generalizing this case, we can see how the idea of a "representing subject" ends up being presented as a *general* condition of representation[69].

12. The considerations above shall help us understand why it is that the pronoun 'my' is introduced in proposition 5.6, by showing that it was already implicated by Wittgenstein's account of the method of projection in the preceding parts of the book. This of course is not the same as explaining what exactly is the *meaning* of the resulting thesis—a task which requires that we read the sub-propositions of this section. Notice, however, that this analysis already gives us an important clue to understand why solipsism becomes such an important issue at this point—after all, given the (necessary) "congruence" between the limits of *my* language and the limits of *my* world (which, N. B., is presented as an inevitable consequence of the general account of how language works, of how propositions can represent the world), it is only natural to ask how I can be sure that *my* language / world is the same as everybody else's.

[69] I take the following quotation from Peter Hacker as illustrative of the traditional view on this respect:

> Anything which I can understand as a language must have a content which is assigned to it by my projecting logico-syntactical forms on to reality. 'Things acquire "*Bedeutung*" only in relation to my will' is not only an ethical principle, but a semantic one. Propositional signs are merely 'inscriptions'; only in relation to *my will* do they constitute symbols. [...] From this point of view language is *my* language. In order for propositional signs to have sense I have to think the method of projection. What I cannot project is not language. Without the accompaniment of my consciousness language is nothing but a husk. (Hacker, 1986, p. 100)

(An important alternative reading of the role of the subject is advanced by Rush Rhees (1996). According to him, the whole set of *psychological* concepts employed in the *Tractatus* (e.g., 'thinking subject', 'to think the sense of the proposition') are to be explained (away) by the *logical* ones (e.g., 'projection', 'method of projection', etc.). Although I shall not analyse Rhees's reading in what follows, I take it to be congenial to the results of my own reading below. (Thanks to Dr. Stephen Mulhall for calling my attention to that reading, to Paulo Faria for further references.))

But we are moving forward too fast. So, let us turn back to the main sub-propositions offered to clarify 5.6, starting with 5.61, which reads as follows:

> 5.61 Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits.
>
> So we cannot say in logic, 'The world has this in it, and this, but not that.'
>
> For that would appear to presuppose that we were excluding certain possibilities, and this cannot be the case, since it would require that logic should go beyond the limits of the world; for only in that way could it view those limits from the other side as well.
>
> We cannot think what we cannot think; so what we cannot think we cannot *say* either.

13. The idea presented in the first sentence (5.61a) is by now familiar—to show that 'logic pervades the world', and that the limits of world and the limits of logic are *one*, were the essential tasks set already in the Preface, and pursued by the book as a whole. The second sentence (5.61b) presents a consequence of this general idea: that logic cannot *say* what there is and what there is not in the world. The next sentence (5.61c) further elucidates the nature of the limitation to 'what can be said' (in logic): the idea is *not* that we cannot talk about what *contingently* constitutes the world, i.e., a set of facts which are, but could well not be, the case; rather, we cannot talk about what holds (or doesn't hold) *necessarily* of the world—what *necessarily* is (or isn't) the case. The (ontological, existential) *possibilities* we cannot exclude (and, consequently, include) in logic are those which would depend on 'go[ing] beyond the limits of the world', 'view[ing] those limits from the other side'—again, a move already indicated (and excluded) by the programmatic claims of the Preface.

These considerations shall help us see the point of the (otherwise very innocuous) final sentence of the section (5.61d). What makes the tautology presented in its first part ('We cannot think what we cannot think') relevant to the understanding of its second part ('what we cannot think we cannot *say* either') is the implicit assumption (which was made explicit above, in the analysis of proposition 5.6) of there being a necessary congruence, an internal relation, between *language* and *thought*—the complete lesson being that to (really) *think* is to think something *determinate* and *contingent* about the world, and if we are not doing

that, then it is of no use to try to use *language* to express what we (wrongly) supposed we were thinking. Given the limiting conditions imposed by logic to the expression of thoughts, we are always faced with only two options: either we *say* something (ultimately) determinate and (contingently) true or false about the world, or else we are just *babbling*, in which case we were better advised to *remain silent*[70].

After these considerations, the role of 5.61 as an 'elucidation' of 5.6 should also be clear: basically, what it does is to present a (negative or limiting) consequence of the congruence established before for the expressive capabilities of our language: since the limits of (*my*) language and (*my*) world are one, we (I) cannot use language (logic) to speak of what would presuppose our (my) going beyond those limits.

2.3.2 The (ineffable) truth in solipsism

14. With that analysis in mind, let's move to proposition 5.62, which reads:

> 5.62 This remark provides a key to the problem, how much truth there is in solipsism.
>
> For what the solipsist *means* is quite correct; only it cannot be *said*, but makes itself manifest.
>
> The world is *my* world: this is manifest in the fact that the limits of *language* (of that language which alone I understand) mean the limits of *my* world.

This time the relation of the proposition above with 5.6 is made clear from the very outset, since it is explicitly presented as devoted to the task of investigating a *consequence* of that former remark to the problem of 'how much truth there is in solipsism'. As I said above, it should come as no surprise that this problem is brought to view in this context—after all, it presents itself in a very natural way when we start thinking critically about the congruence between the limits of *my* language and the limits of *my* world. What, on the other hand, seems very surprising is the content of the next sentence (5.62b), which starts by saying

[70] This point, besides being already made in the Preface, is presented clearly in proposition 4.116, where we read that: 'Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly. Everything that can be put into words can be put clearly.'

that ‘what the solipsist *means* is quite correct’. Now, before trying to understand how it can be ‘correct’, let us try to be clear about *what* it is that ‘the solipsist *means*’ in the first place.

The (rather cryptic) answer to that question is given in the first part of the next sentence (5.62c): ‘The world is *my* world’. In order to “unpack” the “solipsistic thesis” presented in the latter sentence, it will be useful to repeat once again the main steps of the argument presented up to this point in the book: first, let us recall that the ‘world’ spoken of in the book was since its very beginning identified with ‘the totality of *facts*’; those facts, in turn, were said to be representable by *propositions;* a proposition ‘applied and thought out’ was identified with a *thought;* that application, in turn, was said to amount to the operation of combining the truth-functions of elementary propositions; and that operation, as we just saw, presupposes a *subject* who can put it at work in order to generate a *particular* projection, hence providing a *determinate* sense to his propositions; now, since *all* representation is based on that sort of operation, room is made for a solipsistic threat, in the sense that the possibility remains open that each subject could, at least in principle, generate projections which are *private*, and, in that sense, could live in a world which is made up of facts which he alone can grasp—his (my) own *private* world.

The analysis above go some way toward explaining (i) ‘what the solipsist *means*’, i.e., the *content* of the solipsistic thesis that ‘the world is *my* world’, and also (ii) the sense in which that thesis is said to be ‘quite correct’—it is, at the very least, coherent with the general analysis of the conditions of representation established by the book’s argument so far. But this of course is not the whole story told in 5.62b—in fact, it is (at best) half of it. The remaining half is presented in the last part of 5.62b, which states that the solipsistic thesis, however inevitable, (iii) ‘cannot be *said*’, but (iv) ‘makes itself manifest’. So, let us turn our attention to those further qualifications.

As to (iii), again some work of interpretation is needed if we are to go beyond the absurd (and rather comic) idea that we *cannot say* what we *have just said—viz.*, that ‘The world is *my* world’. Now the analysis of 5.61b-c provides a model which can be smootlhy applied to the case in view: if the “unpacking” of the thesis that ‘The world is *my* world’, as presented above, is correct, then what the solipsist is attempting to express is a *general* and *necessary* feature of language, and also of the *world* that can be represented by that

language ('which alone I understand'); being a necessary feature of the world, it cannot be expressed by (*bona fide,* bipolar) propositions—which, by their own essential truth-functional nature, must always present situations for a test, as being true *or* false, and, therefore, *contingently* one or another. Therefore, what we (as well as the solipsist) *imagined* to have said (or thought) when looking at the string of signs which comprises the "solipsistic thesis" ('The world is *my* world'), was not *really* said (or thought) at all[71].

Before continuing with the analysis of 5.62, let us pause to reflect about an important (and possibly unexpected) *subversive* consequence that the results obtained so far have for our understanding of proposition 5.6—which, N.B., should have been 'elucidated' by that analysis. Details aside, remember that one thing we (and the solipsist) imagined to have expressed by employing the signs 'The world is *my* world' was exactly the *necessary congruence* of limits presented in 5.6 (those of the / my world, and those of the / my language). Now, if the analysis presented above is correct, we should conclude, echoing 5.61, that such a "necessary congruence" *itself* cannot be said, because when we try to express it the (pseudo-)propositions we generate *seem* to be 'excluding certain possibilities, and this cannot be the case, since it would require that logic should go beyond the limits of the world; for only in that way could it view those limits from the other side as well'. What is paradoxical about this conclusion is that proposition 5.6 was a necessary step in the argument leading to the limiting consequence presented in 5.61. In other words, chances are that we readers have been somewhat tricked, in that we were first made to stick to the *appearance of sense* of proposition 5.6, then to extract an (*apparent*) limiting consequence (5.61), only in order to conclude, finally, that after all "proposition" 5.6 has no sense at all —is not a *proposition* at all.

But the story, as I said, does not end here—we are still left with the fourth and final point made in 6.52b, according to which 'what the solipsist means [...] makes itself manifest'. Actually, it is on this last claim that we should put our hopes of finding a way out of this whole paradoxical situation, since it allows us to think that, even if it proves true that we were being "tricked" up to this point—i.e., by being impelled to take the pseudo-propositions above as expressing some necessary truths about language and the world, when they were in fact just *nonsensical strings of signs*—we were not just *wasting our*

[71] Notice also the parallel between this analysis and that presented in the concluding part of the book (6.5 ss.), where something (*apparently*) 'said' (or expressed) by a string of signs (the skeptical 'question' and the 'problem of life') is shown not to be *really* said (or even say*able*) at all.

time, since (hopefully) something was 'made manifest' all along, or after, this whole self-subverting process. Now, what exactly was 'made manifest'—or, to put the same question in other words, how much 'truth' is there 'in solipsism' after all? Notice, first, that the sentence above ('what the solipsist means [...] makes itself manifest') is *not* saying, nor implying (as it could appear in a first reading) that the *pseudo*-proposition 'The world is *my* world'—the (supposed) expression of solipsism—which (admittedly) *says nothing*, can *by itself* 'make something manifest'. If such an string of signs *says nothing*, it also cannot *say* (as we *imagined* it did) 'what the solipsist means'. What the solipsist *means*—what he *tries* to say by employing the *signs* presented in the first part of 6.52c—is what (supposedly) 'makes itself manifest' by the *fact* presented in its second half—the fact, i.e., that when trying to go *beyond* 'the limits of *language*', the solipsist *says nothing*—he just ends up producing plainly nonsensical combinations of signs.

In the face of these considerations, it seems that we can sum up the whole content of 5.62 as the triviality that there is nothing (and no thing either) to understand, to think, or to talk about, beyond the limits of what *I* understand, think and talk about. Now if there is *nothing* beyond those limits, it follows that the very opposition between what is "*mine*" (be it *my* experience, *my* language, or *my* world) and something *else* is itself nonsensical, and, consequently, must be abandoned. To the extent, then, that there is some 'truth in solipsism', its truth would be simply the inescapable *fact* with which I am faced when I unsuccessfully try to express the "solipsistic thesis", i.e., that I am fated to express only what my language can express; and this 'truth' is *not* something that I discover because I can 'view those limits from the other side as well'—on the contrary, it is exactly the failure in my hopeless attempt to do so that shows that this is impossible[72]. (By the same token,

[72] H. O. Mounce, in his introductory commentary to the *Tractatus*, reaches a very similar conclusion. Having argued that it is an error to think, as some commentators (Hacker included) do, that 'although it is a confusion to express solipsism, nevertheless it is really true' (Mounce, 1981, p. 91), he claims that there is, in fact, 'a truth behind solipsism'—solipsism itself being just the 'confused result' of trying to state such (ineffable) truth. The truth, according to Mounce, 'is not that I alone am real but that I have a point of view on the world which is without neighbours' (ibid.). He adds the following considerations in order to clarify the content of that claim:

> [...] Wittgenstein's point, I think, is as follows. What I conceive of as the world is given to me in language. This conception is the only one there is. I know this not because I have considered other possibilities and rejected them. Rather, I know this precisely because it shows itself in there being no other possibilities. For there is no language but language and therefore no conception of the world other than the one language gives. This conception is my conception. My conception of the world, therefore, like my visual field, is without neighbours.

this trivializing or deflationary reading must also hold of 5.621, which states that 'The world and life are one'—so that its whole point will turn out to be simply that I cannot live except in the world that I live.)

15. However, this deflationary rendition of the 'truth in solipsism' faces some immediate problems. First, are we really supposed to believe, without more ado, that such a *triviality* is 'what the solipsist *means*'—i.e., what the solipsist always *wanted* (however hopelessly) to say? How can we (or Wittgenstein) be sure about that? Second, and more importantly, are we *really* clear about the content of this 'truth'? As my own attempt at clarifying it testifies, when we try to spell it out we inevitably end up producing more and more strings of signs which, by the *Tractatus*' own standards, are simply nonsense, since they are themselves intended as expressions of a necessary feature of our language. Notice that even if we try to neutralize this problem, as I myself attempted above, by repeating Wittgenstein's strategy of "pointing to" (supposedly without having to *speak about*) some kind of *fact,* we cannot avoid helping ourselves of some linguistic description (e.g., by describing it as 'the fact that I am fated to express only what my language can express'). Therefore, there seems to be an infinite regress latent in this strategy—a regress which can only be stopped if we entirely give up the attempt to *explain* what the truth in solipsism is. If this truth is ineffable, then we should stop *babbling* about it—in fact, we should follow the advice given in the very last proposition of the book (7), and 'pass over [it] in silence'. This, of course, may not be 'satisfying to the other person' (i.e., the solipsist), but it seems to be the only strictly correct attitude to take in this case.

Is it? But then—and this is the third problem—why does Wittgenstein continue to invite us to think (or to imagine that we are thinking) about it in the rest of the section? Why doesn't he remain *silent* about this subject from now on? Is it because to *really* learn to remain silent we need a greater exposition to the effects of trying to go beyond the limits of

(Mounce, 1981, p. 92)

The main problem I have with Mounce's analysis is that it does not really *explain* how 'Wittgenstein's point' (i.e., that 'What I conceive of as the world is given to me in language' and that 'This conception is the only one there is'), which is supposed to be a *necessary feature* of language, can 'show itself', without my having to 'consider[...] other possibilities and reject[...] them'. In other words, the question Mounce should try to answer is: how can I know that 'there [*are*] no other possibilities', if I don't *at least* consider the *possibility* of there being some, if only to *exclude* them?

language?—How much have we to flutter in the flybottle before we can get our rest?—Let us see if we can get a little bit clearer about these questions by reading the remaining propositions of section 5.6.

2.3.3 The (shrinking) 'metaphysical subject', and the way back to realism

16. The next proposition in our list is 5.63: 'I am my world. (The microcosm.)'. Taken by itself, this proposition seems again smoothly amenable to the kind of deflationary rendition presented above—so that its whole point could be rephrased (if only it could *really* be expressed in a proposition!) as saying that the only world I can live in is the world in which I am, the world which alone my language can represent. As if the nonsensical and ineffable character of what I just said was not puzzling enough (are we already used to this?), matters become even worst when we read the sub-propositions which are intended to clarify 5.63. Let us have a list:

> 5.631 There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas.
>
> If I wrote a book called *The World as I found it*, I should have to include a report on my body, and should have to say which parts were subordinate to my will, and which were not, etc., this being a method of isolating the subject, or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject; for it alone could *not* be mentioned in that book. —
>
> 5.632 The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world.
>
> 5.633 Where *in* the world is a metaphysical subject to be found?
>
> You will say that this is exactly like the case of the eye and the visual field. But really you do not *see* the eye.
>
> And nothing *in the visual field* allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye.
>
> 5.634 This is connected with the fact that no part of our experience is at the same time a priori.
>
> Whatever we see could be other than it is.

> Whatever we can describe at all could be other than it is.
>
> There is no a priori order of things.

17. The first remarkable thing about proposition 5.631 is that its first part—i.e., 5.631a, saying that *there is no* thinking subject—if taken at face value, directly contradicts 5.61—saying that we cannot *say* in logic what *there is* and what *there is not* in the world; furthermore, it also contradicts (however less manifestly) the last proposition of the list—i.e., 5.634, about there being *no* a priori 'part of our experience', 'no a priori order of things'. In fact, the contradiction is so striking that it cries for some kind of reinterpretation. Following the method applied in similar cases above, the first step would be to notice that, contrary to the appearances, 5.631a is not a proposition at all, but rather a *nonsensical* string of signs, a *pseudo*-proposition—after all, if, *per impossibile*, it had a sense, it could not be false—it should be *necessary*; hence, it would not satisfy the book's own standards for something to count as a *bona fide* proposition (i.e., its capability of being true *or* false, of allowing us to *think the opposite* of what it says, etc.). Consequently, this sentence also has a self-subversive character, in that it first impels us to *imagine* that we understood its sense—and, therefore, that by saying / thinking it we are 'excluding certain possibilities', and thus presenting an *a priori* part of our experience—when in fact that is made impossible by the very conditions of representation—since, in order to be done, 'it would require that logic should go beyond the limits of the world', viewing those limits 'from the other side as well' (5.61).

Having noticed that, I suppose one would like to ask what is the point of presenting that proposition in the first place. If the comparison with the cases analysed before is in order, its point must lie precisely in its self-subversive character, in that something should be 'made manifest' after the process triggered by it. What, then, is made manifest by that pseudo-proposition? To answer that question we shall pay attention to the next sentence, 5.631b. Again, there is something very remarkable about that sentence, in that it *enacts* a 'method of isolating the subject', just in order to show that, when we try to do that, our inevitable failure in this task will show that 'in an important sense there is no subject'. Notice, though, that this last phrase is just as *nonsensical* as the former one (5.631a): it also

appears to 'exclude certain possibilities', to describe a *contingent* feature of our world, when in fact it should be presenting the only *actuality* there is, and there *can* be—the 'a priori order of things'. So its whole point cannot lie in what it *says* (since it says nothing), but rather in what is made manifest by it—i.e., the impossibility of finding an 'I' who could be in any sense *separated* from the 'world'[73]. Basically the same analysis goes for 5.633, where we are presented with the very same kind of *enactment*—the search for the 'metaphysical subject'—only this time with another simile—so, instead of something that I am incapable of mentioning in the "great book of beings", the idea now is of something that I cannot *find*, and not even *infer*, from what I 'see' in my 'visual field'.

This analysis shall help us to understand how 5.631 and 5.633 can be seen as elucidations of 5.63, i.e., the (pseudo-)thesis that 'I am my world': to repeat, what both propositions 'made manifest' (even if they were not capable of *saying* it) was that we cannot *separate* subject and world. And this conclusion, in turn, would provide a further confirmation—a further elucidation—of 5.6's general view of a necessary *congruence* between (my) language and (my) world. The problem for this reading emerges when we try to apply it to the proposition which lies in between the former ones, 5.632. More specifically, the problem arises from the idea expressed in its second half: 'The subject [...] is a limit of the world'; notice that, if this sentence is true, then we should conclude that the subject is not exactly a *nothing,* as the former propositions could have made us think it was. The key to solve this apparent problem is to take proposition 5.632 not as being in direct opposition to its neighbours, but rather as an attempt to "soften" or to "balance" the radical view they (seemingly) put forward. Consequently, even if it is true that 'in an important sense there is no subject' (it is not a "something"), maybe it is also true that, in *another* important sense, there is one (it is not a "nothing" either). That the subject cannot be *separated* from the world does not imply that it cannot be at least *distinguished* in some way (i.e., as a *limit*). In fact, the case here is *not* like that of 'the eye and the visual field', where the former is really separated from the later, but rather like the case of the point in geometry, which does

[73] It is hardly necessary to indicate the parallel between this enactment of a search for the 'thinking subject' and Hume's notorious (self-aware) failure in attempting to find an 'impression of the subject'. The same point is made in still more clearly Humean fashion in the *Notebooks*, e.g., when Wittgenstein says that 'The I is not an object. I objectively confront every object. But not the I.' (NB, p. 80). The parallel is also often noticed by commentators; Hacker again provides an illustrative opinion on this parallel, his conclusion being that: 'Wittgenstein was willing to adopt a neo-Humean analysis of the empirical self. There is no empirical soul-substance thinking thoughts, there are only thoughts. The self of psychology is a manifold, a series of experiences, a bundle of perceptions in perpetual flux.' (Hacker, 1986, p. 86)

not "exist" in any other way except as a *limit* of lines, figures, and, ultimately, three-dimensional objects.

18. Now the analogy with geometry is presented by Wittgenstein himself, in the second half of the next first-level sub-proposition (5.64), which reads: 'The self of solipsism shrinks to a point without extension, and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it'. It is interesting that Wittgenstein here (re-)dubs the 'metaphysical subject' by means of the description 'the self of solipsism'; this gives a further reason to take seriously the idea that there is some 'truth in solipsism', something *correct* in what the solipsist *means*, but is incapable of *saying*; in fact, this much is repeated, with something of a twist, in the first half of the proposition under analysis, where we read: 'Here it can be seen that solipsism, when its implications are followed out strictly, coincides with pure realism.' It may well seem far-fetched to equate solipsism and (pure) realism, but just think about this: what else can a 'realist' expect than a *complete suppression* of the 'self'—taken as the 'subject that thinks or entertains ideas'—to give room for a *direct* apprehension (i.e., without any kind of intermediary) of the *whole reality*? In fact, *if* we characterize 'realism' by something like the thesis that what we perceive or experience directly is *reality itself* (as opposed to *ideas* which 'stand for' that reality), we can see that solipsism, as presented so far, is the other side of that same (realistic) coin—another way of satisfying the craving for a direct contact with 'the whole reality', therefore avoiding our metaphysical and epistemological loneliness.

2.4 Act two: throwing the ladder away (but not as quickly as one would wish to!)

2.4.1 Throwing the ladder away (take one)

19. The analysis of solipsism presented in the last section (2.3) can be seen as a concrete illustration of the procedure prescribed by the *Tractatus* to solve philosophical problems, and, to that extent, it should help us clarify the issues we were left with at the conclusion of

the preceding one (2.2). In order to see this, let us first have a summary of the most important results obtained up to this point.

As we saw in §§3-5, the method to deal with philosophical problems was already presented, however programmatically, in the Preface to the *Tractatus*. Basically, the view stated there was that, in order to clarify the 'misunderstandings of the logic of our language'—the source of philosophical problems—one would need to draw limits separating sense from nonsense, and this should be done 'in language', i.e., without having to go (or even to think about) 'the other side of the limit' (see TLP, p. 3). This, as we saw in §§6-7, was exactly the role played by the presentation of the 'general form of proposition', which allows one to exclude from the category of 'proposition'—and, consequently, to include in the category of 'pure nonsense'—all the strings of signs which are not generated in accordance to the rules of logical syntax (this being the case of the pseudo-propositions of mathematics (6.2), science (6.3), and ethics (6.4)). Once in possession of this general form, one can employ it to "solve" the "philosophical problems", by showing that they were in fact just *pseudo*-problems, which strictly speaking could not even be "posed", since the kind of "question" one tries to formulate to express them is simply made impossible by the rules of logical syntax, so that of course there are no possible "answers" to them either (the general lesson of 6.5, which is illustrated by the cases of scepticism (6.51) and of the 'problem of life' (6.521)).

The reading sketched above was further borne out by proposition 6.53 (see §8), where Wittgenstein presented the 'correct method in philosophy'—i.e., 'to say nothing except what can be said, i.e., propositions of natural science [...] 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'. The problem which came out at that point of the analysis was that Wittgenstein himself did not seem to have been following his own advice in 6.53, in that he said many "metaphysical things" in order to achieve the results indicated in the Preface. Motivated by the appearance of that problem, we were in a position to at least understand the *rationale* for the presentation, in proposition 6.54, of the "self-undoing" concluding remarks of the book—the problem of the ladder, with which we (problematically) concluded section 1 (see §9). The questions which we left unanswered at that point were basically the following: (i) *Which* propositions of the book are we supposed to use as 'rungs' in the 'ladder' which we should 'throw away'? (ii) *How* exactly are we

supposed to throw it away? (iii) What is exactly the *result* of this whole process—what does it mean to 'see the world aright'?

20. Now, by focusing our attention in the set of propositions dealing with solipsism (TLP 5.6), we notice that the main steps of the self-subversive procedure presented at the end of the book were already at work in that particular stretch. In order to make this clear, the first thing we should observe is that the dialectical situation presented in 6.53 is reproduced in 5.6: on the one hand, we have someone—the solipsist, say—wanting to 'say something metaphysical'—*viz*., that 'the world is *my* world'; on the other hand we have someone—call him Wittgenstein—trying to demonstrate to his solipsistic interlocutor that 'he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions'. Having noticed that fact, the question arises whether Wittgenstein has 'demonstrated' this problem of the solipsist's position by 'saying nothing except what can be said, i.e., propositions of natural science'. And the answer to that question is: of course not; as we saw above, in order to show that the solipsist was producing nonsense Wittgenstein clearly employed some 'metaphysical theses'—e.g., that '*the limits of my language* are the limits of my world' (5.6), that 'The subject does not belong to the world; rather, it is a limit of the world' (5.632), and so on. Yet those 'metaphysical theses', as we also observed, are themselves self-subversive, in that they amount to attempts to express something *necessary* about the world and language —something which, according to the general analysis presented before in the book, simply cannot be said by any *bona fide* proposition. What is more remarkable, however, is that the self-subversive character of those 'metaphysical theses' is also made manifest by the internal tension generated when we closely compare their (alleged) "content" with the (alleged) "content" of other claims made in the very same section (i.e., 5.6)—e.g., that 'we cannot say in logic, "The world has this in it, and this, but not that"' (5.61), or that 'no part of our experience is at the same time a priori' (5.634).

Given the notorious self-subversive character of the 'metaphysical theses' employed in section 5.6 in order to point out the shortcomings of solipsism, we must conclude that Wittgenstein was himself making a (self-conscious) use of *nonsense*;—by forcing us (the readers) to flutter in the walls of our language in this way, he produces an awareness of the limits of sense, and, consequently, disavows us (and the solipsistic interlocutor) of tacitly,

un-self-consciously, producing nonsense—in other words, he makes latent nonsensicality patent.

21. Now that conclusion can be used as a starting point, or as a test case, to answer the questions made above (§19). Question (i) was about *which* propositions we should use as rungs; given the analysis above, the answer seems to be: only Wittgenstein's own self-conscious, self-subversive metaphysical claims—those which try *to state*, or *to express* (as opposed to *make manifest*) *necessary* truths about the world, language and thought; as to *how* we shall use those propositions as rungs—question (ii)—the answer is: we can use them as tools which make us aware of the (otherwise hidden, or latent) failure of our (or the interlocutor's) own attempts to talk about things which are beyond the limits of what can be said; as to the result of this whole process—question (iii)—the answer is: freedom from the impulse to try to express those things, and, ultimately, the lesson presented in proposition 7: 'What we cannot speak we must pass over in silence'. To 'overcome these propositions', and to 'see the world aright', is to become aware of the limits of our language, and, therefore, to 'throw away the ladder' is to give up the hopeless attempt to pose problems where questions cannot be asked—in other words, to give up metaphysics, as traditionally pursued. (Notice that, according to this reading, there is an important sense in which no 'transcendence' is involved here at all—the idea is *not* to go to 'the other side of the limit', but rather the very opposite, i.e., to give up the attempt to do so; hence the problem with Pears and McGuinness's translation (see n. 80).)

2.4.2 Back to the ladder: the solipsist (justly) dissatisfied

22. I take the conclusions extracted above (§21) as coherent with the orthodox reading of the *Tractatus*. However, I do not think the story should end at that point, for the simple reason that we would then be still firmly on the ladder. In order to show this, I will again take the analysis of solipsism as my test case, only this time I will focus on a different aspect of that analysis which was left out in the brief reconstruction presented in §20. Recall that a result of the reading offered in the 'Intermission' above was that the 'truth in

solipsism'—however strictly ineffable—was already implicit from the beginning of the book's examination of the conditions for representation: if we are to have propositions with a determinate sense, which represent particular and determinate facts, there must be a determinate projection, which in turn requires a subject who can make it—who can *think* the sense of the proposition in such a determinate way. Now this view seems to commit one to the (at first sight) problematic consequence of having to accept some form of solipsism—and hence, the possibility of (representational) *privacy*. However, as we saw, Wittgenstein apparently doesn't find himself in need of being too concerned with this general and abstract possibility, since he has also provided a tool for dissolving practical and circumscribed representational disagreements—this being the role of his method of logical analysis. Provided that there is only one possible analysis of a (determinately projected) proposition, guaranty of intersubjectivity is just a matter of logical calculation. Besides, remember that Wittgenstein also readily reassures us, at the end of the argument of section 5.6, that this peculiar form of solipsism which comes out 'true' is actually the purest form of realism there can be, since it implies that no reality can *possibly* fall short of direct and determinate representation in this scheme—I mean, the one in which the limits of world and language coincide.

I take it that the general picture which results from that analysis—by "making manifest" the "necessary congruence" between the limits of *my* world (i.e., the extent of possible experience) and the limits of *my* language—is designed to satisfy two deep-rooted philosophical needs—to calm down two intimately connected philosophical fears: the fear of *metaphysical loneliness*—i.e., of there being an unbriedgeable gulf separating oneself from the reality around—and the fear of (for lack of a better term) *inexpressiveness*—i.e., of not being capable to *represent* (hence to *express*) that reality in a determinate, trustworthy manner. Notice, however, that since the "way out" of those philosophical "problems" requires that, in an important sense, the world itself becomes part of the subject's (private) experience, no matter how ultimately backed our intersubjective agreement may be—by the availability of a logical method of analysis which can resolve our disputes—this is not really that reassuring—or is it? It is in order to put some pressure on this point that I suggest we take again as a test case the dispute enacted in section 5.6, between Wittgenstein (let us continue calling him Wittgenstein) and the solipsist.

To begin with, remember that the solipsist was trying to *express* something—more specifically, he was trying to formulate his own philosophical position, by means of a single and determinate thesis—when he employed the signs 'The world is *my* world'. Wittgenstein, on the other side, was trying to convince us that the solipsist did not say *anything* with those signs—he only produced nonsense.—Now, obviously enough, the dispute enacted at this point between Wittgenstein and the solipsist is also an instance of a (possible) *dialogue*, or *conversation*—it is, at the very least, an exchange supposed to be (possibly) occurring *in language*; therefore, the set of claims that the author of the *Tractatus* has been busy to establish (about the nature of language and its connection to reality—call it his theory of meaning) *ought* to apply to this instance as well as to any other communicative exchange. But if this is the case—if, i.e., the theory of meaning presented in the book is to have such a reflective application, informing or conditioning the nature of this particular dialogue—there arises a problem. Remember that, according to that theory, no string of signs should be taken as *intrinsically* expressing a determinate proposition—a determinate symbol, with a determinate sense; in order to do so, the signs must have been *projected* (i.e., applied) in a determinate way, by a particular subject. Notice, though, that if this is true, it also implies that a string of signs does not—and cannot—be intrinsically *nonsensical.* Consequently, the target of Wittgenstein's criticisms when arguing against the solipsist cannot be the mere *string of signs* employed by him—it must be rather something like his *intended projection*. And if this is the case, the question arises of how could Wittgenstein be so sure that he got the solipsist's intended projection right. Couldn't the solipsist be (justly) dissatisfied with this dogmatic attitude of Wittgenstein's, who claims that he cannot say what he wants to say?

Notice that it will not do as a way out of this difficulty just to say that this (i.e., the solipsist *versus* Wittgenstein) is a *peculiar instance* of linguistic dispute, or disagreement—one in which Wittgenstein could be particularly confident about his attitude, since he knows exactly well what his interlocutor *would like* to say in this occasion—*viz*., that the limits of his language are the limits of his world. To say this would be just to push the problem a little bit further, in that we could now ask the same question once again: and how could Wittgenstein be so sure about the particular sense that the solipsist wants to give to the *signs* 'the limits of my language are the limits of my world'? One could also try to avoid this problem employing a different strategy—by pointing out that the case of solipsism is

peculiar for another reason—namely, that no string of signs *whatsoever* could *possibly* play the role intended by the solipsist. In other words (so the reply would go), there are some "things" which simply cannot be grasped by our signs, which have no corresponding symbol in our language—this being the case of 'what the solipsist *means*'.—But if this is true, then we must conclude that the limits of language and the limits of reality (of what there is) are not completely *congruent* after all. And if this is the case it will be of no help to say that the 'world' (as this word is technically employed in the book) is just a part of this greater reality—the part about which we can talk and think. The moment we arrive at this kind of claim—are held captive by this kind of picture—we are again forced to face that threatening possibility of inexpressiveness, of there being invincible obstacles—impassable limitations—to what can be represented in our language and thought. In other words, we are back to our metaphysical bottle, still fluttering against its walls.

23. Now I think this is exactly the result that Wittgenstein planned to achieve with his enactment of a dispute with his solipsistic interlocutor—in fact, although the justification of this claim goes beyond the scope of this study, I am inclined to think that this would apply not only to this particular case, but equally to any other context in which a tension is (intentionally) created by the enactment of a (particular) conflict between the imposition of *limits* which the book is trying to establish thoroughly (limits to what can be said, thought, experienced, represented) and the invitation to *transgress* those limits, which is in turn triggered by the (self-subversive) categorical *denials* of some possibilities (e.g., that the metaphysical subject, or absolute value, or God, could be found *in* the world)—denials which automatically prompt one to *affirm* their contrary (e.g., by conceiving that the metaphysical subject, or absolute value, or God, could be found *outside* the world). In contexts like these, the further move of saying that the "things" in question are neither *inside* nor *outside* the world, amounting rather to its *limits*, is just another way of playing with our imagination, since we cannot *really* (can we?) conceive any limit which does not separate an *inside* from an *outside*, the result being again a feeling—in the back of our minds, so to speak—that there *is* "something" *beyond* those limits, only we *cannot reach* "it".

So, am I suggesting that there is no way out of this vertiginous situation?—Well, I think there is one, but in order to see it we have to understand how this whole story of projection —the entire "picture theory of meaning" presented by the book—is itself intended as a rung in the ladder that we are supposed to throw away. I shall try to clarify and justify this claim is the next sub-section.

2.4.3 Throwing the "picture theory of meaning" away

24. Recall that Wittgenstein's contention against the solipsist is, basically, that the latter is incapable of expressing his own philosophical position—his own central thesis—since when he tries to do so he systematically ends up producing mere *nonsense*—mere *strings of signs* which do not amount to any *symbol* whatsoever. Now a problem arises when we ask how exactly that kind of claim is supposed to be grounded—in particular, what exactly are the *data* from which it is supposed to depart. As we saw, it cannot be merely the *signs* offered by the solipsist, since, as Wittgenstein himself has warned, 'the sign, of course, is arbitrary' (3.322), in that it can be used to signify *whatever one wants*: 'We cannot give a sign the wrong sense' (5.4732)[74]. The only alternative seems to be that the problem—the nonsensical character of the solipsist's "thesis"—would rather lie in the *symbol(s)* employed by him; but this, in turn, will not do, since symbols are, *by definition*, strings of signs (e.g., words) which were already given a *particular sense*, which were employed (projected) to represent a *particular* (possible) *fact*.

The problem we just faced is one which, according to Cora Diamond, would affect any reading which takes the *Tractatus* as providing (what she describes as) a 'wholesale method for criticizing philosophical propositions' (2004, p. 202). Here is how she articulates that problem:

> Any propositional sign can be used in various ways; there is no reason to doubt, of anything that looks like a propositional sign, that it can be used to express a thought, or to name a cat, or in other ways. So, if there is a 'wholesale' approach to demonstrating of any philosophical or metaphysical proposition that it is

[74] It would be important to notice, at this point of the analysis, that the "arbitrariness" involved here only holds at the *elementary* level—once we have chosen particular signs to refer to particular objects, the possibilities of combination are governed by logical syntax, and, in that sense, are not arbitrary any more. However, as we shall see in a moment, this is actually another rung in the ladder.

> nonsense, there must first be some way of making clear how the proposition is to be taken, since it can be used to say something perfectly intelligible. It isn't to be taken in any of the ways in which it wouldn't be nonsense. How, then, is the intended nonsensical use to be made clear? For only if that can be done could the wholesale approach catch hold of the proposition in question. So some kind of clarification, or attempt at clarification, is going to be involved if the wholesale approach is even to have a chance to connect with some purportedly nonsensical proposition. The devastating problem for a reading of that general type is this: to attempt to specify which way of taking the propositional sign makes it nonsensical, you have to make clear what use of the sign you have in mind. Any such clarification deals with the detail of the individual sentence; it is an essentially retail proceeding. But, in the case of a nonsensical proposition, the attempt at clarification will reveal that it is nonsense by making plain that there is no particular use of the propositional sign that is clearly in focus; there is no way in which the sign is being meant. The 'wholesale' approach requires that there be some way of taking the propositional sign, such that the sign, taken that way, can be recognized to be an attempt to express something which propositions allegedly can't be used to express, or in some other way to violate some or other rule. But then that use must be specifiable, and distinguishable from other uses. But this attempt to specify a use proceeds by attempting philosophical clarification. In the course of that attempt the proposition's character will be revealed, without any appeal to supposed general *Tractatus* doctrines. (Diamond, 2004, p. 203)

Let me try to clarify Diamond's analysis—in particular, the conclusion extracted in the last sentence of the passage above—by taking an indirect route, helping myself of some elements from Denis McManus' analysis of the same point. According to McManus, the main lesson to be extracted from the examination of the kind of difficulty we have at hand is that there is 'no *external* determination of how [our] words *ought* to be used' in order to represent a particular, possible fact, since 'we are only considering—are only led to—those particular possible facts because we have taken for granted how these words *are* actually used' (McManus, 2006, p. 40). By imagining the contrary—i.e., by (tacitly) taking our words as having an independent life of their own, as Wittgenstein tempted us to do—we were victims of an illusion, which amounts to 'treat these words simultaneously as signs and as symbols' (ibid.)—a conflation which, as we saw above, Wittgenstein takes as being nothing less than the origin of 'the most fundamental confusions' of which 'philosophy is full' (3.324). At this juncture, McManus argues—and here comes the main reason for bringing his analysis into play in the present context—that the analogy with pictures provided in the *Tractatus* is precisely intended to make us aware of such a conflation: according to him, 'there is much to be learnt' by following Wittgenstein's advice in proposition 3.1431; in particular, it can teach us that '[t]he essential nature of the propositional sign becomes very clear when we imagine it made up of spatial objects (such as tables, chairs, books) instead of written signs' (ibid, p. 66).

25. In order to help us follow Wittgenstein's advice, McManus presents an interesting example, which I think is worth quoting at full length, in order to further a better understanding of the rest of his argument (the reconstruction of which will be the main task of the remainder of this sub-section). The example is introduced as follows:

> Let us consider how one might represent a road accident on a kitchen table, with cups, napkins, and a pepper-pot. Let us imagine the roads are represented by folded napkins, the cars involved by cups, and the unfortunate pedestrian, who I will call 'Frank', by the pepper-pot. Consider first what we must have understood to have grasped what each element represents. To grasp how the pepper-pot can represent a person is to grasp how moving it here and there upon the table, into different places relative to the napkins and the cups, is to describe different things that can have happened to that person: for example, to see how the pepper-pot's movement across this napkin is the person's crossing a road.
>
> Note what is involved in this achievement: to grasp how this particular 'name' represents is to see how other 'names' represent. To understand what the pepper-pot represents is to see how it can be used in telling stories in which cups represent cars and napkins represent roads. Note also how the analogy presents the project of 'constructing a proposition'. In particular, note that we do not construct the proposition out of already understood elements; rather, we understand the elements when we understand how they can be used to construct propositions. To see this pepper-pot as this person is to see it as used in a context that will itself have meaning and will be populated by other entities having meaning—a context which is here a particular range of spatial locations and the other entities being cars and roads. We may say, 'Let's say that this is Frank, that cup is Bert's car, this cup is ... '. But we do not first grasp that the pepper-pot is Frank, then that the cup is a car, etc., and then finally grasp how they can be used to tell stories about Frank, a car, etc. We do not understand how indeed 'this' 'is Frank' until we see how 'this' and 'that' will be used to tell stories about Frank and Bert's car, how this combination of kitchenalia can be the car, the road, the traffic lights, etc., how the movement of the pepper-pot across the napkin can be Frank crossing the road (as opposed to the rise of a stock price or a gas's density increasing, say, which that same movement of that same pepper-pot could represent in a different system of representation).
>
> Imagine what it would be like to be told, having been presented with the pepper-pot, that 'This is Frank', followed by ... nothing. There is no further 'This is Bert's car, this is the red car, and ... ' Instead we are simply told 'This is Frank'. Now what are we in a position to do? We can't place Frank anyway, because no system for representing location has been explained to us. But neither has any system for explaining any 'logical space' (age, star sign, favourite holiday venue, etc., etc.). In other words, there is nothing for us to say about Frank. We find ourselves wondering not so much what to do with our new 'sign', but more what it was that the person we took to be explaining a new sign was trying to do. (McManus, pp. 66-67)

The case presented above is meant as an illustration of the general (exegetical) thesis according to which 'the picture analogy makes clear that grasping how one particular name —one particular element of such a picture/model—represents involves grasping how other names represent, along with the propositions within which they figure' (ibid., p. 66). That thesis is in its turn the key to understand how the picture analogy can be used as a rung in the ladder that is intended to be 'thrown away' when we come to understand Wittgenstein —it does so precisely by exposing what Mcanus dubs 'the myth of the independent life of names' (ibid., p. 69)—a 'myth', N.B., that so far the *Tractatus* has been tricking us to accept (however tacitly) as a *truth* about language. In order to show this, McManus asks us to imagine how would *nonsense*—an 'illogical combination of signs'—arise in a situation like the one just depicted. Here is how he presents the point:

> Consider what we would say if, for example, the pepper-pot were picked up and put back in the cupboard. What, one might ask, would this say of Frank now? Only if we understand what the cupboard and the pepper-pot's being placed inside the cupboard are to represent, do we have any sense of what would then be being said about Frank, and indeed whether this pepper-pot is still representing Frank, instead of representing something else or nothing at all. Or suppose someone said 'What if *this* happens?' and placed two napkins on top of each other. What is the force of our saying now 'That cannot happen'? The answer that the picture analogy suggests is not that the presented state of affairs is physically or logically impossible (or indeed unthinkable or indescribable). Rather, the response that comes to mind is: 'Well, what is that meant to represent?' We do not judge 'this'—'this' referring to 'the depicted situation'—to be physically or logically impossible; rather, we wonder what 'this'—'this' referring to this combination of signs—is meant to mean, what situation this arrangement is meant to depict. Prior to the envisaged question, 'Is this logically possible?', is the question, 'What is *this* meant to be?' Prior to our philosophical 'How?' question is a sobering 'What?' question. (McManus, p. 69)

Given the analysis presented in the passage above, and the conclusion it supports—about the confusion behind the idea of *nonsense* as prior to, independent of, and even conditioning upon, a particular method of projection (a particular assignment of meaning / use to a set of *signs*)—the next step in McManus' argument is a generalization, to the effect that 'what the picture analogy serves to remind us of here is that our signs have as much life as our use of them gives them' (ibid.). The reason why the picture analogy can be usefully employed to that end is that

> when the elements of our representation are familiar words or elements which, as in conventional, non-abstract pictures, have some visual similarity to what they represent, it is easier to fall into thinking of such elements as possessing lives of their own, as it were. We may then arrange them in ways that are expressive within other, but superficially similar, actual or possible modes of representation,

> and then ask 'Is this logically possible?', untroubled by the prior question of whether 'this' has been assigned a sense. The philosopher's 'possibility' question need not then be expressive of an unusual but admirable rigour or imagination. Rather, to come to understand the signs is to understand which aspects of them and their combinations represent, *and* which do not, which are, to use Wittgenstein's terms, their 'essential' features and their 'accidental' features (3.34). To understand this is not to be tempted by the philosopher's question. (McManus, p. 69)[75]

26. If we take the phrase 'picture *theory*' as referring to the 'theory of meaning' which is presented in the *Tractatus*—i.e., the theory about the conditions for our propositions to represent the facts in the world—then we can say that the picture *analogy*—i.e., the device employed in order to show the problem of 'the philosopher's question' mentioned above—shows us why and how the picture theory must be thrown away. It does so exactly in the way described by Wittgenstein in the 3.32*n*'s (see §11), namely, as a 'sign-language'

[75] In order to clarify the mechanism which (mis)leads 'the philosopher' to ask the kind of question alluded above—*viz*., 'Is this logically possible?', where no 'this' has been assigned a sense—McManus draws an interesting parallel with the mechanism which (mis)leads us into (makes us being 'caught' by) the humour of Lewis Carroll's 'nonsensical' uses of language: according to him, what (mis)leads us in both cases is a kind of 'nonsense with a logic', i.e., 'a nonsense which one can, in a recognizable sense, understand and which, in a recognizable sense, is capable of being inferred from other items of nonsense':

> Such items of nonsense possess these features by virtue of borrowing sense from elsewhere. Part of what that borrowing is is their standing in pseudo-logical relations with other nonsensical 'propositions' that borrow their sense from corresponding sources. An aspect of what it would be for someone not to get Carroll's humour would be their failure to see how conclusions that his characters draw 'follow' from their premisses, despite the fact that the arguments in question are also nonsensical—patently so to those who *do* understand. As a result, one can offer reasons why certain nonsensical claims should naturally 'follow' from others. (McManus, p. 53)

Here is a handy illustration of the kind of 'inference' which we are supposed to make (however tacitly) in order to 'understand' Carrollinian nonsense—in order to 'get' one of his jokes (there is a *lot more* such illustrations in McManus' book, especially in section 4.4):

> When Alice passes through the looking-glass, she is surprised to find that the flowers there talk. But the 'explanation' is simple: 'In most gardens,' the Tiger-lily said, 'they make the beds so soft—so that the flowers are always asleep.' [...] Now in one sense this is a simple play on words, a pun on 'beds'. But what is funny about this, what makes it a joke that one can 'get', is that we can understand Carroll's extrapolation: if we imagine (if that is the word) flowers in their beds as like people in theirs, the reason that the flowers don't talk must be because they are asleep. In one sense, Carroll presents us with nonsense. But it is nonsense with a logic in the sense that it can be followed—someone who has understood the preceding few sentences has done just that—and indeed elaborated upon: for example, bed-wetting is clearly applauded among plants . . . To understand such nonsense—to get the joke—is to be able to follow the pseudo-logic of such nonsense. (McManus, p. 51)

which allows us to avoid the conflation of signs / symbols, which in turn gives rise to the 'most fundamental confusions' of which 'philosophy is full'. Again, this is a point which McManus explains very clearly in the conclusion of his analysis:

> Though it has often been remarked that the construction of a new notation does not seem to be the philosophical method that the *Tractatus* itself employs, the picture analogy itself works [...] in a remarkably similar way to that in which the envisaged notation ought to work: it undermines philosophical illusions by 'disenchanting' words. By asking us to think about models that are 'made up of spatial objects (such as tables, chairs, books) instead of written signs', Wittgenstein introduces a (short-lived) 'notational reform' that breaks up the familiar sign/symbol associations upon which our philosophical confusions feed: the 'expressions' used no longer even seem to carry their meanings outside the uses in which they represent in the particular systems of representation in which they figure, and the temptation to see confusing illusions of meaning in non-representing combinations—in 'illogical combinations'—is dissipated. We no longer seek to understand the difference between 'logical impossibilities' (such as 'Seven is darker than your hat') and sentences with sense (like 'My coat is darker than your hat') as that between 'impermissible' and 'permissible' combinations of objects or ideas. (McManus, p. 72)

27. An important aspect of what is involved in 'throwing away' the picture theory, in the way suggested above, has to do with the role of bipolarity as a criterion for 'propositionality' (i.e., for some string of signs to count as a *proposition,* a *symbol* capable of truth and falsity). As it shall be clear at this point, I take it that insofar as bipolarity is offered as an *external* criterion for a string of signs to symbolize, it constitutes part of the 'myth' (of an independent life of signs) which McManus (and Diamond before him) has been trying to unveil, and accordingly must be 'thrown away' together with it. In order to see this, let us pause to think about what exactly could *lack* bipolarity—and, therefore, *sense*—according to the standards presented in the *Tractatus*: is it a string of signs, or a complex of symbols? Here is Stephen Mulhall's concise answer to that question:

> No mere string of signs could possibly either possess or lack bipolarity; but if we are in a position to treat some given string of signs as symbolizing, then we must have parsed it as symbolizing in a particular way, and hence assigned specific logical roles to its components. If so, then the question of whether or not it possesses bipolarity comes too late; and if not—if, that is, we haven't yet settled on a particular parsing of it—then that question simply doesn't arise. (Mulhall, 2007a, p. 6)[76]

[76] Again, an illustration can help to understand this general point. Although employed for a slightly different purpose (*viz*., to show the mistake involved in taking a sentence as intrinsically nonsensical, i.e., independently of the meaning which is assigned to its components), the following case shall do. Take the sentence 'Chairman Mao is rare', which, according to Mulhall, was originally presented by Michael Dummett as a piece of 'substantial nonsense', since it would (supposedly) conjoin a proper name, which can be used only as an argument for *first-level* functions, with a *second-level* function. The problem with Dummett's rather quick categorization is that:

Notice the close parallel between Mulhall's move in the quotation above—aiming to show that there is *no* bipolarity/sense (since there is no *no*-bipolarity/*non*sense) prior to and independent of our assignment of a *determinate use* to our signs—and Diamond's / McManus' general contention, as presented above, to the effect that it is an illusion to think that our signs have an 'independent life' of their own, prior to the applications to which we put them. The conclusion Mulhall extracts from this analysis is also very congenial to theirs, and serves to bring home a lesson which will be valuable when we go back to Wittgenstein's dialogue with the solipsist. It runs as follows:

> [B]efore any general doctrine about non-bipolar propositions can be brought to bear on a particular candidate, before we are even in a position to think of ourselves as having a candidate that might meet this proposed criterion for nonsensicality, we must already have made clear the particular use we are inclined to make of it such that we want to say of it that it expresses something non-bipolar (and that it is not a tautology, and so on). In other words, all the work is being done by that process of clarification of meaning, not by the attempted application of a general doctrine to whatever is thereby clarified; and if the proposition-like thing is philosophically problematic, then [...] that will come out in the attempted process of clarification as a kind of failure to mean anything in particular by it, or a hovering between various ways of meaning something by it, rather than by its violating logical syntax. (Mulhall, 2007a, p. 6)

In other (and more general) words, the lesson here is that, contrarily to what its readers have been made (provisionally) to assume, the *Tractatus* (ultimately) does not offer a philosophical 'theory of meaning'—in particular (to borrow once again from Diamond's analysis), there is 'no special *Tractatus* sense of 'nonsensical', only the ordinary idea of not meaning anything at all' (Diamond, 2004, p. 205); consequently, the only strategy available for a philosopher (or anyone else, for that matter) in order to clarify a given sentence—or to show its confusion and emptiness thereby—thus identifying and

> if it is essential to a symbol's being a proper name that it [is used as an argument to first-level functions], then we can treat 'Chairman Mao' as a proper name in this context only if we treat 'is rare' as a first-level function rather than a second-level function (say, as meaning 'tender' or 'sensitive'). And by the same token, if it is essential to a symbol's being a second-level function that it take first-level functions as arguments, then we can treat 'is rare' as a second-level function in this context only if we treat 'Chairman Mao' as a first-level function rather than a proper name (perhaps on the model of 'a brutal politician'). Either way of parsing the string of signs is perfectly feasible—we need only to determine a suitable meaning for the complementary component in each case; but each way presupposes an interpretation of the string as a whole which excludes the other. So treating it as substantial nonsense involves hovering between two feasible but incompatible ways of treating the string, without ever settling on either. (Mulhall, 2007a, p. 4—I modified the quotation in order to fix what seems to be a slip in the original.)

overcoming certain philosophical illusions, is the mobilization of (in Mulhall's phrase) 'a certain kind of practical knowledge, a know-how possessed by anyone capable of speech' (2007a, p. 7). And this means that instead of a top-down, dogmatic insistence that some signs are simply (intrinsically) nonsensical—as the one enacted by Wittgenstein in his purported criticism of the solipsist—philosophical (logical) clarity requires a rather more patient and sympathetic stance, an effort to specify the use one may have in mind when employing certain signs; that, in turn, will involve imaginatively distinguishing the (supposed) empty use (the 'use-as-nonsense') from other possible ways of using the same signs, which might be legitimate, and (recognizably) meaningful. As Diamond concludes:

> [P]hilosophical clarification is an activity which we can and, indeed, must attempt to carry through if we want to criticize a thing that looks like a proposition, and claim that it is nonsense. It is, essentially, in the failure of the attempt at clarification of the particular proposition with which we are concerned that we are able to come to recognize that there was nothing there to clarify. There is no philosophical critique of propositions available on the basis of the *Tractatus*, separate from the *Tractatus* conception of clarification of genuine propositions. (Diamond, 2004, pp. 203-204)

With that conclusion in mind, let us go back to the enacted dispute between Wittgenstein and his solipsistic interlocutor, in order to see if we can find a better end for that story—one which could be a little more satisfying to the solipsist himself, who was so harshly criticized in the former round of the argument.

2.4.4 The (real) truth in solipsism

28. As I said above (see §22b), the picture presented in TLP 5.6 as an inevitable conclusion of the book's argument—the "congruence" which is there "made manifest" between the limits of (*my*) world and the limits of (*my*) language—seems designed to satisfy two deep-rooted philosophical needs: those of overcoming metaphysical loneliness (or separateness from reality), and inexpressiveness (in the sense of a "lack of fit" between one's language and the facts one wants to—faithfully—represent). The reason why these needs seem to be satisfied by the discovery of the 'truth in solipsism' is exactly that 'when its implications are followed out strictly', the result of solipsism is 'pure realism'—i.e., the view according to which what we experience *directly* is the whole reality itself (as opposed to, say, ideas

which 'stand for' that reality) (see §18). Having reached that conclusion, I highlighted a problem about it—namely, that in order to obtain it, Wittgenstein himself had to resort to an ultimately self-subverting strategy, based on the idea of drawing limits to the expressive capabilities of our language—and, therefore, to the reality (the set of possible facts) which can be expressed / thought by means of that language. We arrive at a kind of "realism" in this way, but only at the expense of making the world itself tailored for our cognitive capacities—to become part of the subject's (private) experience.

Now, contrary to what Wittgenstein wants us to (momentarily) assume, no logical method of analysis can ever allow us to escape that kind of metaphysical isolation—*if*, i.e., we accept that the only way to solve the (logical) disputes about the sense our signs (or purported projections) would amount to find some 'external determination' (to borrow McManus' phrase) as to how our words / sentences can or must be used. I then submitted that the way out of this problem depends on our seeing the whole idea of a method of projection, insofar as it is part of the "picture theory of meaning" presented in the *Tractatus*, as an illusion, a rung in the ladder which we were supposed to 'throw away' (see §23b). To show how to do this was, in turn, the task of the last sub-section. Its conclusion was that, ultimately, there is no such an external determination—in particular, no *philosophical* external determination, in the guise, most notably, of a "theory of meaning"—to which we could appeal as a guaranty that our signs do symbolize (or fail to); our signs have no life of their own, apart from the uses to which we put them in particular contexts, and the only way to determine if a particular (purported) use is legitimate or not is by mobilizing our 'practical knowledge' or linguistic 'know-how' (more on this in a moment).

29. Now, supposing we have freed ourselves of the 'myth of the independent life of signs', what about those deep-rooted philosophical needs which I mentioned above? In the answer to this question I hope to show what the *real* 'truth in solipsism' is—the truth, i.e., which is at the very basis of our search for some kind of philosophical guaranty against metaphysical loneliness and inexpressiveness.

Notice, first, that a consequence of there being no external determination to how our words should be used is that we also lack any kind of "external guaranty" that we are "mirroring" the world with our language, and, therefore, that we are making our experience (of that world) understood (or even understand*able*) by others, and hence shared. The only ground we are left with is our *contingent* agreement itself—the *fact* that our words are, more often than not, projected in similar ways. Being contingent—and, as such, not metaphysically backed up by any kind of *a priori* theory of meaning—the possibility will always be open that this agreement should be lost, for one reason or another—we can always avoid, e.g., to accept the world as it is, or deny that we inhabit the same world (some particular) others inhabit; we also can (all too easyly) close ourselves to others, and them to us. For an enormous number of reasons—which are themselves not to be reduced to a definite set by any *a priori* theory—we, or our fellow interlocutors, can always start to project our/their words in strange, unexpected, eccentric ways[77].

I take it that this was part of the lesson that Wittgenstein wanted to teach us—but which only now, after throwing the "picture theory" away, can be really learnt—by means of the (supposedly) "unimportant" (i.e., below zero—see n. 57) propositions of TLP 4, such as the following: 'Everyday language is a part of the human organism and is not less complicated than it' (4.002); 'The tacit conventions on which the understanding of everyday language depends are enormously complicated' (ibid.); 'It belongs to the essence of a proposition that it should be able to communicate a *new* sense to us' (4.027), and in order to do so 'A proposition must use old expressions to communicate a new sense. A proposition communicates a situation to us, and so it must be *essentially* connected with the situation' (4.03). As things stand, this is precisely the lesson which Stanley Cavell wants us to learn from his own (professedly Wittgensteinian) view on the nature of *criteria*, which notoriously lead him to the signature claim that there is a 'truth in skepticism'. The following pair of quotations (which are extracted from different contexts) shall present this lesson in a sufficiently perspicuous way:

[77] Although the topics I am here announcing—those of the *contingent* nature of our linguistic agreement, and its consequences for our *responsibilities* to create and sustain a linguistic community—will be tackled in the next paragraphs (where I shall sketch Stanley Cavell's view on the nature of our criteria), a more detailed treatment can be found in chapters 1 and 5—the former having (more) to do with the burden of acknowledging other human beings, and the latter having (more) to do with the burden of acceptance of the world.

> We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humour and of significance and of fulfilment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgivenness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation—all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls 'forms of life.' Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying. (Cavell, 1976, p. 52)

> [...] I take Wittgenstein's idea of a criterion as meant to account both for the depth of our sharing of language and at the same time for our power to refuse this legacy, to account for, as I put it, both the possibility and the recurrent threat or coherence of skepticism. To possess criteria is also to possess the demonic power to strip them from ourselves, to turn language upon itself, to find that its criteria are, in relation to others, merely outer; in relation to certainty, simply blind; in relation to being able to go on with our concepts into new contexts, wholly ungrounded. (Cavell, 2006, p. 20)

Having read these quotations, somebody can object—fairly enough, as the claim goes—that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein never mention 'criteria', or talks of 'forms of life'; however, as I indicated above, he speaks of a 'human organism', and of the complexity that such an organism has, and of the way this complexity is mirrored in the 'complication' of human language; he also speaks elsewhere (see section 1) of logical rules for the use of signs, and—if my reading so far has been on the right tracks—he does that with the ultimate aim of indicating the limits of those rules when it comes to "guarantee" our agreement in particular projections. These, in my view, are important clues—which, when seen against the background of the general analysis I have been trying to articulate, hopefully will appear as good reasons—to conclude that, if there is some (real—not ineffable) truth in solipsism, it amounts rather to the kind of 'terrifying' vision about the human condition which Cavell is concerned to describe in the quotations above —'terrifying', N.B., for somebody who (like ourselves, in some philosophical moods) would expect some kind of stronger metaphysical ground to back up our use of language, and, in particular, our *agreement* in the way we use our words. According to this view, what would be 'correct' about solipsism—what a (possible) flesh-and-blood solipsist would like to convey, something (s)he would be (really) concerned about—is that this fragile basis for our linguistic agreement—the lack of any 'external determination' for how to use our words—poses a (real) threat to expressiveness. To accept that fact is part of what it means to accept our finitude—and it is precisely because of the difficulty of accepting it

that a solipsist (and not only him/her!) might seek for some consolation in a metaphysical story (with which comes also a "theory of meaning").

30. In yet another context, Cavell claims that Wittgenstein portraits skepticism 'as the site in which we abdicate such responsibility as we have over words, unleashing them from our criteria, as if toward the world—unleashing our voices from them—coming to feel that our criteria limit rather than constitute our access to the world' (CHU 22). In the same vein, I think we can say that the portrait of solipsism that Wittgenstein offers in the *Tractatus*—as well as his portrait of the 'pure realism', with which the former is said to coincide—is that of a site where we (self-)deceive ourselves, by assuming (rather self-indulgently) that the meaning of our words can be at the same time 'externally determined'—i.e., can derive from the constitution of (say) the "reality itself"—and also be fully and easily and directly within our grasp—since we made that reality itself a part of our own experience.

The solipsism which Wittgenstein (provisionally) tempts us to accept when we read the *Tractatus* is one among many philosophical garbs that we—to the extent in which we truly engage in our role as readers of his book—might feel naturally inclined to don on the real difficulties which come with the responsibilities we inherit by entering in a linguistic community. We sublimate or rationalize these difficulties by transforming them into general *theoretical* problems—about, say, the "ground of agreement" between language (or thought) and reality—so that we can eschew from the real pressures which are put upon us in our daily interactions with others, in our life with words. In this way many of the traditional philosophical questions arise—questions such as: how can I know whether my concepts / propositions (really) refer to objects / facts *in the world*, instead of referring only to (my) ideas? And how can I know whether they refer to mental experiences / states / events which occur *inside* the other, instead of being (at best) *indirectly* connected with them—e.g., *via* their bodies or behaviours?

Solipsism, in this context—as well as its twin, the 'pure realism' of the *Tractatus*—can be seen as an intellectualized attempt at re-establishing the link between the subject and the world (and other subjects, to the extent in which they are supposed to be part of that world), so as to escape metaphysical loneliness and inexpressiveness. To free us from this kind of evasive attitude—which, to repeat, is not an exclusive characteristic of 'solipsism'

or 'pure realism', but is also constitutive of a number of philosophical 'isms' purporting to give us an easy 'way out' of our practical and existential problems—thus leading us to accept our finitude and its burdens (in particular, that of making sense of ourselves, the world and others) is part of what I take to be the 'ethical point' of the *Tractatus*[78].

31. Before elaborating the last claim—or, rather, in order to start doing it—let me notice that, if I am right in my contention that the kind of (evasive) theoretical attitude which the book as a whole is trying to free us from is something which can assume many forms—which can be embodied in many philosophical 'isms'—then this favouring of (fixation in?) solipsism may appear somewhat recalcitrant. This is where I would like to recall and further articulate a claim that I made in the general Introduction—namely, that solipsism is not only (in Hacker's phrase) a 'paradigm' of the 'diseases of the intellect to which philosophers are so prone', but also a kind of ultimate outburst, a paroxysm, a limit to which philosophers in general are not willing to go with their analyses, but which is always in the horizon, as a possible consequence of their initial attitude to problems like the ones indicated above (§30), just waiting for the kind of 'strict following out' which the *Tractatus* enacts in its propositions.

In an essay to which I am much indebted, Juliet Floyd describes solipsism in a way which seems very congenial to the view I just presented. 'Solipsism', she says, 'is one of the most persistent refuges of the *a priori*, a limiting attempt to impose a limit upon thinking and living' (1998, p. 82). Notwithstanding my agreement with that description, I think her

[78] I am here alluding, as it shall be clear, to Wittgenstein's famous claim that 'the point of the [*Tractatus*] is ethical'. That claim was made in a letter to Ludwig von Ficker, who was a prospective publisher of the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein further elaborated the point as follows:

> I once wanted to give a few words in the foreword [of the *Tractatus*] which now actually are not in it, which, however, I'll write to you now because they might be a key for you: I wanted to write that my work consists of two parts: of the one which is here, and of everything which I have *not* written. And precisely this second part is the important one. For the the Ethical is delimited from within, as it were, by my book; and I'm convinced that, *strictly* speaking, it can ONLY be delimited in this way. In brief, I think: All of that which *many* are *babbling* today, I have defined in my book by remaining silent about it. (Quoted in Monk, 1990, p. 178)

I will have more to say about what I think is the 'ethical point' of the book at the conclusion of this chapter.

account of the impulse which leads to solipsism, thus understood, is somewhat misleading —hence a comparison can be useful to clarify and further develop the analysis pursued so far. The following quotation summarizes her view on this point (I enumerate the sentences in order to analyse them below):

> [1] The impulse to metaphysical solipsism arises naturally from the surrender of traditional ideas of necessity and reason, including traditional ideas of logic as a necessary framework governing thought and reality. [2] If logic and grammar cannot hold forms of thinking and speaking in place, if analysis cannot uncover definiteness of sense by specifying forms of objects in the world, and if ethics does not consist of true propositions or principles, then *my* consciousness, *my* experience, may seem to be all that is left in the way of an underlying bulwark for thought and reality. [3] The *Tractatus* depicts this as one route into solipsism, and [4] then shows how this idea of a mental limit is just another way to see with a captive eye. [5] Here too is an ethical dimension of his work. (Floyd, 1998, p. 82)

I am in complete agreement with sentences (1), (4) and (5). However, what I have been saying so far amounts precisely to the opposite of what is stated in the central sentence (2): whereas Floyd there seems to be saying that solipsism is a kind of "second best"—in *this* sense, a 'refuge'—which is available when you lose your faith in the idea of an objective connection between language and world—one which would be guaranteed by reason, or logic—what I have been trying to show is that, for Wittgenstein, solipsism is (at least *prima facie*) the *best* philosophical candidate to secure such a direct, objective and impersonal relation between subject (or his/her language) and the world. (That this is only *prima facie* true must by now be clear—after all, according to the general reading I have been presenting, ultimately such a view is to be seen as another rung in the ladder which must be thrown away at the end of the book—and here lies my agreement with Floyd on (4) and (5).)

It is somewhat perplexing, to my mind, that Floyd should say what she says in (2), given the overall view presented in her essay—in relation to which, as I said, I am in general very sympathetic. The apparent conflict I see as internal to her view can be made perspicuous by comparing the quotation above with another set of remarks presented at the end of her essay, with which I also entirely agree, and which I take as indeed very helpful to clarify my own position. These are the relevant remarks:

> [O]ne 'deep need' Wittgenstein saw wrongly gratified in idealism and in solipsism was a wish for total absorption in the world and in life, in the feeling of

> there being no space, no gap, between *the* language I understand, *the* world I contemplate, and *the* life which I live. [...] Solipsism is a metaphysical version of loneliness—or, perhaps better, a metaphysical attempt to overcome the possibility of loneliness. If solipsism were true, my all-embracing experience and my all-embracing world would be one. I would find myself reflected in all things. (Floyd, 1998, pp. 103-104)

It is, I think, precisely because of these *apparent* philosophical merits that solipsism ends up being the main focus of Wittgenstein's reflections at the time he wrote the *Tractatus.* (Given that solipsism can also be seen as the most radical version of a more general myth —call it the logico-metaphysical myth of privacy—these considerations may give us a hint about why the interest in solipsism would be gradually replaced, in Wittgenstein's later writings, by a wider concern with a number of different issues steming from that general myth—see chapters 3 & 4.)

32. But solipsism, to the extent in which it can be taken as a 'metaphysical attempt to overcome the possibility of loneliness', is precisely what is *un*true—or at any rate this is what I have been trying to show.—But in saying this, am I not being as dogmatic and unfair to the solipsist as I accused Wittgenstein (in his dogmatic *persona*) of being? In what sense is the view just stated supposed to be more 'satisfying to the other person'—i.e., 'the solipsist'[79]? Well, to begin with, I am not commited to the view that the solipsist cannot say whatever she wants to say with her words—she has all the room to use her words as she wants, provided that she (tries to) make herself understood. (Of course she has no *obligation* to do this—after all, it as characteristic of our human condition, of our life with words, that we can simply decide to give up our responsibility to make ourselves understood, whenever we want, provided that we assume the consequences of that decision). Now, assuming that she wants to make herself understood, the only possible way of continuing with our dialogue—i.e., after throwing away any philosophical temptation to appeal to a theory of meaning, such as the *Tractatus*' "picture theory" and the machinery

[79] But *who* is this person which I am calling 'the solipsist' henceforth? I am assuming he or she is a *real human being*, someone really interested in defending a claim like that 'the world is my world', for whatever reason. As we shall see, in his later writings (starting with the *Philosophical Remarks*) Wittgenstein gradually reformulates his own reflections—changing his whole style—aiming to achieve increasingly more *concreteness* in his analyses, paying more attention to the (variously nuanced) different claims which can be made in different contexts, by different human beings (particularly oneself) inflicted by philosophical problems. In order to highlight this change toward concreteness—thus indicating that my intended reference is to *particular* interlocutors (including oneself)—I shall henceforth employ the pronoun 'she' in its (purported) gender-neutral use; although I am aware of the problems surrounding this —or any similar—artificial attempt at neutrality (stylistically and otherwise), I hope the effect will be worth the price.

which goes with it—is as we normally do when we have a disagreement: we *just talk*, mobilizing our practical mastery, or know-how, of language, seeking to find a (set of) shared judgment(s) to use as a starting point. In this process, it may well turn out that the solipsist (this particular, fleshed and blooded, interlocutor) really had something interesting, important (or rather completely uninteresting and unimportant) to say. Or it may occur that I simply find myself unable to understand what she wants to say—what may in turn make me adopt a whole range of different attitudes, from feeling myself guilty —unprepared, unsophisticated, stupid, different—to blaming my interlocutor instead—treating her as strange, eccentric, mad, unintelligible, and so on. But notice that even if I adopt one of the latter attitudes, my reason, whether good or bad (I can be just tired, say, and try to pass my problem to the other) will not derive from any metaphysical story / theory of meaning this time—if, N.B., I am not to fall back to the evasive philosophical attitude described above.

But I would like to take another step: it is not that I just want to make room for a (possibly productive, possibly barren) dialogue with a (possibly real) solipsist—a room for her words to have a (or many) legitimate use(s). My sympathy toward the solipsist goes further, in the sense that, as I said above, I also find myself, at least in some moods, thinking that there are many "good reasons"—which might actually amount to *rationalizations* of so many concrete dissatisfactions with the human condition—which can lead one (myself included) to be tempted to take refuge in some kind of solipsistic (theoretical) story, such as that one Wittgenstein presents in the *Tractatus*. If I see an error or misunderstanding in the solipsist's attitude, it is rather a failure in her self-knowledge, in her self-interpretation of her own stance. To the extent that I take the theoretical recasting of those concrete dissatisfactions as a symptom of philosophical sublimation—and, therefore, as a kind of self-deception—I also think that to present them as effects of 'logical misunderstandings', and to treat them accordingly, would be just another symptom of the same sort of attitude. If we give up this sublimating attitude, what remains are the real anxieties, or dissatisfactions, that we (or 'the solipsist') encounter in our life with words and other people—dissatisfactions with the truly fragile basis of the agreement between our language and that of which we speak, i.e., the world and others. This, as I already suggested, might turn out to be the real truth in solipsism—a truth that has nothing

ineffable about itself, but which is difficult to take at face value, without philosophical (re)interpretation.

2.4.5 Throwing the ladder away (take two)

33. The Wittgenstein who arises from the reading pursued so far is neither a "mystic", nor the dogmatic philosopher who simply follows the would-be 'only strictly correct' method presented in 6.53—i.e., one who would (simply) say, in a rather Carnapian tone, and in complete accordance with an idea presented in the Preface, that all the philosophical (pseudo-)problems arise from 'misunderstandings of the logic of our language', so that they could only be 'solved' when this 'logic' is well understood. As 6.53 already warned us—and as the enacted dispute with the solipsist illustrates—that kind of philosophical treatment 'would not be satisfying to the other person'. It will not do as a *therapy* just to show to 'the other person' (e.g., the solipsist) that she cannot (really) *say* what she (thought she) had been saying when she was trying to express her "problems". But what else, then, is needed, by the lights of the *Tractatus*, in order for a therapy to be successful? My suggestion is that what we need is, first and foremost, to reassess the very aims of the whole enterprise pursued in the book—so that instead of trying to understand how it could help us to "solve" (or, for that matter, "dissolve") the philosophical (pseudo-)problems, we should try to understand how it can help us see (maybe for the first time, or at least for the first time *in full light*) the *real facts* behind those "problems"—behind, i.e., the philosophical masks we have put on them.

Now, since it is not exactly against a *thesis* or an *opinion* that one has to fight when dealing with such "problems", but rather against a kind of *fantasy* or *illusion* which shapes the (overt) theses and opinions of someone in their grip (like the solipsist of the *Tractatus*), the best strategy is not direct opposition, or contradiction—in fact, that would only generate resistance, and, consequently, reinforce the grip of the underlying illusion. What one need is, rather—and here I borrow from Mulhall's analysis of a different case—'a way of loosening that grip, of freeing us from our captivation, of bringing about a kind of disillusionment'; and in order to achieve that aim one needs to accept the terms set by the underlying illusion, 'working through them from within and hoping thereby to work

beyond them'; this, as Mulhall indicates, is what in psychoanalysis would be called 'transference': 'the analyst suffers the analysand's projection of her fantasies, but does so precisely in order to put its mechanisms and motivations in question, to work with and upon the material rather than simply reiterating it' (2001, p. 137).

I take it that at least part of what it means to work beyond the terms of a philosophical illusion, by means of a (successful) therapeutic use of transference, is to make manifest to "the analysand" the self-deception involved in the (initial) theoretical recasting of her "problems"; that, in turn, can trigger a change of attitude on the part of "the analysand": once she is able to see that her "problems" have an irreducibly practical—call it existential—dimension, she will stop looking for (purely) theoretical (dis)solutions. One can indeed say—as Wittgenstein himself does—that after this whole therapeutic process our (pseudo-)problems will disappear—meaning that our *philosophically sublimated* "questions" will be shown not to be *questions* at all (see 6.52); yet one could also say—as Wittgenstein precisely does *not*[80]—that, in another important sense, our *real* problems have only just began to show up at this point. And this is my primary reason to think, regarding the conclusions we reached at the end of the last section, that although they are legitimate, given the *Tractatus*'s self-understanding of its own therapeutic aims, they are ultimately unsatisfactory, or incomplete, because they do not go all the way to the envisaged *change of attitude* that the book as a whole—and, in particular, its self-subversive enactment of a solipsistic position—is encouraging us to take. In other words, I think we still need to get clear about the full ethical significance of the *Tractatus*.

34. Let me start dealing with this issue by echoing some of the conclusions reached in Michael Kremer's analysis of the 'truth in solipsism', in a paper to which I am much indebted (Kremer, 2004). One of Kremer's main contentions is that solipsism is, at least in part, true, *because* when it is strictly followed through, it not only leads one to abandon (what I would qualify as) the philosophical or theoretical illusion of 'drawing limits to language and thought'—an illusion which, N.B., the *Tractatus* has tempted its readers to indulge in from its very beginning—but, more importantly, it also should lead one to explode the—not only philosophical, but also ethical—'illusion of the godhead of the

[80] See above, n. 78.

independent "I"' (p. 66); hence the main lesson extracted by Kremer, according to which solipsism, if strictly followed through, amounts to 'the self-humbling of pride' (ibid.).

Now, I think that such a lesson is closely related to the kind of solution—or, in Wittgenstein's own words, the 'vanishing'—of the 'problem of life' alluded to in 6.521, which, in turn, connects to the idea of 'seeing the world aright' after having 'overcome' the propositions of the *Tractatus* (throwing away the ladder), thus coming to understand its author. Here is how I see these connections: to 'see the world aright'—to have a clear, non-philosophically sublimated, realistic perspective on that world—is, as I said above, to see (among many other things) the facts it presents to us as what they really are, namely, as absolutely *contingent* happenings, which, as such, have nothing of (intrinsically) good or bad, fortunate or regrettable about them. To think (or to assume) the contrary—e.g., that (at least some) facts in the world are so to speak "intrinsically connected" to our (i.e., the metaphysical subject's) will—is to fall prey of the most seductive, and hence most dangerous aspect of the solipsistic fantasy. This is because, as Wittgenstein would later put[81], the issue at hand when one deals with solipsism (as with so many other philosophical fantasies) has more to do with our *will* than with our *intellect*—hence it should come as no surprise that even the most engaged *intellectual* efforts to dissipate it end up only deflecting the real difficulty behind the temptation of solipsism. What one needs in order to be freed from that temptation is precisely *not* more argument—hence Wittgenstein's decision of *remaining silent* about it; rather, what one needs is to (gradually) engage in an active effort to come to terms with—to become conscious of, and ultimately counteract, hence take control of—one's own will, so as to become capable of taking a different stand toward the world.

That, it seems to me, is at least part of what it means to confront (and to accept) our finitude—in particular, our real separateness from the world and its happenings. And I take it that this is exactly the kind of (practical, existential) change which is envisaged as the terminus of the whole therapeutic process of 'throwing away the ladder'—thus leading one to abandon, maybe against one's deepest expectations (philosophical and other) the search for "limits of sense", for a "theory of meaning", or for any (other) kind of metaphysical guaranty of "direct connection" with the (whole) world.

[81] See, e.g., CV p. 17.

(The conclusion above is admittedly opaque; although I shall try to gradually clarify its content in the remainder chapters, for the time being I would like to avoid a possible misunderstanding, which can be formulated by means of the following question: am I, by calling attention to that kind of separateness, trying to say, or to imply, that one should, by the *Tractatus*'s lights, take a *detached perspective* with respect to the (whole) world? The (brief) answer to that question is: No. And yet, the very fact that it may appear so overwhelming at this juncture—as it does to me (in some moods) anyway—shows something important about the nature of this particular philosophical temptation—I mean solipsism. For let us recall Floyd's words: 'one "deep need" Wittgenstein saw wrongly gratified in [...] solipsism was a wish for total absorption in the world and in life, in the feeling of there being no space, no gap, between *the* language I understand, *the* world I contemplate, and *the* life which I live' (1998, pp. 103-104); now of course, if *that* were the kind of "absorption" that one had in mind (however tacitly) when one thinks about a *non*-detached relation to the world, there would be no doubt that, by affirming separateness—thereby denying solipsism—one would be forced to accept the implication referred above. But given that I am not willing to bite that bullet, what is the alternative model I am proposing? And what exactly is the problem with the solipsistic model of "attachment to the world"? Starting with the last question, I take it that one of the main problems with the solipsistic model—which is also supposed to be one of its main merits, if one is tempted to accept it—lies in the suppression it would promote of any kind of (not only epistemic but) existential *risks*. And yet, to feel threatened—or rather excited, or soberly unperturbed, or otherwise burdened—in the face of such risks seems to be a precondition of any realistic (non-detached) stance toward the world[82]; now that seems to be exactly the opposite of the 'pure realism' depicted in the *Tractatus*, where a relation is promised in which the whole of 'reality' would be 'co-ordinated'—with no rest—with the 'self of solipsism' (see TLP 5.64). Consequently, I take it that an alternative, *bona fide* realistic model for a (or rather a number of) non-detached relation(s) to the world must involve the notion of a subject as being rather open to be *challenged* in her beliefs, convictions, or preconceptions—practical as well as theoretical—'in the teeth of the facts'[83]. As it happens in so many (difficult) situations of our ordinary lives, separation can be initially traumatic—it can even be a case for grief or mourning, as Emerson, followed by Cavell, would be willing to say[84]—but

[82] For an interesting and illuminating discussion of this point, see Dreyfus 2009, esp. ch. 2.

[83] See Diamond, 1995, p. 39.

[84] Emerson presents that point most notably in his essay 'Experience', which Cavell resumes and analyses in many of his writings, the main context perhaps being the first chapter of *Conditions Handsome and*

precisely because of that it can also serve as a catalyst for a renewed, affirmative and more engaged (realistic) attitude toward life and world—one in which, in Cavell's terms, we would not try to 'become near' the world 'by grasping it, getting to it, but by letting its distance, its separateness, impress us' (see PDAT, p. 52).)

The conclusion to which we have just arrived is also very congenial to—and, hence, amenable to be further clarified and enriched by—the view which Stephen Mulhall offers when summing up Wittgenstein's 'early conception of ethics'. Here is the passage where that view is presented:

> [T]he happy man of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is not he who finds answers to the problems of life, but he who finds life unproblematic. He is the one for whom the solution to the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem, in coming to see what happens as what happens, as opposed to something that opposes or resists our conception of what should or must happen. [...] [This is a] variation[...] on the key spiritual idea of accepting the world's independence of our will, and hence acknowledging this aspect of our own finitude. One might express it as a conception of the self as dying to a conception of itself as being at the centre of the universe, and accepting thereby the utter non-necessity of things going well for it—at least as it judges flourishing. For if life is a gift to be accepted beyond wish, will, and craving, then we cannot think of anyone or anything, and thus of the world, as owing us a living. (Mulhall, 2005, p. 108)

And if, following Mulhall, I am right in finding a view like the one summarized above at work in the *Tractatus*, then the next step would be to conclude that the 'silence' recommend at its last proposition shall not to be seen (as so many have) as an invitation to a passive contemplation—of "the mystical", say—but rather as a call to stop *talking*—stop theorizing about what *should* or *must* be the case—and to start *acting* in this contingent—and (sometimes) difficult to accept—real world.

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2.5 Epilogue: on philosophical elucidation, and the role of logical analysis

Unhandsome (1990).

35. By bringing this chapter to a close I want to address a worry, or question, which, although not directly related to the central topic of the text—solipsism and its overcoming—may nonetheless naturally arise in relation to the general reading of the *Tractatus* presented so far. The question has to do with the role of logical analysis, and, in particular, the ideal of a logically perspicuous notation, as they are presented in book. To put it briefly, the question is: should the idea of logical analysis be thrown away together with the "picture theory of meaning"?—The (short) answer is: not at all.—But then, what is its purpose? After all, according to the reading presented so far, what (ultimately) does all the work in the task of philosophical elucidation (as the one illustrated above, by the dialogue between Wittgenstein and the solipsist) is *not* logical analysis—understood as a sort of logical *calculation*—but rather the use of our ordinary linguistic mastery—our practical capacity to distinguish, in concrete contexts, legitimate from illegitimate (i.e., meaningful from nonsensical, or rather empty) projections of signs; now, although the knowledge of logical syntax (i.e., the rules governing logical relations among propositions) surely *can* be (part of what is) appealed to in such concrete situations in order to clarify the meaning (or lack thereof) of some sentences, it would be preposterous to suppose that it *must* be (explicitly) involved in our ordinary linguistic mastery.

So here comes an extended answer, the first step of which will be to try to get clear about the nature of analysis, as well as of its companion notion of a perspicuous logical notation, or *Begriffsschrift*, as they are *actually* employed in the *Tractatus*. There is a very widespread assumption to the effect that, by the time he wrote the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein would have espoused some sort of logical atomism[85]. Given that opinion, and given that he later came to reject (rather explicitly) any form of atomism, as well as to criticize his earlier commitment to the idea of a final or complete analysis (as being dogmatic and mistaken)[86], it is only natural to suppose that those two things (i.e., atomism and logical analysis) would go hand in hand in the *Tractatus*. Yet, an important case was recently made by Juliet Floyd against just such a conflation. Floyd argues—to my mind, very compellingly—that the opinion that Wittgenstein was a logical atomist is a 'great myth of twentieth century' (Floyd, 2007, p. 192); she also claims that instead of assuming that his view of logical analysis was simply inherited (in a more or less definitive format) from

[85] For a very clear presentation of that opinion, see Kenny (1973, esp. chs. 4 & 5) and Mounce (1989, esp. chs. 1 & 2).

[86] See esp. PG, p. 210.

Frege and Russell, we should rather see the movement already attempted (however ultimately unsatisfactorily) in the *Tractatus* as 'something more akin to a philosophical transformation of the idea of analysis itself' (ibid.)—as a first step in the continuous development toward his later views on logical clarification.

Floyd's argument for these conclusions is very complex and filled with exegetical and historical details, offering a vast number of (different but related) reasons for debunking that 'great myth'. In what follows I shall provide only a brief and very selective reconstruction of her position, focusing on the central contention that the 'Frege-Russell ideal' of a 'canonical, *correct* concept-script reflective of *the* logical order of thinking'[87] is something that not only 'Wittgenstein was trying to overcome in the *Tractatus*' (p. 195), but was indeed one of its 'primary philosophical target[s]' (p. 196). Floyd starts her defense of this contention by reminding us that Wittgenstein—unlike Frege or Russell—'repeatedly expressed worries about uncritical idolatry of *Begriffsschrift* notation' (p. 195); she illustrates that claim by indicating Wittgenstein's critical stance against 'confusing the structure of an equation with the holding of a relation, confusing the sign for generality with a functional element of a sentence contributing separately to its sense or content, [and] confusing two distinct uses of the same sign though they express different symbols, as in Russell's paradox' (ibid.). In this juncture, she also reminds us that, in contrast to Russell's and Ramsey's 'positive program of research in analysis'—which was aimed at such achievements as 'the proving of theorems, causal accounts of belief, and so on'—'the most striking applications that [Wittgenstein] makes of the various analyses he proposes in the *Tractatus* are negative', in that their main aims would be 'to cut off certain paths and routes into certain philosophical questions and problems, to show that the *Fragestellungen* of certain purported a priori analyses are illusory, [or] in some way not genuine', and so on (see p. 196).

Those initial reminders are meant to go some of the way toward showing, as Floyd puts later on, the extent to which Wittgenstein's view of the role of a *Begriffsschrift* 'differ[s] in spirit, commitment, and aim from the attitudes to be found in Frege and in Russell' (p. 202)[88]. Having presented those reminders, Floyd goes on to quote a passage from an earlier

[87] I have been warned by a friend that to ascribe the view that there is such a thing as *the* logical order of thinking to Frege is contentious, given the latter's principle of multiple analizablity of propositions. For the present purposes I shall simply suspend my judgment on that issue, following Floyd's reading in order to get a clearer view on Wittgenstein's position.

[88] Many other such differences are indicated throughout Floyd's essay. One which I think is worth

essay of hers, which states some of the central tenets of her general interpretative stance on this issue. The passage goes as follows:

> [In 2001 I wrote that] by examining the details of what Wittgenstein actually *did* with the *Begriffsschriften* of Frege and Russell in the *Tractatus*, we can see that he is rejecting [their] ideal of clarity of expression. According to this ideal [...] we imagine ourselves to be depicting *the* inferential order among thoughts (or sentences of our language) when we work with a logical notation. But on my reading, one aim of the *Tractatus* is to depict such notions as "*the* inferential order", "*the* logical grammar of our language," and "*the* logical form of a proposition" as chimeras. [...] Frege and Russell write as if, at least ideally, there is a single context of expression within which we may discern the structure of thought, a systematically presented *Begriffsschrift* within which we can use logical notation to make perspicuous *the* logical order. In contrast, I have emphasized Wittgenstein's insistence in the *Tractatus* that no single imposition of a logico-syntatic order on what we say is or can be the final word, the final way of expressing or depicting thought. [...] For Wittgenstein—even in the *Tractatus—however* useful the formalized languages of Frege and Russell may be for warding off certain grammatical and metaphysical confusions, these languages must simultaneously be seen as sources of new forms of philosophical illusion—indeed the deepest kind of illusion of all, the illusion of having found ultimate clarity. (Floyd, 2001, p. 179) [quoted in Floyd, 2007, pp. 196-197]

Having read that passage, one may wonder: but how would logical analysis help us 'warding off certain grammatical and metaphysical confusions', given that 'no single imposition of a logico-syntatic order on what we say is or can be the final word'? Floyd herself provides the elements for answering that question in a later context, starting with the claim that the very *usefulness* of a logical analysis depends on its being related 'to a particular speaker's language at a particular time' (p. 204). She elaborates on that claim in the following passage, by drawing an interesting parallel with Quine's view of paraphrase:

> We can think of [the *Tractatus*' analysis], in fact, as a kind of extensionalized, Quinean view, however nascent and unclearly articulated. When we formalize language, we paraphrase, for purposes local to whatever context we are in. Paraphrase is context- and purpose-relative. Paraphrase has no commitment to meaning- or content-preservation, and there is probably no general method or systematic routine for achieving it. This is partly because paraphrase involves an exercise in the home language as much as in the object of assessment. For Quine, there is in this sense nothing to be correct or incorrect about in formalizing (applying logic to) our language. "Paraphrase" is his phrase for avoiding space for the kind of worries about meaning that he saw Russell and Carnap generating. We apply logic and formulate its structure. We need no general (kind of) justification to do so.

mentioning—since it seems very congenial to some ideas that surfaced before in my own analysis—is expressed by the claim that Wittgenstein, unlike Frege, Russell *et al.*, would have 'never insisted on, but instead resisted the idea that thoughts must be imagined to be expressible, in principle, in a single universally applicable, logically perspicuous "ideal" language' (Floyd, 2007, pp. 199-200).

> From this perspective, questions such as: What strategies and techniques do we need to employ in order to stop? Does analysis depend upon certain empirical truths? Certain meaning-theoretic principles? How will we recognize when we have made a complete catalog of the complexity in an expression? What is our right to the "*must*" in the idea that analysis "must" end at the elementary propositions? How can we be sure, for any given analysis of an argument, that an invalidating explanation of its deeper logical structure will not be found?—Each of these is a question asking for something we cannot have and do not need. So long as truth-functional orientation (*sense* in the sense of the *Tractatus*) is preserved through the entire context relevant for reasoning, replacement (i.e., expressive rearrangement) can proceed as it proceeds. And that is all. (Floyd, 2007, pp. 205-206)

Having reached this point in Floyd's analysis, I think we are in a better position to (re)articulate the questions with which this section started. For, if the view presented above is sound—if, i.e., the ultimate purpose of (Tractarian) logical analysis is (only) to provide a (Quinean) sort of paraphrase—one would like to know what happens, first, with the *Tractatus*'s ideal of a *complete* analysis (of a particular, determinately projected, proposition), and, second, with its (related) requirement of *simple signs* lying somewhere at the end of the process of clarification—a requirement which, at least in the *Tractatus*, seems to be equivalent to the requirement of *determinacy of sense.* According to Floyd herself, the general reading she has being proposing does not go all the way toward answering those difficult questions; yet, it may at least go some way, by suggesting that

> there were materials within the *Tractatus* leading Wittgenstein to suppose that the requirement of determinacy of sense was innocent sounding enough to have accomplished what he wanted without having committed him either to ruling out or ruling in any particular analysis of phenomena involving subsentential complexity. And it [also] suggest[s] that we can take the *Tractatus* to be recasting our understanding of the formal use of the notion of analysis itself, away from an image of a quest for *the* logically correct notation (logical syntax conceived as *a* correct syntax) and toward a more complicated, piecemeal conception of the role that translation into formalized languages may play in the activity of philosophical clarification. With this comes a more complicated conception of the relationship between ordinary language, with its variety of expressive powers, and the kinds of translations ordinary language may or may not be capable of receiving in a formalized language designed to make logical form perspicuous. (Floyd, 2007, p. 206)

How are we to understand the claim that Wittgenstein would have thought that 'the requirement of determinacy of sense was innocent sounding'? Floyd thinks, interestingly, that by the time he wrote the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein 'thought he had a general scheme or model' of analysis which 'would be able to accommodate future developments'—however, as she emphatically warns, that 'general scheme' should *not* be confused with 'a method or a substantive independent requirement or an a priori condition or a semantics' (p. 213).

What is 'innocent sounding' about that 'general scheme' is that it 'seems at times to amount to no more than the idea that analysis is analysis of propositions, and insofar as it is, it must begin and end in expressions that are determinately true or false—expressions subject, that is, to logic' (pp. 204-205). Yet that was exactly the point where Wittgenstein himself came to see that too dangerous a concession was made in the *Tractatus*; as Floyd puts the point: '[h]e did come to think, and rightly, that he had been myopic, vague, and naive—if you like, metaphysical—about the image of a "final" or "complete" analysis that would display the logical as logical and prevent misunderstandings for all possible contexts' (p. 212). As his views about logical analysis and clarification evolved, he became able to see 'how misleading and partial that general scheme was: how little it allowed in the way of coming to an understanding of the essence of the logical' (ibid.). From these considerations Floyd concludes that:

> What was in error by [Wittgenstein's own] later lights were his nebulous gestures involving the notion of *analysis*, coupled with the insistence that it *must* end somewhere, even if the termination point lies infinitely in the complex distance, and his sketch of the sort of expressive structures it would terminate in. [...] That the *Tractatus* created new forms of confusion of its own, precisely in the effort to unmask older ones, is perhaps in the end not surprising. [...] The author of the *Tractatus* came to see that philosophical problems do not have as unified a source, or as unified a means of escape, as he had once suggested—indeed his suggestion of this generated yet more problems and difficulties. (Floyd, 2007, p. 213)

36. The results summarized above give us an important clue to understand the change that would take place after the publication of the *Tractatus*. We will come back to this issue soon enough (see next chapter). Yet, in order to pave the way for its analysis, I would like to go back (once again) to our initial question. For, although I think Floyd's view sheds some (much needed) light on the nature of logical analysis, it does not exactly explain the reason why that sort of analysis ends up *not* being employed by Wittgenstein himself at those climatic stages where he faces his "metaphysical interlocutors" (e.g., the solipsist) in the text of the *Tractatus*. In order, then, to attain clarity about this issue, I will help myself once again of an important element taken from McManus's analysis—namely, his proposal of distinguishing two ways of dealing with 'logical misunderstandings' (hence, with philosophical confusions); to put the distinction very crudely: it is one thing to try to *avoid* those misunderstanding and confusions; but it is another, very different one to try to fix, or overcome, misunderstandings and confusions which are *already* widespread. In McManus's own words, we should distinguish (logico-philosophical) *cure* from (logico-

philosophical) *prevention*. In so doing, we are in a better position to understand the *rationale* for Wittgenstein's statement that 'logical analysis' (i.e., 'paraphrase', in Quine's and Floyd's sense) *would be* the 'correct method in philosophy'—it would, i.e., if only things were different than they really are, and prevention was our (main) aim.

McManus formulates the last point very aptly in his claim that '[t]he project of developing a *Begriffsschrift* is, for the early Wittgenstein, the key measure in our efforts at *preventive* medicine'; this is because '[i]n our existing notations, one can substitute for one another similar-looking signs that express different symbols, producing strings of signs that have no sense but which *look* or *sound* as if they do' yet, that kind of replacement would be 'impossible within the *Begriffsschrift*'—a claim that McManus illustrates by saying that, e.g., 'the *Alice* books couldn't have been written in such a notation, and the philosopher would find that nothing corresponds to his propositions in that notation either' (McManus, 2006, p. 130). Now, given that '[t]he world is already populated by plenty of the already infected, and it is they who discuss, and claim an understanding of, the problems of philosophy' (ibid.), what we are most in need of is not prevention, but some sort of *remedy*, a strategy for philosophical *cure*. How, then, is one to proceed in order to treat an existing sufferer? In answering this question, McManus presents a view which is again very congenial to the one presented at the conclusion of our last section (see § 33). The answer goes as follows:

> First of all, one needs to reach [the sufferer], and this requires that we enter into his (nonsensical) conversation; if one wants to talk to such a person, one needs to address his issues. Such a person might well have no interest in the *Begriffsschrift* project, because he may not feel as if that will teach him any philosophy; he may, as a matter of contingent fact, be interested in your observations about different uses of words, just as he may be interested in your observations about stamp collecting; but he won't think that this has anything to do with philosophy, with his questions, with him *as a philosopher*. He is not interested in how meaning has been assigned to a variety of words; he is interested in making progress with the questions—which he thinks are real and pressing—of metaphysics and the philosophy of language, mind, and logic. (McManus, 2006, p. 130-131)

The analogy with psychoanalysis is once again manifest: it will not do as a *cure* just to say to the "analysand" that she has a particular problem, whose causes are such-and-such—as I said above, that would only cause resistance. What we need is a different, more engaged and sympathetic, kind of involvement. McManus presents this point by indicating that the psychoanalyst would have to 'be able to maintain a kind of double vision: as well as his

own diagnostic vision, he needs to be able to make his own the patient's distorted vision'; by seeing how things look from the latter's perspective, he will (hopefully) be able to find a way to 'begin to nudge the patient toward the point from which he will be able to see what the diagnostic perspective sees' (p. 132). Now the same would apply to the philosopher, as far as Wittgenstein's view of her task is concerned:

> To help others out of nonsense, one needs to think through it, to uncover how that vulnerability 'works'. This requires a certain sympathy with the confusions in question—what might seem to some Wittgensteinians a perverse or nostalgic love of the problems of philosophy. One needs to be able to see things as the confused see them, but also to be able to escape that addled perspective. To maintain that double vision is to be able to enter and then escape—which is to say, truly understand—this 'chaos'. If one loses this double vision, one may either become captured by the confusions—losing one's appreciation of how our talk here *is* mere nonsense—or lose one's appreciation of their power—losing one's grasp of how they can appear utterly real to those in their grip. (McManus, p. 132)[89]

The reason why I think it is important to go through these considerations (even at the cost of repeating previous results) is that they will allow us to have a better understanding of the continuities and discontinuities in Wittgenstein's view concerning the nature of philosophical elucidation. As we shall see in the next chapter, an important change in his thinking—undergone by the time he resumed philosophical work, around 1929—was precisely the realization that even as *preventive* medicine, 'logical syntax' was not as efficient as he had initially supposed—after all, it could not be used to prevent the kind of

[89] One of the interesting results of employing this analogy with psychoanalysis is that, as McManus points out, it may 'help us to see why it is quite natural for the *Tractatus* to mix nonsensical elucidations with 'sensical' observations, and, thus, why a reading that presents it so need not be guilty of an *ad hoc* cherry-picking':

> In conversation with a patient with delusions, some of the psychoanalyst's remarks will be elaborations of the patient's delusions; but others will be very obviously and straightforwardly 'sensical'. The psychoanalyst may suggest how things would look to the patient were certain things to happen: for example, 'If A was to do x, you would say it was because A would be seeking to bring about y, wouldn't you?' But the patient does not live on another planet, and in exploring their viewpoint on life, there is no reason why every such elucidatory remark need be expressive of delusion; some will be, and in the depths of their delusion the patient may react to these suggestions with an 'Exactly!' or with a 'So you see it too!'; but the patient will have understood what the analyst's point was in making these suggestions when he also comes to see that they were expressive of delusion. The patient may then look back over the conversation and recognize that parts—but *only parts* —of it were shaped in ways he hadn't realized at the time by certain distorting confusions, including the analyst's forays into, and elaborations on, the patient's delusions. (McManus, pp. 133-134)

nonsense involved in (pseudo-)propositions like ‘white is darker than black’ (i.e., a kind of nonsense which does not arise simply from disobedience to logical *syntax*, understood as a body of rules governing logical relations among *non-analysed*—and indeed unanalys*able*—elementary propositions). On the other hand—concerning philosophical *cure*—although Wittgenstein will continue to maintain—in fact, will increasingly emphasize—the need to engage with the interlocutor in a way similar to the relation between psychoanalyst and patient, he will also come to see that the origins of philosophical confusions (including those grouped under the title ‘solipsism’) are way more various and entangled than he initially supposed, and, consequently, that the respective “therapies” would have to be administered way more *locally*, so much so as to shatter any hope of solving (even ‘in essence’) *all* the problems once and for all.

3 Embracing the whole world: solipsism and the conditions of experience in *Philosophical Remarks*

> *. . . solipsism teaches us a lesson: It is that thought which is* on the way *to destroy this error. For if the* world *is idea it isn't any person's idea. (Solipsism stops short of saying this and says that it is my idea.) But then how could I say what the world is if the realm of ideas has no neighbour?*
>
> (Wittgenstein, PO, p. 255)

3.1 Prologue: analysis, phenomenology, grammar—understanding Wittgenstein's change

1. Wittgenstein opens the *Philosophical Remarks*[90] with the following, rather remarkable pair of entries:

> A proposition is completely logically analysed if its grammar is made completely clear: no matter what idiom it may be written or expressed in.
>
> I do not now have phenomenological language, or "primary language" as I used to call it, in mind as my goal. I no longer hold it to be necessary. All that is possible and necessary is to separate what is essential from what is inessential in *our* language. (PR §1, p. 51).

One of the reasons why those entries are remarkable is that they express an important change of mind in Wittgenstein's thinking—a change which, one can speculate, he must have deemed rather important, so as to decide to open his report by avowing it. Faced with that avowal, a number of questions arise, among which are the following: Did Wittgenstein

[90] According to Rush Rhees, the original text employed in the edition of the *Philosophical Remarks* was 'a typescript that G. E. Moore gave [...] soon after Wittgenstein's death: evidently the one which Wittgenstein left with Bertrand Russell in May, 1930, and which Russell sent to the Council of Trinity College, Cambridge, with his report in favour of a renewal of Wittgenstein's research grant. All the passages in it were written in manuscript volumes between February 2nd, 1929, and the last week of April, 1930' (information taken from the 'Editor's Note'—see PR, p. 347).

—and if so, when did he—had a 'phenomenological language' or 'primary language' as his goal? Did he—and if so, when did he—held that language to be necessary? Necessary for what? Again, when did he change his mind about that, and why? Finally, how does that change relate to the claim made in the first entry—namely, that it does not matter, for purposes of clarification, what 'idiom' [*Ausdrucksweise*] is used to express a ('completely logically analysed') proposition?

Answering the questions presented above would be a crucial step to understand the changes occurred in Wittgenstein's thinking around the years of 1929-30, marking his return to Cambridge and to philosophical research. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to try to offer final and detailed answers to those questions, I shall go some way toward that aim in the remainder of this prologue, trying to offer a minimally detailed picture of the quickly developing new methodology employed by Wittgenstein at that time; that result will in turn be useful in latter sections, where we shall see his method(s) at work in the service of trying to unveil, and hence (hopefully) cure, his interlocutors (and readers) from some temptations related to solipsism.

2. I suggest we approach those issues by taking a detour, examining another important record of Wittgenstein's post-Tractarian reflections—namely, the paper 'Some Remarks on Logical Form' (hereafter SRLF), written in July, 1929[91]. In the first paragraph of that paper, Wittgenstein defines 'syntax' as 'the rules which tell us in which connection only a word give [*sic*.] sense, thus excluding nonsensical structures', and claims that the 'syntax of ordinary language [...] is not quite adequate for this purpose', since '[i]t does not in all cases prevent the construction of nonsensical pseudopropositions' (p. 29)[92]. He then offers as examples of such pseudopropositions: 'red is higher than green' and 'the Real, though it is an *in itself,* must also be able to become a *for myself*' (ibid.). Given the inadequateness

[91] The paper was originally invited for the Joint Session of the Aristotelian Society and the Mind Association of that year; though published in the proceedings, it was not delivered at the occasion, apparently because of Wittgenstein's dissatisfactions with it (see the 'Editor's Note' to *Philosophical Remarks,* p. 349). Notwithstanding his reasons to dismiss it—or even to consider it 'quite worthless' (see PO, p. 28)—that paper stands as an important record (if only because of the lack of any other) to understand this transitional period in Wittgenstein's thinking. The suggestion to pay attention to that paper in order to get clear about Wittgenstein's change of mind was made in Alva Noë's illuminating study of the *Philosophical Remarks* (Noë, 1994), to which my analysis in this section is much indebted.

[92] I quote from the reprinted version of the paper in *Philosophical Occasions* (PO), and the page numbers refer to that collection.

of the syntax of ordinary language to prevent such nonsense, Wittgenstein argues for the usefulness of employing *logical analysis*, and, in particular, a *logical symbolism* which would reflect syntax (more) perspicuously:

> If we try to analyze any given propositions we shall find in general that they are logical sums, products or other truthfunctions of simpler propositions. But our analysis, if carried far enough, must come to the point where it reaches propositional forms which are not themselves composed of simpler propositional forms. We must eventually reach the ultimate connection of the terms, the immediate connection which cannot be broken without destroying the propositional form as such. The propositions which represent this ultimate connexion of terms I call, after B. Russell, atomic propositions. They then, are the kernels of every proposition, *they* contain the material, and all the rest is only a development of this material. It is to them we have to look for the subject matter of propositions. It is the task of the theory of knowledge to find them and to understand their construction out of the words or symbols. This task is very difficult, and philosophy has hardly yet begun to tackle it at some points. What method have we for tackling it? The idea is to express in an appropriate symbolism what in ordinary language leads to endless misunderstandings. That is to say, where ordinary language disguises logical structure, where it allows the formation of pseudopropositions, where it uses one term in an infinity of different meanings, we must replace it by a symbolism which gives a clear picture of the logical structure, excludes pseudopropositions, and uses its terms unambiguously. (SRLF, pp. 29-30)

Nothing said in the passage above seems to imply any remarkable change in relation to Wittgenstein's earlier conception of the philosophical task of clarification, and, in particular, of the role of a '*richtige Begriffsschrift*' for that end. However, a departure seems to be gestured at in the passage which immediately follows the one above:

> Now we can only substitute a clear symbolism for the unprecise one by inspecting the phenomena which we want to describe, thus trying to understand their logical multiplicity. That is to say, we can only arrive at a correct analysis by, what might be called, the logical investigation of the phenomena themselves, *i.e*., in a certain sense *a posteriori*, and not by conjecturing about *a priori* possibilities. One is often tempted to ask from an *a priori* standpoint: What, after all, *can* be the only forms of atomic propositions, and to answer, *e.g*., subject-predicate and relational propositions with two or more terms further, perhaps, propositions relating predicates and relations to one another, and so on. But this, I believe, is mere playing with words. An atomic form cannot be foreseen. And it would be surprising if the actual phenomena had nothing more to teach us about their structure. To such conjectures about the structure of atomic propositions, we are led by our ordinary language, which uses the subject-predicate and the relational form. But in this our language is misleading [...] (SRLF, p. 30)

Clearly, the very idea of pursuing a 'logical investigation of the phenomena themselves'—something 'in a certain sense *a posteriori*'—is a novelty with respect to the staunchly aprioristic stance characteristic of the *Tractatus* (in fact, it is arguably due to *that* novelty

that Wittgenstein had come to be less dismissive about the task of the 'theory of knowledge' by the time he wrote that paper). What triggered that change—if only partially—was of course the so-called 'problem of synthetic incompatibilities'[93]. That problem may be illustrated with the analysis of propositions stating colour-exclusion. Take, e.g., the proposition stating that 'if A is red then A is not green' (where 'A' stands for a point in my visual space); if true, that proposition implies that 'A is red and A is green' *must* (by necessity) be false; now, if one assumes—as the author of the *Tractatus* did—that *all* necessity is *logical*, then, given the necessary falsehood of the latter proposition, one should conclude that it amounts to a logical (i.e., purely formal) contradiction; yet that is not the case, as one can clearly see by paraphrasing that proposition by means of the very notational devices laid down in TLP—i.e., the 'T-F notation'.

The critical result is that there are logical relations among propositions that the *Tractatus*'s 'general propositional form' is simply unable to capture, because they are not *formal* relations: nothing that accounts (only) for the behaviour of the logical constants will be enough as an account of the relations of (synthetic) exclusion holding between (e.g.) two propositions ascribing different colours to a point[94]. That result also leads Wittgenstein to abandon the thesis of the logical independence of elementary propositions, thus coming to acknowledge an important failure of his original, truth-functional analysis of the proposition. And that is the reason why an 'investigation of the phenomena themselves' seems to be necessary—in particular, it is only upon pursuing such an investigation that one might become able to know what *form* the "elementary propositions" actually have. Now, in order to correctly mirror the logical multiplicity of those phenomena, a symbolism more powerful than the *Tractatus*'s *Begriffsschrift* would be needed—and that is precisely the role of what Wittgenstein would come to call a 'phenomenological' or 'primary' language. Hence, the project of constructing such a symbolism can be seen as, in an important respect, *continuous with* the Tractarian ideal of offering a 'logically perspicuous

[93] This is Russell's (not Wittgenstein's) phrase. Paulo Faria deals with that story at length in his Master's thesis: *Forma Lógica e Interpretação: Wittgenstein e o Problema das Incompatibilidades Sintéticas, 1929-30* (1989).

[94] More specifically, what the author of the *Philosophical Remarks* came to believe that what was wrong with the T-F method was precisely that 'The methods for "and", "or", "not" etc., which I represented by means of the T-F notation, are *a part* of the grammar of these words, but not *the whole*.' (PR §83, p. 111). 'Material validities' of inference, in other words, are not just a matter of the meanings of extra-logical vocabulary ('if it's green all over, then it's not red'): the very understanding of logical constants (hence of logical form) stands to be affected by the recognition that 'these remarks [e.g. about colour incompatibilities] do not express an experience but are in some sense tautologies' (SRLF, p. 32).

notation'. In fact, Wittgenstein's first attempts to lay bare 'the logical structure of phenomena'—by means of an investigation which is 'in a sense *a posteriori*', yet not exactly or fully empirical or scientific—can be seen as an effort to rescue what remains of the Tractarian edifice after one of its foundations—namely, the thesis of the logical independence among elementary propositions—is relinquished.

3. There is, however, an important discontinuity folded within the continuity indicated above. As is well known, Wittgenstein already held in the *Tractatus* that ordinary language, however misleading it may be, is nevertheless in 'perfect logical order'—hence, that the usefulness of logical analysis and logically perspicuous notation(s) is to bring that (already existing) order to full light, so as to prevent logical and philosophical confusions. And the same goes, of course, for phenomenological language, as Wittgenstein came to think of it. Yet, in the meantime, an important change occurred in his view of the relationship between logically perspicuous notation(s) and ordinary language. In the *Tractatus*, as we saw in the last chapter, that relation was conceived as, basically, holding between 'molecular' and 'elementary' propositions. Things become much more complex in the *Remarks*. For one thing, Wittgenstein now distinguishes two kinds of 'descriptions of reality', namely: (i) propositions (properly so-called), which are the descriptions employed in what he dubs the 'primary system'—the bearers of truth and falsity, which are verified or falsified by immediate experience—and (ii) hypotheses, which are employed in the 'secondary system', also dubbed 'physics' (corresponding, roughly, to the ordinary talk about spatio-temporal objects supplemented by scientific language) and are not (properly speaking) descriptions of states of affairs—which would be either true or false—but rather rules or laws for the formation of genuine propositions.

Thus, according to the view which was emerging by the time Wittgenstein proposes the distinction above, hypotheses would relate only *indirectly* to the objects of immediate experience—thereby hiding an enormously complex symbolical structure under their (apparently) simple signs; now, since hypotheses, in the sense just defined, would be the means of description characteristically employed in ordinary language, that fact should account for its 'misleading character'. By the same token, the emerging view would also account for the need of a logically perspicuous notation, free of hypotheses: the

(phenomenological) language which would embody in its very form (in the structure of its *signs*) all the (otherwise) hidden complexity of the underlying *symbols,* thus mirroring the complexity of the phenomena represented by it.

4. That, at least, *was* Wittgenstein's (emerging) view about the role of phenomenological language, for a (rather short) period of time—after having abandoned the (now seen as) oversimplified picture of the relation between ordinary descriptions and the 'immediate objects of experience' presented in the *Tractatus*. Yet, as we already saw, at some point he changed his mind in an even more radical way, giving up the whole idea that logically perspicuous notations (of *any* sort) were really necessary for his task of clarification—thus coming to (fully) acknowledge for the first time that the original Tractarian project of employing a *Begriffsschrift* in order to avoid philosophical confusions was completely misguided, and should accordingly be rejected. (Recall that Wittgenstein was *initially* willing to amend that project and push it forward, even in the face of the challenge created by the problem of synthetic incompatibilities.)

The question now arises: what does Wittgenstein propose to replace for that project? The first element for answering that question was presented in the last sentence of the opening section of the *Remarks* quoted above—namely, that '[a]ll that is possible and necessary is to separate what is essential from what is inessential in our language'. Wittgenstein elaborates that point—thus providing a description of the new method envisaged after his radical change of mind—in the next entries of that opening section, which go as follows:

> That is, if we so to speak describe the class of languages which serve their purpose, then in so doing we have shown what is essential to them and given an immediate representation of immediate experience.
>
> Each time I say that, instead of such and such a representation, you could also use this other one, we take a further step towards the goal of grasping the essence of what is represented.

> A recognition of what is essential and what inessential in our language if it is to represent, a recognition of which parts of our language are wheels turning idly, amounts to the construction of a phenomenological language.[95] (PR, §1, p. 51)[96]

As we are now in a position to acknowledge, the remarks above express Wittgenstein's (really) new methodology—i.e., the one adopted after his having finally abandoned the (essentially Tractarian) view that 'logically perspicuous notations' (including the short-lived device of a 'phenomenological language') were *necessary* in order to clarify our propositions. Alva Noë (1994) offers an illuminating assessment of that methodological change, which gets summarized in the following passage:

> Philosophy must proceed by careful examination and comparison of *different* methods of representation (not only of our ordinary ones). This investigation of notations enables us to give "an immediate representation of immediate experience." Whereas before Wittgenstein had believed that the surface forms of ordinary language conceal what is essential to the method of representation, and that consequently it is necessary to construct a notation which perspicuously mirrors the form of experience, he now casts aside this enterprise as misguided. Since our ordinary language symbolizes just fine, we need only get clear about how it symbolizes. This, as stated, is accomplished not by constructing improved notations, nor by simply attending to the way we use our ordinary one. Rather, the correct method is that of careful comparison of different methods of representation. (Noë, 1994, pp. 18-19)

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[95] The original wording of the last sentence reads as follows: '[...] *kommt auf die Konstruction einer phäenomenologischen Sprache hinaus*'; that could well be translated as 'comes down to the same thing as' (cf. Noë, 1994, n. 59). I will come back to the importance of this point below.

[96] Wittgenstein makes precisely the same point to Waismann and Schlick, in December of 1929. Here is the relevant passage where that point is recorded in WWK:

> I used to believe that there was the everyday language that we all usually spoke and a primary language that expressed what we really knew, namely phenomena. I also spoke of a first system and a second system. Now I wish to explain why I do not adhere to that conception any more.
>
> I think that essentially we have only one language, and that is our everyday language. We need not invent a new language or construct a new symbolism, but our everyday language already is *the* language, provided we rid it of the obscurities that lie hidden in it.
>
> Our language is completely in order, as long as we are clear about what it symbolizes. Languages other than the ordinary ones are also valuable in so far as they show us what they have in common. For certain purposes, e.g. for representing inferential relations, an artificial symbolism is very useful. Indeed, in the construction of symbolic logic Frege, Peano, and Russell paid attention solely to its application to mathematics and did not think of the representation of real states of affairs. (WWK, pp. 45-46)

Faced with that assessment, one might wonder how exactly would the kind of comparison indicated in Noë's last sentence—the consideration of a number of alternative 'methods of representation', which (N.B.) should *not* (anymore) be conceived as in any sense improved or better suited to represent phenomena than the ordinary ones—allow us to get clear about the content of 'immediate experience'—and thereby about the *essence* of what is represented? Noë starts answering that question claiming that such a comparison would compel us to 'explore fully the question of what it makes sense to say about whatever the domain in which we are interested' (ibid., p. 20). As an illustration of how that method is supposed to work, Noë quotes the following passage from the *Remarks*, where Wittgenstein presents his notorious (although often misunderstood) proposal of eliminating the first person pronoun, 'I', from our 'representational techniques':

> One of the most misleading representational techniques in our language is the use of the word 'I', particularly when it is used in representing immediate experience, as in 'I can see a red patch'.
>
> It would be instructive to replace this way of speaking by another in which immediate experience would be represented without using the personal pronoun; for then we'd be able to see that the previous representation wasn't essential to the facts. Not that the representation would be in any sense more correct than the old one, but it would serve to show clearly what was logically essential in the representation. (PR, §57, p. 88)

I will come back to the details of that specific proposal of representational change (i.e., the elimination of the 'I') in the next chapter. For the time being, let us only take notice of two general points that the passage is meant to illustrate: first, that Wittgenstein does in fact offer a different notation, or a new method of representation in that passage, and one which would, indeed, enable us to get clear(er) about what is (and what isn't) 'essential to the facts' thus represented, hence allowing us to 'explore fully the question of what it makes sense to say' *in our own, familiar notation* (i.e., ordinary language); second, that he explicitly acknowledges that the kind of clarification that this comparison with a new notation makes possible is *not* a result of our being offered a method of representation which would be 'more correct than the old one'—say, by better mirroring the underlying structure of phenomena.

The moral Noë draws from his analysis of Wittgenstein's change of mind is twofold: first, the main reason why a phenomenological language—understood as the result of an

investigation 'into the possibilities of phenomena'—seemed (momentarily) important to him was that it promised to offer a way to 'determine what could sensibly be said, and thus what the rules of syntax of the *Begriffsschrift* should permit' (p. 21); yet (second) at some point he came to recognize that 'the phenomenological investigation just is a consideration of what it makes sense to say about phenomena, viz. a grammatical investigation of the words used to describe immediate experience' (ibid.). And that recognition, in turn, is what (ultimately) would explain the change of mind avowed in the opening section of the *Remarks*:

> For, clearly, on this picture the task of constructing a new notation becomes redundant, since what is difficult and important is to get clear about what it makes sense to say in our own familiar language. At first, then, the view that phenomenology is grammar seemed to Wittgenstein to provide an elucidation of what the inspection of the phenomenon really amounted to. But with changes in his understanding of the nature of grammar, this identification leads to his rejection of the need to construct a phenomenological language altogether, and, ultimately, to the rejection even of the possibility of such an accomplishment. (Noë, 1994, p. 21)

5. There is, to my mind, much to agree with in Noë's assessment. Yet I have some qualms concerning the claim about the redundancy of 'constructing a new notation', given that 'what is difficult and important is to get clear about what it makes sense to say in our own familiar language'. If taken at face value, that claim is certainly true enough; however, I think it is misleading, in that it seems to carry the implication that there was a time in Wittgenstein thinking (namely, before his radical change of mind) when constructing new notations was *not* seen as (in *some* sense) 'redundant', or when the 'difficult and important' task was *not* seen as 'to get clear about what it makes sense to say in our own familiar language'. It is somewhat perplexing—let me notice at the outset—to find such an implication at this point of Noë's analysis; after all, he was the first to emphasize that (i) 'the logically clarified notation of TLP recommends itself not because it has expressive powers above and beyond ordinary language, or because it is a *better* logical order, but only because it is less misleading and can serve as a more faithful guide to underlying structure', and (ii) that 'Wittgenstein was very clear that the value of a phenomenological language was not that it enabled us to say something, as it were, unsayable in ordinary language' (p. 10). Now, don't (i) and (ii) *alone* already imply that logically perspicuous

notations are *redundant*—relative, i.e., to (the 'expressive powers of') ordinary language? And yet, if Noë was not commited to that implication—i.e., to the view that there was a time when Wittgenstein thought that constructing new notations was *not* redundant—then what exactly would be the point of saying that new notations have *become* redundant—after, i.e., his radical change of mind?

I take it that at least part of the reason for Noë's (tacit) commitment to that implication lies in his incipient attempts—in the text under consideration, in any case—to get clear about the *actual use* of logical analysis in the *Tractatus* itself—particularly in his neglecting of the distinction, discussed at the end of the previous chapter, between the 'preventive' and 'curative' tasks that Wittgenstein devised to be accomplished (by whatever other names) by that book. Bearing that distinction in mind, one would say of both Tractarian (as opposed to, say, Fregean, Russellian or Ramseyan) *Begriffsschrift and* post-Tractarian phenomenological language, that, notwithstanding their shortcomings as *preventive* devices—belatedly acknowledged by Wittgenstein himself—they were never meant by him as the only or even the primary means to *cure* (to solve or to dissolve) *already existing* philosophical confusions. To suppose that they were is, at least in part, a consequence of embracing the (all but unavoidable) view that philosophical cure—hence, the kind of *clarity* sought of by (early and late) Wittgenstein—*could* be accomplished simply by laying down the (logico-grammatical) Law, thus (dogmatically) showing to a misguided interlocutor what it does (and what it doesn't) 'make sense to say', i.e., by pointing out which of his/her sentences violate a set of (syntactic/grammatical) rules for the employment of signs[97]. Now if that assumption is discarded—as I have been trying to show it should[98]—one will be in a better position to understand why, for (early and late) Wittgenstein, logically perspicuous notations were seen as (intrinsically) neither *more* nor

[97] Precisely that assumption can be seen to be at work in some contexts of Noë's argument—e.g., when he illustrates the general claim that '[a] phenomenological language [...] aims to be what Wittgenstein calls a "correct" representation of phenomena' with the case of the ("correct") representation of colours, and says that it would amount to 'a notation in which only what is possible is representable and in which the impossible—"reddish-green" or "blackish-black"—*are ruled out by grammatical rules*' (Noë, 1994, p. 10, my emphasis).

[98] One of the tasks of the analysis of Wittgenstein dialogue with the solipsist in the preceding chapter was precisely to justify that general claim with respect to the *Tractatus*'s case; in the following sections I shall attempt an analogous demonstration with respect to the *Remarks*. For the time being, it may be of some help recalling the *Tractatus's* claim, stated in proposition 6.53, that the *would-be* 'correct method in philosophy', i.e., *logical analysis*—that of 'whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs'—would *not* be 'satisfying to the other person'; hence the need for more sophisticated *curative* strategies, such as the self-subverting one enacted by the whole book and its process of 'throwing away the ladder'.

less capable of *curing* philosophical confusions than (the rest of?) ordinary language itself; and this is exactly the sense in which one can say that such notations were *always* seen by him as 'redundant'—by comparison, i.e., with the expressive powers of ordinary language. But of course that does not make those notations *useless*, and, what is more important, it does not prevent Wittgenstein of seeing them as necessary *for a particular and restricted aim*—namely, the (*preventive*) task of avoiding logical confusions.

To sum up, then, my disagreement with Noë, I take it that Wittgenstein's avowal of a change of mind has to be reassessed, in light of the distinction between philosophical cure and prevention, so as to make clear that it has more to do with the latter, rather than the former—in other words, that what changed was his belief, or rather his hope, in the *preventive* capabilities of his (variously envisaged) 'logically perspicuous notations'. By stating, then, at the opening of the *Remarks*, that he 'do[es] not now have phenomenological language [...] in [his] mind as [his] goal', and that he 'no longer hold[s] it to be necessary' in order to 'separate what is essential from what is inessential' in *our* (ordinary) language, Wittgenstein is actually acknowledging, probably for the first time, that ordinary language already contains all the necessary means (not only to cure but) to prevent 'logical misunderstandings', and, hence, 'philosophical confusions'—provided, i.e., that we try to 'rid it of the obscurities that lie hidden in it'[99], e.g., by comparing the uses of the words and sentences which may be causing confusion with new, invented ones, thus coming to acknowledge when our (familiar) words and sentences become 'wheels turning idly'[100].

6. Having presented my qualms concerning that aspect of Noë's analysis, let me now turn to another important point made by him, having to do with yet another change in Wittgenstein's thinking—namely, with his understanding of grammar and, in particular, its arbitrariness. As we have seen, Wittgenstein initially tried to account for some (grammatical) "prohibitions" (e.g., that of talking about 'reddish-green') by means of an investigation (which would be 'in a sense a posteriori') of the underlying structure of the

[99] Cf. quotation on n. 89.

[100] A method which, as we shall see in the next chapter, would eventually develop into the construal of language-games, which might thus be seen as yet another successor (besides the phenomenological language) of the erstwhile '*richtige Begriffsschrift*'.

phenomena that one wants to describe, or represent. Yet he eventually relinquished that project, declaring that sentences like 'there is no such thing as reddish-green' are not (properly so-called) *propositions* at all—i.e., not true or false *descriptions* of phenomena—but rather expressions of our *norms of representation* (i.e., grammatical rules). Although that development gets expressed in some passages of the *Remarks* themselves[101], it is explored in greater detail in the *Big Typescript*'s section on grammar. The following remark, extracted from that section, should be enough to illustrate the change under analysis here: 'Grammar is not indebted to reality. Grammatical rules first determine meaning (constitute it) and are therefore not responsible to any meaning and are to that extent arbitrary' (BT 233)[102]. When analysing this point—the change in Wittgenstein's view of grammar and its arbitrariness—Noë extracts the following conclusion:

> These considerations about the arbitrariness of grammar, about its autonomy, force Wittgenstein to recognize that the question of *what it makes sense to say* about immediate experience, viz. the grammatical investigation of the language used to describe experience, is at best misleadingly characterized as requiring the inspection of experience, or the phenomenon itself. The claim that grammar is arbitrary amounts to the recognition that, for example, a statement like "there is no such thing as reddish-green" is not true because in fact there is no such color that is a mixture of red and green. Indeed, it is not "true" at all, but is rather a potentially misleading formulation of a rule of grammar, one expressing that no sense is attached to the words "reddish-green". (Noë, 1994, p. 24)

Importantly, according to Noë, the emergence of this new conception of the arbitrariness of grammar makes more apparent 'the rationale for [Wittgenstein's] renunciation of the project of constructing a phenomenological language' (p. 24). Noë presents that rationale as follows:

> From the beginning of 1929 Wittgenstein had explored the significance of the idea that the phenomenological investigation and the grammatical investigation were in fact one. But this led him finally to realize that the appropriate philosophical task ought not be that of developing a notation that is structurally isomorphic with reality, but ought rather to be that of understanding what it makes sense to say about experience. But since what it makes sense to say about experience is independent of what experience is like—since any description of what experience is like begs the issue of what it makes sense to say about experience—there is no need for phenomenology, nor for a new phenomenological notation. (Noë, 1994, p. 25)

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[101] Noë calls our attention particularly to §§ 53 and 55, which he guesses 'were written towards the very end of 1929 or at the beginning of 1930' (see p. 22, n. 72).

[102] Quoted on (Noë, 1994, p. 23). See also BT 236 for an interesting (and illuminating) comparison with units of measurement.

Having become convinced that, in Noë's phrase, 'phenomenological investigation just is the investigation of a *grammatical structure*' (ibid.), Wittgenstein will continue to use the word 'phenomenology' to describe (at least one important aspect of) his new philosophical method. That explains not only why he titles a section of BT 'Phenomenology', but also why he seems absolutely untroubled to state—as we saw him doing in the opening passages of the *Remarks,* soon upon claiming that a 'phenomenological language' was not his aim anymore—that '[a] recognition of what is essential and what inessential in our language if it is to represent [...] comes down to the same thing as the construction of a phenomenological language'[103].

7. This analysis shall enable us to (finally) understand the reason why Wittgenstein has decided to open the text of the *Remarks* stating that '[a] proposition is completely logically analysed if its grammar is made completely clear: no matter what idiom it may be written or expressed in'. Again, a comparison with Noë's assessment may help us to better understand the import of that claim. According to Noë, Wittgenstein's main reason for stressing that it is understanding the *grammar* of a proposition that is crucial, and not the notation in which it is expressed, is that this captures his 'most important new insight, the one which most sharply brings to the fore the evolution in his thinking'—namely: 'that his new conception of grammar undermines the earlier account of "analysis," and so changes radically his earlier account of philosophical activity' (p. 31). Bearing in mind my previous qualms about what exactly Wittgenstein hoped to achieve with his (earlier or later) method of (phenomeno-)logical analysis—namely (primarily) *prevention* instead of *cure* of philosophical confusion—I would suggest that we qualify Noë's assessment, saying instead that the fundamental change in Wittgenstein's thinking lies in his recognition that logically perspicuous notations may be unnecessary *even for prevention*—although they remain useful means (among many others) for that task. In other words, while Noë seems to assume that perspicuous notations were (momentarily) seen by Wittgenstein as the primary means to indicate to an interlocutor that his signs do not amount to symbols—that he failed to make sense when he tried to 'say something metaphysical'—I would rather say that from the very beginning that was (only) the *would-be* 'correct method in philosophy', hence, that it was precisely *not* Wittgenstein's method, *not* the way his propositions

[103] Translation amended—see n. 88.

elucidate (not even in the *Tractatus*). Accordingly, perhaps I should say that I do not find Wittgenstein's "new method" (as expressed in the opening of the *Remarks*, i.e.,) to be *as radically* distinct from his Tractarian approach as Nöe thinks it is.

Radical or not, that is undoubtedly an important change, which has many ramifications in Wittgenstein's thinking. One of those ramifications—which Noë himself notes in his conclusion—is the adoption of new 'leading metaphor' for describing philosophical activity—one which dispenses with 'any sort of [talk about] digging beneath the surface and excavating, or a breaking down of the symbol' (p. 31), focusing instead on the 'horizontal plane' of our language. A related change—which I mentioned at the end of the former chapter—is Wittgenstein's realization that the origins of philosophical confusions are way more entangled and difficult to unveil than he initially supposed—and, consequently, that their disentanglement would have to be pursued in a much more piecemeal way, thus shattering his (initial) high hopes of definitively curing them.

The analysis pursued so far shall also serves as a warning, showing what awaits any prospective reader of the *Remarks*—in particular, showing how complex and difficult can be the task of trying to extract a clear and final message from a text which was itself composed along such a constantly evolving (even radically changing) process of thought. And yet—and I think this is worth noticing in this context—to a lesser or greater extent, that would apply to virtually *any* of Wittgenstein's (post-Tractarian) texts. In the analysis that follows I will try to do my best in taking Wittgenstein's remarks seriously, trying to avoid the (all too tempting) tendency of dropping his reflections before letting them challenge one's most ingrained philosophical assumptions and prejudices—hence, before letting them elicit one's deeper and most liberating responses.

3.2 'The world as idea': solipsism and the limits of experience

8. The first continuous set of reflections dealing with solipsism in the *Remarks* is grouped under chapter V (comprising §§47-56)[104]. The chapter opens with the following passage:

> That it doesn't strike us at all when we look around us, move about in space, feel our own bodies, etc., etc., shows how natural these things are to us. We do not notice that we see space perspectively or that our visual field is in some sense blurred towards the edges. It doesn't strike us and never can strike us because it is *the* way we perceive. We never give it a thought and it's impossible we should, since there is nothing that contrasts with the form of our world.
>
> What I wanted to say is it's strange that those who ascribe reality only to things and not to our ideas [*Vorstellungen*] move about so unquestioningly in the world as idea [*Vorstellungswelt*] and never long to escape from it. (PR §47, p. 80)

Remarkably, the passage above purports to criticize the attitude of some philosophers (call them realists) who take the things they (think they) perceive as being (metaphysically) independent from the *way* they are perceived, i.e., from facts concerning and conditioning the 'form of our world'—e.g., 'that we see space perspectively', and so on.—Faced with that initial criticism, shall one conclude that Wittgenstein would be, however implicitly, willing to support the opposite (call it idealist or solipsist) attitude? It surely *seems* so—after all, he (all too explicitly) says that the philosopher we are calling realist *is* in fact moving himself 'unquestioningly', and against his own philosophical expectations, 'in the world as idea'. He also claims, apparently in the same vein, that 'there is *nothing* that contrasts with the form of our world' (my emphasis)—a claim which is reinforced further in the text (still in §47), when he concludes: 'That is, what we neither can nor want to go beyond would not be the world.'

10. Before going on with the analysis of §47, let me notice how close the view presented so far would be to (what has been traditionally interpreted as) Wittgenstein's earlier commitment to some form of solipsism in the *Tractatus.* As we saw in chapter 2, that (supposed) commitment was expressed in section 5.6 of that book, which is meant as an elucidation of the proposition according to which '*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world'; now that proposition, as you may recall, purported to state the existence of (what I have called) an internal relation, or necessary congruence, between the

[104] The numbering of paragraphs, along with their grouping under different chapters, is Rush Rhees's editorial decision, not Wittgenstein's.

limits of (my) world and the limits of (my) language, therefore implying that anything “outside” or “beyond” those limits would be simply nonsense, i.e., nothing possibly thinkable or expressible. Read against that backdrop, I think one cannot avoid noticing a family resemblance between the very approach taken in the opening passage of *Remarks* V (in order to introduce Wittgenstein’s investigation about the nature and limits of experience) and the *Tractatus*’s approach to the same topic.

Similarities notwithstanding, let us also recall that, according to the reading pursued in the former chapter, this whole “metaphysical talk” of an impossibility of going beyond the limits of one’s world / language—which in the *Tractatus* was said to characterize solipsism as well as the ‘pure realism’ with which the former would coincide (see TLP 5.64)—was presented as a rung in a ladder which should be (ultimately) thrown away.—But if that is true, then why in the world would Wittgenstein want to go back, in this new context, to that kind of “metaphysical talk”—by presenting, i.e., (what appears to be) a very substantial thesis about the essence of reality, or its conditions of representation? Would Wittgenstein have changed his mind about such an important matter?

Needless to say, should the answer to the last question be positive, one would be well advised to rethink the reading presented in the last chapter. Are there any alternatives? The obvious (initial) candidate would be to take such an impossibility of going beyond the limits of ‘the world as idea’ as some kind of rung which should be (ultimately) thrown away.—Yet, how could one possibly want to defend such a claim in relation to the *Remarks*? To begin with, there seems to be nothing in that work which could possibly be seen as analogous to the *Tractatus*’s concluding, “self-undoing” instructions—which in turn would prompt one to pursue some sort of self-subverting reading of the (main) text. But then it is only sensible to keep in mind that the *Tractatus* is a (carefully composed) book, while the *Remarks* are a fragmentary research report. Moreover, even concerning the reading of the *Tractatus* presented above, the main justification for the idea of a self-subverting strategy lied not so much in those final instructions alone, but rather in a careful analysis of (a number of sections from) the main body of the text itself. Now of course the same kind of analysis may—and in my view really should—be applied to the *Remarks*—or, for that matter, to any of Wittgenstein’s writings.—But then again, if those (other) writings do not present us with any (explicit) “self-undoing instruction”, what would be the *motivation* for pursuing such an analysis in their case? As I will try to show, the motivation

comes from the very content of Wittgenstein’s claims, provided that we engage critically with them, so as to take notice of their own self-subverting character—the fact that they actually amount to (miniature) dialectical exercises—smaller ladders—offering specific directions to pass from (particular pieces of) disguised nonsense to (corresponding pieces of) patent nonsense. But in order to see that we need to allow ourselves to become (simultaneously) tempted by and suspicious of their (all too evident) “metaphysical tone”—a tone which, as we shall see, is particularly perspicuous in those claims purporting to state what *can* or *cannot* be the case, and, still more particularly, those purporting to state what can or cannot be done *in language* or *thought*, thus leading to the view that there are some (determinate) things which are *ineffable* or *unthinkable*.

11. Now surely that piece of (exegetical) advice is easier to state than to apply to Wittgenstein’s writings—not surprisingly, if I am right in my general contention about his signature strategy of trying to tempt the reader to indulge (however momentarily) in the very kind of philosophical confusion which he wants to dissolve. As a first illustration of this strategy at work, let us go back to the analysis of the opening passage of chapter V—whose (apparent) result was, I recall, a kind of solipsistic view according to which there is no world, or reality, outside or beyond the limits imposed by our form of representing it. That this is only an *apparent* result shall become evident when we start to ask *how exactly* Wittgenstein would be entitled to so much as *state* it, given his former claim (in the same passage) according to which it is simply *impossible* to ‘give a thought’ to the conditioned character of our experience—since, i.e., ‘there is *nothing* that contrasts with the form of our world’ (my emphasis).

The dialectical situation illustrated in that opening passage is in fact very complicated; I suppose I would like to portrait it as follows: on the one hand, Wittgenstein seems to be tempting us to assume that there is a perspective (call it a ‘view from nowhere’) from which one might consider, e.g., the dispute between the realist and the idealist/solipsist, and then judge that the former is wrong, since she is not taking into account the conditioned character of our experience—i.e., not taking into account the very fact that this experience is *always perspectival*; yet, as if the idea of a perspective from which one would conclude that all experience is perspectival was not puzzling enough, Wittgenstein

also seems to be tempting us to accept, on the other hand, that such a view from nowhere is itself *impossible*—a claim which now seems to be made from *no perspective at all*!

Confronted with that complicated dialectic, a reader acquainted with Wittgenstein’s earlier work would be reminded of another, very Tractarian device, which was apparently introduced in order to relieve us from the same kind of difficulty in which we seem to be involved now—namely, the distinction between *saying* and *showing*. Actually, Wittgenstein resorts to a very similar distinction in a number of different contexts throughout the *Remarks*. One such context is chapter V itself, in §54 (just a few pages below the ones we have been analysing). There we read, for example, that ‘What belongs to the essence of the world cannot be expressed by language’, and that ‘Language can only say those things that we can also imagine otherwise’ (PR, p. 84, §54). A bit further (still in the same paragraph), Wittgenstein repeats that ‘what belongs to the essence of the world simply *cannot* be said’; to this, he adds the following, more positive consideration:

> And philosophy, if it were to say anything, would have to describe the essence of the world.
>
> But the essence of language is a picture of the essence of the world; and philosophy as custodian of grammar can in fact grasp the essence of the world, only not in the propositions of language, but in rules for this language which exclude nonsensical combinations of signs. (PR, p. 85, §54)

Notice how smooth is the transition from the older, Tractarian view—according to which the essence of the world is indeed ineffable, but would nonetheless be ‘made manifest’ by logic/philosophy—to the newer one—according to which philosophy could ‘grasp’ the (equally ineffable) essence of the world by presenting grammatical rules, thus enabling one (the philosopher, say) to ‘exclude nonsensical combinations of signs’—just like the presentation of the ‘general form of proposition’ would, according to the *Tractatus*’s official project. Is Wittgenstein, then, resuming the Tractarian view that a line can be drawn separating sense from nonsense—thus enabling one to tell what *can* or *cannot* be said, and, consequently, what *can* or *cannot* be the case in the world, i.e., the *totality* of possible facts, the very *form* of the world? Or are we (rather unself-consciously) projecting our own philosophical prejudices to the text, prompted by Wittgenstein’s (very self-conscious) use of “metaphysical language”? (And do we really need to be reminded of this parallel with the metaphysical story (in the meantime) told in the *Tractatus* in order to

become suspicious about claims such as those, purporting to express, or at least to ‘make manifest’, the ‘limits of sense’?)

12. In the following passage, which comes from a later context of the *Remarks*, Wittgenstein himself seems to support the latter, more self-questioning view about the possibility of telling sense from nonsense:

> If someone said: Very well, how do you know that the whole of reality can be represented by propositions?, the reply is: I only know that it can be represented by propositions in so far as it can be represented by propositions, and to draw a line between a part which can and a part which can’t be so represented is something I can’t do in language. Language *means* the totality of propositions. (PR §85, p. 113)

Does the categorical denial presented in the passage above allow us to settle our previous issue—about the very possibility of trying to tell the representable from the non-representable, hence the thinkable from the unthinkable, sense from nonsense?—I don’t think so. As I said above, I think we shouldn’t accept so easily and uncritically *any* of Wittgenstein’s (maybe a little *too* overtly) categorical—one might say: dogmatic—denials of logico-metaphysical possibilities. Concerning the particular passage under analysis, the reason is *not*, N.B., that the opposite claim—the *affirmation* of the possibility under investigation—would be more plausible than its denial; the problem is, rather, that *none* of the alternative claims would have a clear sense—or would they? In order to answer that question, ask yourself exactly *what* possibility would Wittgenstein be *excluding* by (categorically) denying that we can ‘draw a line’ between what is and what is not representable ‘in language’? Does that denial imply that there is (a determinate, particular, specifiable) “something” that we cannot do—or talk or think about? How could we (possibly) give a determinate *sense* to such an ineffable and unthinkable “possibility”? And if we cannot, then what exactly are we saying, or thinking, when we read a “sentence” (a string of signs) like the one employed in the passage above by Wittgenstein—namely: ‘to draw a line between a part which can and a part which can’t be so represented is something I can’t do in language’?

By suggesting that we try to answer the questions above, I am not implying that we simply *can’t* give any sense to either of the alternative “claims”—on the contrary, I am trying to

question precisely that kind of philosophical move, that kind of *a priori*, categorical denial of linguistic possibilities. What I am implying is, rather, that we should not take so quickly something that *appears* to be a (determinate) proposition (i.e., something which has the *form* of one, in that it is composed of familiar words, in a familiar—i.e., grammatically or syntactically correct—order) as in fact *being* so. The reason why we tend to adopt that uncritical attitude was presented in the last chapter, when we analysed (what McManus dubbed) the ‘myth of the independent life of signs’—a myth which, as we saw in that context, Wittgenstein was already trying to unveil (and undo) in the *Tractatus*, not exactly by means of refuting it, but rather by allowing us to become aware of its influence in generating philosophical confusion. The “solution” which was there presented—the cure for that philosophical temptation—involved, besides our becoming aware of the power of that myth, the active effort to turn our attention away from the mere *form* of “propositions” employed in such (philosophical) contexts, and back to the rough ground of our linguistic practices, where words are employed for determinate (and determinately specifiable) purposes.

Similarly, I submit, in contexts like the one provided by the passage above—contexts, i.e., where Wittgenstein tries to give voice to some philosophical “theses” or “problems”, so as to make their apparently incompatible demands perspicuous to the attentive reader—he is again trying to achieve that therapeutic end of allowing one to use one’s own linguistic expertise in order to unveil the (ultimate) emptiness, pointlessness, or utter confusion behind the formulation of such “theses” and “problems”. But in order for that aim to be properly achieved—so as to really prevent one from falling back into a particular confusion—Wittgenstein first needs to tempt his reader to accept those (all too convenient) categorical “answers” to some (all too neatly formulated) philosophical “problems”; by doing so—i.e., by self-consciously employing “propositions” without (as yet) any clear sense, and having us bite such philosophical baits—he is ultimately trying to make us aware (and suspicious) of our own eagerness to accept such categorical, “metaphysical” talk of (im)possibilities.

At this point, one may find oneself wondering: but *how far* shall we go with this self-aware (even self-suspicious) attitude in relation to (our reactions to) Wittgenstein’s writings? How would we know when to stop the (therapeutic) process, taking a particular result as final, as not further questionable? Where exactly is the limit separating “metaphysical”

(mis)uses of language from ordinary ones?—As it happens with many questions raised by the reading of Wittgenstein’s writings, I think the answers can only be found in (each particular enactment of) the therapeutic process itself—not surprisingly, given that (according to the reading I am pursuing) the ultimate aim of the whole self-subverting process is precisely to allow a reader to find her own way around—hence her own resolution of—her own philosophical confusions, as they come to be mirrored by Wittgenstein’s writings. Of course this puts a heavy burden upon the reader—who must, in a way, simultaneously undertake the roles of analyst and analysand; yet I think Wittgenstein was indeed such a demanding author; also, it goes without saying, not all of us (including some of his most committed advocates) are prepared to accept those demands.

13. Part of the lesson that I want to extract from the preceding considerations is that, instead of going around trying to find textual evidence of Wittgenstein’s “final word” on any particular subject—including the possibility of drawing a line between sense and nonsense, or the very nature of philosophy and its grammatical investigation—one is better advised to go one’s own way—encountering one’s own resolution—working on particular passages. With that aim in mind, I would like to go back and work on the remainder of §47, which closes as follows:

> Time and again the attempt is made to use language to limit the world and set it in relief—but it can’t be done. The self-evidence of the world expresses itself in the very fact that language can and does only refer to it.
>
> For since language only derives the way in which it means from its meaning, from the world, no language is conceivable which does not represent this world. (PR §47, p. 80)

What is that text stating? Again, a very natural and straightforward answer would be: a kind of (logico-metaphysical) impossibility—that of limiting the world through language. But let us stop for a moment in order to reflect about *what exactly* this impossibility would amount to. I think at least two possible, competing, and equally plausible interpretations are available—corresponding to two very different starting points from which this first, “natural” reading could be pursued, depending on the reader’s philosophical frame of

mind. On the one hand—for a committed realist, say—the message would be that since 'language can and does only refer to [the world]' (and so on), then the world must be seen as *more fundamental than* our linguistic means of representing it (in the sense that the former would surpass, be independent from, even indifferent to, the latter). According to another philosophical frame of mind—that of a linguistic idealist, or even a solipsist—the message would be rather different, *viz.*, that since 'language can and does only refer to [the world]' (and so on), then there must be an *internal relation* between language and world, and, consequently, the very idea of a world "outside of", or "beyond" our linguistic means of representing it would be simply nonsensical, hence unthinkable—exactly the same message that was (apparently) stated in the opening remarks of §47.

Confronted with those two competing (and apparently incompatible) interpretations, what are we supposed to do? Shall we choose one of them—presumably on the grounds that it would be the one intended by Wittgenstein himself? But how could we be sure about *that*? —One possible strategy would be to try and collect a number of texts dealing with the same or related issues, in order to see which interpretation (the realist or the idealist/solipsist) would better fit the whole set. However, as I said above, I think such an strategy would be hopelessly flawed—as is in fact attested by the existence of an unending dispute, about virtually *any* piece of writing by Wittgenstein, whether it is to be taken as an instance of (some sort of) "realism" or "anti-realism"—as it is precisely the *ambivalence* (or maybe polyvalence) of claims like the ones above which is of interest, given the (therapeutic) aims of the whole enterprise. By thus allowing *both* (or, more generally, any number of) interpretations to be (equally) defensible, Wittgenstein's text would resonate with severally-minded readers—eliciting different reactions according to their own philosophical prejudices or inclinations[105].

Let me try to elucidate those methodological claims by sketching another parallel with the method employed in the *Tractatus*. First of all, notice how the possibility of a double interpretation of the passage above harks back to the (much more explicit and direct)

[105] One could here be reminded of Kant's treatment of the Antinomies, and surely there is at least a family resemblance—with the important difference that, as I have been arguing, in Wittgenstein's case there is no privileged *theoretical* point of view (say, 'Transcendental Idealism') from which the dispute would be settled, or else shown to be hopeless; rather, the only resource available to deal with cases like these is our practical mastery of ordinary language, and the only and ultimate aim of the process envisaged by Wittgenstein in presenting those "antinomic" claims is precisely to allow us to recover that (momentarily lost, repressed, or forgotten) mastery, i.e., to recover an awareness of how our words are used in concrete contexts, so as to overcome our own philosophical confusions.

message conveyed in that earlier work, about there being a sense in which realism and solipsism ‘coincide’—in that, i.e., both can be made coherent with the (more fundamental) metaphysical assumption of an impossibility of telling world and language apart. Now, as we saw in chapter 2, it was precisely that shared assumption which Wittgenstein was (ultimately) trying to undermine through the self-subverting process enacted in the *Tractatus*. In order to free his reader from such an assumption—and, consequently, from the confusions afflicting both “realists” and “solipsists”—the reader was initially tempted to accept the thesis (repeatedly expressed, in different formulations, in TLP 5.6ff) that world and language are “internally related”, as well as to follow its (apparent) logical consequences, until the latent nonsense of that initial “thesis” (i.e., its *emptiness* or *pointlessness*) was made patent. Now, the very fact that we can so easily be tempted to project our own philosophical prejudices into the text of the *Remarks* (as illustrated above) is, to my mind, an important index that something analogous to the self-subverting (therapeutic) process enacted in the *Tractatus* is also at play in the later work.

14. In the next sections, I shall try to (further) illustrate this process by analysing another set of crucial remarks concerning solipsism and related issues. But before closing the present one, I would like to offer another preliminary illustration—one which, hopefully, will serve at least two additional purposes: first, to throw some light on Wittgenstein’s general, methodological claim about the nature of philosophy as the ‘custodian of grammar’ (see above, §11); second, to give further support to my contention that Wittgenstein should not be understood as being prone to either “realism” or “anti-realism”.

The illustration I have in mind comes from a later context of the *Remarks*—namely, §216—where Wittgenstein purports to criticize the use of a particular phrase: ‘sense-datum’. ‘A sense-datum’, he explains and illustrates, ‘is the appearance of this tree, whether “there really is a tree standing there” or a dummy, a mirror image, an hallucination, etc.’ (PR, §216, p. 270). So far, nothing to worry about—after all, one is surely allowed to define and employ a (technical) phrase in the way one wants, provided that it fulfils any (number of) practical function(s)—e.g., enable us to see more clearly a conceptual distinction, etc. But confusion arises when one—e.g., a philosopher—forgets her initial, determinate (theoretical) purpose in introducing a new description, and assumes that it is somewhat

more adequate—even 'essential' (see ibid.)—for representing reality. In sum, there is, according to Wittgenstein, nothing (inherently) problematic about a phrase like 'A sense-datum is the appearance of the tree', however, he continues, 'what we want to say is that its representation in language is only *one* description, but not *the* essential one. Just as you can say of the expression "*my* visual image" that it is only one form of description, but by no means the only possible and correct one' (ibid.)[106].

At this point one may wonder what exactly would be the reasons leading one to privilege some forms of description over the alternatives—to assume that some notations are intrinsically more faithful to the reality they purport to represent. Wittgenstein does not spill much ink in the *Remarks* trying to identify the possible causes of this kind of attitude[107]. On a rare occasion he risks a general statement about the issue, resulting in the (rather obscure) claim that '[i]n philosophy we are always in danger of giving a mythology of the symbolism [...]: instead of simply saying what everyone knows and must admit' (§24, p. 65). Now, instead of trying to clarify that general, methodological claim in some (equally) general and abstract way, I think we are better advised to approach the question above by making it internal, so to speak, to our reading of particular cases where such "mythologies" are shown to be at work[108]. So, let us go back to the analysis of the remainder of §216, where Wittgenstein reacts to the attitude of some philosophers (the 'idealists') who would be inclined to give one such "mythology", by privileging (taking as essential) the employment of the expression 'sense-data' (and related ones):

> Idealists would like to reproach language with presenting what is secondary as primary and what is primary as secondary. But that is only the case with these inessential valuations which are independent of cognition ("only" an appearance). Apart from that, ordinary language makes no decision as to what is primary or secondary. We have no reason to accept that the expression 'the appearance of a tree' represents something which is secondary in relation to the expression 'tree'. (PR §216, p. 271)

[106] Notice how this claim echoes Wittgenstein's methodological remarks, analysed in the Prologue to the present chapter, to the effect that one should not take alternative 'notations' or 'methods of representation' as being either *more* or *less* 'correct' than our everyday descriptions of reality.

[107] An important change in the development of his reflections is that much more attention will be given to this issue afterwards—starting with the reflections recorded some years later in the *Blue Book*, as we shall see in the next chapter.

[108] Interestingly, the 'mythology' Wittgenstein himself presents in the context of that general claim has to do with a chess game: 'What if someone played chess and, when he was mated, said, "Look, I've won, for *that* is the goal I was aiming at"? We would say that such a man simply wasn't trying to play chess, but another game' (PR, §24, p. 65). From the analysis of this simple illustration one can conclude that 'giving a mythology' is, at least in part, a function of forgeting, or repressing, or otherwise deviating from the familiar practices involving the use of a word / sentence / piece in a game.

In case you are wondering where exactly we would find an example of an ‘idealist’ willing to ‘reproach language with presenting what is secondary as primary and what is primary as secondary’, notice that we don’t need to look very far; after all, wasn’t such a ‘reproach’ already enacted in §47, where Wittgenstein himself (?) purported to criticize those who ‘ascribe reality only to things and not to our ideas’?—But then—if, that is, *Wittgenstein himself* (?) is now criticizing his own previous criticism—isn’t he contradicting himself at this point?—Well, yes and no; he surely is contradicting a “position” which was illustrated before in (and by) his text; yet, as I have been arguing, that “position” was not—not really, not exactly—being *defended* in that earlier context—rather, it was being presented (one might say: being given voice—but by whom? Wittgenstein? Ourselves?) in order to tempt us to (momentarily) accept it, to follow its (apparent) consequences, and (ultimately) become aware of its emptiness, or confusion—seeing it as a mechanism consisting of (at least some) ‘wheels turning idly’—and, therefore, ‘overcoming it’ and ‘throwing it away’. This, I repeat, is a very complex dialectical situation, and one which puts a heavy burden upon Wittgenstein’s readers; and yet, it seems an absolutely pervasive, structural feature of his remarks (what doesn’t mean, of course, that it is always visible from the mere inspection of their surface, requiring that one pays attention to the “clues” gathered by a closer survey). For the moment, the implication, or moral, I would like to extract by calling attention to this dialectic is that one should *not* think of the “characters” being given voice in these and other remarks—including ‘the idealist’ of §216 and ‘the realist’ of §47—so much as “others”, but rather as, say, so many facets of oneself (of *one’s self*), or, maybe more aptly, as echoes of one’s own (*inner*—perhaps even *repressed*) philosophical voices, which are unleashed (perhaps for the first time—or at least for the first time with this level of articulation) by Wittgenstein’s own use of carefully crafted, tempting (metaphysical) claims (such as, e.g., those presented in the opening passage of chapter V)[109].

Bearing that (methodological and exegetical) lesson in mind, let us see if we are in a better position to understand what exactly would be the problem of adopting the ‘idealist’s’ (reproaching) attitude toward (ordinary) language. In order to start dealing with this issue,

[109] BT §87 is composed of a set of very interesting and clarifying (self-)descriptions of the philosophical task, all of them (I would submit) capable of offering further support to my own description. Let me highlight a couple of passages which may illustrate the point (I quote from the translation published in PO, p. 165): ‘The philosopher tries to find the liberating word, that is, the word that finally permits us to grasp what up until now has intangibly weighed down our consciousness’; ‘One of the most important tasks is to express all false trains of thought so characteristically that the reader says, “Yes, that’s exactly the way I meant it.” To trace the physiognomy of every error.’; ‘For only if he acknowledges it as such, it is the correct expression. (Psychoanalysis).’

let us first try to get clear about the contrasting case presented in the passage above—namely, that of the ‘inessential valuations which are independent of cognition’, which, according to Wittgenstein, is the (only?) use of language correctly described as presenting ‘what is secondary as primary and what is primary as secondary’. In order to facilitate the analysis, let us first take note of the German wording of that description, which reads: ‘[...] *diesen unwesentlichen, und mit der Erkenntnis nicht zusammenhängenden Wertungen der Fall*’. What would be the reference of the description at hand? The only hint Wittgenstein gives us in this passage is (what appears to be meant as) an *instance*: ‘“only” an appearance [*“nur” die Erscheinung*]’; yet, that doesn’t get us very far. In fact, nothing in the context surrounding this passage in the *Remarks* does. I take it that the difficulty here has editorial causes—I mean, is caused by Wittgenstein’s arrangement of his reflections to produce the *Remarks*; so much so, that some years later, when he once again took up those reflections for (re)arrangement, the result is much clearer. That result is recorded in §101 of *The Big Typescript*, titled ‘The Representation of what is Immediately Perceived’. As its very title indicates, this section deals with exactly the same issue which is central to §216 of the *Remarks*; in fact, that section (i.e., PR §216) is fully reproduced in BT §101, only in the later context it is prefixed by a couple of reflections which were apparently suppressed in its first iteration. Among those reflections, we read that ‘the words “seem” [*scheinen*], “error”, etc., have a certain emotional emphasis that isn’t essential [*nicht wesentlicht ist*] to phenomena. This emphasis is somehow connected to the will, and not merely to knowledge [*nicht bloss mit der Erkenntnis zusammen*]’ (BT, §101, p. 347). As an illustration of such (cognitively) ‘inessential’, ‘emotional’ emphases, which would be embedded in our (philosophical) assessments of reality, Wittgenstein offers the following: ‘We say “We can *only* remember something”. As if, in some primary sense, memory were a rather weak and uncertain image of what was originally before us with complete clarity’ (ibid).

Attention to the German text shows (more) conspicuously how the passage closing PR §216 comfortably fits in the wider context provided by BT §101. Read against that backdrop, the text of PR §216 seems to be implying not only that it would be right to describe *some* particular uses of language—i.e., those expressing ‘inessential valuations which are independent of cognition’, and having more to do with the will (e.g., that ‘we can *only* remember something’, and so on)—as presenting ‘what is secondary as primary

and what is primary as secondary'; it also implies that *there is no problem* in making such a 'decision as to what is primary or secondary' in those particular cases. (Hence, to stick to the example of §216—that of 'the appearance of a tree'—there would be no problem at all involved in the decision to employ, for a number of (non-cognitive) reasons (i.e., those having to do with the *will*) a phrase such as 'this three is *only* an appearance'; perhaps one feels like saying it to oneself, *sotto voce*, reacting to a (pitifully) amazed reaction from an (inveterate city-dweller) friend, when faced with some particular (real) three, placed all too "naturally" among others in an (artificial) "forest" inside a big shopping centre.) Yet—and this is the important point for which the cases analysed thus far serve as a counterpoint—that is precisely *not* the sort of reason that we would expect an 'idealist' to have in mind when making a 'decision as to what is primary or secondary', and, consequently, when 'reproaching' (ordinary) language for making the wrong—indeed inverted—decision about that.

The upshot of these considerations is that the main problem involved in 'the idealist's' position lies not so much in her "revisionary" proposal (the proposal, i.e., to replace one notation for another, inverting the order of what is to be considered primary/secondary), but rather in a misleading *self*-interpretation of that proposal, as if the mere use of a new notation would enable one to take note—hence, to say—something "essential" about "the nature of reality"—something, i.e., which would be hidden (or even reversed) in our familiar forms of description. To repeat: as far as it fulfils any practical goal, a new 'form of description' would be as good or acceptable as any other. So, in sum, by asserting that 'ordinary language makes no decision as to what is primary or secondary', Wittgenstein is calling our attention to the fact that (as one might put it) our language is "ontologically neutral"[110], hence, that it does not privilege either 'realism' or 'idealism', as far as those expressions are supposed to name two (competing) metaphysical stances towards the 'essence of the world'. As Wittgenstein himself asserts back in chapter V: '[f]rom the very outset "Realism", "Idealism", etc., are names which belong to metaphysics. That is, they indicate that their adherents believe they can say something specific about the essence of the world' (PR, §55, p. 86). Yet, nothing of 'specific' is really said by means of their

[110] From the fact that our (ordinary) language is "ontologically neutral" and 'makes no decision as to what is primary or secondary', it does not follow (as I hope the preceding paragraph makes clear) that *we* (language users) are (or *have* to be) "neutral" in that sense—on the contrary, we make that sort of decisions all the time, and lucidity lies not in relinquishing all such decisions, but in knowing that *we* are indeed *making* them, and *for what purposes*.

(revisionary) "theses"—let alone something specific about 'the *essence* of the world'—as we are in a position to acknowledge as soon as we uncover *what* the utterer of those "theses" may possibly mean by uttering them, what purposes she would be trying to fulfil.

15. Now let us compare, or confront, the results of this analysis with the general, methodological claims made in §54 (see above, §11)—namely, that 'what belongs to the essence of the world simply *cannot* be said', yet could be 'grasped' (by philosophy) 'not in the propositions of language, but in rules for this language which exclude nonsensical combinations of signs.' Notice, first, that in the passages analysed above, Wittgenstein is open to be read—i.e., has (on purpose) not armed himself against being read—as arguing that some particular 'combinations of signs'—*viz.*, those sentences employed by philosophers in general, and by 'realists' and 'idealists' in particular (involving notions such as those of 'sense-datum', 'visual image', 'appearance')—*may* in fact be excluded as, in some particular contexts, 'nonsensical' (i.e., as pointless or empty). But the reason he offers is *not*—as a de-contextualised reading of the methodological remarks above would imply—that those combinations are (so to speak) *intrinsically* nonsensical—as if they were trying to express something that is simply *ineffable*, i.e., something outside or beyond the limits of language and sense. Rather, the reason to "exclude" those signs is, simply, the realization that when they are employed in some particular (philosophical) contexts—like the ones depicted in, or rather prepared by, Wittgenstein's text, which are (re)enacted each time a reader gets seriously engaged with their dialectic—they can be shown to be at best 'wheels turning idly', and, at worst, as resulting from philosophical (i.e., logical or grammatical) *confusion* (that, e.g., of privileging a form of description as if it were saying 'something specific about the essence of the world').

The general lesson I hope to extract from the analysis of this concrete application of the method of 'grammatical investigation' in the *Remarks* is that we should be careful not to read too much into the idea of philosophy as the 'custodian of grammar', i.e., as an activity which would enable us to 'grasp the essence of the world' as reflected in the 'rules for excluding nonsensical combinations of signs'[111]. To depict philosophy as being capable of some kind of "extraordinary feat" (*viz.*, circumscribing the limits of sense, be it by means

[111] A claim which, N.B., will still be echoed in the *Philosophical Investigations* (see §371).

of logical, phenomenological or grammatical investigation) is yet another symptom—maybe the ultimate symptom—that one has become victim of the kind of temptation against which Wittgenstein has been trying to guard us at least since the *Tractatus*—namely, that of evading our human, finite (and thus conditioned) condition. The implication, then, is that we should be particularly careful to read those (all too overtly dogmatic) judgements about the nonsensicality of “the philosopher’s” (metaphysical) claims. In fact, Wittgenstein’s text itself sometimes becomes overtly (self-)critical about such judgements, suggesting a more balanced view; this clearly applies to some of the opening remarks of the book (see esp. §6-9), of which the following offers us a good illustration:

> Asked whether philosophers have hitherto spoken nonsense, you could reply: no, they have only failed to notice that they are using a word in quite different senses. In this sense, if we say it’s nonsense to say that one thing is as identical as another, this needs qualification, since if anyone says this with conviction, then at that moment he means something by the word ‘identical’ (perhaps ‘large’), but isn’t aware that he is using the word here with a different meaning from that in 2 + 2 = 4. (PR, §9, pp. 55-56)

I take it that the preceding discussion gives at least some initial purchase to a conclusion which is (once again) very similar to the one obtained at the end of our analysis of the *Tractatus* in the last chapter, namely, that there is no “external” standard for the meaningfulness of our signs—in particular, no *philosophical* “external” standard, no “book of rules” waiting to be “discovered” by means of (phenomeno-)logical or grammatical analysis; the only way to determine *whether* a (particular token of a) proposition really makes sense, and if so, *what* is that sense, or meaning, is to ask what, if any, is its *use* (and purpose) in a concrete (possible) context; as Wittgenstein himself puts it: ‘If [someone] states that a certain string of words makes sense to him, and it makes none to me, I can only suppose that in this context he is using words with a different meaning from the one I give them, or else is speaking without thinking’ (PR, §7; see also §114). The whole difficulty of the task lies in trying to get clear about which of the options is true, in each particular case, with the (ordinary) linguistic means at our disposal. With that conclusion in mind, let us move to the analysis of the remainder of chapter V.

3.3 Time, memory, and sublimation

16. One might call the problem presented in the opening passages of chapter V—concerning the logico-metaphysical (im)possibility of going beyond the limits imposed by the 'form of our world'—'the problem of the conditionedness of experience'. Having given voice to that problem—thereby prompting the reader to examine its sense (or senselessness)—Wittgenstein's reflections turn to a new set of questions involving a particular, although ubiquitous, condition of our experience, namely, time. The questions raised at this juncture continue the task of giving voice to—hence allowing us to probe into the sense of—some "problems" arising in the investigation of the nature of our experience. Among those questions we find the following: 'If the world of data is timeless, how can we speak of it at all?' (§48); 'If memory is *no* kind of seeing into the past, how do we know at all that it is to be taken as referring to the past?' (§50); 'Can I conceive the time in which the experiences of visual space occur without experiences of sound?' (§50). Similarly to what happened in the analysis of the previous remarks of chapter V, Wittgenstein's overt intentions in facing these questions are to unveil (at least some of) the logico-grammatical confusions behind the formulations of the "problems" they express—e.g., the 'confusion of the time of the film strip with the time of the picture it projects' (§49)—and to offer a perspicuous view of the syntactical rules for employing the relevant concepts in their respective contexts—e.g., 'we cannot use [...] the syntactical rules that hold for the names of physical objects, in the world of the image' (§49).

Notwithstanding those overt aims—and again similarly to the analysis pursued in the last section—a different, more self-questioning reading of Wittgenstein's remarks is also available, which suggests that behind such (all too overtly) dogmatic exchanges (between, say, Wittgenstein and his philosophical interlocutors) there is a much more complex and subtle dialectic going on. In order to flesh out that claim, I would like to focus the analysis on a rather limited subset of remarks, dealing with (what may be called) 'the problem of the flow of time', and the related problem of the metaphysico-epistemological status of memory. Both are traditional philosophical "problems"—arguably as old as the history of philosophy itself; yet, as we shall see below, in Wittgenstein's hands they end up (rather

quickly) leading to some unexpected, radically solipsistic conclusions—particularly to what he would elsewhere call 'solipsism of the present moment'[112].

17. Let us try to reconstruct the path leading to such conclusions by taking the following passage, which comprises the first half of §52, as an entry point:

> It's strange that in ordinary life we are not troubled by the feeling that the phenomenon is slipping away from us, the constant flux of appearance, but only when we philosophize. This indicates that what is in question here is an idea suggested by a misapplication of our language.
>
> The feeling we have is that the present disappears into the past without our being able to prevent it. And here we are obviously using the picture of a film strip remorselessly moving past us, that we are unable to stop. But it is of course just as clear that the picture is misapplied: that we cannot say 'Time flows' if by time we mean the possibility of change. What we are looking at here is really the possibility of motion: and so the logical form of motion. (PR, p. 83, §52)

The passage above strikes me as remarkable in many ways. For one thing, it seems remarkable that Wittgenstein should introduce the problem of the flow of time by relating its appearance to a *feeling* (that, namely, of not being able to *prevent* such flow) as well as by saying that it arises *only* 'when we philosophize', and (hence) not 'in ordinary life'. On the face of those claims, it seems even more remarkable that he should open the passage saying that it is strange (or remarkable [*merkwürdig*]) that 'in ordinary life we are not troubled by [that] feeling'; and yet, notice that it is precisely because such trouble would not arise in ordinary life that Wittgenstein seems so confident (maybe all too confident) in saying that some 'misapplication of our language' would be the cause of the 'idea' of there being such an unstoppable flow.—Now, can we really take in the claim that 'in ordinary life we are not troubled by [that] feeling'? After all, don't we commonly *say* ('in ordinary life', i.e.,) such things as that 'time is slipping away', and 'we are unable to stop it'? And, in employing such sentences, are we not purporting to express some *feelings* we are experiencing—say, e.g., disappointment at not being able to achieve some of our goals in (ordinary) life? Or is it the case that, by employing such sentences, we would be already involved (however involuntarily) in philosophizing?—But how could we tell the

[112] WLC, p. 25.

difference? How could we know when our sentences became 'misapplications of language'—hence, when philosophy (as described in the quoted passage) starts?

That much for the remarkableness of the first paragraph of the passage. In the second, Wittgenstein adds—again very remarkably—that when we are caught by that feeling 'we are *obviously* using the picture of a film strip remorselessly moving past us, that we are unable to stop' (my emphasis). I take it that he doesn't mean that it is 'obvious' that we shall employ that particular (cinematographic) picture—hence, that any of a number of other familiar pictures would equally do. (The ancients, who unfortunately had not cinema, already got puzzled when reflecting about the 'constant flow of appearance', comparing it not to a film strip, but to a river; the same puzzle returns in a well known passage from St. Augustine's *Confessions*, again formulated with the help of a simple picture—namely, that of time as an infinite measuring tape being unrolled in front of us.) Now even if one grants that the application of *some picture or other* would 'obviously' be involved when we are caught by the feeling of the 'unstoppable flow of time', what would be the *rationale* for saying that it is 'just as clear that the picture is *mis*applied' in the context Wittgenstein describes (that, i.e., of a philosophical—say metaphysical—investigation of time, taken as the 'form of motion', and so on)?

Let us notice at the outset that in order for a picture to be *mis*applied, there must be something as a legitimate or *bona fide* application of it—hence, that in the case under analysis, there must be some *other* context(s)—e.g., 'ordinary life'—where it would be correct to describe time-related phenomena by applying pictures such as that of the film strip. In fact, it seems arguable that without resorting to such pictures our ordinary descriptions would almost certainly become poorer, less clear and perspicuous, or otherwise less powerful than they actually are—hence, that there is a sense in which those pictures are not only *legitimate,* but even *necessary*; to say, e.g., that 'time flows'—or 'flies', or 'is passing by', etc.—may be effective—both economic and clear—ways to express *lots* of things 'in ordinary life'—from one's regret for not having taken all the opportunities life offered in the past, to impatience with an overly long philosophical disquisition.

This consideration goes some way toward answering a question made above—namely, whether one should conclude, from the mere fact that a person is employing a picture like

the ones under analysis (e.g., by saying that 'time is slipping away'), that she would be (however involuntarily) philosophizing. The answer, as it shall be clear, is: No. But that doesn't answer the further question of how to tell (ordinary, legitimate) applications from (philosophical) *mis*applications of the same pictures. Now Wittgenstein, as I said above, seems rather confident of having such a criterion at hand—after all, he all too quickly concludes that our 'trouble' only arises because of a particular *mis*application of the picture of the film strip in an *extra*-ordinary (philosophical[113]) context—namely, one in which we would like to speak ("metaphysically") of time *qua* 'possibility of change [...] really the possibility of motion: and so the logical form of motion', and say of *it* that 'is slipping away from us', and so on. But again, what exactly is his reason to present this case as one of *mis*application—as opposed, say, to the (legitimate) applications illustrated in the paragraph above? There is, clearly enough, an important *difference* in the (purported) applications—in that when the "metaphysical sense" of time is in view, a sentence like 'time is slipping away' would hardly be meant to hurry up someone or to regret something. But what, then, would be its point?

One answer which seems to be suggested by the text is that, in fact, *there is no point at all* in the philosopher's (purported) use of that sentence: *if* time is taken as a condition of possibility of change, and, in that sense, as 'the form of motion' (which is just a philosophical jargon for referring to a very ordinary use of our concept of time—namely, as that dimension in which *events*, as opposed to *things*, extend themselves—hence, where change and, in particular, motion can be *measured*), *then* there is no point in saying that '*it* is slipping away'; for something to slip away it must be *possible* for it to be grabbed, maybe to be stopped or accelerated, and so on (a grammatical reminder); now time *as* the

[113] But, what makes a context a *philosophical* one? Suppose someone—a child, perhaps—asks: 'What happens to things when we are not looking at them?' Is she not 'philosophizing', in the above sense? And yet, might one not suppose her question being made in an (otherwise?) very *ordinary* context? What this shows is—as Cavell once put—that 'one does not know, in advance, where philosophy might begin, when one's mind may be stopped, to think' (NAT 264); or again that language can 'go on holiday' anytime, in no special setting or frame of mind, that the "metaphysical" is our everyday predicament. There can be a number of causes inclining one to start *questioning* the (ordinary) ways of going on applying our words and pictures, or to imagine (even to crave for) *different* applications; again, one cannot know in advance if those new applications will amount to (recognizably) legitimate extensions of a previous concept / picture, or become (recognizably) *mis*applications of it. To tell the difference is a burden that any member of a linguistic community faces all the time, having as her only resource (ordinary) linguistic expertise. Hence—as I hope it will become clear as the analysis advances—I take it that when Wittgenstein says that a particular use of a concept / picture is a (philosophical) *mis*use—that it is an instance of a wheel turning idly, instead of a purposeful device—he too is deploying that expertise, and thus making a claim for his judgement to be acknowledged and assented by other language users; there is no "sure-fire", *a priori* way to tell the difference between ordinary and philosophical contexts.

very dimension where events occur and change can be measured cannot *possibly* undergo any such modifications (as Aristotle, for one, had remarked); hence, one cannot (legitimately or sensibly) apply a picture such as that of a film strip (or any other mov*ing* or modify*ing* thing—i.e., any other event) in order to describe *it*.—One might here say: time as a dimension and the events which occur in it are incommensurable, really incomparable phenomena.—And finally—if, i.e., one cannot apply any such picture to describe time-as-the-form-of-motion—the very feeling that we are unable to stop the 'flow of time' should disappear; in other words, if there is *no sense* in the idea of such a 'flow', there is equally no sense in the idea of trying (or even willing) to stop it.

These considerations seem to offer a sound explanation of the (otherwise very remarkable) claims made by Wittgenstein in the passage under analysis—about, i.e., why the 'trouble' about the 'flow of time' (the feeling that we are unable to stop it) would arise *only* 'when we philosophize', and are lead to *mis*apply language and its pictures. Additionally, they seem to offer a good illustration of how one can be freed from a 'philosophical trouble' by means of getting the application of language—of its words, sentences, and, in particular, its pictures—right, which means, at least in part, bringing some descriptions (e.g., 'time is slipping away') back to the rough ground of ordinary life, where they would be employed for a number of different purposes (e.g., hurrying up people or regretting something)[114], instead of becoming very *complex* but *useless* mechanisms, full of 'wheels turning idly' (as one might say of the Augustinian—philosophical—story about time)[115]. (We may express

[114] Of course the 'rough ground of ordinary life' includes some theoretical (e.g., scientific) purposes as well as (more) practical ones. Nowadays physicists do not speak of the 'flow' of time—physical time is (as Wittgenstein already knew) space-like. I suppose that (theoretical) view could be expressed (if roughly) by a sentence like 'time does not flow'; if that were the case, we would have another instance of purposeful use of a description, as opposed to a 'philosophical' one, in the sense here in view—i.e., 'a wheel turning idly'.

[115] In this connection, is worth highlighting that even a picture like that of the film strip *may* be purposefully employed in ordinary life; Wittgenstein himself acknowledges at least one such purpose, as the last paragraph of the following passage makes clear:

> If I compare the facts of immediate experience with the pictures on the screen and the facts of physics with pictures in the film strip, on the film strip there is a present picture and past and future pictures. But on the screen, there is only the present.
>
> What is characteristic about this image is that in using it I regard the future as preformed.
>
> There's a point in saying future events are pre-formed if it belongs to the *essence* of time that it does not break off. For then we can say: something will happen, it's only that I don't know what. And in the world of physics we can say that. (PR, p. 83, §51)

that methodological lesson employing Wittgenstein's favourite turn of phrase in this context, saying that one should be careful not to confuse ordinary, 'physical' descriptions with the 'phenomenological' ones, i.e., those which would be fitted to describe the 'immediately given'—yet another grammatical reminder.)

18. Yet—if only one was really tempted to take the trouble about the flow of time any seriously from the beginning—there would seem to be something inherently dissatisfying about that kind of (dis)solution. Wittgenstein himself is aware of that apparent shortcoming, as we can see in the following passage:

> If, for instance, you ask, 'Does the box still exist when I'm not looking at it?', the only right answer would be 'Of course, unless someone has taken it away or destroyed it'. Naturally, a philosopher would be dissatisfied with this answer, but it would quite rightly reduce his way of formulating the question *ad absurdum*. (PR, p. 88, §57)

Notice that the passage above is introduced as *an illustration* or *instantiation* of a philosophical exchange—one which, in fact, is recurrent and characteristic in Wittgenstein's writings. Given that illustrative purpose, one might apply a kind of 'universal generalization' to the passage, thus getting a useful model or blueprint for such exchanges, which would go as follows:

> If, for instance, you ask, '*x*' [a philosophical question], the only right answer would be '*y*' [a grammatical reminder]. Naturally, a philosopher would be dissatisfied with *y*, but it would quite rightly reduce his way of formulating *x ad absurdum*.

Bearing that (generalized) version of the passage in mind, the question I would like to ask is how we are to understand Wittgenstein's own assessment, as it gets expressed in its final sentence, of the results of applying his grammatical method (an assessment which, it is worth noticing, strikingly reminds one of proposition 6.53 of the *Tractatus*). There are, I take it, at least two ways of interpreting it. The first, and probably the more natural rendition, would have it that:

1. notwithstanding the philosopher's dissatisfaction with *y*—a dissatisfaction which, given the purposes of logical clarification, would be ultimately

> negligible—his original "question" (*x*) was in fact 'reduced *ad absurdum*' (i.e., shown to be just a *pseudo*-question) by means of the use of grammatical reminders, and that is the end of the matter—the philosophical, elucidative task would be over at that point;

Yet a second interpretation is available, according to which

> 2. notwithstanding the logical correction of such a *reductio*—which, from the perspective of someone genuinely puzzled by the difficulty in view, would be ultimately negligible (in that it completely misses the point)—the use of grammatical reminders would let the philosopher dissatisfied, and (*hence*) that cannot be the end of the matter—more is necessary for a (successful) philosophical therapy.

I find that many readers of Wittgenstein's writings (myself included, at least in some moods) are rather oblivious—or even blind—to the possibility of the latter rendition of the exchanges between (say) Wittgenstein and his philosophical interlocutor(s)[116], and accordingly are all too prone—even anxious—to stop their reflection when they reach a (rather dogmatic) result similar to the one depicted in the first one.—Why is that?

One possible reason is that we (at least in our dogmatic and self-indulgent moods) would be trying to repress something—a difficulty, say, that we would rather not face *seriously;* hence the convenience of accepting that our 'trouble' (e.g., about the unstoppable flow of time, or, as in the original version of §57, the unperceived existence of objects) is mere nonsense after all—that our "questions" are actually just *pseudo*-questions.

Bearing that (as yet abstract and speculative) possibility in mind, let us ask whether (and, if so, why) a philosopher puzzled by the problem of the flow of time would be dissatisfied with the solution offered above (§17). I take it that, contrariwise to what we would (rather self-indulgently) assume if we stopped the reading at the first rendition, our philosopher would have an immediate reply to the charge that her (purported) use of a sentence like 'time is slipping away' (made in an extra-ordinary context) is simply pointless; granted, its point is not exactly ordinary—but human beings have other purposes and interests in addition to the ordinary ones. And, however ultimately incoherent the attempt may be, it

[116] On the identity of the "voices" in Wittgenstein's writings, see footnotes 124 and 125 of the next chapter.

remains the fact that reflection about (e.g.) time might inexorably lead one to *try* to express, to describe, to call attention to, some extraordinary, peculiar, even astonishing (metaphysical) features of the phenomenon under analysis—e.g., that the past, which is *no more*, keeps *becoming distanced* from the present, which, in turn, has *no extension*, and keeps *going toward* a future which is *not yet*. Faced with such an impulse, the claim that one is employing a picture which could (should?) not legitimately be employed—because it is 'incommensurable' with the phenomenon one wants to describe—is very dissatisfying indeed, not exactly because it is wrong or false, but rather because it is beside the point, and lets the *real difficulty* simply untouched—it is an attempt to change the subject completely. (Notice that our dissatisfied philosopher needs not to be characterized as ignorant of the grammatical rules of ordinary language; she would, as I said, happily accept the charge of not being able to express her trouble employing ordinary descriptions—but so much the worse for those descriptions!)

19. Supposing the reply I just imagined (or another to the same effect) is plausible—and why would it not be?—how would the exchange continue? For the time being, I will let it stand—the philosopher having the last word—to turn to the analysis of some subsequent remarks, which may help us to resume that exchange in a more productive way. So let us (re)start with the second half of §52, in which Wittgenstein presents a related 'trouble' arising in the philosophical investigation of time—namely, one having to do with the role of memory in our experience of the past. Here is the passage:

> In this connection it appears to us as if memory were a somewhat secondary sort of experience, when compared with experience of the present. We say 'We can *only* remember that'. As though in a primary sense memory were a somewhat faint and uncertain picture of what we originally had before us in full clarity.
>
> In the language of physical objects, that's so: I say: 'I *only* have a *vague* memory of this house.' (PR, p. 84, §52)

The reason for presenting this new 'trouble', and relating it to the previous one, should be by now clear—after all, once one is caught by the feeling that 'the present disappears into the past' (as if inexorably, unstoppably), it is only natural to think of the experience of the past itself (i.e., of the stretch of the 'strip of time' which has already 'remorselessly

mov[ed] past us'), as it is recorded in our memory, that it becomes only a 'faint and uncertain picture' compared with the original (i.e., the experience of the present). Now, if read against the backdrop of the previous analysis, the last sentence of the passage above will have two clear implications, namely: (i) that there is no problem in putting the situation that way—applying that kind of picture—in 'the language of physical objects' (hence, 'in ordinary life'); but (ii) trouble may arise 'when we philosophize' about those familiar facts, and start *mis*applying that familiar (kind of) picture. In fact, the next set of remarks (§53) can be read as elaborating just those implications. Here is how it goes:

> And why not let matters rest there? For this way of talking surely says everything we want to say, and everything that can be said. But we wish to say that it can also be put *differently*; and that is important.
>
> It is as if the emphasis is placed elsewhere in this other way of speaking: for the words 'seem', 'error', etc., have a certain emotional overtone which doesn't belong to the essence of the phenomena. In a way it's connected with the will and not merely with cognition.
>
> We talk for instance of an optical illusion and associate this expression with the idea of a mistake, although of course it isn't essential that there should be any mistake; and if appearance were normally more important in our lives than the results of measurement, then language would also show a different attitude to this phenomenon. (PR, p. 84, §53).

The main point of those remarks is to indicate the precise moment in which a "leap" is made from ordinary descriptions—e.g., 'We can *only* remember that'—which can have many clear and legitimate uses in our common linguistic practices, to the extraction of some (supposedly) substantial philosophical conclusions—in the present case, the metaphyisico-epistemological thesis that memory offers just a 'faint image' of the 'reality' originally experienced. Once again, Wittgenstein is highlighting that this kind of "leap" occurs only when one ('the philosopher') starts employing some pictures which would be fine in their original context ('ordinary life') for some supposedly new (philosophical) purposes; thus, even though our current use of some descriptions may be from the beginning impregnated with certain 'emotional overtones'—after all, we actually *say* that memory allows us *only* to remember facts, and we actually *draw a contrast* between that (mnemonic) access to the world and a more direct one, namely, present experience—the kind of trouble that the philosopher would like to indicate (concerning, i.e., the epistemic limitations of memory) does not arise in the ordinary situations which are the original

home of those descriptions. The trouble, one might say, arises only when those 'emotional overtones'—which, N.B., are *characteristic* of ordinary language, to the extent in which that language is to record our (natural and other) *reactions* to the world (including time and its flow) and our experiences of it[117]—are *sublimated* by philosophical reflection, so that instead of facing the real anxieties that are mirrored in those descriptions, attention gets redirected to some (supposedly) theoretical (i.e., logical, metaphysical, epistemological, etc.) 'troubles' like the one about the 'limitations of memory' (as a guide to reality). Yet memory—as far as the 'essence' of this phenomenon is concerned—is *not* 'a somewhat secondary sort of experience', *nor* does it offer 'a somewhat faint and uncertain picture of what we originally had before us in full clarity'; those are descriptions we may feel *inclined* to make (and non-problematically so) in our *ordinary* life—hence, 'in the language of physical objects'—because of the *emotional responses* which we (naturally?) connect with, or superimpose to, our (mnemonic) experiences of the past (experiences)—a matter which, as Wittgenstein reminds us, has more to do with the *will* than with *cognition.*

20. These considerations prompt me to go back to the problem of the 'flow of time', and to resume the exchange between Wittgenstein and his interlocutor (as I will continue to call those voices) on that issue. I said above (§18) that one reason for our (rather quick—even anxious) acceptance of some (rather dogmatic) 'reductions *ad absurdum*' of philosophical questions enacted in Wittgenstein's writings would be our willingness to repress some existential difficulties—what the *Tractatus* (6.52) called 'problems of life'—behind those questions, to avoid facing them *seriously;* but, let's face it: isn't it the case that, at least for some of us, some of the time, it is really difficult to accept that the past has gone, inexorably—and that *we cannot change it*?[118] By the same token, don't we sometimes feel

[117] Interestingly, in the last paragraph of §53 Wittgenstein describes a language which would be free of such 'emotional overtones'—one which 'would not permit any way of expressing a preference for certain phenomena over others', and, hence, 'would have to be, so to speak, absolutely *impartial*'—as 'primary'; in so doing, he offers an important (and, to my mind, much overlooked) key to understand the role of a 'phenomenological language' in freeing us from philosophical confusion. As I have been suggesting, the idea is *not* to use that ('primary' or 'phenomenological') language to correct the ordinary one, or even to show that the latter is intrinsically misleading, but rather to use it as an object of comparison, which may show to 'the philosopher' (in us) that some of the features that s/he takes as troublesome in the analysis of the phenomena are *not essential* to them, and have to do more with will than cognition *in our ordinary life*.

[118] Normally, that is a difficulty felt when one realizes that some *specific* event or deed one would like to change cannot be changed. As a (rather dramatic) illustration, think of the quest of Alexander Hartdegen (Guy Pearce) to rescue his girlfriend Emma (Sienna Guillory) from death, in the beginning of Simon Wells's remake of *The Time Machine* (2002).

burdened when facing the fact that the future *is not yet*—and, hence, that at least in part, it is our responsibility to bring it about? Little wonder, given this (doubly) difficult situation, that one should react toward the present as if it were, on the one hand, always already becoming past—as if escaping us, becoming unchangeable, together with our deeds (or lack of them)—and, on the other hand, as if it were always already pointing toward the future—as if accomplishing it, making it happen, thus reminding one of the burden of having to choose how to act (and to live) henceforth. But again, there is a clear sense in which none of those descriptions captures the 'essence of time'; rather, they are ways of expressing our own (all too human) reactions—in particular, our *existential anxieties*—toward (our experiences of) time and its flow, and, ultimately, toward (the awareness of) our own mortality; now, similarly to the case of memory analysed above, these are all matters which have more to do with our *will*—yet it is all but impossible to sublimate them in philosophical reflection, where they keep being presented as having to do *merely with cognition*.

Let me take one further step back in our discussion: I asked above (§17) if we were really supposed to take in (without more ado) Wittgenstein's claim, in PR §52, to the effect that 'in ordinary life we are not troubled by the feeling that [e.g.,] the phenomenon is slipping away from us, the constant flux of appearance, but only when we philosophize'. Having reached this point in the analysis, I find I would like to answer that question by saying that it is only in their *sublimated form* that the 'troubles' which Wittgenstein presents us do not arise in ordinary life; yet, it is precisely for that reason that the (dis)solution of the logical confusions behind (the sublimated versions of) those 'troubles' would not solve or dissolve the life problems which get deflected, or displaced, by them.—Does that make logical clarification any less valuable? Well, yes and no: what it shows is that—against some dogmatic and self-indulgent expectations—there is a *rationale* behind the kind of 'dissatisfaction' that Wittgenstein himself has diagnosed as an inevitable reaction of 'the philosopher' faced with his grammatical reminders; only the real (existential) difficulty would end up being once again deflected if that *rationale* were presented (as my own dissatisfied philosopher's reply presented it—see §18) in an intellectualized garb, as if the trouble were really derived from the analysis of the 'phenomena'—more specifically, as if it had to do with their *essence*—and our language should be blamed by not being capable of expressing it. The point I am trying to make, then, is that any effective and satisfying (to

the philosopher, i.e.) use of clarification—hence, of the grammatical reminders employed to achieve a perspicuous view of the logico-grammatical syntax of ordinary language—would have to be made in a larger therapeutic context, in which 'the philosopher' were not only (intellectually) shown to be asking *pseudo*-questions, but, additionally, were enabled to become aware of the real difficulties which were getting unselfconsciously repressed, deflected or sublimated by her very attempts at expressing them.

3.4 Solipsism of the present moment

21. To the extent that one is really puzzled by the 'troubles' examined in the last section—about, i.e., the 'flow of time' and the experience of the past—one might be tempted to go one step further, and hold that 'only the experience of the present moment has reality' (PR, §54, p. 85). Let us call that thesis 'S', and the position expressed by it 'solipsism of the present moment'. Immediately after presenting S, Wittgenstein says that 'the first reply must be: As opposed to what?' (ibid.). Clearly, that question aims to bring the prospective solipsist (i.e., each of us, to the extent in which we may feel ourselves tempted to express our feelings in that way) "back to earth", compelling her (us) to think about the sense(s) of S, i.e., about its possible use(s) in concrete situations of ordinary life[119]. Again, that is a very characteristic textual move, which perfectly fits the blueprint indicated above (§18), in that we are presented, first, with an implicit philosophical question—say, 'How would I know whether anything *but* the experience of the present moment has reality?'—and then a reply based on a grammatical reminder—namely, that in any concrete situation, to claim that something 'has reality' implies distinguishing it from something else, which has *no reality;* one might summarize that grammatical point by saying that in such cases, 'real' and its derivatives are *relational* or *comparative* qualifications, and, hence, they do not have an *absolute* sense. Yet—so the reply would continue—what a solipsist would like to express using S depends on assuming (however tacitly) the (supposed) absolute sense of those qualifications; now that is the reason why the resulting position would be incoherent ('reduced *ad absurdum*')—after all, if only (my) *present* experience has reality, and,

[119] I suppose the same would apply to concrete situations of *extraordinary* life—in times of crisis, danger, catastrophe, and so on, words such as those comprising S could undoubtedly assume particular (albeit far from ordinary) meanings, an (hence) have many possible oppositions.

consequently, there is *nothing* with which I can possibly compare it, how would I be able to "pick it out" from the rest (?) of experience in order to confer it some kind of "privilege"?

In order to indicate the incoherence involved in the solipsist's attempt to express her "position", Wittgenstein presents (and immediately discards) two candidates to the role of counterpoint to S (perhaps one might call them 'Moore's responses'). They go as follows:

1. 'Does it [i.e., S] imply I didn't get up this morning? (For if so, it would be dubious.) But that is not what we mean.' (PR, §54, p. 85)

2. 'Does it mean that an event that I'm not remembering at this instant didn't occur? Not that either.' (id. ibid.)

As to the first statement, let us ask why, exactly, it would be a 'dubious' implication of S. Apparently, the reason is that there is a variety of situations in which I could state that 'I didn't get up this morning', but in none of them the resulting opposition between 'appearance' and 'reality' would satisfy the solipsist's (implicit) requirements in expressing S. I could, e.g., mistakenly think that I got up this morning, while in fact I was just dreaming (at night) that I got up in the morning; similarly, I could be hallucinating that, while in the middle of a desert, and after some days without falling asleep; or, finally, I could just be a brain in a vat, which never sleeps neither wakes up, but just receives stimuli from a computer generating the illusory experience of falling asleep and waking up. Be as it may, in none of those cases I would be allowed to say that 'only the experience of the present moment has reality', in the *absolute sense* envisaged by the solipsist—after all, in all those cases there *is* something which opposes to the 'present experience', and (supposedly) is 'unreal' / 'illusory' / 'apparent', namely, the *pseudo*-experiences of waking up that I had when dreaming, hallucinating, or being stimulated by a computer. All those *pseudo*-experiences of waking up can be described as (say) 'unreal' *only comparatively*, i.e., by contrast with the present (and real) experience of waking up; but there seems to be no point in saying that, e.g., they are 'unreal *in themselves*'—after all, in another sense, all of them were *bona fide* (hence 'real') *subjective experiences*, which could be checked by means of (ordinary) objective criteria. (Similar considerations can be applied to the second candidate above.)

22. These considerations go some way toward showing that it does not seem possible to express S with the (absolute) sense intended by the solipsist. Wittgenstein takes up that conclusion in the sequence of the text, by claiming that:

> The proposition that only the present experience has reality appears to contain the last consequence of solipsism. And in a sense that is so; only what it is able to say amounts to just as little as can be said by solipsism.—For what belongs to the essence of the world simply *cannot* be said. And philosophy, if it were to say anything, would have to describe the essence of the world. (PR, p. 85, §54)

Read against the backdrop of the preceding analysis, I take it that what Wittgenstein means by saying that solipsism—presented here as an *instance* of a philosophical position—cannot say what it purports to say by means of S—something belonging to the *essence* of the world—is not that there *is* something which cannot be said, but rather that the very idea of there being such an 'essence'—some feature of our experience which could be "picked out" and presented as that which *alone* (or *ultimately*) 'has reality'—is essentially misguided. That, of course, does not imply that we cannot distinguish, in ordinary life, between some aspects of our experience that we feel inclined to honour with qualifications such as 'real' / 'genuine' / 'legitimate', on the one hand, and aspects which we prefer to diminish as 'unreal' / 'illusory' / 'mere appearance', on the other. Only the impulse to make such distinctions would again have more to do with our *will*—with our way of *reacting* to the contents of our experience—than with *cognition*; and, precisely to that extent, those (ordinary) comparative descriptions and judgements would not belong to any (supposed) 'essence of the phenomena'. To go back to a claim quoted above (§19): 'if appearance were normally more important in our lives than the results of measurement, then language would also show a different attitude to [...] phenomen[a]' (PR, p. 84, §53). Yet, I think that part of the point Wittgenstein is here trying to make is precisely that there is no such a thing as a/the 'correct' attitude toward phenomena—as some philosophers, and, in particular, our solipsist, would have it; language, as Wittgenstein would later say, is 'the expression of our interests' (see PI, §570).

Those considerations are confirmed and further elaborated in the next remark, which concludes §54. It goes as follows:

> If someone says, only the *present experience* has reality, then the word 'present' must be redundant here, as the word 'I' is in other contexts. For it cannot mean *present* as opposed to past and future.—Something else must be meant by the word, something that isn't *in* a space, but is itself a space. That is to say, not something bordering on something else (from which it could therefore be limited off). And so, something language cannot legitimately set in relief.
>
> The present we are talking about here is not the frame in the film reel that is in front of the projector's lens at precisely this moment, as opposed to the frames before and after it, which have already been there or are yet to come; but the picture on the screen which would illegitimately be called present, since 'present' would not be used here to distinguish it from past and future. And so it is a meaningless epithet. (PR, pp. 85-86, §54)

The passage above sums up Wittgenstein's diagnosis about the logico-grammatical confusions involved in the attempt to give expression to the 'solipsism of present moment' by means of S: the problem is, in short, that the absolute sense which the solipsist intends to give to the words which are fundamental for formulating her position—in this case, 'reality', 'present', 'I', and its derivatives—is incoherent, hence, it is *no sense at all*; in fact, those words become completely *pointless* and *empty* when used in a (philosophical) context in which one tries (if tacitly) to isolate them from the conceptual relations they had in their original home. So, similarly to what happened in the diagnosis presented in the *Tractatus*, the general lesson to be extracted from this analysis of solipsism seems to be that, if that position is taken until its last consequences, it shows itself unsustainable, and its central thesis nonsensical.

23. Would our solipsist be satisfied with such a reduction *ad absurdum* of her position? The answer is, of course: 'No'. After all, I imagine she (we) could grant the grammatical point about comparative / absolute senses of the words involved in the formulation of S, and still feel inclined to hold that, notwithstanding the incoherence of such an attempt, there remains a (possibly ineffable) experience of "losing touch with *reality*" (in particular, at least in this context, with the past), and, consequently, of becoming distrustful of the (ordinary) comparative assessments of it. There simply *is* such condition of being human as being subjected to the (threatening) experience, or feeling, of being isolated from, or out of attunement with, the world—particularly its (presently) unperceived aspects[120]; in the

[120] Similarly, there is such condition of being human as the (threatening) experience, or feeling, of being separate of, or out of attunement with, others—particularly their (externally) unperceived states (see chapter 1). Stanley Cavell has argued that behind the (eminently epistemological) quests for justification

face of such a condition, *both* the attempts at escaping our metaphysical loneliness by resorting to a philosophical fantasy (e.g., 'solipsism of the present moment')—conceiving all reality as internal to our all-embracing experience (the 'world as idea')—*and* the (dogmatic) denials of the legitimacy of our troubles can be seen as hysterical and forced repressions of our humanity[121].

This prompts me to make a claim which was echoed in the general Introduction—namely, that as I read Wittgenstein, his is a text where both kinds of repressions are (alternately) *enacted*, none of them to be simply *taken in* as the "final word" on the subject by his readers; little wonder, then, that one may find commentators willing to ascribe each of those attitudes to him—i.e., to say either that Wittgenstein was tempted by some form of solipsism, or that he refuted it by means of his grammatical clarifications. Yet solipsism—as one among so many instances of our all too human attitudes of philosophical indulgence in the face of the problems of life—is neither *refuted* nor *defended* in these texts; rather, it is shown by what it really is, partially by means of grammatical reminders, whose (negative) purpose is to indicate that, contrary to what one would initially suppose, there is no such thing as a (meaningful, *bona fide*) formulation of that "philosophical position"—hence, that resorting to solipsism (among many other such "positions") is not really a matter of presenting and defending "theses" or "theories" about the essence of the phenomena; rather, it is a matter of deflecting the attention from the real difficulties faced by creatures endowed with such capacities (and burdens) as we have of taking up our experiences, our condition in the world, and give them sense—or fail to. Yet in order to accept that diagnosis one has to be prepared to counteract old philosophical habits, which may be deeply rooted; faced with that challenge, it is all but impossible to fall back, taking those very grammatical reminders presented by Wittgenstein as further paths, or excuses, to sublimation, only reinforcing repression.

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of our claims to *knowledge* of the 'external world' and 'other minds' stand the prior issues of *acceptance* (of the world) and *acknowledgement* (of others). Supposing, as I am inclined to do, that his argument for that view is sound, an interesting question arises whether an analogous point might be made concerning skepticism about the past. Although I will not try to pursue further that possibility here, I think it would be worth considering a positive answer to that question, starting with the intuition that behind the (epistemological) troubles concerning 'cognition' of the past, there may be the prior (existential) difficulties of acknowledging *and* accepting one's own past—as part of the task of coming to terms with one's own mortality and finitude. (Nietzsche's notion of *amor fati*, as well as Heidegger's attempt to unveil our own condition as 'Beings-toward-Death'—which in turn should enable a more authentic attitude of *Dasein* toward life, as opposed to a mere identification with the impersonal 'one'—are instances of the kind of alternative, non-sublimated philosophical stances I imagine one might adopt dealing with these issues.)

[121] I am here echoing Richard Eldridge's very apt formulations of these points (see Eldridge, 2001, p. 194).

Again, it is up to each of us to find a resolution to this situation—to take Wittgenstein's reminders as laying down the (grammatical) law, or as mere rungs in so many ladders to be thrown away once the whole therapeutic progress is over. Having reached this point in the analysis of the *Remarks,* my own inclination would be to emphasize that, in writing the reflections we have been reading, Wittgenstein was still moved by an ethical project of sorts, which gets conspicuously displayed in these reiterations of his attempts to cure the readers (and himself) from some of the temptations expressed by solipsism.

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3.5 Epilogue: on letting oneself be 'dragged into the mire'

24. If the preceding reading is on the right tracks, I hope it has gone some of the way toward showing that Wittgenstein, by the time he wrote the *Remarks,* held a rather similar attitude to solipsism as the one adopted in the *Tractatus*—hence, a rather different attitude from the self-indulgent one commonly adopted by most philosophers—in that he really took the pains of the solipsist for himself, systematically engaging in the task of acknowledging and giving full voice to a whole range of philosophical fantasies which go associated with that "position". As I said above, it is not exactly surprising that such an attitude could be sometimes confused with a symptom of his own "succumbing" to those temptations; yet a more sympathetic and faithful assessment is available, whose starting point is the recognition that for Wittgenstein (early and late), there is no effective treatment to 'the diseases of the intellect to which philosophers are so prone' except immunization (however momentary and local, as the late Wittgenstein would perhaps like to add) through one's own defences—something which is brought about only by being first infected oneself. And since solipsism, besides being the paradigm of those diseases, may also be seen as one of the most intense—call it an outburst or paroxysm—this could account for the rather careful, aseptic handling which characterizes the standard attitude of philosophers toward it, few of whom would have the willingness to 'strictly follow out' the implications of their initial assumptions.

By way of bringing the present chapter to a close, I would like to call attention to a passage from a different context, which I hope will help clarify the methodological claims just made—bringing their point home—as well as paving the way for the analysis which I will pursue in the next chapter. The context is that of a lecture, delivered some years after Wittgenstein's return to Cambridge[122], and the reason why I think it may help us at this juncture is that in it Wittgenstein provides an interesting new metaphor, which is designed to clarify (what he sees as) the correct philosophical method to deal with "positions" like solipsism. I quote the relevant passage in full:

> Philosophy may start from common sense but it cannot remain common sense. As a mater of fact philosophy cannot start from common sense because the business of philosophy is to rid one of those puzzles which do not arise in common sense. No philosopher lacks common sense in ordinary life. So philosophers should not attempt to present the idealistic or solipsistic positions, for example, as though they were absurd—by pointing out to a person who puts forward these positions that he does not really wonder whether the beef is real or whether it is an idea in his mind, whether his wife is real or whether only he is real. Of course he does not, and it is not a proper objection. You must not try to avoid a philosophical problem by appealing to common sense; instead, present it as it arises with most power. You must allow yourself to be dragged into the mire, and get out of it. Philosophy can be said to consist of three activities: to see the commonsense answer, to get yourself so deeply into the problem that the commonsense answer is unbearable, and to get from that situation back to the commonsense answer. But the commonsense answer in itself is no solution; everyone knows it. One must not in philosophy attempt to short-circuit problems. (WLC, pp. 108-109)

This passage offers a key to understand Wittgenstein's "therapeutic" methodology concerning not only solipsism, but many other "intellectual diseases" of which solipsism stands as a paradigm. As I have been trying to illustrate with the preceding analysis the default procedure adopted in order to free his "philosophical interlocutors"—i.e., Wittgenstein's own "internal voices", which are also *our own*, to the extent to which we really engage with his texts—from their (our) philosophical temptations involves precisely to 'allow oneself to be dragged into the mire', in order to really feel those temptations arising 'with most power', and then—but only then—to try to 'get out of it', going 'back to the commonsense answer'—which, as we also saw, is never to be confused with the dogmatic and self-indulgent standpoint of the 'commonsense philosopher'.

Bearing those considerations in mind, and taking the analysis pursued up to this point as a backdrop, one might conclude that to strictly follow through solipsism's implications, in

[122] More specifically, near the end of *Michaelmas Term* of 1934.

each of its multiple formulations, is precisely a way of ‘letting yourself to be dragged into the mire’; but what we should realize after doing it—as a condition of coming ‘back to the commonsense answer’—is that, from the very beginning, we were not saying *anything* when combining words in order to “formulate” the solipsistic (supposed) “theses”. That is, of course, a rather negative and destructive result; the bonus is that, by having our positions reduced *ad absurdum* in such a way—by seeing that our “questions” were only *pseudo*-questions—we may become able to climb beyond them, redirecting our attention to the real difficulties underlying our evasive attempts to sublimate them. Those are the methodological aims which, as we shall see in the next chapter, were still being pursued by Wittgenstein by the time he dictated what became known as *The Blue Book*.

4 Solipsism, Privacy and the Grammar of the First Person in *The Blue Book*

What the solipsist wants is not a notation in which the ego has a monopoly, but one in which the ego vanishes.

(Wittgenstein, WLC 22)

4.1 Prologue

1. As I have been arguing, the philosophical temptation of solipsism—its nature, sources, and cure—is among the central and most recurrent concerns in Wittgenstein's writings. When dealing with that temptation, he continuously went back to issues involving the nature of the 'I', 'self', 'soul or 'subject'—words which, as Hans Sluga aptly notes when surveying a nearby terrain, were used 'more or less indiscriminately' during Wittgenstein's lifetime (see Sluga, 1996, p. 320). Actually, since his very earliest recorded philosophical reflections[123], Wittgenstein has been interested in the connection between the temptation to assume some form of solipsism and certain confusions concerning the grammar of the first person pronoun; eventually, he also came to believe that the joint treatment of those issues would be an effective—perhaps *the* most effective—way of blocking some of the major sources of philosophical confusion arising in the analysis of language in general—particularly, but not exclusively, that portion of language used to talk about our 'personal experiences'.

One of the most sustained and detailed analyses of solipsism and the grammar of the first person occurs in the work we know as *The Blue Book*[124]. Among the claims presented in that analysis, one shall find some of the most surprisingly counter-intuitive, as well as

[123] At least as early as 1916, in the middle of a continuous stream of remarks dealing with solipsism—which would be latter incorporated almost without change in section 5.6 of the *Tractatus*—Wittgenstein had already written that 'The I, the I is what is deeply mysterious!' (NB 80).

[124] *The Blue Book* is a selection of notes dictated by Wittgenstein to some of his pupils at Cambridge in the intervals of the lectures delivered in the academic year 1933-34; its title is due to the fact that the first set of mimeographed copies of those notes which circulated among students had a blue cover.

some of the most remarkably trivial of all his writings. To the first category belong the claim that the pronoun 'I' does not refer to anything—be it a body, a soul or a person (where the latter is taken as a different kind of entity from the former two) (see e.g. BB 69); regarding the second category, an example is the claim that 'In "I have pain", "I" is not a demonstrative pronoun' (BB 68). As it happens so often with Wittgenstein's writings, those claims pose a difficult exegetical challenge for the reader, who might find herself unable to devise their meaning and relevance. Again, an important part of that difficulty lies in the all but unavoidable failure in taking notice of the peculiar nature of Wittgenstein's philosophical prose, engaging in the process of self-examination and self-criticism that he sets up for his readers—call it the internal relation between form and content in his texts.

2. Let me try to briefly illustrate that claim: there is a widely spread opinion among Wittgenstein's supporters to the effect that his—particularly his post-Tractarian—treatment of subjectivity[125] represents a fundamental break relative to the whole (Western) philosophical tradition[126]. One of the main reasons presented in support to that opinion is precisely that he would have been the first to question an assumption shared by virtually any author in that tradition—namely, that the first person pronoun has a *referential* role in "self-ascriptive"[127] statements concerning actions, mental states, events and attitudes, in the present of the indicative tense[128]. I shall from time to time refer to that view as the 'non-

[125] The phrase 'treatment of subjectivity' is here being employed in deliberately broad sense, so as to cover both the analysis of traditional metaphysical questions about the nature of 'the self'—such as personal identity, substantiality of the subject *qua* thinking being, and the possibility of its existence in isolation from the rest of the world and other minds—as the analysis of the grammar of the pronoun 'I' in first person statements. Echoing a claim made by Wittgenstein in the *Blue Book* (see BB 28), one might perhaps say that his treatment of the grammar of first person is one of the 'heirs' of what used to be called 'philosophy of the subject'.

[126] Here is a representative pair of quotes from Hacker in *Connexions and Controversies*: 'The *Tractatus* is, and was intended to be, the culmination of a tradition of European philosophy. The *Investigations* and the other unfinished later works were not. They were meant to be a break with the great tradition of Western thought—indeed a destructive break, which would undermine its most fundamental tenets.' (Preface, p. ix); 'For the contour lines of the body of his thought cannot be represented on existing philosophical maps. And that is not a mere coincidence, but rather a consequence of the fact that he rejected the most fundamental presuppositions of received philosophical thought.' (p. ix)

[127] The phrase 'self-ascriptive' is employed here due to its prominence in the philosophical literature; for the time being, I shall set aside the question about whether it is legitimate to use it in the context of Wittgenstein's philosophy—after all, one of his main contentions seems to be precisely that (presumptive) 'self-ascriptive' statements have an *expressive* function, which is very different from the role of *bona fide*, third person statements describing actions, mental states, events and attitudes of other subjects. I shall come back to that issue below.

[128] In an essay which is seminal for this discussion, Elizabeth Anscombe (1994, pp. 140-159) explores some

referential view'. Despite finding *prima facie* strong textual support, I take it that the non-referential view unduly simplifies and distorts—one might say: caricatures—Wittgenstein's stance on the issue of the grammar of the first person, leading to a series of exegetical and philosophical misunderstandings, whose culmination, at least to my mind, is the attempt to extract from his remarks some kind of straightforward logico-grammatical "refutation" of positions such as dualism, idealism, solipsism or behaviourism—i.e., some of the views which, precisely in Wittgenstein's eyes, were to count among the most pervasive and strongly tempting ones in philosophy, and (consequently) would require a much less dogmatic and more self-questioning approach in order for their real sources to be unveiled, and their grip to be loosened—as opposed to repressed or sublimated.

By taking Wittgenstein's claims about the ordinary use of the first person pronoun as direct attempts at (grammatically) blocking some substantial metaphysical results, the supporters of the non-referential view seem to be missing, at least to some extent, the therapeutic nature of his argumentation. That is the main reason why I think it is crucial to analyse Wittgenstein's remarks concerning the grammar of first person in their proper contexts, as parts of a (dialectic) *process* of gradual overcoming of some philosophical temptations—particularly, given my present concerns, the solipsistic one. Accordingly, aiming to supply a more detailed picture of his treatment of the first person pronoun, as well as to lay bare some of the main problems faced by the non-referential view, the following analysis will remain as close as possible to the textual development of his argumentation in the particular context provided by the *Blue Book.* (Since—as the subtitle of its published edition indicates—that text also served as an important 'preliminary study' to the (rather condensed) treatment of the issues involving privacy and the grammar of the first person in the *Philosophical Investigations*, by analysing it I hope to go part of the way toward the aim of sheding some (still needed) light upon the latter work.)

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of Wittgenstein's claims (especially those presented in the *Blue Book* and in PI §§ 398-411), and offers a series of connected arguments defending the thesis that 'I' is not a referential expression—hence, that the following definition is incorrect: ' "I" is the word that a person uses to talk about herself' (ibid. p. 142). Basically the same view is held by many other interpreters, among whom figure Norman Malcolm (1995, pp. 16-26), Anthony Kenny (1984) and Peter Hacker (1990, ch. 4 & 1997c, cap . VIII).

4.2 Meaning, Understanding, and Personal Experiences

3. I would like to start the present reading by making some preliminary considerations about the way in which the treatment of solipsism emerges in the *Blue Book*. I shall take the following passage—which, for reasons soon to be mentioned, serves as a sort of watershed in the argument presented in the book—as an entry point:

> The reason I postponed talking about personal experience was that thinking about this topic raises a host of philosophical difficulties which threaten to break up all our commonsense notions about what we should commonly call the objects of our experience. And if we were struck by these problems it might seem to us that all we have said about signs and about the various objects we mentioned in our examples may have to go into the melting-pot. (BB 44)

At first sight—for the reader who has been following the pages of the *Blue Book* up to this point—what the passage above states is (literally) quite incredible; after all, it purports to mark a change in the focus of the analysis pursued in the book—supposedly going from talk of 'signs' and 'objects' to the examination of our 'personal experience'—which is far from conspicuous, in that it is quite manifest that Wittgenstein did not spend the first half of the book talking only of 'signs' and 'objects', and it takes only a quick look forward to realize that he will equally not talk exclusively about 'personal experience' in its second half.

However, a more attentive reading of the analysis preceding that passage is available, which might show that, appearances notwithstanding, it is possible to interpret Wittgenstein's argumentative strategy up to this point in accordance to his own assessment —namely, as an attempt to divert our (and, we may suppose, his students's) attention from the (supposedly) *inner* and *private* 'personal experiences' to their *overt* and *public* linguistic expression—'signs', in a broad sense—as well as to the *objects* employed in the ordinary contexts in which those signs are used.

4. In fact, the very first move presented in the book can be so construed as to illustrate that strategy—as an attempt, i.e., to divert our attention from the question 'what is the *meaning* of a word' (BB 1, emphasis added)—a question which, if asked of a word for personal

experiences, may naturally incline one to seek for some 'inner' and 'private' item in response—to questions like 'what is an *explanation* of the meaning of a word; what does the *explanation* of a word look like?' (ibid, emphasis added). According to Wittgenstein, the advantage of asking the second kind of question, instead of the first, is that:

> You in a sense bring the question "what is meaning?" down to earth. For, surely, to understand the meaning of "meaning" you ought also to understand the meaning of "explanation of meaning". Roughly: "let's ask what the explanation of meaning is, for whatever that explains will be the meaning." Studying the grammar of the expression "explanation of meaning" will teach you something about the grammar of the word "meaning" and will cure you of the temptation to look about you for some object which you might call "the meaning". (BB 1)

Wittgenstein elaborates on this last point—about, i.e., 'the temptation to look about you for some object which you might call "the meaning"'—in a number of different contexts of the book, starting with the following passage, in which he presents a picture of the relation between signs and mental processes that will play a central role in his subsequent argumentation:

> It seems that there are *certain definite* mental processes bound up with the working of language, processes through which alone language can function. I mean the processes of understanding and meaning. The signs of our language seem dead without these mental processes; and it might seem that the only function of the signs is to induce such processes, and that these are the things we ought really to be interested in. [...]—We are tempted to think that the action of language consists of two parts; an inorganic part, the handling of signs, and an organic part, which we may call understanding these signs, meaning them, interpreting them, thinking. These latter activities seem to take place in a queer kind of medium, the mind; and the mechanism of the mind, the nature of which, it seems, we don't quite understand, can bring about effects which no material mechanism could. (BB 3)

Against the temptation to accept, or to assume, the picture described above—about the 'occult appearance' of the processes of thinking, meaning and understanding (see BB 4)—Wittgenstein suggests precisely that we 'replace in these processes any working of the imagination by acts of looking at *real objects*', as well as 'every process of speaking to oneself by speaking aloud or by writing' (BB 4, emphasis added). He illustrates that methodological advice suggesting that, instead of assuming that 'when I hear the word "red" with understanding, a red image should be before my mind's eye', I should try to 'substitute seeing a red bit of paper for imagining a red patch' (ibid.).

5. Now, if one recalls the analysis pursued in the former chapter, one might perhaps conclude that the replacement strategy (of 'inner' by 'outer' processes) presented in the *Blue Book* is an instance—or better: a heir—of the 'new method' of grammatical elucidation conceived during the time Wittgenstein wrote the *Philosophical Remarks*. As we observed analysing that text, the method there prescribed and pursued was grounded in the comparison between *actual* (ordinary) uses of words, sentences and pictures with somewhat modified or even invented ones. Bearing that in mind, one might also notice that when Wittgenstein introduces—for the first time in his recorded thinking—the notion of language-games, he seems to be precisely resuming and re-elaborating that former methodological conception:

> I shall in the future again and again draw your attention to what I shall call language games. These are ways of using signs simpler than those in which we use the signs of our highly complicated everyday language. Language games are the forms of language with which a child begins to make use of words. The study of language games is the study of primitive forms of language or primitive languages. If we want to study the problems of truth and falsehood, of the agreement and disagreement of propositions with reality, of the nature of assertion, assumption, and question, we shall with great advantage look at primitive forms of language in which these forms of thinking appear without the confusing background of highly complicated processes of thought. When we look at such simple forms of language the mental mist which seems to enshroud our ordinary use of language disappears. We see activities, reactions, which are clear-cut and transparent. On the other hand we recognize in these simple processes forms of language not separated by a break from our more complicated ones. We see that we can build up the complicated forms from the primitive ones by gradually adding new forms. (BB 17)

Now, to replace 'inner' by 'outer' processes is of course *one way* of isolating a region of the language we want to elucidate from its 'confusing background of highly complicated processes of thought', thus dissipating at least part of the 'mental mist' enshrouding the ordinary use of the relevant concepts, yet without producing a complete break with those (more complicated) ordinary practices[129].

6. In the context of the *Blue Book*, the central aim of employing that replacement strategy is precisely to divert the reader's attention from the picture of meaning as something *mental*, to the picture of meaning as *use*: 'if we had to name anything which is the life of

[129] That, by the way, seems to be precisely the role assigned to the builder's language-game in PI §2. For an interesting discussion of this point, see Mulhall (2001, esp. pp. 52-58).

the sign, we should have to say that it was its *use*' (BB 4); 'Roughly: understanding a sentence means understanding a language. / As a part of the system of language, one may say, the sentence has life.' (BB 5). That aim gets clearly expressed when Wittgenstein presents a 'rule of thumb' to deal with cases in which we become puzzled about the nature of 'mental processes':

> If you are puzzled about the nature of thought, belief, knowledge, and the like, substitute for the thought the expression of the thought, etc. The difficulty which lies in this substitution, and at the same time the whole point of it, is this: the expression of belief, thought, etc., is just a sentence;—and the sentence has sense only as a member of a system of language; as one expression within a calculus. (BB 42)

In fact, Wittgenstein takes his 'rule of thumb' to some extremes, originating claims which are very counter-intuitive, if read outside their original contexts. The following passage offers a representative example:

> It is misleading then to talk of thinking as of a "mental activity". We may say that thinking is essentially the activity of operating with signs. This activity is performed by the hand, when we think by writing; by the mouth and larynx, when we think by speaking; and if we think by imagining signs or pictures, I can give you no agent that thinks. If then you say that in such cases the mind thinks, I would only draw your attention to the fact that you are using a metaphor, that here the mind is an agent in a different sense from that in which the hand can be said to be the agent in writing. (BB 6-7)

Taken at face value, that passage seems to be stating that there is no such thing as a 'mind' or 'consciousness' above and beyond the *physical* activities of writing and speaking—these being the only ones which might literally (as opposed to metaphorically) be described as *thinking*. Now that surely sounds paradoxical. The paradoxicality fades away, however, when one realizes the *methodological role* of such claims; one might say that, in practice, what Wittgenstein is aiming at is making a crooked stick—the analysis of thinking / meaning in terms of inner processes—straight, by bending it to the opposite direction—that of the public, outward expression of thinking / meaning. His intention, then, is neither to *deny* that mental processes do exist, nor that they do go hand in hand with the use of linguistic 'signs'[130].

[130] That point is made clear in the sequence of the passage quoted above, where Wittgenstein introduces his 'rule of thumb':

> Now we are tempted to imagine this calculus [i.e., that of 'a system of language'], as it were, as a permanent background to every sentence which we say, and to think that, although the sentence as written on a piece of paper or spoken stands isolated, in the mental act of thinking the calculus is there—all in

The *prima facie* paradoxicality of the claims resulting from the employment of language-games is, in fact, a welcomed aspect of Wittgenstein's method, as he acknowledges in another telling passage:

> It is wrong to say that in philosophy we consider an ideal language as opposed to our ordinary one. For this makes it appear as though we thought we could improve on ordinary language. But ordinary language is all right. Whenever we make up 'ideal languages' it is not in order to replace our ordinary language by them; but just to remove some trouble caused in someone's mind by thinking that he has got hold of the exact use of a common word. That is also why our method is not merely to enumerate actual usages of words, but rather deliberately to invent new ones, some of them because of their absurd appearance. (BB 28)

7. The considerations made so far go some way toward explaining how one should understand the passage with which our analysis began, and which, as I said above, serves as a watershed in *Blue Book*'s argument; what they show is that there is a methodological concern behind Wittgenstein's decision to postpone talking about 'personal experience', calling the reader's attention instead to the 'signs' and 'real objects' employed in our linguistic practices. That said, we are still left with the task of understanding which would be the 'philosophical difficulties' that would 'threaten to break up all our commonsense notions' about 'the objects of our experience' (BB 44), were we to attack the question about the nature of 'personal experiences' directly, instead of going sideways, following Wittgenstein's guidance.

Wittgenstein begins to account for this latter point—as well as to direct our attention to the questions which will lead to the analysis of solipsism—in the following passage:

> When we think about the relation of the objects surrounding us to our personal experiences of them, we are sometimes tempted to say that these personal experiences are the material of which reality consists. How this temptation arises will become clearer later on.

> a lump. The mental act seems to perform in a miraculous way what could not be performed by any act of manipulating symbols. Now when the temptation to think that in some sense the whole calculus must be present at the same time vanishes, there is no more point in *postulating* the existence of a peculiar kind of mental act alongside of our expression. This, of course, doesn't mean that we have shown that peculiar acts of consciousness do not accompany the expressions of our thoughts! Only we no longer say that they *must* accompany them. (BB 42)

> When we think in this way we seem to lose our firm hold on the objects surrounding us. And instead we are left with a lot of separate personal experiences of different individuals. These personal experiences again seem vague and seem to be in constant flux. Our language seems not to have been made to describe them. We are tempted to think that in order to clear up such matters philosophically our ordinary language is too coarse, that we need a more subtle one. (BB 45)

In the passage above, Wittgenstein presents the path leading from an apparently innocent consideration of the relation between 'objects' and 'our personal experiences', to the temptation of revising (ordinary) language, replacing a 'subtler' one for it. Given that the account of the origins of that temptation is here postponed, one might (re)construct Wittgenstein's central claim in that passage as a conditional with (something like) an occult variable—stating that *if* we assume a certain picture (*x*) of the relation between the 'objects surrounding us' and 'our personal experiences'—one which implies that our experiences would be 'vague' and 'in constant flux'—*then* our analysis would end up leading to a kind of feeling of loss from the 'firm hold' on those objects. That feeling, I take it, might in turn originate a whole range of distinct attitudes, according to one's philosophical frame of mind. Thus, to stick to the extremities of that range, if one has an idealistic or solipsistic bend, the inclination would be to conclude that our personal experiences simply are the *only* reality there is; yet, for someone with realistic qualms, that conclusion would be obviously unacceptable, hence the inclination to take another route, seeking for (yet another) philosophical theory allowing to revert that situation, by providing some guarantee against metaphysical and / or epistemological separation from the "external" reality.

8. In the sequence of the text, Wittgenstein offers another description of the initial attitude triggered by that (still unidentified) picture—and also indicates the way out of it—in the following way:

> We seem to have made a discovery—which I could describe by saying that the ground on which we stood and which appeared to be firm and reliable was found to be boggy and unsafe.—That is, this happens when we philosophize; for as soon as we revert to the standpoint of common sense this *general* uncertainty disappears. (BB 45)

In order to clear up the 'queer situation' faced by the philosopher—as well as the way out of it—Wittgenstein offers what he describes as 'a kind parable' (BB 45), comparing it with the difficulty generated when 'popular scientists' present their discoveries by stating that, contrary to common sense beliefs, the floor on which we stand is not solid, since it consists only of tiny particles in a mostly empty space. Now that claim is very likely to generate perplexity—since, on the one hand, 'of course we know that the floor is solid, or that, if it isn't solid, this may be due to the wood being rotten but not to its being composed of electrons'; on the other hand, however, 'even if the particles were as big as grains of sand, and as close together as these are in a sandheap, the floor would not be solid if it were composed of them in the sense in which a sandheap is composed of grains' (ibid.). Now, according to Wittgenstein, that whole perplexity is 'based on a misunderstanding', created by a *mis*application of the picture of the 'thinly filled space'—which was, N.B., originally meant to 'explain the very phenomenon of solidity' (ibid.). The problem, one might say, arises from the conflation of two kinds of descriptions—two different 'language-games'—to talk about the floor, only in one of whose (i.e., ordinary language) clear rules are available to employ the concept of 'solidity'.

How are we to compare the situation just described with our philosopher's original puzzle about the nature of our personal experiences? Here is Wittgenstein's answer:

> As in this example the word "solidity" was used wrongly and it seemed that we had shown that nothing really was solid, just in this way, in stating our puzzles about the *general vagueness* of sense-experience, and about the flux of all phenomena, we are using the words "flux" and "vagueness" wrongly, in a typically metaphysical way, namely without an antithesis; whereas in their correct and everyday use vagueness is opposed to clearness, flux to stability, inaccuracy to accuracy, and *problem* to *solution*. The very word "problem", one might say, is misapplied when used for our philosophical troubles. These difficulties, as long as they are seen as problems, are tantalizing, and appear insoluble. (BB 45-46)

The main idea presented in the passage above is that, I take it, similarly to the difficulty created by the popular scientist in Wittgenstein's parable, the philosopher's puzzle about the nature of personal experiences arises from a conflation between two kinds of descriptions, or language-games, only in one of whose the words 'flux', 'vagueness', and so on, have clear rules of employment—in particular, clear *antitheses*. In both cases, the way out of those perplexities involves getting clear about the grammar of everyday statements, in order to notify and / or to avoid such kind of conflation.

9. Notice again the close parallel between the way Wittgenstein presents the situation in the passages quoted above and in the *Philosophical Remarks*: in both contexts he tries to show how some 'troubles' originate when one departs from the 'standpoint of common sense' to describe one's (supposed) "philosophical discoveries", and suggests that, in order to free oneself of such troubles, what one needs is a perspicuous view of the grammar of the expressions involved. In the remainder of the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein will point out a number of such troubles—all of which, according to him, arise naturally in the analysis of 'personal experience'—showing, in each case, that if we strictly follow through their implications, we will end up adopting one of the philosophical attitudes belonging to the range mentioned above (e.g., skepticism, realism, idealism, solipsism, and so on). Also, for each detected trouble, there will be an attempt to bring us (or, what comes to the same, the philosopher in each of us) back to the 'standpoint of common sense', thus (supposedly) dissolving the philosophical motivation to revise ordinary language, replacing a 'subtler' one for it—which is how realists and idealists and solipsists alike would interpret their respective proposals. In the next sections I shall present some of the main arguments aiming to accomplish such objectives, focusing on Wittgenstein's remarks on the latter (i.e., the solipsistic) philosophical temptation.

4.3 'I can't feel his pain': a first route to solipsism

10. Wittgenstein introduces his diagnose of the confusions leading to the thesis that 'personal experiences are the material of which reality consists' (BB 45) with a very characteristic enactment of a dialectical exchange with some "interlocutors". In order to facilitate the analysis, I will take the following passage as an entry point, enumerating its main dialectical moments:

> [i] There is a temptation for me to say that only my own experience is real: "I know that *I* see, hear, feel pains, etc., but not that anyone else does. I can't know this, because I am I and they are they."

> [ii] On the other hand I feel ashamed to say to anyone that my experience is the only real one; and I know that he will reply that he could say exactly the same thing about his experience. This seems to lead to a silly quibble. [iii] Also I am told: “If you pity someone for having pains, surely you must at least *believe* that he has pains”. [iv] But how can I even *believe* this? How can these words make sense to me? How could I even have come by the idea of another’s experience if there is no possibility of any evidence for it? (BB 46)

As I read the passage above, its dialectical structure can be reconstructed as follows: (i) Wittgenstein expresses a philosophical—in this case, solipsistic—temptation; (ii) he indicates the paradoxical situation which would arise if one—here: the philosopher with solipsistic inclinations—were to try to express his view to a non-philosophical interlocutor; (iii) he then presents a philosophical—in this case: realistic—reply (yet another temptation); finally, (iv) the solipsistic philosopher reverts to his original stance with renewed conviction—since the previous, realistic reply not even seems to *make sense* to him.

The next passage takes that exchange a little further, and adds a new character, or voice[131], to the exchange:

> [v] But wasn’t this a queer question to ask? *Can’t* I believe that someone else has pains? Is it not quite easy to believe this?—[vi] Is it an answer to say that things are as they appear to common sense?—[vii] Again, needless to say, we don’t feel these difficulties in ordinary life. Nor is it true to say that we feel them when we scrutinize our experiences by introspection, or make scientific investigations about them. But somehow, when we look at them in a certain way, our expression is liable to get into a tangle. It seems to us as though we had either the wrong pieces, or not enough of them, to put together our jigsaw puzzle. But they are all there, only all mixed up; and there is a further analogy between the jig-saw puzzle and our case: It’s no use trying to apply force in fitting pieces together. All we should do is to look at them *carefully* and arrange them. (BB 46)

Step (v) in this imaginary dialogue—amounting rather to a piece of internal monologue—might be described as a self-questioning moment in the solipsistic philosopher’s reflection—one which is clearly motivated, as in the case of step (ii) above, by an imaginary

[131] The characterization of Wittgenstein’s (mature) writing as a dialogue among different “voices”, to which I am here subscribing, was introduced it an early essay of Stanley Cavell’s: ‘The Availability of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy’ (first published in 1962, republished in MWM). In that essay, Cavell distinguishes two main “voices”—namely, (i) the voice of temptation, i.e., the one which tempts the reader to theorize or philosophize, and (ii) the voice of correctness, which aims to return the reader to ordinary life—in particular, to ordinary linguistic practices. In a latter essay—‘Notes and afterthoughts on the opening of Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*’ (1996)—Cavell re-dubs the pair of voices, calling them ‘the voices of melancholy and merriment, or of metaphysics and the ordinary’ (p. 270). In my own reading, as it might be clear by now, I tend to distinguish among different inflections (intonations?) of those two voices—after all, one might be tempted by a number of different philosophical views, and accordingly might need to be ‘corrected’, i.e., brought back to ordinary life, by different means.

confrontation with common sense beliefs, and is precisely *not* motivated by the realistic philosopher’s reply (iii). Step (vi)—coming after a pause for reflection, marked by the use of the long dash—seems to be a question directly addressed to the reader, which is not exactly answered afterwards (more on this in a moment). Then finally—after another pause—we get to step (vii), whose originating voice does not seem to be any of the former ones—as if it came from above or beyond the dispute.

(To say that the latter voice would be Wittgenstein’s own—or more characteristic—would not exactly be wrong but, I take it, at best empty, and at worst biased; after all, why should we suppose that the former voices are not, or not as characteristically, Wittgenstein’s? And if they are not, what is the point of the identification? That said, I shall continue using the name ‘Wittgenstein’ to refer simply to the author of the book we are reading—someone who is all and none of the “interlocutors” he creates[132].)

11. Now, what the latter “voice” in the passage prescribes—in order to get us out of the trouble faced by the solipsistic philosopher—is grammatical (re)arrangement. Wittgenstein’s first attempt at (re)arrangement in this context involves precisely distinguishing two kinds of propositions, or descriptions, namely: (a) the ones refering to ‘facts in the material world’—in particular, ‘physical objects’ (BB 46)—and (b) the ones ‘describing personal experiences’—which would be ‘independent of both physical and physiological facts’ (BB 47). The point of presenting such a distinction is to remind us that, provided that we keep employing each of the descriptions in its normal, everyday contexts—including, N.B., introspection and scientific investigations—no (special) difficulty would arise; the trouble only shows up in the peculiar context of *philosophical* investigation about the relation between the objects referred by propositions of group (a), and the psychological experiences referred by those of group (b).

The first thing to notice here is that, precisely because of the peculiarity of the context in which that philosophical trouble arises, it is of no use, in trying to (dis)solve it, to offer a

[132] Interestingly, on Cavell’s reading (see preceding footnote), none of the “voices” in Wittgenstein’s writings is to be taken as expressing his own real or final views; instead, Cavell construes them as expressing opposing trains of argument, which form part of a larger dialectical exchange in which they ultimately (and hopefully) cancel each other out. On this reading, the aim of Wittgenstein’s enacted dialogues is not to lead the reader to accept any particular philosophical view, but rather to help us overcome the temptations originally leading us to seek—even crave—for them.

list of ‘common sense beliefs’; from the perspective of the puzzled philosopher, the very fact that we should actually hold such beliefs is just part of the (supposed) problem, not its solution.

In fact, Wittgenstein’s opinion about the philosopher’s doubt—about, i.e., the very *sense* of ascribing ‘personal experiences’ (such as pains) to other people—is even more radical: it is not only that recounting common sense beliefs would not (dis)solve it, but neither would it be (dis)solved by the (dogmatic) replies coming from a ‘realist’ or ‘common sense philosopher’—i.e., the one who interprets her/his own stance as being that of a philosophical defender of the beliefs which ‘the common sense man’ (supposedly) assumes in an unquestioned and naive manner, but who should not be confused with the latter, who, according to Wittgenstein, ‘is as far from realism as from idealism’ (BB 48). For such a philosopher, Wittgenstein claims, ‘surely there is no difficulty in the idea of supposing, thinking, imagining that someone else has what I have’—e.g., a toothache (ibid.). But, he continues, ‘the trouble with the realist is always that he does not solve but skip the difficulties which his adversaries see, though they too don’t succeed in solving them’ (ibid.). In fact, the ‘realist answer, for us, just bring out the difficulty’ (BB 49).

Which difficulty? There is, according to Wittgenstein, a ‘troublesome feature in our grammar which the realist does not notice’, but the solipsist does (ibid.). Such is the difference between (at least) two uses of propositions of the form ‘A has x’, which Wittgenstein illustrates as follows:

> “A has a gold tooth” means that the tooth is in A’s mouth. This may account for the fact that I am not able to see it. Now the case of his toothache, of which I say that I am not able to feel it because it is in his mouth, is not analogous to the case of the gold tooth. It is the apparent analogy, and again the lack of analogy, between these cases which causes our trouble. (BB 49)

The lack of analogy between the sentences ‘A has a gold tooth’ and ‘A has a toothache’ shows itself more clearly when we compare them with two different, yet related sentences, *viz.*: (i) ‘We can’t have (haven’t as a rule) pains in another person’s tooth’ and (ii) ‘I can’t feel his pain’ (BB 49). The last sentence, Wittgenstein has it, is meant to express a *metaphysical* impossibility, which should not be confused with the (merely) *empirical* impossibility expressed by the first one, in which ‘the word “can’t” is used in the same way as in the proposition “An iron nail can’t scratch glass” ’ (ibid.). In other words, (i)

describes only a (contingent) fact about the way our pains are experienced, and it is conceivable that such a description—similarly to the empirical law describing scratches in the glass—could be revised if (empirical) conditions changed; as Wittgenstein himself puts: ‘We could write this in the form “experience teaches that an iron nail *doesn’t* scratch glass”, thus doing away with the “can’t” ’ (ibid.). And in fact, Wittgenstein strategy in the sequence will be exactly to argue that we can easily imagine some such changes, so that at the end of the process, the opposite possibility—having pains in another people’s tooth (or body)—shows itself as intelligible as the one from which we started.

12. To accomplish such results, Wittgenstein presents a finely detailed analysis of the criteria for pain location (see BB 49-57), which I shall not reconstruct here. As I read it, the main contention of that analysis is the following: *generally*, when one has a pain in some part of one’s body, there is a coincidence or correlation among certain sensory experiences —i.e., visual, tactile, kinaesthetic, audible, and so on. So, for example, when a sharp object hurts my arm, I can (simultaneously) *see* my arm being pricked, *feel* the prick, *determine* (by means of kinaesthetic awareness) which is the position of my pricked arm, and so on. However, in some special cases those experiences do not coincide—the most radical case perhaps being that of so called ‘phantom pains’, in which one can feel (e.g.) pain in one’s (phantom) leg, thus having all the tactile and kinaesthetic experiences normally associated with that feeling, but without the corresponding visual data. What cases like these show is that our concept of ‘pain’ (or, to stick to Wittgenstein’s specific example, ‘toothache’) is sufficiently complex and indeterminate so that we can imagine, with no great difficulties, extended uses, or projections. One of those projections, whose indication will be useful for our subsequent analysis, would be that of:

> a person having the kinaesthetic sensation of moving his hand, and the tactual sensation, in his fingers and face, of his fingers moving over his face, whereas his kinaesthetic and visual sensations should have to be described as those of his fingers moving over his knee. If we had a sensation of toothache plus certain tactual and kinaesthetic sensations usually characteristic of touching the painful tooth and neighbouring parts of our face, and if these sensations were accompanied by seeing my hand touch, and move about on, the edge of my table, we should feel doubtful whether to call this experience an experience of toothache in the table or not. If, on the other hand, the tactual and kinaesthetic sensations described were correlated to the visual experience of seeing my hand touch a tooth and other parts of the face of another person, there is no doubt that I would call this experience “toothache in another person’s tooth”. (BB 52-53)

One might say that, in the passage above, the concept of 'toothache' is put into a "stress test", where extended uses are presented and evaluated that would accommodate a set of possible changes in the empirical conditions normally associated with that concept. The suggestion is that, given the appropriate changes, we would be rather inclined to accept some (small) extensions—including the phenomenon of 'toothache in another person's tooth'—but rather un-inclined to accept some (big) others—including 'toothache in the table's edge'[133].

Now the main point of the whole exercise, we shall recall, is to indicate the *empirical* status of the proposition according to which 'We can't have [...] pains in another person's tooth', thus allowing us to better understand the solipsist's motivation to emphasize—against his realist interlocutor—the special, i.e., *metaphysical* status of the impossibility described by proposition that 'I can't feel *another person's* pain'—a proposition which (apparently) no possible or imaginable situation would make one feel inclined to revise. That is precisely what Wittgenstein emphasizes by reminding us that the solipsist could say: 'I may have toothache in another man's tooth, but not *his* toothache' (BB 53). The conclusion Wittgenstein extracts from his analysis is that, after all, 'the propositions "A has a gold tooth" and "A has toothache" are not used analogously. They differ in their grammar where at first sight they might not seem to differ' (ibid.)

13. Notice that the conclusion above—the achievement of a grammatical (re)arrangement—is presented in direct opposition to the 'commonsense philosopher's' assumptions, for whom there seemed to be no special difference between those propositions. Hence, up to this point in the dialogue, the solipsist philosopher seems to be winning the dispute. Yet, this is just the begining of the path which will eventually lead to some radical implications of the solipsistic position—to recall the metaphor presented at the end of chapter 3, we are just starting to be 'dragged to the mire'. The real trouble has to do with the revisionary attitude that the solipsist himself is inclined to take concerning the kind of 'metaphysical impossibility' he has just identified. Given that, in complete agreement with ordinary language, he perceives that there is a profound difference in the status of the propositions mentioned above, and given that their (superficial) grammatical form sometimes conceal

[133] I shall say more about our inclinations to accept or deny new conceptual projections in chapter 5.

that difference—leading to the kind of innocuous and pointless claims made by the ‘commonsense philosopher’—the solipsist would like to propose a ‘new notation’, capable of presenting in its very *form* the difference of *content* between those propositions—so that, for example, it would only *make sense* to say of *my* experience that it is *real*.

The ultimate motivation for proposing that (or any other) ‘new notation’ is, according to Wittgenstein, a sort of ‘craving of the metaphysician which our ordinary language does not fulfil’ (BB 55). He describes that craving in the following terms:

> Our ordinary language, which of all possible notations is the one which pervades all our life, holds our mind rigidly in one position, as it were, and in this position sometimes it feels cramped, having a desire for other positions as well. Thus we sometimes wish for a notation which stresses a difference more strongly, makes it more obvious, than ordinary language does, or one which in a particular case uses more closely similar forms of expression than our ordinary language. Our mental cramp is loosened when we are shown the notations which fulfil these needs. These needs can be of the greatest variety. (BB 59)

Now, however multiple the philosophical motivations may be to tempt one to embrace a ‘solipsistic notation’—one which would express more conspicuously than ordinary language does the differences which the solipsist deems relevant—it is important not to confuse that methodological proposal with a disagreement about the very *facts* being described by each notation. As Wittgenstein clarifies:

> Now the man whom we call a solipsist and who says that only his own experiences are real, does not thereby disagree with us about any practical question of fact, he does not say that we are simulating when we complain of pains, he pities us as much as anyone else, and at the same time he wishes to restrict the use of the epithet “real” to what we should call his experiences; and perhaps he doesn’t want to call our experiences “experiences” at all (again without disagreeing with us about any question of fact). For he would say that it was *inconceivable* that experiences other than his own were real. He ought therefore to use a notation in which such a phrase as “A has real toothache” (where A is not he) is meaningless, a notation whose rules exclude this phrase as the rules of chess exclude a pawn’s making a knight’s move. (BB 59)

But, if that is right, then what exactly is the problem of the solipsist’s proposal? ‘And why shouldn’t we grant him this notation?’, Wittgenstein asks himself (ibid.). The problem begins to show up when we realize that the solipsist—or the revisionist philosopher in general—‘is not aware that he is objecting to a convention’ (BB 57). Wittgenstein clarifies that claim by means of a new metaphor, comparing the solipsist’s attitude with that of a

person who ‘sees a way of dividing the country different from the one used on the ordinary map’:

> He feels tempted, say, to use the name “Devonshire” not for the county with its conventional boundary, but for a region differently bounded. He could express this by saying: “Isn’t it absurd to make *this* a county, to draw the boundaries *here*?” But what he says is: “The *real* Devonshire is this”. We could answer: “What you want is only a new notation, and by a new notation no facts of geography are changed”. It is true, however, that we may be irresistibly attracted or repelled by a notation. (BB 57)

Now, as a new cartographic notation does not alter geographical facts, so a new notation to describe personal experiences (such as pains) does not alter any facts concerning those experiences. Hence, the disagreement between the solipsist and the ordinary language speaker ‘is not founded on a more subtle knowledge of fact’ (BB 59).

14. What is it, then, the true motivation for the solipsist’s (or the philosopher’s in general) proposals to revise certain ordinary forms of expression? This is not a simple question to answer. There is an enormous variety of apparent analogies and disanalogies, of pictures and associations underlying our linguistic practices, and many of them can mislead us—or ‘the philosopher’—in the task of getting clear about a determined region of ordinary language. That makes the investigation of the sources of philosophical confusion, in a great measure, a matter of creativity (to imagine, i.e., recognizable ways in which one might feel ‘irresistibly attracted or repelled by a notation’), together with a careful comparison with our ordinary practices (in order to evaluate the point of those ‘new notations’, by putting them under “stress tests”, so to speak). Actually, from this point until the end of the book, Wittgenstein will do virtually nothing besides presenting—and trying to block—different routes which may lead one to accept some solipsistic conclusions. But there is no simple recipe for that procedure, no predetermined limit for its ending, and nothing can guarantee *a priori* that it has gone far enough, resulting in a definitive cure for the solipsist’s confusions.

Of course Wittgenstein is well aware of that, as the following passage testifies:

> When we say that by our method we try to counteract the misleading effect of certain analogies, it is important that you should understand that the idea of an

> analogy being misleading is nothing sharply defined. No sharp boundary can be drawn round the cases in which we should say that a man was misled by an analogy. The use of expressions constructed on analogical patterns stresses analogies between cases often far apart. And by doing this these expressions may be extremely useful. It is, in most cases, impossible to show an exact point where an analogy begins to mislead us. Every particular notation stresses some particular point of view. [...] The cases in which particularly we wish to say that someone is misled by a form of expression are those in which we would say: "he wouldn't talk as he does if he were aware of this difference in the grammar of such-and-such words, or if he were aware of this other possibility of expression" and so on. (BB 28)

Read against the backdrop of the preceding analysis, the methodological lesson presented in the passage above might be formulated somewhat like this: let us take note of grammatical differences; if we do that well, our remaining problems—including our inclination to misuse analogies, to misapply pictures, and to revise ordinary language—will take care of themselves.

In another context, Wittgenstein himself employs an interesting analogy in order to describe his procedure, which might shed some light upon our present, methodological issue:

> Language sets everyone the same traps; it is an immense network of easily accessible wrong turnings. And so we watch one man after another walking down the same paths and we know in advance where he will branch off, where walk straight on without noticing the side turning, etc., etc. What I have to do then is erect signposts at all the junctions where there are wrong turnings so as to help people past the danger points. (CV 18)

In what follows I shall present some of the 'signposts' erected by Wittgenstein in order to prevent the 'wrong turnings' responsible for leading the solipsist to feel dissatisfied with ordinary language—and, consequently, to feel inclined to revise it, proposing notations capable of satisfying his 'metaphysical cravings'.

4.4 When language goes on holiday: some further routes to solipsism

15. Wittgenstein indicates further possible sources for the solipsist's confusions by means of his characteristic dialectical strategy, presenting, alternately, some formulations of the solipsist's main thesis, followed by a diagnosis of their grammatical flaws—in particular, the incoherences involved in the simultaneous *presupposition* and *repudiation* of certain conditions for the employment of concepts which are central to each formulation. The conclusion, invariably, is not only that the solipsist misapplies some pictures and analogies —a result of his lack of attention to important grammatical differences—but also, and more important, that he is simply incapable of expressing his position with any sense, not being able to supply clear rules for the employment of the signs he wants to use.

A first possible source of confusion leading to the solipsist's proposal of a new notation—in which it would not make sense to say of other people that they feel pains or possess experiences of any kind—is the apparent analogy between not knowing what another person *feels* or *thinks* and not knowing what another person *sees*:

> The phrase "only I really see" is closely connected with the idea expressed in the assertion "we never know what the other man really sees when he looks at a thing" or this, "we can never know whether he calls the same thing 'blue' which we call 'blue' ". In fact we might argue: "I can never know what he sees or that he sees at all, for all I have is signs of various sorts which he gives me; therefore it is an unnecessary hypothesis altogether to say that he sees; what seeing is I only know from seeing myself; I have only learnt the word 'seeing' to mean what *I* do". (BB 60)

According to Wittgenstein, what might incline one to argue according to those lines—hence, to adopt a skeptical position relative to the possibility of knowing 'other minds'—is a perverted picture of the use of the concept of vision, as well as the concept of what counts as an *object* of vision:

> The difficulty which we express by saying "I can't know what he sees when he (truthfully) says that he sees a blue patch" arises from the idea that "knowing what he sees" means: "seeing that which he also sees"; not, however, in the sense in which we do so when we both have the same object before our eyes: but in the sense in which the object seen would be an object, say, in his head, or in him. The idea is that the same object may be before his eyes and mine, but that I can't stick my head into his (or my mind into his, which comes to the same) so that the *real* and *immediate* object of his vision becomes the real and immediate object of my vision too. (BB 61)

In the passage above Wittgenstein calls our attention to a picture of the perceptual relation which seems to underlie the solipsist's position—namely, that of an immediate contact

between the subject and some kind of private entity (e.g., a *sense-datum*), which would be '*before his mind's eye*' (ibid.). Given that picture, the conclusion becomes trivial that I cannot see what other people see—or even that only I can *really* see; after all, if the only evidence I have concerning what happens *within* the other person is her *outward* behaviour, then the claim that she also sees becomes at best an *inference,* and, as such, a result of a fallible process[134]. The way out of that confusion, Wittgenstein suggests in the sequence, is to 'examine the grammatical difference between the statements "I don't know what he sees" and "I don't know what he looks at", as they are actually used in our language' (ibid). Wittgenstein himself does not elaborate that suggestion further in the text, but, given the clues he has left, this is not a difficult task.

In our ordinary language we have relatively clear criteria to determine what a person is *looking at*. I suppose one such criterion might be: finding out the region toward which her eyes are directed; if that is right, then a good reason for saying that we do not know what (or where) a person is looking at might be: being unable to observe her eye's direction—because it is too dark, she is giving her back to us, she is too far away, and so on. However, even if the conditions to know what a person is *looking at* are satisfied, sometimes we might still be unable to determine what she is *seeing*. Paradigmatic cases would be those of a subject enjoying a work of art which seems completely meaningless to us (or *vice-versa*), or that of a subject looking to a puzzle-picture (such as the duck-rabbit), saying that she can see two figures (obviously, not at the same time), while we can see only one—say, the duck; in that case, perhaps the subject could challenge us by saying 'now I am seeing another animal, not the duck', and we would remain completely at loss as to which animal that can be. Yet another, simpler case to illustrate the difference between *looking* and *seeing* is that of observing a subject who *looks* steadily at some point in order to reflect, or to recollect something, but who is not *seeing* anything at that moment.

The problem with Wittgenstein's solipsist is that he conflates the two cases presented above: what he says is that one cannot *see* what the other person sees; however, what motivates him in saying that is the picture of a private object presented 'before his mind's eye'. Given that picture, he might (easily enough) imagine analogous conditions to those in which, in ordinary language, we would say that we cannot know what a subject is *looking at*—after all, 'I can't stick my head into his (or my mind into his, which comes to the

[134] Compare *PI*, p. 85, § 293.

same)' (BB 61) in order to determine where his 'mind's eye' is directed at. But, in so proceeding, the solipsist tacitly employs the relevant concepts—in the present case, those of 'seeing' and 'looking'—maintaining some of the connexions and contrasts they have in ordinary language, while at the same time making it impossible to satisfy those conditions in his 'new notation'. In this way, one ends up with a notation which is not just completely arbitrary—which in itself would be no problem at all—but which has no clear rules for the employment of its signs. Now, if one is aware of the picture underlying the solipsist's claims, as well as the conditions for employing the concepts of 'seeing' and 'looking' in ordinary language, one can realize that (at least so far) no (grammatical) justification has been offered to the (revisionist) claim that we do not (or cannot) know what a subject sees *in normal circumstances*—i.e., circumstances in which we are able to determine that he is *looking at* the same object / place as we are.

16. Having pointed out that first possible source for the solipsist's confusion, Wittgenstein (dialectically) presents a reformulation of the central thesis of that position, aiming at immunizing it from the criticism previously sketched: 'Sometimes the most satisfying expression of our solipsism seems to be this: "When anything is seen (really *seen*), it is always I who see it" ' (BB 61). The reason for taking such a reformulation as an attempt to circumvent the precedent criticism is that now the solipsist seems to be granting the distinction between *looking* and *seeing*—concepts which he seemed to be conflating before—and giving up the picture of the 'mind's eye', arguing instead that the looking / seeing distinction *itself* depends on an essentially private and subjective experience. His contention seems to be this: 'True, we can know that we are *looking at* the same object as another person, yet the very fact that sometimes we cannot be sure that we are *seeing* the same as she already indicates the existence of an experience which is accessible only to the person who has it.'

Wittgenstein's line of criticism now turns to the conditions for the use of the pronoun 'I' in the formulation of the solipsist's thesis: 'What should strike us about this expression is the phrase "always I". Always *who*?—For, queer enough, I don't mean: "always L. W." ' (BB 61). In reply to that question, Wittgenstein reminds us that our use of the phrase 'the same person', as well as our use of proper names, are 'based on the fact that many characteristics

which we use as the criteria for identity coincide in the vast majority of cases' (BB 61). Amongst such characteristics figures, e.g., physical appearance, behaviour and memories. It is because these and other *facts* concerning people are relatively persistent that we use names to refer to them. In order to mark this point, Wittgenstein suggests another conceptual "stress test", consisting in a set of three language-games presenting 'different "geometries" we would be inclined to use if facts were different' (BB 61). Since I believe the cases speak for themselves, I shall quote them at length, without making further comments:

> [Case 1:] Imagine, e.g., that all human bodies which exist looked alike, that on the other hand, different sets of [psychological] characteristics seemed, as it were, to change their habitation among these bodies. [...] Under such circumstances, although it would be possible to give the bodies names, we should perhaps be as little inclined to do so as we are to give names to the chairs of our dining-room set. On the other hand, it might be useful to give names to the sets of characteristics, and the use of these names would now *roughly* correspond to the personal names in our present language.[135]

> [Case 2:] Or imagine that it were usual for human beings to have two characters, in this way: People's shape, size and characteristics of behaviour periodically undergo a complete change. It is the usual thing for a man to have two such states, and he lapses suddenly from one into the other. It is very likely that in such a society we should be inclined to christen every man with two names, and perhaps to talk of the pair of persons in his body. Now were Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde two persons or were they the same person who merely changed? We can say whichever we like. We are not forced to talk of a double personality.

> [Case 3:] [...] Imagine a man whose memories on the even days of his life comprise the events of all these days, skipping entirely what happened on the odd days. On the other hand, he remembers on an odd day what happened on previous odd days, but his memory then skips the even days without a feeling of discontinuity. If we like we can also assume that he has alternating appearances and characteristics on odd and even days. Are we bound to say that here two persons are inhabiting the same body? That is, is it right to say that there are, and wrong to say that there aren't, or vice versa? [Conclusion:] Neither. For the *ordinary* use of the word "person" is what one might call a composite use suitable under the ordinary circumstances. If I assume, as I do, that these circumstances are changed, the application of the term "person" or "personality" has thereby changed; and if I wish to preserve this term and give it a use analogous to its former use, I am at liberty to choose between many uses, that is,

[135] The Clone Army portrayed in the series *Star Wars*—esp. in the episodes *Attack of the Clones* (2002), *Revenge of the Sith* (2005), and *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* (2008)—supplies an interesting further case for comparison, which is still more akin to that of the 'chairs of our dining-room set': since there is no difference in physical or psychological characteristics among the clones, there is no need to use proper names for distinguishing among them—their commanders live well simply calling them 'clones', 'soldiers', or whatever. That might bring home the point, explicitly made by Wittgenstein in some contexts, that our concepts—including that of personal identity—are expressions of our interests—hence, they can be simply dropped out if those interests suitably change.

> between many different kinds of analogy. One might say in such a case that the term "personality" hasn't got one legitimate heir only. (BB 61-62)

The main purpose of assembling the grammatical reminders above—about different uses of the concept of personal identity—is to indicate a problem with the solipsist's thesis, in that none of the characteristics listed so far—constancy in physical appearance, behaviour or memories—seems to be relevant to determine the kind of identity envisaged when he tries to state his position by saying that 'When anything is seen (really *seen*), it is always I who see it'—after all, I do not always see parts of my body when I see something else, and it does not matter for determining the content of my visual experience if my memories and / or behaviour are the same as before. In fact, the pronoun 'I' seems completely superfluous and even alien to that formulation.

17. Given that result, if the solipsist still wants to defend his position, he has to find a better suited expression for his main thesis. Wittgenstein offers a further candidate in the following passage:

> When I think about it a little longer I see that what I wished to say was: "Always when anything is seen, something is seen". I.e., that of which I said it continued during all the experiences of seeing was not any particular entity "I", but the experience of seeing itself. (BB 63)

The passage above presents the motivation which may lead the solipsist to (ultimately) exclude 'the I', or the subject of experience, completely from consideration, focusing instead on contents of the experience itself—a move which is reminiscent of David Hume's (so-called) 'bundle theory of the self'. The reasoning behind that reformulation seems to be as follows: first, given the grammatical (or, if you will, metaphysical) constraints imposed by the solipsist in order to express the peculiarity of first person experience, there is no possible way of doing that while satisfying the (ordinary) conditions for personal identity; hence, either one gives up the initial task, or the 'I' has to be dropped; now, given the person he is, our solipsist would be rather inclined to choose the latter option; and yet, he still needs to present some element or other which would be shared by all cases of visual experience—since otherwise there would be no point in treating them homogeneously as cases of that kind of peculiar first person experience he

wants to express; but all that remains to play that role now is the experience itself—to employ Peter Hacker's apt (and economic) Schopenhauerian formulation: 'What is unique is experience; the world is idea' (1986, p. 241).

The problem with that position—as Hume himself probably realized[136]—is that it entails a kind of 'inversion of priorities' relative to our actual use of language, generating a conception which is ultimately unsustainable—after all, the region of our ordinary language which is responsible for the talk about 'personal experiences' seems to be so structured that the identity of those experiences depends on the identity of the subjects who 'have' them[137]; now, if the subject is to be dropped, what could the alternative criterion for that identity be?

18. Once more, the solipsist is depicted as someone who borrows some concepts from their native home—i.e., ordinary language—smuggling (some of) its conditions of use, yet ultimately neglecting them—even making them impossible to satisfy—thus ending up unable to provide any clear sense to the signs he employs in order to (try to) express his position. Similarly to what happened in the texts we have been analysing in the former chapters—I mean, of course, the *Tractatus* and the *Remarks*—the main result of Wittgenstein's enacted exchange with a solipsist interlocutor is to remove a number of *prima facie* motivations for the latter's proposal of 'new notations'. One upon another, the attempts at justifying his stance were examined, and shown to be ultimately flawed[138]. Yet, by reaching this conclusion, I find it important to emphasize once more that there is no problem at all—at least in principle—with the mere attempt to offer such alternative notations. Wittgenstein himself emphasizes that point recurrently in the text, and the following passage makes a good representative case:

> There is [...] no objection to adopting a symbolism in which [e.g.] a certain person always or temporarily holds an exceptional place. And therefore, if I utter the sentence "Only I really see", it is conceivable that my fellow creatures thereupon will arrange their notation so as to fall in with me by saying "so-and-so is really seen" instead of "L. W. sees so-and-so", etc., etc. What, however, is

[136] See *Treatise of Human Nature,* Appendix i.

[137] That is precisely the point of Peter Strawson's argument in chapter 3 of *Individuals* (see chapter 1).

[138] A couple of further such attempts receive Wittgenstein's attention in the sequence of the text (see BB 66 ss.), yet I shall left them unanalysed, hoping that the preceding reconstruction is representative enough for understanding his characteristic methodology in dealing with those cases.

> wrong, is to think that I can *justify* this choice of notation. When I said, from my heart, that only I see, I was also inclined to say that by "I" I didn't really mean L. W. [...]. I could almost say that by "I" I mean something which just now inhabits L. W., something which the others can't see. (I meant my mind, but could only point to it via my body.) There is nothing wrong in suggesting that the others should give me an exceptional place in their notation; but the justification which I wish to give for it: that this body is now the seat of that which really lives—is senseless. For admittedly this is not to state anything which in the ordinary sense is a matter of experience. (And don't think that it is an experiential proposition which only I can know because only I am in the position to have the particular experience.) (BB 66)

Besides recalling that there is no *a priori* problem involved in the proposal of new notations, the passage above also presents the general picture which seems to underlie all the (solipsistic) manoeuvres analysed up to this point—that of a special object, the 'mind', as being the real, or ultimate referent of the first person pronoun. In Wittgenstein's own words: 'the idea that the real I lives in my body is connected with the peculiar grammar of the word "I", and the misunderstandings this grammar is liable to give rise to' (ibid.). In order to indicate such misunderstandings he proceeds to a detailed analysis of the grammar of the first person pronoun. That will be the object of the next section.

4.5 ' "I" does nor refer': the peculiar grammar of the first person

19. The first step in Wittgenstein's new attempt at grammatical (re)arrangement is calling attention to a distinction which became well known—in fact, I shall suggest, perhaps a little *too* well known—in secondary literature, namely, that between two uses of the word 'I'. The distinction is introduced in the following passage:

> There are two different cases in the use of the word "I" (or "my") which I might call "the use as object" and "the use as subject". Examples of the first kind of use are these: "My arm is broken", "I have grown six inches", "I have a bump on my forehead", "The wind blows my hair about". Examples of the second kind are: "*I* see so-and-so", "*I* hear so-and-so", "*I* try to lift my arm", "*I* think it will rain", "*I* have toothache". One can point to the difference between these two categories by saying: The cases of the first category involve the recognition of a particular person, and there is in these cases the possibility of an error, or as I should rather put it: The possibility of an error has been provided for. [...] It is possible that, say in an accident, I should feel a pain in my arm, see a broken arm at my side, and think it is mine, when really it is my neighbour's. [...] On the other hand,

> there is no question of recognizing a person when I say I have toothache. To ask “are *you* sure that it’s you who have pains?” would be nonsensical. Now, when in this case no error is possible, it is because the move which we might be inclined to think of as an error, a ‘bad move’, is no move of the game at all. (BB 66-67)

For obvious reasons, it is the last use of the word ‘I’—its ‘use as subject’—which will be the main focus of Wittgenstein’s analysis in the remainder of the book. In pursuing that analysis, he presents four main claims, as follows:

1. ‘To say “I have pain” is no more a statement *about* a particular person than moaning is’ (BB 67);

2. ‘The word “I” does not mean the same as “L.W.”, even if I am L.W’ (BB 67);

3. ‘[The word “I” does not] mean the same as the expression “the person who is now speaking”’ (BB 67);

4. ‘In [propositions such as] “I have pain”, “I” is not a demonstrative pronoun’ (BB 68).

The four claims above, as well as the arguments supporting each of them, are intimately connected in the text. Note, however, that in none of them Wittgenstein offers a *positive* characterization of the use of first person pronoun, limiting himself instead to describe analogies and disanalogies between *some uses* of that pronoun and the uses of other words in our language, therefore helping us to achieve a perspicuous view of the grammar of those words in some more or less interconnected language-games. The central aim of that process is, once again, to indicate *grammatical differences*, which in turn can be used to make conspicuous the confusions involved in the characterizations offered by his interlocutor, thus hopefully helping to set him free of certain pictures which are commonly assumed in the philosophical treatment of first person pronoun. (Note that, according to this reading, Wittgenstein’s intended results are rather humble; now one shall be careful not to leap too quickly from those (essentially negative) results to the (rather substantial) conclusion that he would be offering an “alternative account”, or a “definition” of *the* use of ‘I’—say, a non-referential one. I shall return to the point of this warning below.) In order to achieve that aim, Wittgenstein’s analysis will be again structured dialectically, alternately presenting some theses about the use of the pronoun ‘I’ that naturally (if tacitly)

suggest themselves when we reflect about the grammar of the statements in which it is employed, and diagnosing the problems involved in each of those theses.

20. In order to justify claim (1)—‘To say “I have pain” is no more a statement *about* a particular person than moaning is’—Wittgenstein indicates some grammatical differences between propositions ascribing pains in first and third person, as they are normally employed in ordinary language. According to Wittgenstein, ‘[t]he difference between the propositions “I have pain” and “he has pain” is not that of “L. W. has pain” and “Smith has pain”. Rather, it corresponds to the difference between moaning and saying that someone moans (BB 68). Some light can be shed upon the latter claim by reminding ourselves of the role of language-games in Wittgenstein analysis (see §4 above)—in particular, that when we look at simpler or more primitive forms of language

> the mental mist which seems to enshroud our ordinary use of language disappears. We see activities, reactions, which are clear-cut and transparent. On the other hand we recognize in these simple processes forms of language not separated by a break from our more complicated ones. We see that we can build up the complicated forms from the primitive ones by gradually adding new forms. (BB 17)

Now, by indicating the proximity between propositions expressing pain in first person and instinctive behaviours of pain—such as moaning—Wittgenstein is precisely moving along the lines presented in the passage above, indicating a ‘primitive form of language’ from which we can ‘build up’ our own, more complicated vocabulary for the expression of pains[139]. In the ‘primitive’ level of reactive behaviour, it is manifest that the expression of pains does not involve recognizing a person as its condition. The person moaning in pain is

[139] One has to be careful not to take that too literally—as if Wittgenstein was proposing (or assuming) a “genetic” or “evolutionary” account of the development of human language. As a matter of empirical or scientific fact, it seems indeed very likely that such an account would prove true; yet, as I read Wittgenstein, that would be simply beside his (methodological) point—which is defending the philosophical relevance of paying attention to natural or instinctive human reactions, as they show up in real *or* invented language-games, in order to get clear about our own, actually more complex and sophisticated linguistic practices; those reactions, to borrow from Joachim Schulte’s apt formulation, are ‘the point of intersection of acting and speaking, of conduct and use of language’ (1993, p. 18). One might say: to indicate such an intersection is to go as deep as philosophical analysis can get—only that would be misleading, since it suggests a picture of “layers” to be “dug”; what it means is that it would be pointless, from the perspective of someone seeking grammatical elucidation, to try to “get beyond” that point by finding some (empirical) justification(s) for our language-games; as Wittgenstein reminds us in *On Certainty*, ‘[a] language-game [...] is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). / It is there—like our life’ (OC §559). (See also RPP I, §916 and RPP II, §453—“The primitive language game we originally learned needs no justification’.)

(of course!) not stating something *about* herself—she is not *describing* her own state, in the sense in which another person could do it. Again, in normal conditions, she obviously do not need to observe her own *behaviour*, or to make any kind *inference*, or to gather any kind of *evidence* in order to moan—she simply reacts, in an instinctive and natural way, to whatever has hurt her. By the same token—and given that the more complicated forms of language that we use to express pains can be recognized as belonging to the same “family” to which that kind of instinctive behaviour belongs, in that they are ‘not separated by a break’—the conclusion seems to be that, *even in the case of ordinary language* (of our *actual* language-games), expressions of pain in first person are not statements *about* a person; they belong to different (grammatical) shelves.

Now, it is precisely because of that grammatical peculiarity that the analysis of the ‘use as subject’ of first person pronoun (in expressive sentences) becomes relevant in the debate with the solipsist. Given that such use does without the satisfaction of any conditions for the use of names, or for the recognition of a person as being such-and-such[140], the solipsist —and not only him—may feel inclined to imagine a set of somewhat analogous conditions, e.g., some kind of introspective access to the content of personal experiences, such as pains. Wittgenstein presents that point as follows:

> We feel then that in the cases in which “I” is used as subject, we don’t use it because we recognize a particular person by his bodily characteristics; and this creates the illusion that we use this word to refer to something bodiless, which, however, has its seat in our body. In fact *this* seems to be the real ego, the one of which it was said, “Cogito, ergo sum”. (BB 69)

Against the illusion presented above, Wittgenstein attempts—by inventing a more primitive form of expressive language-game, in which individuals simply *react* to pains with natural and instinctive behaviour—to dissipate the ‘mental mist’ surrounding the use of our *actual* expressive language-games, presenting us ‘activities, reactions, which are clear-cut and transparent’, thus diverting our (the solipsist’s) attention from the picture of ‘internal processes’[141].

[140] See above, §15.

[141] Of course, one shall not expect that such a procedure would at once eliminate the appeal of the picture under analysis—after all, people can be tempted to apply it even in the case of pain moans emited by non-human animals (which, N.B., have been traditionally used as paradigmatic examples of creatures guided by instinctive behaviour), by imagining those animals “internally” having the same (or similar) experiences we humans have. This is again to remind that Wittgenstein aims here are rather humble, in that he is attacking (only) *one* of the sources of that picture—the one which departs from the analysis of the first-person pronoun in its use ‘as subject.’

21. Of course the strategy illustrated above—that of comparing linguistic expressions of pain with instinctive behaviour, such as moaning—is open to many criticisms, and it is a source of much controversy even among Wittgenstein’s supporters, some of whom are not willing to grant that such an analysis would show that the use of ‘I’ is not intended to *refer* to the person who says ‘I am in pain’. Yet Wittgenstein has anticipated those reactions. Having presented this first defence of claim (1), he immediately points out—in the voice of an interlocutor—an objection that runs on these lines: ‘ “But surely the word ‘I’ in the mouth of a man refers to the man who says it; it points to himself; and very often a man who says it actually points to himself with his finger” ’ (BB 67). As a reply he observes that:

> it was quite superfluous to point to himself. He might just as well only have raised his hand. It would be wrong to say that when someone points to the sun with his hand, he is pointing both to the sun and himself because it is *he* who points; on the other hand, he may by pointing attract attention both to the sun and to himself. (BB 67)

What is the point of such a reply? In order to answer that question we need first get clear about the parallel Wittgenstein draws between the case of the subject employing ‘I’ (in the situation presented above by his interlocutor) and the subject who, in the last passage, points to the sun. As I understand that parallel, its purpose is to show that, as the former subject *can* point to himself when saying ‘I…’, so the latter *can* call attention to himself when pointing to the sun—only that is *generally* not the case, i.e., that is neither the primary function of the pronoun ‘I’, nor of the ostensive gesture pointing to an object. In fact, one might say that the primary function of the ostensive gesture is precisely the opposite—namely, to call attention *to the object*; now, if that gesture is to succeed, of course the other persons involved in this piece of communication have to react appropriately—which means, among other things, that they shall take the speaker as the (provisional) centre or point of origin of an (*ad hoc*) indexical system. Consequently, it would be simply *wrong*, in the vast majority of (ordinary) cases, to take the speaker’s ostensive gesture as an attempt to call attention to himself—e.g., by looking at his *hand* instead of looking at where his hand is pointing. Yet none of this prevents that, in some specific (extraordinary) cases, a speaker should use the ostensive gesture also to call attention to himself—e.g., when he points toward the sun, but, given that all his

interlocutors are looking at a different direction (from that one in which he stands), he has to shout something (maybe something about the sun), thus calling their attention first to himself and then to that star.

By the same token, in some specific (and extraordinary) cases—say, that of a student shouting ‘I!’ in a classroom, answering to a call—a referential analysis would seem correct. However, as indicated previously, in most cases—particularly in the case of the subject shouting ‘I am in pain!’—that analysis would be simply false, in that there is no need at all for the subject to recognize himself as being such-and-such a person in order to cry that out. (It is worth noting that Wittgenstein does not need denying that there are similarities between, say, the self-referential and the expressive uses of ‘I’; his aim is simply to indicate *one essential difference* between the language-games in which that pronoun occurs, so as to prevent a hasty assimilation of all the sorts of use to a rather narrow paradigm, which is that of reference. There are cases in which we clearly intend to refer to ourselves—or to speak *about* the particular person we are, or recognize ourselves as being—by using the first person pronoun; and there are many other cases in which that is clearly not the point. Our challenge is not to lose track of such differences, motivated by philosophical ‘cravings for generality’ (see BB 17)[142].)

Let me repeat, for the sake of clarity, that the main problem with the assimilation to the paradigm of reference is not so much its *falsity,* but rather the fact that such an assimilation might be the tip of an iceberg of serious philosophical confusions. When we are dealing with statements in which ‘I’ is used ‘as object’, the referential analysis seems to work

[142] It may help comparing that with Wittgenstein’s claims in the following passage—where the philosophical ‘craving for generality’ is illustrated by the search of a single definition for the concept of ‘number’:

> If, e.g., someone tries to explain the concept of number and tells us that such and such a definition will not do or is clumsy because it only applies to, say, finite cardinals I should answer that the mere fact that he could have given such a limited definition makes this definition extremely important to us. (Elegance is *not* what we are trying for.) For why should what finite and transfinite numbers have in common be more interesting to us than what distinguishes them? Or rather, I should not have said “why should it be more interesting to us?”—it *isn’t*; and this characterizes our way of thinking. (BB 18-19)

Read the passage above replacing the reference to the ‘I’ for the reference to numbers, and—I submit—you shall get the essence of what Wittgenstein has to say about the use of that pronoun: the ‘referential view’ (or analysis) of the ‘I’ may be “more elegant”, but it is not elegance that we (should) seek; rather, what we are most in need of, in order to free ourselves from grammatical and philosophical confusions, is a subtler and more nuanced understanding of the various forms and circumstances in which we employ the first person pronoun in our ordinary language.

seamlessly—in that the subject who utters / thinks such statements intends to refer to a particular *object* that we too can perceive, recognize, and so on. However, if one tries to generalize, applying it to *all* first person statements—including the ones in which the ‘I’ is used ‘as subject’—one may (correctly) notice that in such cases the intended object of reference is not necessarily the *body* of the subject; hence, the temptation may arise to seek for some *other* kind of referent—such as the mind, spirit, and so on[143]. It is, therefore, with the ultimate aim of loosening the grip of *that* kind of picture upon the reader / interlocutor that Wittgenstein finds it important to highlight the grammatical differences we have been tracking so far.

22. Having criticized the thesis contained in claim (1)—that first person statements would serve to speak *about* a person—Wittgenstein turns to the theses contained in claims (2) and (3)—namely, that ‘I’ means the same as ‘L. W.’, or as ‘the person who is now speaking’. Against those assimilations, his main contention will be that the first person pronoun (in its ‘use as subject’) and the words ‘L. W.’, and ‘the person who is now speaking’ are ‘different instruments in our language’ (BB 67). Again, that does not mean that the latter phrases simply *cannot* be used in similar ways to that pronoun in some contexts: it is conceivable that in some special circumstances someone could shout, e.g., ‘L. W. is in pain!’ (think of a little child, or a Tarzan-like human being) or even ‘the person who is now speaking is in pain!’ (think of a character in Saramago’s *Blindness*), behaving as people normally do when they feel pain; yet, if we were to react to those utterances similarly to the way we react to people shouting ‘I am in pain’, in ordinary circumstances, we would precisely not be understanding them according to the paradigm of reference—as if they were intending to *refer to a particular person*, to *speak about* him or her—but rather as something akin to a moan. In this sense, the same rule would apply to such a speaker as the one applying to a person who cries out in pain—namely, that he or she ‘*doesn’t choose the mouth which says it*’ (BB 68)[144].

[143] Strawson’s strategy of taking the notion of ‘person’ as primitive (relatively to ‘body’ and ‘mind’) is designed to avoid just that kind of move (see chapter 1). Yet, provided that one is aware of the *variety* of different roles that first person statements play in our language-games, the very motivation for that kind of (a little too reductionist and artificial) solution might seem to fade away—or so I think.

[144] That remark may sound enigmatic; its point is, I take it, calling our attention once again to the *expressive* character of certain behaviours—language included. Intuitively, it seems clear that if we were to realize in the behaviour of a person saying that she is in pain—regardless of using ‘I’, ‘L. W.’, or ‘the person that is now speaking’ as a prefix to her utterance—a deliberate attempt to ‘choose the mouth which says it’—

As those brief considerations shall suggest, I take it that Wittgenstein’s purpose, in presenting claims (2) and (3), is simply to show that, *in their primary uses*, sentences employing the first person pronoun ‘as subject’ are the ones we (normally) take—even in the absence of any other companion circumstances—as genuine expressions of ‘personal experiences’—in other words, they are (fallible) *criteria* for such ascriptions[145]. Yet there is no indication that such an analysis should be extended to the *totality* of ‘language-games’ for the use of ‘I’[146]. As I noted above, Wittgenstein is not trying to achieve a *definition* of the use of ‘I’—in the sense of a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for *the* use (or *the* ‘use as subject’) of that pronoun. He is, rather, describing some uses which are particularly relevant for his therapeutic purposes—particularly, that of loosening the grip of certain pictures which are deeply rooted in philosophical analyses of the first person pronoun, leading to rather narrow, even monolithic views of its grammar, such as the assimilations to the paradigm of reference.

Moreover, let me recall that Wittgenstein introduced the distinction between two uses of ‘I’ by listing examples—of sentences concerning *physical* characteristics of the speaker (the ‘use as object’), and others concerning his/her *psychological* characteristics (the ‘use as subject’). Yet one might wonder if that dichotomy was really supposed to exhaust the uses of ‘I’, with no space being left for intermediate or composite cases. Is it not remarkable that cases such as that of personal identity and the use of proper names—‘I am such-and-such a person’, ‘I am L. W.’—both of which had been mentioned previously in the analysis, should be left out precisely at the moment in which Wittgenstein lists his

that is, some kind of artificiality in the formulation or even in the *tone* of her exclamation—we would be rather inclined to distrust her, to think she is dissimulating, and hence would probably not react to her case as we normally do when faced with *bona fide* pain behaviour—i.e., pitying, trying to assist, etc. (Again, a comparison with Strawson’s view in ‘Freedom and Resentment’ may help clarify that point.)

[145] In order to bring that point home, it may help to think about the case of a subject suffering from retrograde amnesia—someone like Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce), the main character of the film *Memento* (2000)—who by no means possess the capacity to use a proper name or to identify him/herself as being such-and-such a person, but still can use the first person pronoun to express (e.g.) pain, thus enabling other persons to understand his/her situation and react appropriately.

[146] It is notorious, especially in the *Blue Book*, the recurrent reminder of Wittgenstein’s to the effect that, when faced with questions about whether it makes or it does not make sense to say that a term ‘x’ has the meaning *y* (e.g., whether ‘I’ can be used referentially or not), the only sensible attitude is imagining concrete contexts of the proposed or intended use—“stress test” situations, as I have been calling them. As in the earlier texts we have been reading, the suggestion behind that reminder is that there is no *intrinsic* characteristic to the use of words that would hinder (or legitimise) *a priori* certain uses (or senses)—in McManus’s words, signs do not have an ‘independent life’ of their own (see chapter 2). It is only with the analysis of concrete language-games—effective or invented—that we can hope to arrive at such conclusions. It is somewhat surprising, however, that so many readers of the *Blue Book* should suffer of so intense a lack of imagination, as to conclude that (in Wittgenstein’s view), ‘I’ simply does not (ever) refer—hence, that *any* statement purporting to use it referentially must be (*a priori!*) nonsensical.

examples of the two uses of ‘I’? Would not those cases be recalcitrant relative to the dichotomy ‘as object’ / ‘as subject’? And if they are, would not one have enough reason to put into question Wittgenstein’s whole analysis?

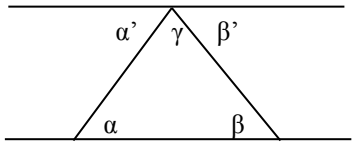
The answer, I take it, is negative. As I read Wittgenstein, the dichotomy he presents is by no means intended to exhaust the description of the uses of first person pronoun; it amounts, rather, to a presentation of two extremities of a *range* of uses—between which there may lie an indefinite number of intermediate cases, such as, e.g., that of a student shouting ‘*I*!’ in reply to his name in a call, as mentioned above. Nowhere Wittgenstein denies the possibility or legitimacy of such intermediate or composed uses: they are simply not interesting for his immediate, therapeutic aims. Paradigmatic cases of the ‘use as subject’, on the contrary, are of interest, because they are responsible for some of the biggest philosophical distortions in the analysis of the grammar of the first person—ultimately capable of leading one to feel inclined toward some form of solipsism; and paradigmatic cases of the ‘use as object’ are equally of interest, because they provide a clear counterpoint, and also serve to indicate the fundamental flaw in analyses which intend to assimilate all the uses of ‘I’ to the referential model.

23. Those considerations shall become clearer as we advance in the analysis of the argument presented in the *Blue Book*. Let me go back, then, to the attempt to elucidate the differences between pain statements in first and third person. Regarding that difference, in the sequence of the passages we have been analysing, Wittgenstein offers the following considerations:

> All this comes to saying that the person of whom we say “he has pain” is, by the rules of the game, the person who cries, contorts his face, etc. The place of the pain—as we have said—may be in another person’s body. If, in saying “I”, I point to my own body, I model the use of the word “I” on that of the demonstrative “this person” or “he”. [...] In “I have pain”, “I” is not a demonstrative pronoun. (BB 67-68)

The last sentence above presents our claim (4)—that the pronoun ‘I’, *in sentences such as ‘I have pain’*, does not function as a demonstrative. To understand the point of that thesis, it shall be useful to investigate with more detail what Wittgenstein means when he talks about modelling the use of ‘I’ in demonstrative expressions. Let’s start thinking about the

analogy presented in the suppressed part of the passage just quoted—the case of a mathematical proof concerning the sum of the internal angles of a triangle. Look at the following diagram:



The notion which is relevant to draw the intended analogy with the case of first-person pronoun is ‘equality.’ According to Wittgenstein, that notion is employed in one way when we say, regarding the diagram above, that $\alpha = \alpha'$ and $\beta = \beta$’, and in another way when we say that $\gamma = \gamma$. Now, to assimilate the pronoun ‘I’ to a demonstrative, such as ‘this person’ or ‘he’, would be ‘somewhat analogous’ to assimilate the two equalities above. The point of the analogy seems to be as follows: in the case of the equalities $\alpha = \alpha'$ and $\beta = \beta$’ we actually compare *two things*—namely, two angles—and say they are equal; yet in the case of $\gamma = \gamma$, one might say that we are facing a sort of degenerated equality (i.e., *self*-identity), since no *two* elements are being compared. Something analogous would apply to the case of someone using ‘I’ while pointing to one’s body: in their primary and strict uses, demonstratives—like ‘he’ / ‘she’ and ‘this / that person’—need to be supplemented with ostensive gestures, in order to be correctly understood; but, as we noticed above, understanding ostensive gestures involves, in its turn, looking at the person who makes a (demonstrative) statement, taking he or she as the centre in an *ad hoc* indexical system. Given those conditions, in the case of a subject employing ‘I’ while pointing to him/herself, what we have is (at best) a degenerate kind of ostension—one in which the centre points to itself, so to speak. In such a case, it may be correct to say that the pronoun ‘I’ is being used as a (degenerated) demonstrative, but only to the extent in which one might say that $\gamma = \gamma$ is a (degenerated) case of equality. There is no problem in principle with that possibility—on the contrary: as degenerated equality is useful for the construction of a mathematical proof, so the use of degenerate ostension may be useful (and legitimate) in some cases. (Think of the following situation: I want to draw the attention of a friend to myself, in a context where there is too much noise and people talking everywhere—maybe a party; I then shout that friend’s name; she hears my scream, yet is unable to determine

from where—hence, from whom—it comes; in such a case, shouting ‘I!’—or, more likely, ‘Hey, it’s me!’—while pointing to my own *body* would seem to be the best way of achieving my initial aim.)

Once again, the main lesson I would like to draw from those brief considerations is negative—namely, that Wittgenstein is not defending that ‘I’ simply *is not* a demonstrative: stones may well serve as hammers from time to time; words have the uses we put them to in concrete situations, for certain specific purposes. Wittgenstein’s suggestion seems to be rather simpler, even trivial—namely, that, in some of its primary uses, such as the one paradigmatically expressed when someone says ‘I am in pain’, the first-person pronoun does not, as a matter of (grammatical) fact, function as a demonstrative. Yet that triviality is not useless—in its original context, it has a particular (dialectical) purpose, which is avoiding the hasty assimilation to a rather narrow grammatical paradigm, motivated by a lack of attention to grammatical differences; and it is in order to avoid that mistake that it becomes useful to present cases in which the move would be conspicuously inappropriate.

24. Unsurprisingly, Wittgenstein’s interlocutor shows himself dissatisfied with that negative result, claiming that ‘surely the word “I” in “I have pain” serves to distinguish me from other people, because it is by the sign “I” that I distinguish saying that I have pain from saying that one of the others has’ (BB 68-69). In reply to that claim Wittgenstein proposes the following (rather remarkable) language-game:

> Imagine a language in which, instead of “I found nobody in the room”, one said “I found Mr. Nobody in the room”. Imagine the philosophical problems which would arise out of such a convention. Some philosophers brought up in this language would probably feel that they didn’t like the similarity of the expressions “Mr. Nobody” and “Mr. Smith”. When we feel that we wish to abolish the “I” in “I have pain”, one may say that we tend to make the verbal expression of pain similar to the expression by moaning.—We are inclined to forget that it is the particular use of a word only which gives the word its meaning. (BB 69)

Is difficult to understand the point of the analogy above, except if one analyses it against the broader backdrop of the criticism of solipsism. Read that way, what the analogy seems to indicate is that, in our ordinary language, there is a similarity between the use of ‘I’ in

sentences such as ‘I am in pain’ (the ‘use as subject’), and the use of ‘I’ in cases in which we actually identify a person, or even a particular body, in order to make our utterance (the ‘use as object’); that similarity, in turn, can either tempt one to assimilate both cases to the latter model—and, accordingly, always to seek for a referent of the term ‘I’—or to simply drop the (supposedly) problematic use of ‘I’, thus proposing a new notation, in which, e.g., one would say simply ‘there is pain’. Now that would be a revisionist proposal similar to the one a philosopher grown up in the language presented in the passage above would probably make, by arguing that we should simply drop the phrase ‘Mr. Nobody’, in order not to conflate it with the phrase ‘Mr. Smith’, thus (supposedly) escaping the temptation to imagine that there is some hidden entity in the room when we say that Mr. Nobody is in the room. If we went on saying simply ‘there is pain’—instead of ‘I’m in pain’—we would stop thinking—so thinks Wittgenstein’s interlocutor—that there is some kind of hidden referent of the pronoun ‘I’.

And here we arrive to an opposite (but congenial) attitude to the ones presented earlier. Both the proposal to assimilate all the uses of ‘I’ to grammatical paradigms primary applicable to the ‘use as object’, and the proposal to drop that pronoun from our language —in order to stick to what is supposedly peculiar in our personal experiences, ending with the surface similarities with expressions used to talk about the experiences of *other* subjects—stem from the same deep philosophical roots, among which are the craving for a *single* explanation which would account for all uses of certain concept, the assumption that if there is a noun there *must* be a referent, and so on.

25. The (negative) results of this analysis seem to me quite straightforward: first, Wittgenstein does not advocate a ‘non-referential view’ of the grammar of the first person in the *Blue Book*; to defend that would be like saying that stones do not serve to nail, for the simple reason that they are not hammers (a conclusion which some philosophers could perhaps draw from their armchairs, while examining the conditions of possibility of building). Second, Wittgenstein also does not argue that the first-person pronoun has *two uses*—one ‘as object’ and other ‘as subject’; those are only two extremities of a *range* of uses—two rather different members of a *family*, if you like (see BB 17)—the indication of which was useful for diagnosing the congenial errors of several monolithic accounts of the

role of that pronoun. Between those two extremities there is an enormous variety of other possible and more or less overlaping uses, whose “identity” depends on the requirements of the concrete linguistic context where they are employed, and, in particular, on our concrete interests and purposes in each case. Finally (and more positively), the fundamental lesson of this whole analysis is *methodological*—namely, that one shall strive to pay attention to *differences* between the various uses of certain concepts—such as the pronoun ‘I’—rather than try to fit them all in a single, narrow bin, whatever that is—e.g., reference, demonstration, description, expression, etc.

That, by the way, is precisely the lesson presented by Wittgenstein in an earlier passage of the book, with the quotation of which I would like to bring this reading to a close. The passage goes as follows:

> [S]ome of the greatest achievements in philosophy could only be compared with taking up some books which seemed to belong together, and putting them on different shelves; nothing more being final about their positions than that they no longer lie side by side. The onlooker who doesn’t know the difficulty of the task might well think in such a case that nothing at all had been achieved.—The difficulty in philosophy is to say no more than we know. E.g., to see that when we have put two books together in their right order we have not thereby put them in their final places. (BB 44-45)

Philosophy, as that activity is envisaged and carried on in Wittgenstein’s texts, is always provisional. That shall explain, at least in part, why his (post-Tractarian) writings never end up—and, as far as I know, were never *intended* to end up—with a proper, structurally distinguishable conclusion—as if to mark that the “last word” is only *contingently* so, and that the invitation is always open to continue the conversation. That, I take it, is an exemplar attitude from an author truly engaged in the continuous and difficult task of trying to accept, and to make good of, our finite condition.

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4.6 Epilogue: The Path to the *Investigations*

26. Having brought my reading of the *Blue Book* to a close, I shall also abandon, at least for the time being, Wittgenstein's imaginary conversations with his solipsist interlocutor. Yet before doing that, I would like to take a few steps forward in one of the paths which that reading opens up, indicating some possible applications of the methodology I have been following in my analysis of those exchanges to Wittgenstein's later treatment of privacy, particularly in the *Philosophical Investigations*. By doing that, I shall in fact follow a trail left by Stephen Mulhall in his *Wittgenstein's Private Language*—a book which has been an important source of inspiration for my own readings.

Mulhall characterizes two opposed ways of reading Wittgenstein's texts *in general*, employing for that purpose a distinction which was originally presented in the discussion of the *Tractatus*—namely, that between 'resolute' and 'substantial' readings[147]. According to him, the 'fundamental point' of a resolute reading is 'that of identifying and aiming to overcome our attraction to the idea that there is something we cannot do in philosophy' (2007a, p. 8); the intended contrast is with a reading which postulates certain *a priori limits*—logical, grammatical, metaphysical—to what one—be it oneself, or an interlocutor—can 'do in philosophy'—in particular, to what one can (sensibly) *say* in a philosophical exchange, such as the ones illustrated in Wittgenstein's writings.

For the purposes of this exercise, I shall take as definitive of the difference between those two readings their respective understandings of how the appeal to logic / grammar is supposed to help one—Wittgenstein, or a Wittgensteinian philosopher—achieving clarity in a conceptual investigation. Thus, for a supporter of the substantial reading, the main point of invoking logic / grammar is to enable one to 'analyse' certain philosophical sentences, supported by a determinate set of constraints—a particular 'theory of meaning'—which, in turn, can allow one to reject them as 'determinately nonsensical'—as if their nonsensicality was 'a result of the speaker attempting to conjoin intelligible words in unintelligible ways' (Mulhall, 2007a, p. 9); from such a (substantial) perspective:

> grammatical reminders [would] articulate the limits of sense, and thereby identify a region or domain that lies beyond those limits, from which we are

[147] See his 'Introduction' in 2007a.

> excluded. It may further lead us to assume that [...] grammatical investigations presuppose or otherwise deploy an implicit philosophical theory of the [...] conditions of sense—quite as if our everyday abilities to distinguish sense from nonsense require at the very least a philosophical grounding or foundation (perhaps a criterial semantics, or a theory of language-games, or an anthropology of the human form of life). (Mulhall, 2007a, p. 9)

From a resolute point of view, by contrast, a grammatical investigation shall be understood

> as simply deploying our everyday capacity to distinguish sense from nonsense in a philosophical context, and hence as depriving itself of any claim to expertise or authority that exceeds that form of practical ability—an ability that can equally well be laid claim to by any competent speaker, and hence by any philosophical interlocutor. It will, in short, see the primary task of [Wittgenstein's, or a Wittgensteinian] philosophy as a matter of identifying and attempting to overcome our sense that grammar is a limitation on our capacities for speech and thought—that it deprives us of something. It will, in effect, amount to the same project of acknowledging (as opposed to despairing of, resenting, or denying) our finitude that resolute readers find always already at work in the *Tractatus*. (Mulhall, 2007a, p. 10)

Whether the readings I have been pursuing in the chapters 2-4 have the marks of 'resoluteness', in Mulhall's sense, is not for me to decide—I cannot do better than letting the particular analyses of the solipsist's attempts at formulating his point speak for themselves. I shall nonetheless try to make my own self-assessment clear, if only to let others judge on its correction. I find that a central and recurrent concern of mine in those analyses was indicating that for Wittgenstein—appearances notwithstanding—the solipsist's main problem was not so much the 'determinate nonsensicality' of his formulations—the attempt, i.e., of violating logic / grammar, trying to get beyond the 'limits of sense' by combining individually intelligible signs in illegitimate ways—but, rather, the fact that the signs he was employing simply did not have any clear point—not by any kind of logical / grammatical / metaphysical necessity (verifiable only from the vantage point of someone who masters a theory of the conditions of sense), but as a contingent matter of (linguistic) fact, verifiable by any competent speaker.

27. That said, I move to my vowed task—that of assessing the gains of trying to apply a resolute approach to the *Philosophical Investigations*'s treatment of privacy. Mulhall contends, and I second him, that 'Wittgenstein's remarks on the idea of a private language might be seen as an illuminating test-case for the claim that even those genuinely

sympathetic to his later work can find themselves defending it in terms, and with a tenor, that amounts to its subversion into substantiality' (2007a, p. 11). In fact, his own book is precisely an attempt at 'diagnosing and overcoming' the temptation to (mis)read Wittgenstein's remarks that way. I shall offer an illustration of that diagnose below; but before doing that I would like to address an apparent problem, amounting to a *prima facie* obstacle to draw my own envisaged parallel between Wittgenstein's (early) treatment of solipsism and his (later) treatment of privacy. One way of indicating that problem is simply by noticing that the expression 'solipsism' is notoriously absent from the later work—the only exception being PI §24, where we read: 'The significance of such possibilities of transformation, for example of turning all statements into sentences beginning "I think" or "I believe" (and thus, as it were, into descriptions of *my* inner life) will become clearer in another place. (Solipsism.)'. Now, since no further explicit reference to solipsism occurs in the remainder of the text, where—if at all—would the 'significance of such transformations' be clarified? My guess—perhaps unsurprisingly—is that the task anticipated in §24 will be fulfilled precisely in the context of the analysis of the possibility of 'private languages', which starts in §243.

The main reason for that guess has to do with the very characterization of a 'private language', as stated in §243—namely, as one 'in which a person could write down or give vocal expression to his inner experiences—his feelings, moods, and the rest—for his private use', so that in it 'individual words [...] are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations', and 'another person cannot understand it'. As I hope the analysis pursued up to this point shall make clear, that characterization makes the private languages referred in PI direct descendants of the 'solipsistic notations' presented in the *Blue Book*. In fact, one might perhaps take a step further, and say that the 'private linguist' of PI is (basically) a new iteration—a heir?—of 'the solipsist' in Wittgenstein's earlier writings.

Once that first link between the treatment of solipsism and privacy is established, some further structural parallels between earlier and later texts start showing up. For the present purposes, I shall indicate a rather restricted set of such parallels, comparing the elements which were emphasized above, in my own reading of the *Blue Book,* with their counterparts in PI. The resulting list goes as follows:

1. The initial strategy: both texts (i.e., BB and PI) start dealing with problems concerning the nature of *meaning* and *understanding*, and go on immediately trying to divert the reader's attention from certain pictures which stand in the way of a clear view on those notions (among such pictures belong the referential or 'Augustinian'[148], as well as, for lack of a better term, an internalist view of meaning and understanding);

2. Postponing the treatment of 'the inner': as we saw, in both cases Wittgenstein prefers to delay talking about the nature of 'personal experiences' (BB 44) / 'immediate private sensations' (PI §24) at least until he has gone some way toward freeing the reader from the initial pictures referred in (1);

3. A privileged target: when he takes up the topic of personal experiences / private sensations, the analysis rather quickly turns to the solipsist's / private linguist's attempts at revising ordinary language;

4. A further (related) target: finally, the analysis of solipsistic notations / private languages will eventually lead Wittgenstein to turn to the grammar of first person and the nature of the self—the parallel remarks in PI being §§398-411.

28. Steps 1-4 form a textual pattern which is clearly shared by the *Blue Book* and the *Investigations*[149]. Now the main reason for calling attention to that pattern is to indicate some possible parallels between (my reading of) Wittgenstein's treatment of solipsism in the *Blue Book*, and his treatment of privacy in the *Investigations*. Wittgenstein starts that treatment, in PI §243, by recalling us of some *reflexive—hence,* in that (ordinary) sense, *private*—uses of language:

> A human being can encourage himself, give himself orders, obey, blame and punish himself; he can ask himself a question and answer it. We could even imagine human beings who spoke only in monologue; who accompanied their

[148] The presentation of the so-called Augustinian view in PI §1 has an important precedent in the opening pages of the *Brown Book* (pp. 77 ss.).

[149] In fact—although I shall not try to justify or go into details about this claim—I believe that the same pattern can be found in many of Wittgenstein's writings—including the *Tractatus* and (possibly) all the drafts to what for many years after 1930 he called 'my book'. I hope the analyses advanced in the preceding chapters—namely, those dealing with the *Tractatus* (2) and the *Remarks* (3)—can, in retrospect, lend some initial support to that claim.

> activities by talking to themselves.—An explorer who watched them and listened to their talk might succeed in translating their language into ours. (This would enable him to predict these people's actions correctly, for he also hears them making resolutions and decisions.) (PI §243)

In the next paragraph, Wittgenstein (reflexively) asks himself a question—about the possibility of another (extraordinary) kind of private use of language—and answers it, thus resuming a (by now) familiar pattern of dialectical exchange. Here is how the exchange goes:

> But could we also imagine a language in which a person could write down or give vocal expression to his inner experiences—his feelings, moods, and the rest—for his private use?— —Well, can't we do so in our ordinary language?—But that is not what I mean. The individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language. (PI §243)

After that point, Wittgenstein's text will proceed in this reflexive, self-questioning manner, alternately presenting (re)formulations of the idea of a private use of language for the expression of 'inner experiences', and then asking whether the envisaged results really make any—and, in particular, any extraordinary—sense.

29. In commenting the passage above, Mulhall remarks that the 'twists and turns of the further questions and answers, directions and self-criticisms' that follow 'can be interpreted so as to be consistent with two different readings of that opening exchange' (2007a, pp. 16-17). Here is how he summarizes the first—substantial—reading:

> The first sentence sketches an idea—that of using language to give voice to our inner experiences for our personal use—and the rest of the paragraph distinguishes two different ways of filling it out. The first is exemplified by our ordinary life with language, when keeping a journal, writing a memoir, composing a love poem, and so on; but Wittgenstein swiftly rejects this as not what he means. The final two sentences specify what he does mean: the idea of a language whose words refer to the speaker's immediate, private sensations, and hence whose meaning can be known only to that speaker. This idea, and the philosophical issues it puts in play, are the topic of the succeeding sections of the text. (2007a, p. 17)

That, I take it, is a quite straightforward reading. Now, if one follows through with it, the succeeding sections of the text will be seen as attempts to show that, 'given the meaning of the words in the interlocutor's penultimate sentence, the idea of a private language that he

attempts to construct out of them must be nonsensical or incoherent, a violation of grammar' (ibid, p. 18). Yet a second reading of the passage above is also available, according to which:

> The first sentence asks whether we can imagine—literally, find thinkable the idea of—a language in which someone can express his inner experiences for his personal use. There is then a double-dash in the text—an unusually long pause, as if Wittgenstein needs time to contemplate what has just been said. Then he responds by reminding his interlocutor (reminding himself) that we do just this in ordinary language. Giving voice to our inner life for our own purposes is a commonplace of our life with words. How, then, can any participant in that life find himself asking whether we can imagine such a thing, thereby implying that its very intelligibility is questionable, when it is a humdrum actuality? His interlocutor then hastily replies that this everyday banality is not at all what he meant; and in the final two sentences of the paragraph, he attempts to explain what he really wanted the words of the first sentence to mean. And in the following sections, Wittgenstein tries to determine whether this attempt is really successful—whether there is a way of meaning the words of the penultimate sentence that does not simply return us to a banality, whether in fact his interlocutor means anything in particular by those words. (2007a, pp. 17-18)

If one follows through with this second, resolute reading, then the remaining sections of the text will be seen as genuinely dialectical: Wittgenstein will then be read as engaged in an effort to 'tr[y] to imagine, and then tr[y] out, ways of giving meaning to the constituent terms of the interlocutor's formulation' (ibid., p. 18), yet systematically failing in that task —in that the interlocutor would always feel dissatisfied, hence inclined to repeat his response: 'But that is not what I mean'. According to this second reading, then, the result will *not* amount to an indication of the interlocutor's 'violations of grammar', but rather to the indication of a failure—which is as much his as it is ours, or Wittgenstein's—to give (as yet) any particular and clear sense to the words he is inclined to employ:

> He is left with a form of words, and a variety of ways in which they might coherently be taken; but none of those ways satisfy him—none capture what he had it at heart to say. It remains open to him to imagine another such way, and thereby to find the satisfaction he seeks; but if he does not, then Wittgenstein implicitly invites him to ask himself why he is passionately convinced that his words mean something in particular—indeed something deeply significant about our inner life and our expressions of it—and yet rejects any particular assignment of meaning to his words. (2007a, p. 19)

30. Now, since Wittgenstein's text seems to support both (substantial and resolute) readings simultaneously, how shall one decide which of them is right? As Mulhall

indicates, much will depend on where one decides to place the emphasis of one's reading, and the reasons one has to offer for that decision; thus, a resolute reader may 'stress that Wittgenstein repeatedly begins his investigation of the interlocutor's formulations by asking what their elements might mean, rather than telling us what they do mean' (ibid., p. 19)—in other words, the emphasis in this case would be placed on the *imaginative exercise* of trying to get the interlocutor's intended sense right. Yet for a substantial reader the emphasis would be placed on 'the numerous occasions on which Wittgenstein seems not so much to exercise his imagination on his interlocutor's behalf, but rather to lay down the law to him' (id. ibid.)[150].

Worse still: besides being both compatible with Wittgenstein's text, each reading is also able to accommodate the aspects of that text which seem to encourage the opposite one. Thus, for a substantial reader, Wittgenstein's imaginative efforts at getting the interlocutor's meaning right could be easily put aside as mere 'rhetorical devices', whose ultimate function is to pave the way for what really matters—namely, the grammatical reminders themselves, by means of whose Wittgenstein would be able 'to reclaim his interlocutor for the common ground of ordinary meanings' (ibid., p. 20). Resolute readers, on the other hand, would claim that those 'apparently decisive grammatical reminders' have in fact only a dialectical role, in that they are 'essentially responsive to possibilities invoked by his interlocutor', and, consequently, function 'as invitations to acknowledge that his imagined projections of his words either have implications that will not satisfy him, or are in fact insufficiently substantial or contentful to generate definite implications' (id. ibid.).

Faced with those findings, Mulhall invites us to reflect about the (exegetical) hypothesis that, after all, perhaps Wittgenstein really intended to give us 'two apparently different ways of reaching the same conclusion'—namely, in the case here at stake, 'that the private linguist has failed to invoke anything in particular in attempting to invoke the "idea" of a private language' (id. ibid.). If that is true, then perhaps we should stop asking which

[150] Examples of such occasions abound in the text. Mulhall offers the following, representative list:

> In §244, we are simply told that 'the verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it'; in §246, we learn that 'The truth is: it makes sense to say about other people that they doubt whether I am in pain; but not to say it about myself'; and in §253, that 'one does not define a criterion of identity by emphatic stressing of the word "this" '. (2007a, p. 19)

reading is right, and start reflecting about 'whether it matters which way we dramatize the process of reaching that conclusion'—in other words, what we should start asking is 'what difference does it make whether we present these acknowledgements and claims as earned by recalling us to our ordinary life with words, or by recounting ways in which we might imagine that we can repudiate it?' (id. ibid.). The suggestion here is, I take it, that perhaps both (substantial and resolute) aspects of the text may prove useful, or even essential, from a therapeutic perspective, in that the ambiguity, or possibility of multiple readings, may itself be the best way of creating an attunement with the reader's own (possibly conflicting) tendencies—meaning that a text will be as good a basis for self-examination and self-criticism as it is capable of reflecting those tendencies.

Those considerations prompt Mulhall—and us—to examine the relation between *form* (or *style*) and *content* in Wittgenstein's writings—'to investigate not only his treatment of the idea of a private language, but also his idea of how one should treat any philosophical problem, and the one in relation to the other—each as if called for by the other' (ibid., p. 21). At this juncture, Mulhall reminds us that Wittgenstein's interlocutory dialogues are themselves 'internal or self-addressed' (id. ibid.)—hence *private,* in that familiar, ordinary sense recalled at the beginning of §243; that suggests a way of thinking about the 'explorer', who in that paragraph is said to encounter exclusively monolingual speakers, as being himself a portrait of the reader of Wittgenstein's (private) dialogues. The question then arises whether those 'interior monologues for more than one voice [can] ever truly speak to or for another, and hence elicit a genuine philosophical dialogue'—hence if we, as explorers of Wittgenstein's texts, can 'ever really succeed in translating his language into ours' (ibid., p. 22). That question is not answered *in* Mulhall's text, and the reason, I take it, is that the only effective way to answer it is not "by description", but rather "by acquaintance"—I mean, by trying to *engage* with Wittgenstein's monologues, seeing if they can really speak for and to *oneself*; hence, if an answer is to be found in our reading of Mulhall's book, it will surely not be gathered in any particular point of it, but rather by the very process of (re)enacting his own exemplary engagement with the *Investigations*. Since no shortcut is available for that end, the best I can do right now is to stop, letting the path open for future continuations.

5 Meaning, Normativity and Responsibility: A Cavellian Approach

The requirement of purity imposed by philosophy now looks like a wish to leave me *out, I mean each of us, the self, with its arbitrary needs and unruly desires.*

Stanley Cavell

5.1 Introduction

1. As we saw in the preceding chapters, elucidating the nature of meaning—that which is conveyed by our linguistic signs, in a broad sense—and mental content—that which is expressed by means of ascriptive propositions in which psychological predicates occur—were among the central concerns of Strawson's and Wittgenstein's writings. Both issues are still intensely debated in contemporary philosophy, particularly in the analytic tradition[151]. From a strictly methodological point of view—the only which will be relevant here—one can distinguish two main positions polarizing that debate: individualism and anti-individualism[152]. While the former is happy to analyse meaning and / or mental content through an inspection of the individual (or of some part / aspect of that individual, e.g., her brain or behaviour) taken in isolation from her remaining physical and / or social environments, the latter requires that analysis to take into account a set of factors which are

[151] I interpret that phrase along the lines of the (commendably) multi-sided approach taken in Glock (2008), eventually condensed in the claim that 'analytic philosophy is a tradition held together *both* by ties of mutual influence *and* by family resemblances' (p. 205). One of the advantages I see in an approach like Glock's is that it allows one—anyway it has allowed me—to regard works normally categorized under different headings (e.g., 'continental philosophy') as also belonging to a single Philosophy family, thus smoothing some (artificial or imaginary or—dare I say?—prejudiced) obstacles preventing (possibly) fruitful encounters and conversations.

[152] Other (perhaps more common) headings for those positions are, respectively, 'internalism' and 'externalism'; the main reason I have not to use them is to avoid confusion with homonym positions in contemporary *epistemological* debates, where what is mainly at stake is the source of justification of our cognitive claims, or beliefs. (For another reason not to use those headings, see below, n. 154.)

"outside the individual's head"[153] (e.g., the physiochemical constitution of the stuff with which she interacts, or the social relationships she maintains with other human beings)[154].

The dispute among supporters of both positions in the analytic corner has proven very proficuous, and seems to be far from over[155]. Yet I shall not try to review that discussion here; instead, I shall pursue the more homely aim of trying to recollect and (self-)criticize some of the main reasons which eventually—if unstably—led me to favour certain forms of anti-individualistic approaches over individualistic alternatives. That may sound as a rather selfish concern, but it is meant otherwise; I could say it is meant as a Cavellian—hence, according to Cavell's and my own judgement, Wittgensteinian—exercise in philosophical (self-)therapy—if only the meaning of that description could be taken for granted. Since it (most probably) cannot, here goes another attempt: the basic idea—at any rate the regulative idea—is to provide an analysis which, if pursued with enough detail, can serve as an example—anyway as a useful object of comparison—capable of creating both resonance *and* dissonance with the reader's own views (however tacit up to that point), thus allowing for a genuine philosophical exchange, a continuous dialogue based on mutual understandings (not to be confused with mutual *assent*), which will hopefully develop into some shared—hence more universal, and hence hopefully universalizable—conclusions.

2. Given that aim, I shall start my (self-)analysis by recollecting a pair of strong (if *prima facie*) general reasons I had for favouring anti-individualism over individualism. The first

[153] That is of course an allusion to Hilary Putnam's emblematic claim: 'Cut the pie any way you like, "meanings" just ain't in the *head*!' (1975, p. 227). (More about that claim's original context below, in §5.)

[154] It might go without saying that, according to the general characterization I am proposing, positions such as behaviourism and (at least some forms of) functionalism should be classified as individualistic. Personally, I welcome that implication, for it highlights a link—which normally seems to go unnoticed—between the latter positions and traditional individualistic views—i.e., those we use to describe collectively as 'Cartesian'. (That implication offers a further reason for prefering the pair 'individualism' / 'anti-individualism' over 'internalism' / 'externalism', in that, from the mere fact that an analysis takes into account "external" aspects of an individual (e.g., her behaviour), it does not follow that it is 'externalist' *in the relevant sense*—the sense, i.e., which was originally intended by the supporters of that position—about which see below, section 5.2).

[155] Until some time ago, I would risk the claim that there is a growing tendency toward (some or other form of) anti-individualistic methodology; some, in fact, are willing to go further than that, describing anti-individualism as a 'new orthodoxy' in analytical philosophy (see Farkas, 2003, p. 187). But philosophers should be particularly aware that every orthodoxy, as it consolidates, tends to generate an increasing number of dissidents; it may be too early to judge whether a "counter-movement" is arising, but signs of thar are getting ever more conspicuous.

is that, by requiring its supporters to pay attention to a larger set of factors—larger, i.e., if compared with individualistic (lack of) constraints—in order to construct their analyses of meaning and mental content, anti-individualistic methodologies seem to pave the way for more sophisticated or comprehensive—hence more realistic—philosophical models of language and mind. The second (and related) reason for privileging anti-individualistic accounts is that they seem to be far less susceptible to some of the traditional problems inherited by philosophers trying to elucidate the nature of language and mind—problems such as explaining the contact between mind and world (which are anti-individualistically construed as *in some sense* "internally related"), as well as the knowledge of the contents of "other minds" (which are again anti-individualistically construed as at least partially comprised of the same "external factors" which comprise my own mental contents).

Regardless of proving ultimately successful concerning the points I just mentioned, anti-individualism is not free from its own, internal difficulties. One difficulty which particularly caught my attention—and which will be part of the backdrop for this chapter's argument—has to do with what one might call, following Christopher Peacocke, 'psychological self-knowledge'[156]—i.e., the knowledge that one is supposed to have of the content of *one's own* mind. The problem of psychological self-knowledge presents itself clearly in the analysis of thought-experiments commonly referred in the literature as 'slow-switching scenarios'. Typically, those experiments involve the idea of a subject being transported, without knowing, from one environment to another (e.g., from Earth to Twin-Earth), causing her to have (and express) thoughts with different contents according to where she finds herself (e.g., about *water* if on Earth, and *twin-water* if on Twin-Earth), yet without being able to realize the change. Given that possibility, the conclusion seems to be that such a subject would not know the content of her thoughts until she proceeds to an empirical investigation of her environment. Now, since that conclusion manifestly contradicts some of our most deeply-rooted intuitions about the nature of psychological self-knowledge—e.g., that it is endowed with *first person authority*, that it is *immediate* and *transparent*—we seem forced either to abandon those intuitions, or to conclude, by a kind of *reductio*, that anti-individualism is false.

[156] See Peacocke (1998, p. 63).

The alternative adopted by some defenders of anti-individualism is a compatibilist position[157]. The difficulties concerning the acceptability of compatibilism (in particular), and the possibility of psychological self-knowledge (more generally), have received a considerable amount of the attention dispensed in recent literature on anti-individualism[158]. Again, given my present aims, I shall not try to engage directly in that debate in what follows[159]; the only reason for mentioning it here is, to repeat, highlighting that part of the backdrop against which I shall try to articulate my own suspicions concerning some assumptions which seem to be shared by both parties involved in that debate. Given the complexity of the matter—which makes it difficult to obtain a perspicuous view of the positions involved—my analysis will have to be limited in two important respects: first, it will be restricted to a small (although, I hope, representative) number of authors and texts —namely, those of Saul Kripke, Hilary Putnam, and Tyler Burge; second, it will focus on only one problematic assumption shared by those authors, which I shall henceforth refer to as an 'impersonal model of linguistic normativity'[160].

3. Although providing a full characterization of what I mean by 'impersonal model'—as well as an account of the shortcomings of that model—are among the main tasks of this chapter as a whole, I think some preparatory remarks are in order. I shall call 'impersonal' any position purporting to find a ground or foundation for linguistic normativity (and, consequently, for our *agreement* on the meaning of our signs) which would involve some kind of (impersonal) knowledge of a set of "objective" facts. The identity of those facts, as we shall see, varies from author to author. What is invariant, though, is the general

[157] One of the original defenders of compatibilism is Tyler Burge (see esp. 1998b & 1998c). Compatibilist positions are also advocated in Bilgrami (1996), McLaughlin & Tye (1998), and Faley (2000).

[158] There are at least two further, internal problems still discussed in the literature on anti-individualism, and which will not be touched in what follows. The first concerns the possibility of *rationality*: if I had to proceed to some kind of empirical investigation in order to distinguish the contents of my thoughts, and if distinguishing those contents is a condition for establishing logical relationships among my thoughts, then I could, at any given time, be commiting mistakes regarding those relationships, unless I proceed to an empirical investigation; but that seems to undermine our very concept of rationality. The second problem has to do with the (apparently absurd) possibility of *a priori* knowledge of the "external world": if I know the contents of my thoughts, and I know that that content is individuated by its relationships with the world, then I can know *the world* from the knowledge I have of *my mind*; and that may well sound as a *reductio* of the anti-individualistic position (see, e.g., Boghossian 1998). Brown (2004) offers a systematic and detailed examination of the three problems mentioned here, as well as of some of the main answers which can be found in the literature.

[159] Although I tried to do just that elsewhere—see Techio (2006).

[160] Actually, I take it that such an assumption is shared by anti-individualists and individualists alike; yet I shall not try to support that claim explicitly here.

assumption that the burden for linguistic correction (for what one means with what one says) should be placed upon some "external" factor (such as "the world", or "the community's conventions"). One of the main difficulties with that assumption that I shall try to highlight—one which I think did not receive the deserved attention in the literature—is that it implies conceiving the very problem of linguistic correction upside-down, or, at the very least, from a limited perspective, in which the individual's responsibility to make sense of her and others's words—hence, to supply the conditions for linguistic agreement—is discredited, or systematically suppressed[161].

In order to indicate the influence of that impersonal model of normativity in the anti-individualistic analyses mentioned above, as well as to present some of the problems originated from that commitment, I shall adopt a somewhat complex argumentative strategy, whose main steps can be summarized as follows: in section 5.2 I indicate the existence of a common structure in the analyses of the 'founding fathers' of contemporary anti-individualism—respectively, Kripke, Putnam, and Burge—pointing out their shared acceptance of the impersonal model of normativity. That result obtained, I go on to reconstruct, in section 5.3, the 'skeptical solution' for the 'skeptical paradox' of linguistic normativity presented by Kripke in his *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, suggesting that the latter argument can also be framed by the structure obtained in section 5.2. Having thus drawn a parallel between the anti-individualists's and Kripke's arguments, I turn, in section 5.4, to the reconstruction of Stanley Cavell's criticisms against the resulting position, focusing on his diagnosis of the problems inherent to the impersonal

[161] These brief considerations about the impersonal model of normativity allow me to mention two further and intimately related general assumptions that I glimpse in the horizon of the debate concerning psychological self-knowledge, but which will not be directly addressed in what follows (except for a parenthetical remark in §31, where I shall indicate how the results obtained in this chapter could be extended to their case). Those assumptions concern, respectively, the nature of our default attitudes toward the world (particularly its objects and events) and toward human—or, more generally, animated—beings (particularly their mental contents)—including ourselves (our own mental contents). Both can be qualified as theoretical and cognitivist—the former for assuming that our default attitude toward the world and its objects is expressed in our gathering of *evidences* (particularly *perceptual* ones), with the ultimate aim of constructing "theories" which would, in turn, (ideally) amount to 'views from nowhere' (notoriously thus called in Nagel, 2004), i.e., views in which the subject would be completely suppressed, hence exempted from any responsibility in making sense of her experience—or failing thereby; the later for assuming, similarly, that our default attitude toward our own and other's minds is one of *witnesses* or *inquirers*, so that, in order to know their contents—as if *knowing* them were our only or primarily aim—it becomes again necessary to gather certain *evidences* (e.g., introspective and / or behaviouristic ones). What those suppositions have in common with the impersonal model of normativity is precisely the ideal of, in an important sense, removing the individual from the scene, suppressing any mention, in the context of philosophical analysis, to irreducibly "subjective" (i.e., personal) conditions, on behalf of a (supposedly) more "objective" (i.e., impersonal) analysis.

model of normativity assumed by Kripke in his book on Wittgenstein. That criticism shall prompt me to present, in section 5.5, a sketch of an alternative picture of human language and normativity—one that I think is free from the problems of the impersonal model (particularly, from the kind of evasion it implies), and which can supply a way out of difficulties such as (but not exclusively) those presented in the debate involving (compatibilist) anti-individualists and their critics.

5.2 Anti-individualism and the impersonal model of normativity

5.2.1 Anti-individualism: contemporary roots

4. Anti-individualism has its contemporary roots in the debate concerning the reference of singular terms, which took place in the second half of 20th century, culminating with the emergence of the so-called 'new theory of reference' or 'semantics of direct reference', of which Saul Kripke is one of the main exponents[162]. One of Kripke's main results, at least for present purposes, is that the reference of some terms of our language—proper names and natural kind predicates—once fixed, will persist independently of the descriptions associated to them by language users, as well as their knowledge of which is the referred object. In Kripke's technical terminology, that result gets formulated in the thesis that proper names and natural kind predicates are 'rigid designators', i.e., terms that designate the same object in every possible world in which it exists (see 1972, p. 48)[163].

[162] See esp. his *Naming and Necessity,* 1972.

[163] Some unpacking of the analysis summarized in the paragraph above might be in order. Initially, Kripke applies it to proper names (e.g., 'Nixon'), assuming that their reference is fixed by means of an initial "baptism", and showing that its maintenance depends on the existence of *chains of use*, which enable one to defer reference to competent speakers (ultimately, specialists in a certain area of knowledge); later, he extends the analysis to natural kinds predicates (e.g., 'gold'), whose reference, analogously to that of names, would be fixed in a particular normative context—involving an ostensive presentation of a *sample* of the kind to be introduced, or the employment of a description which picks that kind out by means of a (generally) *contingent* property of their instances—and whose maintenance would be thus normatively guaranteed, independently of any mental association that users might make. In other words, the use of predicates for natural kinds will be instituted for *whatever it is of the same kind* as the chosen sample (at the moment in which its reference is fixed), or again for *whatever possesses* the property (or properties) mentioned in the initial description. Now given that, at the moment in which the kind is introduced, it is possible—and often is the case—that we *do not know* which are the constituent properties of the sample

Here is a simple illustration of the point: let S be a speaker who thinks about the Large Hadron Collider (LHC, for short). As it commonly happens, S may associate a vast number of descriptions to that name—some of which may be extremely vague and / or idiosyncratic (e.g., LHC = 'An insanely expensive toy located somewhere in Europe') or even completely wrong (e.g., LHC = 'The machine which will cause Earth to vanish, absorbed by a giant black-hole'). However, since (by hypothesis) the reference of that name was successfully fixed—by a group of engineers and astrophysicists initially working on the project, say—and since (again by hypothesis) S herself belongs to the same linguistic community which was responsible for that initial "baptism", she is *ipso facto* licensed to employ the name 'LHC' to refer to *the very same thing* referred to by the scientists who used that name for the first time. The same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the case of predicates for natural kind (such as 'gold' or 'tiger'), the relevant difference being that in such cases what is employed to fix the reference is not a particular object *as such*, but rather an object taken as a *sample* of the kind to which we want to refer henceforth.

The anti-individualistic moral of that analysis is, I take it, quite straightforward: if the story told by Kripke is right, one should conclude that reference is not an (isolated) individual's business, in that there is an irreducible (normative) role to be played by: (i) (shared) *linguistic institutions* in the determination of the reference of proper names; as well as by (ii) *the world*, i.e., the physical environment surrounding *us*, in the determination of the reference of predicates for natural kinds.

5. Although developed quite independently of Kripke's analysis, Hilary Putnam and Tyler Burge develop a similar anti-individualistic approach in their respective theories of meaning and philosophies of mind.

In the seminal essay 'The Meaning of "Meaning" ' (1975), Putnam employs his famous thought-experiment of Twin-Earth in order to show that the extension of a number of predicates is not completely determined by the psychological states (in the 'narrow sense', see p. 220) of the speaker who is employing them—after all, he argues, two speakers (or

used to fix the reference of the relevant term, it is possible that further empirical investigations might come to fill that gap, or even show that things we initially believed to belong to the same kind (e.g., gold and "fool's gold") actually do not.

the same speaker in different situations) with identical (narrow) psychological states can use the same term (e.g., 'water') to refer to different substances according to her physical environment (e.g., H_2O if she is on Earth, *XYZ* if on Twin-Earth). Putnam generalizes that conclusion in a claim which became one of the trademarks of anti-individualism: 'Cut the pie any way you like, "meanings" just ain't in the *head*!' (p. 227). Again, the anti-individualistic moral of this analysis is clear: for a large number of predicates—as well as for the content of the thoughts expressed by means of ascriptive sentences using those predicates—their extension (hence: their meaning) depends on conditions belonging to the individual's physical environment (hence: outside her head).

Tyler Burge (1998a) takes a slightly different approach—but one which also finds precedents in Kripke's analysis—pointing out the role of socio-linguistic institutions in the determination of the meaning of our terms, and, consequently, of the contents of the thoughts expressed by those terms. Burge's argument also begins with a thought-experiment, presenting two temporally distinct situations in which a subject employs the term 'arthritis' intending to refer to a certain phenomenon (namely, rheumatoid diseases, including one in his fist), the result being that she would be right in one case (t1) but wrong in another (t2), due to differences of the socio-linguistic environment in which she finds herself in each situation. Burge also generalizes his conclusions, claiming that '[t]he argument can get under way in any case where it is intuitively possible to attribute a mental state or event whose content involves a notion that the subject incompletely understands' (p. 29)[164]. The alternative model he presents emphasizes 'a certain responsibility to communal conventions governing, and conceptions associated with, symbols that [one] is disposed to use' (p. 79). The fundamental idea is to 'see the language of content attribution

[164] I find Burge's idea of 'incomplete understanding' somewhat misleading; I think I know what he means—namely, that there is a "division of linguistic work" underlying our practices, in that the use of a particular term (hence its meaning), being *shared* by a large linguistic community, is (more often than not) more complex than any single user can realize—it might have more (or less) legitimate applications than a (generally) competent user can think of—except, perhaps, if the user is an specialist in the relevant area, case in which one might say that she has a 'complete understanding' of that particular term (or terminology). So far, so good. Yet surely that model cannot be applied to *all* the terms of our language: there is no 'complete understanding'—hence, no correspondent 'incomplete understanding'—where ordinary (non-technical) terms are concerned (one might say that the meaning of those terms is *intrinsically* open to new applications, *intrinsically* flexible—more on this point below, in section 5.4); therefore, it would be preposterous to draw a *general* division between "specialists" ("insiders") and "laymen" ("outsiders") concerning linguistic understanding. Granted: there are *subtler* and *grosser* understandings, varying with the degree of the user's *experience* and *cultivation*, but that is about it—there is no more sense in the idea of "complete" linguistic mastery than in the idea of "complete" cultivation; one might say, concerning those abilities, that progress in them is *asymptotic*. (Note that I am not saying that Burge *subscribes* to that absurd proposal—yet, to repeat, I take it that his way of putting the matter *misleadingly* suggests it.)

as constituting a complex *standard* by reference to which the subject's mental states are estimated' (ibid.). (That standard, in turn, can be presented by means of a number of metaphors or models (see ibid.), among which Burge privileges one derived from musical analysis (see pp. 79-80).)

5.2.2 A shared structure

6. The brief analysis pursued so far let many relevant aspects of Kripke's, Putnam's and Burge's arguments simply untouched. Yet I hope that will be enough to indicate the existence of a basic structure shared by them. That structure, I take it, is articulated in five distinct phases or moments, that I go on to enumerate and characterize as follows:

1. *Problematization*: the bottom line of the three analyses is the presentation of a problem, which can be broadly formulated as follows: how it is possible that the meaning / reference of a particular term 'x' should persist through *time* (if employed in different moments by the same individual), *space* (if its use is transmited or deferred from one individual to another in a linguistic community), or *both together* (in the case of anaphoric chains of past use)? Let us call this problem *the problem of the persistence of meaning*;

2. *First candidate to answer*: having presented (a variation of) the problem of the persistence of meaning, each author presents a first, hypothetical answer *for the sake of argument*—more specifically, for constructing a *reductio*—that assumes the central thesis of the individualistic model—namely, that meaning / reference can or must be accounted for through an inspection of the individual taken in isolation of her (physical and / or social) environment;

3. *Counterfactual scenario*: aiming to indicate the flaw of that first answer—and, by extension, the falsity of the individualistic model—a thought-experiment is set up in which an individual's "internal states" (including her psychological

and / or physiological states, her history and behaviour) remain constant, but her (physical and / or social) environment changes. The counterfactual situation is then analysed, and a twofold lesson is drawn: negatively, the analysis shows that the individualistic candidate fails to account for the persistence of meaning, because although the individual's "internal states" remain constant, the reference of the term 'x' she employs changes; positively, that analysis prompts one to seek for an alternative account—the anti-individualistic proposal—that will be presented in the next phase of the argument;

4. *Second candidate to answer*: in this phase an account is presented that assumes the central thesis of anti-individualism—namely, that the meaning / reference of a term 'x' is determined, at least partially, by "external" factors or conditions, derived from the individual's belonging to a certain environment (social or linguistic). The problem of the persistence of meaning is then solved;

5. *Generalization / extension of the results*: in spite of the starting point (1) being a problem related to a particular instance of use (of a particular term 'x'), the results achieved in step (4) can be applied—so claim the argument's proponents—to wider areas of language—ultimately to language / meaning as a whole.

Table 1 below displays with more detail how each author's argumentation can be framed by the general structure that I have just presented.

Table 1: The structure of the anti-individualists's arguments (Kripke, Putnam, Burge)

	1. Problematization	***2. 1st Candidate (Individualistic Model)***	***3. Counterfactual Situation***	***4. 2nd Candidate (Anti-individualistic Model)***	***5. Generalization***
Kripke	'Nixon' & 'gold'	descriptions associated by each individual	another 'possible world' & another historical period	linguistic institutions ('baptism' + chain of use) & environment's contribution (stuff's physiochemical constitution)	rigid designators (proper names & terms for natural kinds)
Putnam	'water'	narrow psychological states	Twin-Earth	environment's contribution (stuff's physiochemical constitution)	'Cut the pie any way you like, "meanings" just ain't in the *head*!'
Burge	'arthritis'	(narrow) psychological & physiological states	another linguistic community	a 'complex [social] standard' (community's conventions & rules)	attribution of mental states 'whose content involves a notion that the subject incompletely understands'

7. I assume the table above is self-explanatory. I shall nonetheless highlight the point in which the influence the impersonal model of normativity (mentioned in the Introduction) appears more conspicuously in that picture—I refer, as it should be clear, to its fourth phase (hence, to the fourth column of Table 1), whose explicit role is to establish the (anti-individualistic) conditions for the reference of a term to remain constant. What is perhaps not so clear—anyway, what is not commonly emphasized in the anti-individualistic argumentation, particularly in the seminal texts I mentioned[165]—is that, given the way in which the conditions for persistence of meaning / reference are presented by those authors, they are also conditions for the possibility of *linguistic correction*, and, consequently, for the very *normativity* of language: it is based on those conditions that, in communicative exchanges, speakers can judge if they are *understanding* each other—if they are talking about *the same* things, or about *different* ones—when using certain terms. Without that base, neither linguistic *agreement* nor linguistic *disagreement* would be possible.

This, therefore, is the first point that I would like to make: tacitly or not, the anti-individualistic positions presented so far are invariably commited to *a particular* model (or account) of linguistic normativity.

[165] Burge might be considered an exception, since, as I indicated above, he explicitly presents an (anti-individualistic) model of normativity at the end of his essay (see 1998a, p. 79-80).

What is lacking is a fuller characterization of that model. I assume it will not be necessary to spend a lot of argumentative effort to show that, concerning the three cases above, the conditions presented in the fourth phase (column 4) depend on (or imply) what in the Introduction I described as a kind of impersonal knowledge of certain "objective facts". That connection appears clearly in the very characterization of those conditions—including both the existence of *linguistic institutions* (Kripke and Burge) and the *constitution of the substances* with which speakers relate (Kripke and Putnam). Besides, and more important, that connection is also manifest in what one might call the *dynamic* of the arguments which culminate in that fourth phase, amounting to a systematic attempt of weakening (ultimately suppressing) the *isolated individual*'s role, and, consequently, her *authority*, over the meaning of the terms she employs. This, indeed, is the trademark of anti-individualism, and it is precisely the aspect of that position which (to me, at any rate) seems more promising if thought against the backdrop of the problems faced by the individualistic tradition. Yet what I want to suggest here is that we start paying attention to that glass's empty half—something that neither defenders *nor* critics of anti-individualism seem to be doing as I think they should. This is because I suspect that behind the argumentative dynamic I just highlighted there might lurk a radically distorted picture of normativity—one in which the *individual responsibility* over meaning and linguistic agreement is either missing or displaced or replaced by something else. In the remainder of this chapter I shall try to elaborate and justify that suspicion; what I hope to achieve along the way is, on the one hand, an increased awareness of the assumptions which might be influencing some particular ways of looking at our linguistic practices, and, on the other hand, a defence of an even more demanding methodological directive, i.e., one requiring that we pay attention to an even larger set of conditions or constraints than those imposed by anti-individualists in order to provide a (more) realistic understanding of meaning and normativity.

(Note that when I refer to a 'radically distorted *picture* of normativity' I mean something rather different than a 'thesis' or a 'theory' or something to that effect—in particular, I do not mean something that needs to be *explicit*, let alone *defended*, by anyone on its grip; on the contrary, I actually think that, if formulated as a *theory* or a set of *theses,* probably no supporter of anti-individualism would (or would immediately) acknowledge (or assent to) them. That said, one might wonder what, then, would be the point of presenting such a picture in the first place.—I believe nobody would expect of a person recently told of an

(as yet) unconscious motivation for her actions that she would (or would immediately) accept her analyst's interpretation—on the contrary, one is rather well advised to expect resistance. Does that make the analyst's work pointless?)

5.3 Kripke's Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: a Further Parallel

8. In his *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (hereafter K), Saul Kripke argues that the central problem of the *Philosophical Investigations* is a 'skeptical paradox' concerning the conditions of meaning, or, more generally, normativity (the possibility of following rules). The relevance of that paradox would lie in its absolute generality, which is clearly indicated in Kripke's (*interim*) conclusion that 'Wittgenstein's main problem is that it appears that he has shown that *all* language, *all* concept formation, to be impossible, indeed unintelligible' (K 62). But Kripke also (notoriously) claims that Wittgenstein offers a 'skeptical solution'[166] (*à la* Hume[167]) to that paradox—one which would 'contain[...] the argument against "private language" ' (K 60).

Although admitting that the position resulting from Kripke's reading is superficially very different from those of the authors analysed in the previous section (including Kripke himself, in *Naming and Necessity*), I will try to show that, in a more fundamental level, there are important parallels among those arguments—parallels whose attestation serves to highlight features of those positions which would remain hidden, or at best with very imprecise contours, if looked at separately. Aiming to draw those parallels, I go on to offer a brief reconstruction of the argument establishing the 'skeptical paradox' of normativity, as well as of Kripke's 'skeptical solution' to that paradox[168].

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[166] As opposed to a '*straight* solution', which would show that 'on closer examination the scepticism proves to be unwarranted' a '*sceptical* solution of a sceptical philosophical problem begins [...] by conceding that the sceptic's negative assertions are unanswerable' (K 66).

[167] The *locus classicus* for 'sceptical solutions' of that sort is, of course, Hume's *Enquiry*. (Hume himself calls his 'solution' to a set of epistemological problems a 'sceptical' one, in that he accepts the legitimacy of (sceptical) doubts concerning *reason* or *understanding*, purporting to show that neither faculty can *justify* our beliefs about future 'matters of fact'—e.g., that the sun will raise tomorrow—nor our drawing of causal laws—e.g., that bread will *always* nourish us.)

[168] For ease of exposition, I shall ascribe the views presented below to Kripke, in spite of his disclaimers—e.g., that 'I do not in this piece of writing attempt to speak for myself' (K ix), or again that 'the present

5.3.1 Adding, quadding, and the skeptical paradox of normativity

9. Kripke introduces his presentation of the skeptical paradox proposing an ingenious thought-experiment in which a 'bizarre skeptic' questions my right to claim that my past usage of the word 'plus' (and the symbol '+') denoted the function *plus* rather than the function *quus* (see K 7-9)[169]. The function *quus* (symbolized by '⊕') is defined as follows:

$$x \oplus y = x + y, \text{ if } x, y < 57$$

$$[x \oplus y] = 5 \text{ otherwise}$$

The problem—or challenge—presented by the skeptic is as follows: suppose I am asked to compute the result of 68 + 57—a computation which, by stipulation, I face for the first time in my life; suppose further that all the computations I did in the past involved numbers smaller than 57, and, consequently, whether I knew it or not, all my computations up to now resulted in answers which agreed both with the functions *plus* and *quus*. That being the case, it follows that there seems to be no reason to prefer the claim that I have been making *additions* rather than (say) *quadditions*—'Who is to say', asks Kripke, 'that [quus] is not the function I previously meant by "+"?' (K 9). According to Kripke, the *rationale* behind the skeptical conclusion—i.e., that there is no reason to prefer a claim over the other—is that I am not able to 'give an account of what fact it is (about my mental state) that constitutes my meaning plus, not quus', and that "show[s] how I am justified in giving the answer "125" to "68 + 57" [rather than "5"]' (K 11).

paper should be thought of as expounding neither "Wittgenstein's" argument nor "Kripke's": rather Wittgenstein's argument as it struck Kripke' (K 5).

[169] It is important to emphasize, as Kripke himself does at the outset, that although he is following Wittgenstein in 'develop[ing] the problem initially with respect to a mathematical example, [...] the relevant sceptical problem applies to all meaningful uses of language' (K 7).

10. Assuming that I am actually unable to produce or indicate any such 'fact'[170], how would that lead to the impossibility (or nonsensicality) of the very notion of meaning, and, consequently, of '*all* language'? I believe Kripke's answer to that question becomes reasonably clear in the joint analysis of the following pair of passages:

> Of course, ultimately, if the sceptic is right, the concepts of meaning and of intending one function rather than another will make no sense. For the sceptic holds that no fact about my past history—nothing that was ever in my mind, or in my external behavior—establishes that I meant plus rather than quus. [...] But if this is correct, there can of course be no fact about which function I meant, and if there can be no fact about which particular function I meant in the *past*, there can be none in the *present* either. (K 13)

> The important problem for Wittgenstein is that my present mental state does not appear to determine what I *ought* to do in the future. Although I may *feel* (now) that something in my head corresponding to the word 'plus' mandates a determinate response to any new pair of arguments, in fact nothing in my head does so. (K 56)

In other words, if there is no *past* fact justifying the claim that I have been following a certain rule (meaning *x* rather than *y* by using 'x'), then there is equally no *present* fact to which I can appeal in order to justify my current (rule-following) behaviour. The conclusion, stated radically and paradoxically, is that apparently I *never know*—in that I could never justify my belief about—what I mean with any term I use. Kripke formulates that conclusion in a still more dramatical way when he summarizes, at the beginning of the third chapter, the results of his skeptical argument, asserting that:

> There can be no such thing as meaning anything by any word. Each new application we make is a leap in the dark; any present intention could be interpreted so as to accord with anything we may choose to do. So there can be neither accord, nor conflict. This is what Wittgenstein said in §201. (K 55)

That concludes my reconstruction of Kripke's skeptical paradox. Before turning to his skeptical solution, I would like to emphasize an aspect of the precedent exposition that already points toward the parallel I want to draw with the anti-individualistic arguments. I

[170] That which here I am proposing to *assume* is something Kripke takes considerable pains to *prove* in his subsequent argument, by successively excluding several candidates to 'facts' capable of justifying the subject's answer to the 'skeptical challenge'. For brevity's sake, I will not examine those arguments here. It might nonetheless be of some help to enumerate the "theories" he analyses and excludes; they are, in textual order: (i) dispositionalism (pp. 22-37), (ii) the explanation from the '*simplest* hypothesis' (pp. 38-41), (iii) the appeal to an '*introspectible* experience' (pp. 41-42), particularly (iv) an introspectible experience conceived according to the 'classical empiricist picture' (pp. 42-53), and, finally, (v) 'mathematical realism' or 'Platonism' (pp. 53-54).

refer to the very *formulation* employed by Kripke to introduce his paradox—a formulation which strikes me as very close to those employed by the supporters of anti-individualism to show that the problem of the persistence of meaning cannot be solved by an appeal to "individualistic factors" (see Table 1, column 2): in both cases, what is indicated is that inspecting a single individual, taken in isolation from her physical and / or social environment, is not a sufficient basis to explain the possibility of meaning. Although that move already appears in this skeptical phase of Kripke's argument, it is only in the context of the establishment of the skeptical solution that it will receive an explicit and systematic treatment. Let us then turn to that argument.

5.3.2 The skeptical solution and the impersonal model of normativity

11. Kripke begins his presentation of the skeptical solution with a statement that, at least *prima facie*, points precisely to the kind of consideration that I have just emphasized:

> [Wittgenstein's] solution to his own sceptical problem begins by agreeing with the sceptics that *there is no 'superlative fact' ([PI]§192) about my mind* that constitutes my meaning addition by 'plus' and determines in advance what I should do to accord with this meaning. (K 65; my italics)

The problem with the statement above is that it might lead to a misunderstanding, due to the use of the phrase 'about my mind' to characterize the 'superlative fact' that, according to Kripke, is rejected both by Wittgenstein and by 'the skeptics' as a suited candidate for the justification of (the possibility of) meaning. Now that is a rather restrictive formulation, if compared to those presented in other contexts (such as the passages quoted above), where Kripke refers to 'fact[s] about my past history—nothing that was ever *in my mind, or in my external behavior*' (K 13; my italics). Actually, there are contexts in which Kripke uses a still more general formulation to describe those 'facts'—e.g., when he asserts that 'Wittgenstein's skeptical solution concedes to the sceptic that no "truth conditions" or "corresponding facts" in the world exist that make a statement like "Jones [...] means addition by '+' true" ' (K 86).

For the sake of clarity, let me repeat which are the candidates to 'facts' offered so far, in order of increasing generality: (i) facts concerning the subject's *mind* (*à la* Putnam's 'narrow psychological states'); (ii) facts concerning the subject's *global history* (something like a sum of behavioural, psychological and physiological states, *à la* Burge); or something still more general, namely, (iii) *any* 'corresponding facts in the world'. By reasons which should be obvious, the first two formulations (particularly the second) would make the life of someone who wants compare the anti-individualistic arguments with Kripke's much easier; however, given the importance of the notion of 'facts' in the latter's analysis, one is well advised not to privilege an interpretation over the alternatives, in an *ad hoc* fashion. So, how are we to solve this interpretative problem, so as to get clear about the nature of Kripke's 'facts'?

I suggest that we shall start from the identification, made in the last quoted passage (K 86), between those 'corresponding facts in the world' and truth conditions. That suggestion gets an initial justification from the importance Kripke confers, in his presentation of the skeptical solution, to the fact that, in the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein would have proposed a new 'picture of language', whose innovation would lie precisely in the abandonment of the analysis in terms of *truth conditions* (supposedly pursued in *Tractatus*), on behalf of an analysis in terms of '*assertability conditions* or *justification conditions*'—i.e., conditions which specify 'under what circumstances are we allowed to make a given assertion', or, 'more generally, of the conditions when a move (a form of linguistic expression) is to be made in the "language-game" ' (K 74). What these considerations indicate is, I take it, that Kripke's skeptical solution for the problem of meaning essentially requires one to abandon the analysis in terms of *truth conditions* for assertions, and—here goes my suggestion—*in that sense*, it essentially requires one to abandon the analysis in terms of 'facts in the world' corresponding to those assertions, looking instead 'at how such assertions are *used*' and 'under what circumstances attributions of meaning are made and what role these attributions play in our lives' (K 86).

12. Notice that at first sight the suggestion made in the preceding paragraph goes against the aim of establishing a parallel with the anti-individualistic position—a task for which, as I said above, candidates (i) and (ii) would be clearly more appropriate. However, it is

precisely when Kripke starts to do that which he has just promised—i.e., to analyse the *use* of 'attributions of meaning' and the 'role [they] play in our lives'—that what I shall call the 'anti-individualistic move' of his argument becomes clear. Let me try to spell that out.

I start by calling attention to the fact that, similarly to the way the anti-individualists have structured their arguments, Kripke proposes an analysis which has two distinct moments or phases: initially he examines the case of an individual taken in isolation, an *then* goes on to analyse the case of an individual inside a wider environment (in his case, a wider linguistic community). Now, the conclusions obtained in the first phase of that analysis are precisely the same which were relevant for the purpose of presenting the skeptical paradox in chapter 2. I enumerate some passages where those conclusions are most clearly expressed:

1. 'one person considered in isolation [...] act[s] unhesitatingly but *blindly.'* (K 87);

2. 'It is part of our language game of speaking of rules that a speaker may, without ultimately giving any justification, follow his own confident inclination that this [...] is the *right* way to respond.' (K 87-8);

3. 'if we confine ourselves to looking at one person alone, his psychological states and his external behavior, this is as far as we can go. We can say that he acts confidently at each application of a rule; that he says—without further justification—that the way he acts, rather than some quus-like alternative, is *the* way to respond.' (K 88);

4. 'All we can say, if we consider a single person in isolation, is that our ordinary practice licenses him to apply the rule in the way it strikes him.' (K 88);

5. 'if one person is considered in isolation, the notion of a rule as guiding the person who adopts it can have *no* substantive content.' (K 89).

In at least one occasion Kripke himself identifies the conclusions expressed above—which, it is worth to repeat, are obtained in the first phase of chapter 3's analysis of the 'attributions of meaning'—with the results of the skeptical argument of chapter 2—in particular, with its systematic attempt to show that no fact can justify a subject in saying that he is following one rule rather than another. That identification occurs in the claim that

'the whole point of the skeptical argument was that there can be no facts about him [i.e., the subject who, in chapter 3, has been repeatedly described as *taken in isolation*] in virtue of which he accords with his intentions or not' (K 88).

13. So much for the first phase of Kripke's analysis of the 'attributions of meaning'. Its second phase is introduced with the following consideration:

> The situation is very different if we widen our gaze from consideration of the rule follower alone and allow ourselves to consider him as interacting with a wider community. Others will then have justification conditions for attributing correct or incorrect rule following to the subject, and these will *not* be simply that the subject's own authority is unconditionally to be accepted. (K 89).

Having presented those general considerations, Kripke immediately offers an example aiming to clarify them—that of 'a small child learning addition' (ibid.). His first comment on that example is that '[i]t is obvious that his teacher will not accept just any response from the child. On the contrary, the child must fulfill various conditions if the teacher is to ascribe to him mastery of the concept of addition' (ibid.); Kripke then goes on listing some of those conditions, yet I shall put them aside, since I am more interested in something he says soon afterwards, when contemplating the results one might extract from the analysis of that particular example for the conditions of attributions of meaning *in general*:

> Now, what do I mean when I say that the teacher judges that, for certain cases, the pupil must give the "right" answer? I mean that the teacher judges that the child has given the same answer that he himself would give. Similarly, when I said that the teacher, in order to judge that the child is adding, must judge that [...] he is applying the "right" procedure even if he comes out with a mistaken result, I mean that he judges that the child is applying the procedure he himself is inclined to apply.
>
> Something similar is true for adults. If someone whom I judge to have been computing a normal addition function (that is, someone whom I judge to give, when he adds, the same answer I would give), suddenly gives answers according to procedures that differ bizarrely from my own, then I will judge that something must have happened to him, and that he is no longer following the rule he previously followed. If this happens to him generally, and his responses seem to me to display little discernible pattern, I will judge him probably to have gone insane. (K 90).

14. Generalizing the analysis of the conditions for the 'attribution of meaning' expressed in the passages above, we obtain the following result: my statement that a subject S means *x* rather than *y* by using the term 'x' (e.g., *plus* rather than *quus* by using the term 'plus') is assertable *if and only if* the use S is inclined to do of the term 'x' agrees with the use that I have been inclined to do of that term up to now (see K 90-91). Notice, however, that my license to make such an 'attribution of meaning' expires if S starts using 'x' in a deviant way—case in which I should conclude that S does not mean *x* by 'x' (see K 91-3). That result can be schematized as follows[171]:

Attributing meaning *x* to S's use of 'x' ↔ Check whether S is inclined to use 'x' as I have been inclined to use it up to now

It is important to notice, concerning the scheme above, that even in those cases where I am able to check whether S's procedures when using 'x' have systematically matched mine, there is an important respect in which I do not have any *guarantee* (of the sort that an 'anti-skeptic' would like to obtain) to eliminate the possibility of an (still) *undetected disagreement*—i.e., the possibility that, *in all the cases observed up to now*, S was following yet another rule (say, *z*) that *accidentally* has generated the same (behaviouristic) results as the ones rule *x* has generated in my own case. Now, since *that* skeptical possibility (of an undetected, and, what is more important, a potentially undetect*able* disagreement) would, in Kripke's own view, be unavoidable, I take it that, *in that sense*, his solution for the skeptical paradox obviously does not aim to *refute* skepticism about normativity—what does not prevents us from making *fallible* (since ultimately ungrounded in any set of facts other than our shared inclinations) 'attributions of meaning'.

Notice also, finally, that if the role that those attributions have in our lives is picked out rightly by the scheme above, then clearly there is no place for such attributions except in a *community*, i.e., in a context in which individuals are able to compare their respective

[171] Notice that the scheme to follow does *not* present, strictly speaking, a bi-conditional—i.e., a relation of *logical* (or semantic) *equivalence*, expressing the *truth conditions* of the propositions involved. Precisely in order to avoid such a misunderstanding I decided not to present the *relata* in propositional terms, but rather in terms of descriptions of *actions*—"moves" in a language-game.

inclinations (to use some terms), thus becoming able to mutually correct each other[172]—that being the reason why Kripke finds himself to be justified in saying of that skeptical solution that it includes Wittgenstein's famous argument against the possibility of a 'private language', in that it 'does not allow us to speak of a single individual, considered by himself and in isolation, as ever meaning anything' (K 68-69).

5.3.3 The parallel between Kripke's and the anti-individualists's arguments

15. The parallel between the precedent argumentation and that of the anti-individualists gets conspicuous when we frame Kripke's analysis according to the five phases or moments enumerated in section 5.2. The result is, concisely, the following[173]:

1. *Problematization*: difficulties involving the determination of the meaning / reference of a particular term ('plus')[174];
2. *First candidate to answer*: analysis of the conditions of use of that term by an individual *taken in isolation*;
3. *Counterfactual scenario*: the thought-experiment presenting the 'bizarre skeptic's' challenge;

[172] As Espen Hammer clarifies in his summary of Kripke's 'skeptical solution':

> Kripke does not claim that we continually check the assertibility of our own and each other's utterances: predominantly, we rely on practical capacities that have been internalized trough training. His point is rather that without the *possibility* of mutual control, we would never know in cases of doubt what the right use of a concept might be. For an individual regarded in social isolation, however, no such possible check on right and wrong uses of expressions would exist; thus, in such a case assertibility conditions and therefore also meaning and language would collapse. (Hammer, 2002, p. 25)

[173] Note that I keep the original ordering, although in Kripke's text phases 2 and 3 appear initially amalgamated, being clearly distinguished only later on.

[174] There is a subtle difference in Kripke's starting point, compared with the three analyses presented in section 5.2. Recall that, in the latter case, the problem was formulated in terms of the conditions of possibility for the *persistence* of meaning (or reference) of a particular term, 'x'. Now in Kripke's case the problem is systematically formulated in a different way—namely, as that of explaining how is it possible that an individual should mean *x* rather than *y* by employing a particular term 'x'. Yet that difference is only superficial, as it is indicated by the very fact that the three original (anti-individualistic) analyses can be easily (re)formulated in Kripke's terms (see Table 2 below), and vice-versa. (Thus, e.g., Putnam's problem can be (re)formulated by means of the question 'How can one know whether a subject means *water* rather than *twin-water* by using the term 'water?', and so on.)

4. *Second candidate to answer*: analysis of the conditions for 'attributions of meaning' in the context of a comparison between an individual and members of a wider community;
5. *Generalization / extension of the results*: the analysis seems to apply to '*all* meaning', '*all* language'.

Here is the complete table resulting from that comparison:

Table 2: Parallel between the arguments of the anti-individualists and Kripke's

	1. Problematization	***2. 1st Candidate (Individualistic Model)***	***3. Counterfactual Situation***	***4. 2nd Candidate (Anti-individualistic Model)***	***5. Generalization***
Kripke (1)	'Nixon' = the *same* individual or a *different* one in 2 possible worlds? & 'gold' = *element with atomic weight 79* or *a shiny, ductile (etc.) metal*?	descriptions associated by each individual	another 'possible world' & another historical period	linguistic institutions ('baptism' + chain of use) & environment's contribution (stuff's physiochemical constitution)	rigid designators (proper names & terms for natural kinds)
Putnam	'water' = H_2O or *XYZ?*	narrow psychological states	Twin-Earth	environment's contribution (stuff's physiochemical constitution)	'Cut the pie any way you like, "meanings" just ain't in the *head*!'
Burge	'arthritis' = *arthritis* or *tharthritis?*	(narrow) psychological & physiological states	another linguistic community	a 'complex [social] standard' (community's conventions & rules)	attribution of mental states 'whose content involves a notion that the subject incompletely understands'
Kripke (2)	'plus' = *plus* or *quus?*	'facts' about an *isolated individual* (her mind, behaviour, etc.) = truth conditions	the 'bizarre skeptic's' hypothesis	an irreducible role of the *community* = assertability conditions	*all* meaning / language

5.4 Kripke's Wittgenstein *versus* Cavell's Wittgenstein: problems with the impersonal model

16. Stanley Cavell was the pioneer among Wittgenstein's interpreters in assigning a central (and *positive*) role to skepticism in his reading of the *Philosophical Investigations*[175]. Cavell himself acknowledges that Kripke's account is 'the only [...], other than that in *The Claim of Reason*, that takes *Philosophical Investigations* not to mean to refute skepticism but, on the contrary, to maintain some relation to the possibility of skepticism as internal to Wittgenstein's philosophy' (1990, p. 65). That statement is presented in the second chapter of *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (CHU)—titled 'The Argument of the Ordinary: Scenes of Instruction in Wittgenstein and in Kripke'—which is dedicated precisely to the confrontation with Kripke's skeptical reading of the *Investigations*.

Similarities notwithstanding, already in the introduction of CHU Cavell highlights an important disagreement with Kripke concerning Wittgenstein's relation to skepticism:

> On Kripke's view Wittgenstein makes a skeptical discovery for which he supplies (what Kripke styles) a skeptical solution. For me Wittgenstein discovers the threat of the temptation of skepticism in such a way that efforts to solve it continue its work of denial. The question is what the denial is of. Sometimes I say it is of finitude, sometimes of the human. (CHU 23)

Cavell quickly acknowledges that this allusion to the denial of finitude and / or 'the human' is far from supplying a 'final response' to his own preceding question (see ibid.). In order to achieve such a response, Cavell thinks we first need to get clear about the role of 'Wittgensteinian criteria'—in particular, to get clear about 'why philosophers have typically taken [those criteria] as designed to solve the question whether we can know that there is a world and others in it, that is, to answer the question of skepticism' (CHU 23-24). Now, since Kripke himself exemplifies that 'typical attitude'—to the extent that his analysis of the nature of rules aims precisely at answering 'whether I can know, be certain, that I mean one thing rather than another' (CHU 24)—the critical examination of his

[175] That reading was presented systematically for the first time in Cavell's *magnum opus The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (1979), but have since then developed in numerous other writings.

position provides an indirect way of elucidating the nature of 'Wittgensteinian criteria'. With that aim in mind, Cavell will argue that, *pace* Kripke, (i) '[r]ules are not a (skeptical) solution to the problem of meaning', and (ii) that 'apart from a certain appeal to rules (the kind I believe Kripke makes for Wittgenstein, but which I believe Wittgenstein precisely repudiates) there would be no skeptical crisis of meaning (of the kind Kripke develops)' (ibid).

In the remainder of this section I shall be primarily concerned with reconstructing the arguments for theses (i) and (ii). Before going on, I find that one cautionary note is in order —namely, that one should not lose sight of the fact that theses (i) and (ii) express only the *negative* aspect of Cavell's analysis—i.e., they indicate (primarily) what 'Wittgensteinian criteria' are *not;* yet by defending them Cavell doesn't mean to deny that another kind of 'skeptical crisis' is important for the *Investigations*'s argument—on the contrary, his own understanding of the 'schematism of criteria' is thoroughly informed by his concern with elucidating the conditions of possibility for the 'skeptical temptation' (see CHU 24)[176]. (I shall come back to this point later on.)

5.4.1 Rules, multiple interpretations, and the 'skeptical paradox'

17. According to Cavell, Kripke's 'skeptical paradox' (and, more generally, Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein) is based on a twofold misunderstanding: first, a peculiar (and mistaken) view about the nature of rules, and, second, an improper emphasis on their role in the *Investigations*'s argument. Underlying that mistaken view would be the assumption that agreement in action (be it among different subjects, or the same subject at different times) depends on a particular interpretation of the rule that determines (and, consequently,

[176] As Stephen Mulhall clarifies when commenting on Cavell's view on that point:

> [...] since criteria are based on agreement, a skeptical repudiation of such agreement is a standing human possibility; anything essentially conventional must be vulnerable to the withdrawal of consent. So it can never be right to combat skepticism either by claiming that criteria confer certainty, or by denying the possibility of their repudiation. What must rather be shown is the true cost of that repudiation; for if criteria determine the use, and so the meaning, of our words, to refuse them is to deprive oneself of the power of coherent speech. (Mulhall, 1996, p. 7)

is expressed by) that action. The first clear index showing that Kripke commits to that assumption lies in his initial requirement that the subject, when challenged by the skeptic, should (at least in principle) be able to present a *fact* (or set of facts) that could justify (or consist in) a *particular interpretation* of a rule—i.e., to resume the preceding notation, the fact justifying (or consisting in that) a linguistic statement of a rule ('x') denotes one rule (*x*) rather than another (*y*).

Aiming to indicate the problems with that view on the nature of rules, Cavell starts calling our attention to the fact that, *pace* Kripke's reconstruction, Wittgenstein himself does not assign such a heavy weight to the role of rules—let alone the (skeptical) possibility of 'multiple interpretations' of rules—in his original argument. The first clue supporting that conclusion lies in the very "tone" of the second half of the first paragraph of PI §201 (whose first half, it is worth to recall, supplies one of the main textual supports for Kripke's analysis), in which Wittgenstein presents (in retrospect) what would be the 'answer' for his 'paradox'. Here is the (full) relevant paragraph:

> This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. *The answer was*: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here. (PI, §201; my italics)

Commenting on the answer indicated above, Cavell asserts the following:

> This [answer] seems to me equally readable as suggesting not that this paradox is "central" [as Kripke would have it] but that it is no sooner named than its significance is undermined. Wittgenstein's tone is: What our so-called paradox came to was no more than this so-called answer can completely tame. The facts about possible interpretations of a rule are not sufficient to cause skepticism (though they may play into a skeptical hand, one that has already portrayed rules and their role in language in a particular way). The Wittgensteinian issue is, as elsewhere, why we imagine otherwise. (CHU 68)

Faced with those words one might well wonder why, according to Cavell, would the 'facts about possible interpretations of a rule' *not* be 'sufficient to cause skepticism'. It is in the answer to that question that we shall get clear about what exactly are the problems involved in Kripke's assumption that agreement in actions depends on a *particular* interpretation of the rule that determines those actions—and, consequently, about what is

wrong with his putting so much emphasis in the possibility of 'multiple interpretations' of rules.

18. Cavell's basic idea, as I understand it, is that Kripke's assumption would create an *infinite regress*—one that was actually implied in Wittgenstein's text, but that will be appropriated by Kripke for very different purposes (namely, skeptical ones). Here is how the regress would originate: the first premise is the assumption that acting according to a rule (rather than another) implies interpreting it in a particular way; the second premise is a conclusion argued for by Wittgenstein (and accepted by Kripke), namely: that each interpretation of a rule amounts to no more than a replacement of a linguistic expression (or symbol) that denotes it for a new expression (a new symbol); now, if both premises are true, it follows that a (new) interpretation is always needed, in order for the expression resulting from a previous interpretation to be understood—in other words, we can always try to supply a rule for the application of a rule.

Note that both Wittgenstein and Kripke would agree with the argument presented in the paragraph above. Yet, precisely because of its conclusion (because, i.e., it creates an infinite regress), one can use the understanding of the nature of rules by which that argument is prefixed to present a new argument, which would have the form of a *modus tollens*, as follows:

(1) To act according to a rule (rather than another) implies interpreting it in a particular way; [Assumption]

(2) To interpret a rule is nothing but replacing a linguistic expression for another; [Thesis defended in PI]

(3) (1) & (2) → *infinite regress*

(4) Therefore, the initial assumption (1) is false. [Conclusion]

I take it that something like the argument presented above is what Cavell finds in Wittgenstein's analysis. (That, at any rate, is the way I read Wittgenstein.) Now Kripke seems to see things differently; for according to him premise (1) is not to be taken as an assumption introduced in order to construct a *modus tollens*, but rather as a *truth* concerning the nature of rules—that being the reason why, with the aid of an additional premise (amounting to a different understanding of premiss 2), he will be lead to defend *another argument*, that has the following form:

(1) To act according to a rule (rather than another) implies interpreting it in a particular way; [Assumption]

(2) To interpret a rule is nothing but replacing a linguistic expression for another; [Thesis defended in PI]

(3') (2) ↔ No fact (or set of facts) can be presented by a subject justifying or consisting in a particular interpretation of a rule (rather than another); [Kripke's take on (2)]

(4') Therefore, in order to act according to a rule (rather than another), one shall eventually give up interpreting it in any way, instead following one's inclination —in other words, one shall eventually *act blindly*; [Skeptical conclusion]

This analysis lets us with two readings, both seemingly compatible with Wittgenstein's text. How shall we decide which is correct? In order to answer that question, we need take another step back, seeking to unveil some further assumptions behind that dispute.

5.4.2 The individual / community relation: two ways of reading Wittgenstein's 'scene of instruction'

19. The need to investigate the most general assumptions underlying Kripke's reading is exactly what Cavell expressed at the end of the passage quoted above (§17), mentioning the 'Wittgensteinian issue' of 'why we imagine otherwise'—why, i.e., it is so natural to read PI §201 (and adjacent ones) as Kripke does, taking the possibility of 'multiple interpretations' of rules as a basis to draw a skeptical conclusion. The path to clarify that issue is already indicated in that same passage, in the observation that the nature of rules *might* authorize such a conclusion, provided that their role in language is portrayed 'in a particular way'; it is in order to indicate more precisely the content of that portrayal that it becomes necessary to identify the assumptions which, so to speak, constitute its frame. According to Cavell, that frame is comprised of at least two related (problematic) views: one about the nature of human agreement, and the other about the relation between the individual and her community. Here is how he elaborates the point:

> What Kripke calls the "solution" to the skeptical question or paradox turns on a picture of how the "isolated" individual comes to be "instructed" (and accepted or rejected) by the "community", in terms of "inclinations" expressed by someone (presumably regarding himself or herself as representing the community) who "judges" whether the "same" inclinations are expressed by the other seeking (as it were) the community's recognition or acknowledgement. (CHU 69)

Kripke's portrayal of agreement—as if it was *always* a matter of a community deciding to accept or reject a "beginner"—betrays a commitment with the ideal of an objective (impersonal) ground for judging the extent of that agreement; although Kripke emphatically denies that such a ground would consist in a set of *truth conditions* for judgements concerning the correct employment of our words (hence, in a set of 'facts in the world' corresponding to normative propositions), he does allow it to consist in another set of factors (facts?)—namely, the ones concerning *assertability conditions*, and, to that extent, the pre-existent "conventions" of a linguistic community (i.e., the set of rules expressing our shared inclinations to act under certain circumstances, which in turn allow us to mutually *correct* each other concerning the "moves" we take in particular language-games).

20. Cavell would not exactly want to *deny* that the kind of situation imagined by Kripke is possible—in effect, I believe he could easily grant that *sometimes* the problem of agreement takes place precisely along those lines, and, consequently, might be solved as Kripke proposes. As I understand him, however, Cavell would want to say that such a portrayal falls short of presenting the most common—let alone the *main* or the *only*—kind of risk which is involved in our ordinary linguistic exchanges. Aiming to counteract Kripke's reductionist approach, Cavell tries to call our attention to another aspect of the problem, indicating the costs involved in the abandonment of the kind of 'agreement' (which Cavell prefers to call 'attunement') with the community that is *already* possessed by an individual who has inherited its language.

Cavell describes the particular kind of agreement that he takes as characteristic of our linguistic practices in *The Claim of Reason,* by means of the following comparisons:

> The idea of agreement here is not that of coming to or arriving at an agreement on a given occasion, but of being in agreement throughout, being in harmony, like pitches or tones, or clocks, or weighing scales, or columns of figures. That a group of human beings *stimmen* in their language *überein* says, so to speak, that they are mutually voiced with respect to it, mutually *attuned* top to bottom. (CR 32)

Although (generally) we do not need to *come to* agreement (partaking in any kind of previous "discussion") about the use of our words—and, what is more important, about the *judgements* we make using them—we (generally) *are* in agreement concerning that, in the same way as we (generally) "are in agreement" concerning (i.e., we *share*) certain natural reactions: 'We may laugh and cry at the same things, or not; some experience may throw us out of, or into, agreement here, but the idea of *achieving* agreement in our senses of comedy or tragedy seems out of place'—more specifically, it suggests 'a rejection of Wittgenstein's idea of agreement, or [...] a contractualizing or conventionalizing of it' (CHU 94)[177]. Now, since in that basic level agreement in judgements reflects the

[177] Note that the very example Cavell uses in this context—'our senses of comedy or tragedy'—already indicates that his appeal to our 'natural reactions' should be understood broadly, so as to include the most sophisticated reactions that are developed with *cultivation*. Cavell clarifies that point in another context, accusing the 'over-conventionalized interpretations of Wittgenstein's notion of life forms' of wishing 'to deny human beings their natural history, in its perpetual intersection with human cultivation (a vision linking Wittgenstein with Freud)' (WE [2006] 14). (One might feel inclined to say that those 'natural reactions' would be better described as belonging to our *second* nature—yet are we sure of what we mean by human beings *first* nature? 'What', asks Pascal in his *Pensées,* 'are our natural principles but habitual principles?'; and he adds, a little later: 'Habit is a second nature that destroys the first. But what is nature? Why is habit not natural? I am very much afraid that nature itself is only a first habit, just as habit is a

attunement in our natural reactions—in our form of life—Cavell draws the conclusion that 'nothing is deeper than the fact, or the extent, of agreement itself' (CR 32). That conclusion can be misleading, in that one might take it as offering an (alternative) philosophical explanation of the ground of "linguistic agreement"; what it really means is, on the contrary, to 'question whether [such] a philosophical explanation is needed, or wanted' (ibid.)[178].

21. But why exactly would such an explanation be unnecessary? Is not the reason that Cavell's conclusion is, after all, rather similar to Kripke's 'skeptical solution'? For if *nothing* is more fundamental than (the fact of) agreement itself—if, i.e., no "external guarantee" for it is available—does not that imply that agreement is, after all, (ultimately) ungrounded—hence, that at some point we really have to act *blindly,* as Kripke's skeptic would have it?

I assume sometimes we do have our reasons to feel like we are "acting blindly"—don't we? Suppose someone—a child, say—should ask me endlessly *why* I (have to) act as I do,

second nature.' (1966, p. 61)). Peg O'Connor's *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life* (2008) offers an extremely insightful (and somewhat novel) treatment of the kind of intersection mentioned in Cavell's last quote (and one which seems consistent with Pascal's suspicions). That treatment is condensed in her useful notions of 'felted world' and 'felted contextualism', which can (hopefully) get an initial purchase from the reading of the following pair of passages:

> The deep agreement of community in the sense of natural history is not untethered and free-floating. It is very much a product and a producer of our world, in all its givenness and contingency. Our natural history is part of, responsive to, shaped by, and shaper of the physical world we inhabit. The actions, practices, rules, regularities, reactions, and givens of nature overlap, crisscross, and tangle with one another. This is the felted world. (O'Connor, 2008, p. 85)

> [F]elted contextualism does not presume a world/language divide, but rather maintains that practices have a depth that goes all the way down into what most people simply call the natural world. My position is that our world is not one part natural and one part social, but rather is a shared world where these are intermingled and tangled, resulting in ways of acting and conventions that are inescapably bound together. (ibid., p. 102)

[178] Here one might recall some of Cora Diamond's claims, in her *Realistic Spirit*, about the kind of 'unrealism' one should try to avoid—hence, the kind of 'realism' one should try to seek—in philosophy. Representative claims are these: 'the unrealism to which Wittgenstein was trying to draw our attention was not that of failing to see what the given really is, or ought to be for us in our philosophical thinking. The unrealism was in the questions we were asking. We ask philosophical questions about our concepts in the grip of an unrealistic conception of what knowing about them would be' (1995, p. 66); and again: 'the hardness of realism is in not asking [some] questions' (p. 70).

rather than some other way; how far could I—how far could you?—go with my answers before feeling (embarrassingly) out of reasons—hence ungrounded, and thus reduced to "act blindly"? In cases like that, I might well feel tempted to conclude that the cause of my "blindness"—i.e., my incapacity to find further reasons and justifications for my actions—is something about the *world,* or about *human condition* as such—something that theology or metaphysics or physics or biology or anthropology should explain—as if *it* were (as yet?) "too dark", meaning that the very attempt to try to see through this darkness is (for the time being?) hopeless.

Something analogous might happen where a disagreement arises concerning how to apply a concept—hence, a rule—in a particular context. Suppose I feel strongly inclined (as I actually do) to call those two big cardboard boxes lying (rather loosely) one upon the other in the middle of my living room a table—after all, I use to put a lot of things on it, and even use it to have my dinner every now and then. Yet, I can think of many a friend finding the very idea of calling (let alone using!) such a thing (as) a 'table' a funny or eccentric or simply outraging one[179]. Faced with that disagreement, I might again feel tempted to conclude that there is nothing about *the world* (or its facts) that *obliges* one to apply (or not to apply) a certain concept or rule—hence, that nothing I can point to in the world can possibly put an end to it; and that feeling can in turn lead me to conclude that (sometimes) I have to (ultimately) act blindly, merely following my inclinations.

Now that is precisely the kind of conclusion whose (apparent) necessity Cavell wants to question. I take it that he would do that by suggesting that (sometimes) we actually suffer a kind of blindness, yet we only avoid the real issue—the real source of that blindness—if we project the darkness upon the world[180]. True: there is nothing about the world and its facts that *alone* would be responsible for our agreement; yet that does not imply that agreement is (necessarily) ungrounded—it only implies that *we* must provide such a

[179] Of course disagreements can get way more serious in other contexts. People do sometimes feel outraged facing common practices—including linguistic ones—from other cultures, or even from one's own culture. (Think about, e.g., how people's inclinations differ about the practice of eating meet, and, consequently, of applying the concept "food" (and adjacent ones) to (some) animals.)

[180] I am here adapting a suggestion made in a rather different context—namely, Part Four of *The Claim of Reason*, titled 'Skepticism and the Problem of Others'. The sentence which interests me is this: 'I suffer a kind of blindness, but I avoid the issue by projecting this darkness upon the other' (CR 368); that sentence occurs in the middle of an investigation about the sources of what Cavell there calls the 'myth of the body as a veil' (see ibid.)—particularly the skeptical doubts concerning knowledge of other('s) *minds* which arise when (supposedly) all the evidence available comes from their *bodies*.

ground, in each particular context, by finding or constructing or inventing conditions for it; it implies, in other words, that the burden for achieving and maintaining agreement is upon our capacities to invest our interest upon the world and upon others—to single out some facts or aspects as important (for some particular purposes), finding them worthy of sharing, and hence of universalizing. Now, when no (universally accepted or assumed) theology or metaphysics or ideology or science is available for one to lean on—a condition which was not so much *created* as it was *disclosed* by (some) modern thinkers—the task of reaching and maintaining agreement might understandably appear difficult, even hopeless; accordingly, one might (again understandably) feel tempted to avoid the issue, prefering to adopt the (rather desperate) attitude of accepting some form of relativism or skepticism or idealism or solipsism, or again prefering the (rather sublimated and evasive) acceptance of some form of theological or metaphysical or ideological or scientific dogmatism.

The implications of those brief considerations are numerous and important, and in what follows I shall cover only a small set of them. For the time being, they shall allow me to indicate something very important about Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein's argument: on the one hand, I find Kripke's is one of the few readings (beside Cavell's) sufficiently sensitive to a result of that argument which actually deserves the qualification 'skeptical'—namely, the thesis that linguistic agreement and normativity simply cannot be grounded by any set of "objective" facts about the world (and/or about ourselves); yet his mistake was to stop at that realization—assuming that "the skeptic" should have the last word—instead of looking to the other side of the coin—namely, that the burden of linguistic agreement and normativity is (at least partially) *mine*, i.e., is upon each of us, and, to that extent, has at least one *irreducibly personal* aspect[181]. In other words, I take it that Kripke's 'skeptical solution' might be seen as one of those understandable (if somewhat desperate) reactions

[181] Of course there is a number of (contingent and changeable) constraints over what each of us can *personally* do in order to achieve and maintain agreement in any particular context—including, e.g., attention to empirical regularities (in the way the world *and* humans behave), social practices, traditions and customs of a community, and so on. Yet the reason why I have been emphasizing—and will continue to emphasize, particularly in the present chapter—*our personal role* in that task is precisely my wish to counteract a rather strong temptation to evade that burden—a temptation which, as I indicated in the Introduction, has influenced (and undoubtedly continues influencing, against my better judgement) my own stance on many of the issues under analysis. I grant that this biased strategy can lead to some (different) misunderstandings; yet the difficulty of combining all the important aspects of a philosophical subject under a single analysis increasingly convinces me of the correction of Strawson's claim that 'truth in philosophy [...] is so complex and many-sided, so multi-faced, that any individual philosopher's work, if it is to have any unity and coherence, must at best emphasize some aspects of the truth, to the neglect of others which may strike another philosopher with greater force' (SN viii).

to the destructive aspects of Wittgenstein's argumentation; but I also think, more importantly, that it betrays a deeper commitment (which seems to influence the anti-individualistic analysis of meaning as well), which gets expressed in his impulse to condemn human language (rather quickly) for not corresponding to a pre-conceived, impersonal picture of normativity.

22. Kripke's commitment to that impersonal picture gets (more) conspicuous in his interpretation of the 'scene of instruction' presented in PI §217, which serves as a kind paradigm of language acquisition in that work. As we saw in the previous section (see esp. §§13-14), Kripke sees the teacher's role in determining the correction of a child's answer as a matter of judging whether she 'has given the same answer that he himself would give', or 'is applying the procedure he himself is inclined to apply' (K 90). In examining that view, Cavell accuses Kripke of completely perverting Wittgenstein's appeal to the teacher's 'inclinations' in the scene of instruction. To show that, Cavell compares the original formulation contained in §217—describing what happens when the teacher reaches the 'bedrock'—with the paraphrase that he attributes to Kripke. The formulations are, respectively, the following (I emphasize their differences):

> If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached the bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then *I am inclined to say*: "This is simply what I *do*."
>
> If I have exhausted ... [etc.] Then *I am licensed to say*: "This is simply what *I am inclined to do*." (CHU 70)

The difference between the formulations above is subtle, but full of implications. Cavell notices, first, that '[w]hat I am *inclined* is precisely not something I necessarily go on to say: I may be inclined to say yes to an invitation, but there are considerations against it, and I hesitate to give an answer on the spot' (CHU 71). Thus, there is a hesitation—an openness—in the behaviour of Wittgenstein's teacher that Kripke completely disregards. Yet that hesitation, or openness, is crucial to understand the teacher's role in the scene of instruction—particularly the moment when his instruction comes to an impasse. Cavell presents that point in the following passage:

> I conceive that the good teacher will not say, "This is simply what I do" as a threat to discontinue his or her instruction, as if to say: "I am right; do it my way or leave my sight". The teacher's expression of inclination in what is to be said shows readiness—(unconditional) willingness—to continue presenting himself as an example, as the representative of the community into which the child is being, let me say, invited and initiated. (CHU 72)

Kripke conceives his teacher as a kind of *judge* of her linguistic community's practices, and, consistently, identifies 'normality' (and, therefore, normativity) with *blind obedience* on the part of the beginner in that community. Cavell, on the other hand, emphasizes the teacher's hesitation and openness: in a moment of impasse, she does not take the (possibly easier) path of *evading her responsibility* in the pursuit of instruction (as Kripke's rather authoritarian teacher does), but finds herself instead forced to face her limitations—limitations which are characteristic of relationships among finite individuals—accepting and even sharing them with the child, by presenting herself as (after all) only an *example*, or *representative*, of the community of (finite) human beings in which she is being initiated. Interpreted that way, the scene of instruction illustrates the human quest for real agreement, however difficult in some cases, among concrete individuals—something which would never be achieved by mere (impersonal) 'conformity of inclinations'.

Cavell's take on the scene of instruction provides some further elements to rethink the "problems" of meaning, agreement and normativity—in particular, for discarding their skeptical character, at least in Kripke's sense. The Cavellian lesson, as elsewhere, is that we should not assume—as both Kripke and the anti-individualists do—that the only alternative to a 'skeptical solution' would be the indication an objective, impersonal foundation for meaning, agreement and normativity. There is a better way out of those "problems", which involves accepting—really *accepting*, as opposed to *despairing of*, as Kripke's skeptic does, or *sublimating*, as the anti-individualists seem to do—our condition as finite (human) beings. In particular, we need to face the fact that, as finite, we are actually separate from each other—that there is no metaphysical or epistemological "short-cut" to other's thoughts, meanings, and intentions—making it *our* responsibility to achieve and maintain agreement—something that might feel like a rather heavy burden sometimes. Cavell expresses that feeling by claiming that 'placing confidence in the other—waiting—means letting my confidence be challenged, anyway become hesitant in, thoughtful about, expressing itself' (CHU 76). It is that kind of challenge that we try to avoid, or to deflect,

by unquestioningly subscribing to the philosophical 'requirement of purity' which underlies all kinds of fantasies about meaning and normativity as being totally impersonal phenomena, on the pretext of ensuring an "external", and, consequently, (more) "objective" foundation for our agreement.

23. Having thus reformulated the "problem of agreement" (anyway, having emphasized other crucial aspects of it), and offered an alternative "solution" to Kripke's skeptical one (anyway, an alternative description of the options available to face that problem, in concrete situations), Cavell raises a question that perhaps might be going on in the reader's mind at this very moment—namely, 'what kind of solution is this?' (ibid.). His answer to that question, although purely negative, further elucidates the difference between his and Kripke's position concerning the 'absence of foundation' (hence, the limits) of human agreement. Here is an extended quote presenting that answer:

> If I let my confidence or authority be challenged, and I wait, it cannot be that I conceive myself to be wrong about how I add or, in general, talk. And I can perhaps then come to an astonishing insight—that my authority in these matters of grounding is based on nothing substantive in me, nothing particular about me —and I might say: there is no fact about me that constitutes the justification of what I say and do over against what the other, say the child, says and does.

> In thus coming upon a derivation of some of the language of Kripke's formulation— "there was [and is] *no fact* about me that constituted my having meant [or meaning this rather than that]" [...]—I am surely struck by its truth and gravity. But I find that I do not wish to draw a skeptical conclusion from this insight, something to the effect that I do not know what I mean, or whether I mean one thing rather than another, or mean anything at all. [...] One reason I resist a skeptical moral here is perhaps that I do not know, as it were, whether or how meaning something requires there to be a fact about me that constitutes meaning it: What is not there when there is not this fact? In terms more or less from *The Claim of Reason*, I might express my resistance this way: Kripke takes the discovery of the absence of his fact [e.g., as to whether I mean plus rather than quus] to be itself a fact, to have (eventually) that stability. Whereas I take this "absence of the fact" not as a (skeptical) discovery but as the skeptic's *requirement*. (CHU 76-77).

Realizing that, appearances notwithstanding, the 'absence of a fact' constitutes a *requirement* rather than a *discovery* of the skeptic—a point to which I shall return—is the key to explain the similarities and dissimilarities between Cavell's and Kripke's readings, in that it invites us to seek for deeper assumptions, or pictures, about the nature of

meaning, agreement and normativity that underlie their respective reactions. Simplifying things a bit (Cavell emphasizes that his 'insight' implies only a *partial* 'derivation' of Kripke's formulation, and he has good reasons for that reservation, as we shall see), one might say that both authors agree that there is 'no fact' *grounding* meaning; the difference is that Cavell, unlike Kripke, does not intend to generalize that insight into a skeptical conclusion. The difference, in other words, lies in the morals that each author wants to extract from the analysis of the 'Wittgensteinian paradox' of PI §201 (of which Kripke's 'paradox of quaddition' is an instance): for Kripke, what that paradox shows is that the skeptic is right in pointing out to the absence of any "objective ground" (expressible in terms of truth conditions) for meaning—hence, that one should look for an alternative ground (expressible in terms of conditions for justified assertion); for Cavell, on the other hand, what the paradox shows is that the very idea of there being 'a fact about me that constitutes meaning [something]' was nothing but a 'house of cards' (see PI §118). Once that "philosophical structure" is undermined, all that remains is the "brute datum", so to speak, of our agreement, or attunement—a datum which is undoubtedly a fact—even a fact about me, i.e., about each of us, and our practices—but which is unfit both as a "ground" of the kind initially envisaged by Kripke's skeptic, *and* for his conclusion that, on the absence of such a ground, 'the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air' (K 22). (Instead of agreeing with that conclusion, Cavell indicates that 'what vanishes was already air, revealing no scene of destruction' (CHU 80).)[182]

24. Having reached this point in our reconstruction of Cavell's argument, one might reasonably demand a more detailed account of the latter's view on 'attunement'. In the chapter we have been analysing, by way of offering such an account, Cavell goes on to quote a well known passage of his own 'early philosophical self' (see CHU 82), in which his view on the role of Wittgensteinian criteria gets summarized. The passage goes as follows:

[182] Rogerio Severo has suggested to me that Cavell's negative view, as summarized in this paragraph, parallels Quine's—particularly the thesis that 'two conflicting manuals of translation can both do justice to all dispositions to behavior', and its immediate consequence, *viz.,* that 'there is no fact of the matter of which manual is right' (*Theories and Things*, p. 23). For the time being I shall suspend my own judgement on that parallel, marking it for future reflections.

> We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humor and of significance and of fulfilment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation—all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls "forms of life." Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying. ('The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy', 1976, p. 52 [quoted in CHU 81])

When commenting on that passage, motivated by the confrontation with Kripke's position, Cavell takes a new and important step forward in relation to his previous analysis, and explains that:

> [To say that] human speech and community "rest" only on human attunements, does not quite say that I have no ground of agreement (with others or with myself) but rather suggests that if I am inclined to present myself as such a ground (or thin reed)—when, that is, I am inclined to say "This is simply what I do"—I had better be prepared to say more about my representativeness for this role, since obviously is not me personally, this whole man, who in particular bears this burden. But my question is—taking the passage [from 'Availability'] as a test case—whether it expresses skeptical, paradoxical doubt. My answer has in effect been that it does not, that I can accommodate such a revelation of my life in my life, that I mean to, that I want no solution to it, that it is not insane—while it is not exactly what I hoped sanity would be like. (CHU 82)

In the passage above, Cavell explicitly denies a commitment with a 'skeptical conclusion' *à la* Kripke; but note that he does *not* do that based on a thesis such as that, should we reach an impasse in our communicative exchanges, the only "ground of agreement" would be (*necessarily*—as if by metaphysical compulsion) me, i.e., each of us, individually. The formulation of the passage is *conditional* ('*if* I am inclined to present myself as such a ground [etc.]') for a good reason, which is to make room for the fact that, in concrete situations, *many different things* can happen. Thus, we *may* or *may not* be inclined to act as the teacher of PI §217, presenting ourselves as *examples* or *representatives* of our linguistic community (be it as 'grounds' or 'thin reeds'); if we are not, then we can again react in *several* different ways—ranging from simply *giving up the conversation* (by treating our interlocutor as a 'lunatic'[183]), going through presenting *other candidates* to ground our judgement (a "book of rules", the "community's conventions", a set of

[183] See Wittgenstein's *Brown Book*, p. 93, §30

"objective facts", etc.), until presenting ourselves as omniscient (omnipotent?) *judges,* demanding "blind obedience". None of those reactions is intrinsically better, more appropriate, or more correct—all depends on the particular context in which we find ourselves[184]. An obvious consequence—which not because of its obviousness should remain unnoticed—is that one cannot decide *a priori* which reaction should be adopted in each case. But what one can indicate *a priori*—anyway, what Cavell, *contra* Kripke, has attempted to indicate—is that none of those reactions suits *all* contexts.

What we have here is a clear instance of a general consideration presented by Cavell in the beginning of the chapter that we have been analysing—namely, that 'Wittgenstein takes the ideas Kripke is explicating and organizing to be more various and entangled and specific' than the latter seems to assume (see CHU 67). In the remainder of this section, I shall present one last argument for bringing home that general point concerning the problems of a reductionist analysis, thus illustrating the relevance of the Wittgensteinian commitment to a less restrictive diet of examples.

5.4.3 Walking, qualking, and becoming dissatisfied with our criteria

25. As the preceding analysis indicates, in several moments Cavell shows strong reservations concerning the idea of meaning—or, more generally, rule-following behaviour, hence, normativity—as grounded on some kind of fact. Among the main reasons for those reservations is his finding that the absence of a fact is not a *discovery*, but rather a *requirement* of the skeptic[185]. (That the skeptic's favoured self-interpretation is presented in terms of a discovery, as if he had detected a hopeless problem—an imperfection, an absence, a lack—inherent to our condition, is yet another indication of the

[184] Even the Swiftian attitude suggested by Wittgenstein in the *Brown Book* (i.e., to treat the pupil presenting a 'deviant behaviour' when adding as a 'lunatic', excluding him of certain activities) might, *in some contexts*, be justified. In his analysis of that passage in *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell elaborates precisely on what could such a context be (see CR 112).

[185] Cavell sometimes expresses those reservations saying that both the *facts* (initially) envisaged by Kripke's skeptic and the (ensuing) requirement of their *absence* reminds one of the 'something' and the correspondent 'nothing' mentioned by Wittgenstein in PI §304 (see CHU 79 & 95).

evasiveness of his attitude, of his inclination to take limits as limitations—another instance of the philosophical denial of finitude.)

In the final part of the chapter we have been analysing, Cavell elaborates on those reservations, beginning by presenting the following question:

> Do I—or, how do I—expect there to be a fact about me (in such a way as to be astonished to discover its absence) that explains or grounds or justifies or is the reason for my applying a concept, using a word, as I do? (CHU 84).

In order to indicate the problem with that idea of seeking for (or 'expecting') that there should be some fact(s) grounding our application of concepts, Cavell presents a new concept—a new word—that, should Kripke's *general* requirement be correct, would be analysable just in those terms (in that it would *make sense*, at least in principle, to think about the presence of a fact justifying its use). The chosen word is 'walking', and that choice is not arbitrary; its inspiration comes from PI §25, particularly the following passage:

> It is sometimes said that animals do not talk because they lack the mental capacity. And this means: "they do not think, and that is why they do not talk." But—they simply do not talk. [...]—Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing. (PI §25).

The proximity indicated in the passage above between walking and commanding—the fact, i.e., that both activities are equally part of our 'natural history'—added to the parallel drawn by Wittgenstein in other contexts between obeying commands and following rules (see, e.g., PI §187 & §206), authorizes Cavell to set up a case by means of which he intends to put Kripke's analysis under a "stress test", raising the question whether the application of the concept *walking* is compatible with the idea of 'a fact about me that explains why I go on taking steps as I have in the past' (CHU 85). The case is presented as follows:

> Suppose that one day I start sliding my feet one after the other rather than lifting them [...], or start skipping or hopping or goose-stepping or whirling once around on the toes of each feet in succession. If you question me about this perhaps I answer: [...] "I am doing the same as I always have done, the same as you do, making measured moves in a given direction under my own steam. I am not moving faster than walking, and we are comfortably keeping up with one another

> —unlike our acquaintance far back there who takes a step once a minute and calls that walking." (CHU 85).

(Before turning to Cavell's analysis of the case just presented, let me note the parallel between the (potential) difficulty created by it, and the difficulty (allegedly) created by Kripke's 'paradox of quaddition': in both cases we are presented with instances of "deviant behaviours" from the part of a subject, which might in turn lead us to wonder if we should continue applying a certain concept (*adding* / *walking*) rather than another (*quadding* / *qualking*) to describe that behaviour.)

Cavell examines his case—implicitly comparing it with Kripke's—as follows:

> We are likely in the case of this walker (qualker?) to think that there must be a reason he does it as he does (rather than our way). Just possibly we will, because of him, be impressed by the groundlessness of our way—there are plenty of justifications for our way, but they will come to an end. We may feel the reason for the walker's deviance to lie in the presence of some fact about him. But do we feel our lack of ground to lie in the absence of a fact about us? [...] I might wish there to be such a fact, as some assurance that I will not become deviant, go out of control, an assurance against certain fear of going mad, or being defenseless against the charge of madness. It may seem a fear for human race. [...] It is an anxiety, it seems to me, that Wittgenstein's examples habitually cause or court. [...] But, so far at least, the deviance of another's walking, and the possibility that I might find myself—since walking is groundless or grounded only on the human and the ground—sometime in another gait, does not generalize to (does not cause, or court) a paradoxical conclusion. (CHU 85-86).

As Cavell clarifies next in the text, the moral he wants to draw from the considerations presented above is that the very notion of a (generalized) requirement for a fact grounding our rule-following behaviour seems preposterous, in that ordinary concepts (such as the concept of walking) 'fail[...] to satisfy Kripke's formulation according to which there is no fact about me in which the function I claim to be following consists [...]; or rather, I don't know whether to affirm or do deny that there is any fact in which my walking might be conceived to consist—other than my walking itself' (CHU 86-87). (The formulation of the latter sentence—'I don't know whether to affirm or do deny...'—might strike one as rather skeptical; yet its role is only to qualify the preceding sentence, whose formulation could, in turn, strike one as a little too categorical. What this dialectic aims to show is, I take it, that since Kripke's original requirement has *no clear sense*—at least when applied to a concept such as walking—no *determinate* or *final* response is forthcoming here.)

26. The moral extracted from the case presented above is intimately connected with the result established in *The Claim of Reason*, according to which 'nothing is deeper than the fact, or the extent, of agreement itself' (CR 32). The advantage of (re)thinking that result under the light shed by the analysis of the concept of walking is that it "disarms" one of certain philosophical prejudices, allowing one to see more clearly the absurdity of the (general) requirement for something that should ground our agreement in activities that, in Wittgenstein's saying, are 'part of our natural history' (PI §25); that *in general* we "agree" in those activities—in our ways of walking, commanding, talking, and (why not?) adding[186] —is a reflex of the fact that we share a form of life. Yet one should not lose sight of the consequence indicated above—namely, that if *nothing* is more fundamental than (the fact of) agreement itself, then the responsibility for preserving that agreement falls upon each of us, upon 'our capacity to take and maintain an interest in one another and in ourselves' (Mulhall, 1996, p. 68). Thus, as one's possible reactions facing a "deviant adder" are multiple, so are the ones available in the case of a "deviant walker"—ranging from *absolute intolerance* (we might try to prohibit him of walking in public places, putting 'tremendous pressure' on him to conform to our way—see CHU 85) to *unconditional acceptance*.

The important thing to notice here is that, in a case of impasse—when we feel we are losing our attunement—there is no "firmer ground" for us to lean on; as Cavell indicates, in a such case 'I am thrown back upon myself; I as it were turn my palms outward, as if to exhibit the kind of creature I am, and declare my ground occupied, only mine, ceding yours'; yet that can make me anxious, for:

> When? When do I find or decide that the time has come to grant you secession, allow your divergence to stand, declare that the matter between us is at an end? The anxiety lies not just in the fact that my understanding *has* limits, but that I must *draw* them, on apparently no more ground than my own. (CR 115)

[186] As Wittgenstein says: 'mathematics is after all an anthropological phenomenon' (RFM, VII, §33; p. 399) —e.g.: 'what we call "counting" is an important part of our life's activities. [...] Counting (and that means: counting like *this*) is a technique that is employed daily in the most various operations of our lives.' (RFM, I, §4; p. 37).

It is the anxiety depicted above—caused by the responsibility of having to *draw* limits for our agreement, when we hit the 'bedrock' of our differences—that bases many a philosophical attempt to avoid the real issue—e.g., the attempt enacted by Kripke's skeptic (among others), who prefers to project our "darkness" upon the world, as if it were a necessary feature of our condition, implying that there is nothing for us (for *me*) to do about it, other than blindly following our inclinations.

27. The considerations above prompt me to analyse a further step in Cavell's diagnosis, with the indication of which I shall bring my reconstruction of his argument to a close. I refer to his presentation of an idea underlying the dissatisfaction with the (supposedly) "fragile" basis supplied by our mutual attunement—hence, the aspiration for a "firmer ground", of the kind (supposedly) supplied by logic or mathematics. Cavell formulates that idea as follows:

> Ordinary language will aspire to mathematics as to something sublime; that it can so aspire is specific to its condition. The idea of ordinary language as lacking something in its rules is bound up with—is no more nor less necessary than—this aspiration. This is the place at which Wittgenstein characterizes logic (and I assume the rule for addition is included here) as "normative," as something to which we compare the use of the words ([PI] §81)—to the discredit of words; he takes this further a few sections later in posing the question, "In what sense is logic something sublime?" ([PI] §89). In this role of the normative, the mathematical is not a special case of a problem that arises for the ordinary; without the mathematical this problem of the ordinary would not arise. (CHU 92)

How are we to understand that last claim—viz., 'without the mathematical this problem of the ordinary would not arise'? What, in other words, is the sense in which ordinary language 'will aspire to mathematics'? For starters—as a kind of preparation for taking in Cavell's answer to those questions—let us pause to reflect about the reason why, in the *Investigations,* Wittgenstein presents the picture of 'rails invisibly laid to infinity' (PI §218) in order to examine what would count as a 'final interpretation' of a rule—as the 'stamp' of a 'particular meaning' in face of which we would 'no longer have any choice' except obeying it '*blindly*' (PI §219). Note that, in spite of the requirement for a 'final interpretation' being presented in that context as absolutely general (i.e., as concerning rules *as such*), the picture chosen for 'expressing it symbolically' (see §§220-22) seems carefully designed to satisfy the kind of expectation that is (more?) natural precisely in the

context of mathematics—namely, that a (finally interpreted) rule shall "bring on its face" (but how?—perhaps "virtually"—anyway as virtually as those *invisible* rails...) the indication of all the steps (however infinite) required for its complete projection[187].

The bottom line of the answer for which the preceding reflection serves as a preparation are Cavell's considerations about the difference between rules using mathematical concepts and rules for using non-mathematical ones. The following passage summarizes his view on that difference:

> I suppose that something that makes a mathematical rule mathematical—anyway that makes adding adding—is that what counts as an instance of it [...] is, intuitively, settled in advance, that it tells what its first instance is, and what the interval is to successive instances, and what the order of instances is. The rule for addition extends to all its possible applications. (As does the rule for quadition—otherwise [...] it would not be known to us as a mathematical function.) But our ordinary concepts—for instance that of a table—are not thus mathematical in their application: we do not know, intuitively, [...] a right first instance, or the correct order of instances, or the set interval of their succession. And sometimes we will not know whether to say an instance counts as falling under a concept, or to say that it does not count [...] (CHU 89-90)

Commenting on the passage above, Mulhall calls attention to an important point. As we saw in section 5.3, Kripke originally sets up his skeptical paradox using a mathematical concept—namely, addition; now, as Mulhall indicates, the very fact that he should *assume* such paradox to be 'equally well (if less smoothly) developed from nonmathematical examples amounts [...] to a failure to appreciate the specificity of mathematical concepts' (2003, p. 103); more specifically, what that shows is that Kripke 'treats mathematical concepts as normative for the nonmathematical' (ibid., p. 104)[188]. A possible motivation for doing that is presented by Cavell in the following passage, which resumes and systematizes some of the points indicated previously:

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[187] That such an expectation would not seem (would seem less?) natural in the case of non-mathematical concepts gets clear if one asks which would be the analogue of an infinite number of steps (virtually) inscribed in the rule(s) for applying an ordinary word such as, say, 'table'. Of course that question might simply go unasked—and it often does, particularly when one is on the grip of a picture such as that presented in PI §218; as Wittgenstein would say: 'The decisive movement in the conjuring trick has been made, and it was the very one that we thought quite innocent' (PI §308).

[188] One might well think that, at least exegetically, that manoeuvre is legitimate—or even required—since it is Wittgenstein himself who in his text uses *mathematical* rules as paradigms for the use of rules *as such*; yet suppose he had done that on purpose—so as to tempt the reader to indulge in her own aspiration for the (sublime) model of mathematics—as if he had prepared a philosophical bait (and one which, by the way, Kripke seems to have bitten with no hesitation). I will not try to justify that suggestion here, but there are good reasons supporting it in Mulhall 2001 (see esp. p. 87 ss.).

> We understandably do not like our concepts to be based on what matters to us [...]; it makes our language seem unstable and the instability seems to mean what I have expressed as my being responsible for whatever stability our criteria may have, and I do not want this responsibility; it mars my wish for sublimity. (CHU 92)

28. The notion of stability alluded in the passage above is absolutely crucial here. Among the numerous sources of one's dissatisfaction with criteria—hence, of one's sense of language as *un*stable—is the (philosophical) assumption that only foundations provide stability. In a rather different context[189], Peg O'Connor proposes an alternative to that assumption which is as simple in its formulation as it is fruitful in its consequences—namely, to try and change the dominant metaphor for dealing with normativity, so that instead of seeking to locate (and/or replace) its *foundations*, one should try to understand (and/or change) the conditions allowing *stability* to be created and maintained among numerous aspects of our practices (linguistic and otherwise[190]). Stability, as O'Connor defines it, 'is a matter of balanced relationships among a whole set of factors, and [it] comes with a constant recognition of limitations and location' (ibid., p. 14). That notion has its original home in architecture, where one of the main aims is to combine heterogeneous elements so as to achieve a balance between immobility *and* flexibility: 'Concrete can only bend so much, steel can only hold so much weight, glass can only take so much pressure' (ibid.); by combining those materials and properties, an architect can create a structure which stands up due to *both* balance *and* tension: 'just consider the importance of movement in a tall building or bridge' (ibid.). Now, according to O'Connor, something analogous holds of normativity in general—be it *ethical* or *linguistic*. The following passage—which takes up a metaphor from Wittgenstein's 'Lecture on Ethics'—summarizes her view on this point:

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189 See n. 177.

190 O'Connor's book focuses on our *moral* practices, and the change she is primarily concerned to defend is in *metaethics;* yet, as herself indicates in many contexts, the general strategy she proposes can be applied to different philosophical corners—in particular, to the study of the sources of normativity *as such*. Although my first contact with her work occurred only after having prepared much of the material for the present chapter, I found that her general strategy is very congenial with my own approach, particularly on the issue of the nature of normativity. (Interestingly, O'Connor's seems to have developed her argument quite independently of Cavell's work—anyway, she makes no direct reference to him in the book mentioned; on the other hand, her whole argument was quite clearly inspired by Cavellian readers of Wittgenstein—such as Alice Crary and Cora Diamond—so that the similarities here might come as no surprise after all.)

> In seeking meaning and value, we humans hurl ourselves against the bars of our cage, seeking transcendent meaning and value and objective absolutes beyond the bounds of our finitude and limitations. Instead, I argue that our moral frameworks and language-games provide everything we need just because—and not despite the fact that—they are all pervasive, inescapable, and ineliminable. They are embedded, connected, and overlaping with other frameworks that are part of the felted stability but yet are flexible and dynamic. (O'Connor, 2008, p. 141)

Having thus combined—anyway having approximated—Cavell's diagnosis of the sources of our dissatisfaction with ordinary language and its criteria—in particular, his disclosure of the human wish for a sublime sort of objectivity to be (supposedly) found in logics or mathematics—with O'Connor's call back to the "rough ground" of our moral frameworks and language-games—recalling us of their embeddedness and flexibility, hence the stability they allow—I find this is about the right point to bring this subsection—hence this section—to its close; I shall do that by quoting a last passage from Mulhall's, where I find its main lesson gets perspicuously formulated:

> Philosophy's impulse to regard logic as normative for the normativity of words is emblematic of a broader human impulse to regard such normativity solely as something to which we must impersonally and inflexibly respond rather than as something for which we are also individually and unforeseeably responsible. (Mulhall, 2003, p. 105)

5.5 Final considerations

29. I began this chapter claiming that anti-individualism, at least in some of its contemporary analytic manifestations, seems to be commited to a pre-conceived, impersonal model of normativity. Aiming to articulate that claim more clearly and give it some plausibility, in section 5.2 I summarized and compared the positions of the "founding fathers" of contemporary anti-individualism—Kripke, Putnam and Burge—indicating a shared structure among their arguments, and highlighting a common assumption—namely: that the burden of linguistic correction lies upon some kind of "external" factor, including the existence of linguistic institutions (Kripke and Burge) and the physiochemical constitution of the stuff with which speakers relate (Kripke and Putnam). In order to

indicate the problems involved in that common assumption, I adopted an indirect strategy, consisting of two steps: first I drew a further parallel between the anti-individualistic argumentation and Kripke's skeptical solution to the paradox of normativity (section 5.3), and then went on to reconstruct Stanley Cavell's critique of that solution (section 5.4).

The parallel drawn in section 3 aimed to make more conspicuous an argumentative move already present in the anti-individualist's argumentation, amounting to a systematic weakening—up to complete suppression—of the *individual's role* in achieving and maintaining linguistic agreement—hence, of her *authority* over the meaning of the terms she employs. That move, I went on to suggest, is an unwelcome consequence of adopting an impersonal model of normativity—be it of an essentialist (hence realist) bent, as in the case of Kripke's (in *Naming and Necesity*) and Putnam's positions, or of a communitarian (hence conventionalist) bent, as in the case of Burge's and Kripke's (in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*) positions. The confrontation with Cavell's criticisms (section 5.4) sought precisely to explain what there is of unwelcome and problematic in that argumentative move—indicating in particular the evasion or repression of our (individual) responsibility over meaning and linguistic agreement that its seems to imply. One way to express that problem (which was used in the Introduction) is to say that the impersonal model implies thinking the problem of linguistic correction *upside-down*—or, at best, from a rather *limited perspective*—as if the only (or main) risk involved in our communicative exchanges were the possibility of *repudiation*, on the part of "the world" and / or "the community"[191], of what we mean with what we say, and never the contrary, i.e., the loss of or withdrawal from our attunement with the world and other human beings—a loss / withdrawal which might, in turn, have a number of different causes, at least some of which can be as "opaque" to the individual as those presented in the anti-individualistic thought-experiments, yet are much more serious, in that they have to do with the real, ordinary life

[191] The idea of a repudiation (of what we say) on the part of the world might cause some estrangement; yet that formulation correctly picks out the consequence of the reversal of the burden for linguistic correction that I have described—particularly in those cases in which a kind of metaphysical realistic assumption is made regarding the formation of concepts. An obvious example is Plato's thesis, presented in *Phaedrus* 265e, that we should 'cut up each kind according to its species along its natural joints, and to try not to splinter any part, as a bad butcher might do'—otherwise we would end up with concepts that, in one way or another, the world should repudiate. McManus (2003) presents some instances of concepts that would be thus 'repudiated by the world', including (i) concepts historically proved empty (e.g., *flogistum*), (ii) 'non-projectable' predicates (e.g., *grue*), and (iii) *contra natura* taxonomies (e.g., Borges' Chinese encyclopaedia). (Thanks to Paulo Faria for indicating those examples, and helping with the reference to Plato.)

difficulties and burdens involved in the continuous task of accepting the human condition —and living it.

30. The discovery of this reversal of the burden for linguistic correction is what explains, at least in part, my suspicion that anti-individualism might consist in (or assume, or veil, or incline one to) a (new?) form of philosophical evasion[192]. Although I am fully convinced of the (essentially anti-individualistic) lesson that applying concepts—hence: knowing the meaning of what we say, and the content of our (and other's) minds—are often 'risky activities'[193], I find it equally important to stress that the "risk" here does not lie mainly or exclusively in the possibility that "the world" or "the community's rules" (or whatever "external factor") might change inconspicuously—a possibility which, N.B., is dear both to the skeptic (who overstates it) *and* to the metaphysical realist (who tries to "meet" the skeptical challenge by dogmatically denying it)—but also in the possibility that, *for a number of different reasons*, we might lose our attunement with the world and other speakers[194]—a possibility that neither the skeptic nor the dogmatic seem to want to take seriously enough. (Perhaps I can reformulate that last point saying that there are risks involved in our communicative exchanges which are not so much "out there", but that are rather "in here"—in that they concern how each of us face the responsibility inherited by entering (and becoming a representative of) a linguistic community, and a form of life. Now *those* risks are neither *simply unavoidable*—as the skeptic would suggest in her hurry to evade the issue—nor *simply avoidable*—as the dogmatic would assume in a corresponding repressive way; they are just as avoidable or unavoidable as the difficulties presented in any relationship among finite (human) beings.)

These considerations allow me to go back to Cavell's thesis that 'Wittgensteinian criteria' are not designed to 'answer the skeptic' (i.e., to answer 'the question whether we can know

[192] That discovery might also explain why the 'compatibilist solution' has been seen by some critics (e.g. Boghossian 1998) as still more skeptical than the problem it was supposed to solve.

[193] I borrow that notion of a 'risky activity' from Paulo Faria—who in turn borrowed it from Kripke's 'Outline of a Theory of Truth'—in the essay 'A Preservação da Verdade' ['The Preservation of Truth'] (2006, p. 119).

[194] In *The Lives of Animals*, J. M. Coetzee presents a concrete (fictional) example of that kind of estrangement, caused by his central character's (Elizabeth Costello) growing difficulty in accepting and continue living in a world where human beings seem to be 'participants in a crime of stupefying proportions' (1999, p. 69). Cora Diamond resumes that and other interesting literary examples of "losses of attunement" in her essay 'The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy' (2006).

that there is a world and others in it'—see CHU 24). As I understand it, the (negative) point of that thesis is to recall that there is no "book of rules" or set of "corresponding facts in the world" that can *guarantee* agreement in our uses of words; the role of criteria is simply to record similarities and dissimilarities that *matter to us,* to the extent in which there is an "us", i.e., to the extent in which we share 'routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humor and of significance and of fulfilment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgivenness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation—all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls "forms of life" ' (CHU 81). Evidently, should the world and people stop being (generally) constant, the task of maintaining attunement would be made still more difficult than it already is; yet, it is not *simply* because the world *in general* does not change (did not change?), or because we *in general* react similarly (to it, and to one another) that we can forget our individual responsibility in the task of achieving and maintaining agreement —for instance, by proposing new concepts and new projections for old concepts, prompted by novel or subtler (practical or theoretical) needs, that can in turn be presented to others, hopefully becoming acknowledged, accepted and assimilated in our "linguistic stock"; or again by producing new or subtler moral assessments, prompted by novel situations (or novel ways of looking at them), and trying to show their point to our fellow human beings, hoping to universalize them. In both cases (i.e., conceptual projections and moral assessments) the individual responsibility shows very clearly, in that one will have to take into consideration an enormous cultural heritage, proposing changes that, if acknowledged and accepted, will in turn have to be transmited to new generations, who shall establish their own mutual grounds for agreement anew.

(Similar considerations apply to those other pictures mentioned in the introduction (see §2, n. 161), to the extent in which they too constitute (or assume or veil or incline to) an analogous form of evasion, manifested in the wish for a complete suppression of the subject's role—and, consequently, her *individual responsibility*—in establishing relations with the world and other human beings. The alternative, in those cases, consists in realizing that there are other, more fundamental relations with the world which are not *cognitive*, or, more generally, *theoretical*—hence, that its presentation (or presentness, or givenness) is equally not (fundamentally) a function of *knowing* it (obtaining good evidences, and, presumably, building good theories about it), but rather of *accepting* it—

something that might become very difficult sometimes, particularly in moments of great changes in our "world view" (changes that can be—and have continuously been—caused by scientific revolutions, but that can also be motivated by events whose causes are in turn much more complex—such as, for instance, the 'death of God' announced, among others, by Nietzsche). By the same token, we should realize that some of our most fundamental relations with other human beings (or "their minds"), as well as with ourselves (our own "minds"), are equally not theoretical or cognitive—it is not (is it?) *knowledge* that, in general, we look for in those relations; at least for a vast majority of situations, what really matters to us is *acknowledgement* in a broad sense[195]—something that is expressible in multiple ways, of which love, friendship, admiration and respect, in their multiple expressions, are important representatives[196].)

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[195] Cavell introduces the notion of acknowledgement—which would later become a trademark of his work as a whole—in the essay 'Knowing and Acknowledging' (MWM 238-66). The following passage offers a general idea of his meaning:

> [...] your suffering makes a *claim* upon me. It is not enough that I *know* (am certain) that you suffer—I must do or reveal something (whatever can be done). In a word, I must *acknowledge* it, otherwise I do not know what "(your or his) being in pain" means. Is. [...] But obviously sympathy may not be forthcoming. So when I say that "We must acknowledge another's suffering, and we do that by responding to a claim upon our sympathy," I do not mean that we always in fact *have* sympathy, nor that we always ought to have it. The claim of suffering may go unanswered. We may feel lots of things—sympathy, *Schadenfreude*, nothing. [...] The point [...] is that the concept of acknowledging is evidenced equally by its failure as by its success. It is not a description of a given response but a category in terms of which a given response is evaluated. (It is the sort of concept Heidegger calls an *existentiale*.) A "failure to know" might just mean a piece of ignorance, an absence of something, a blank. A "failure to acknowledge" is the presence of something, a confusion, an indifference, a callousness, an exhaustion, a coldness. [...] Just as, to say that behavior is expressive is not to say that the man impaled upon his sensation must express it in his behavior; it is to say that in order not to express it he must *suppress* the behavior, or twist it. And if he twists it far or often enough, he may lose possession of the region of the mind which that behavior is expressing. (MWM 263-64)

[196] Evidently, there are many contexts in which it is only or primarily *knowledge* that we seek to achieve in our relations with others; yet normally that happens when we are forced to adopt the sorts of attitudes that Strawson (see chapter 1) describes as 'objective' and 'detached'. Actually, that applies not only to our relations to others, but also to ourselves; Moran (see 2001, p. 31 ss.) offers great examples of situations in which we are reduced to the condition of mere 'witnesses' or 'inquirers' regarding the contents of our own minds (think about the cases in which one tries to come to terms with unconscious, or partially opaque feelings: in such cases, what one is more in need of are precisely *further evidences*—something that a good friend, or an analyst, can help one to find). The important thing to notice here is that those are *exceptions*, not the rule. One might say, paraphrasing Wittgenstein, that it is only against a backdrop of attunement (with others, and with oneself) that *knowledge* can become one's aim—hence, that *doubts* can take place.

31. As I warned in the Introduction, the considerations offered above are meant only as sketches of alternative philosophical pictures, which, should they be finished, would portray some fundamental aspects of human experience—of our relations with the world, with ourselves, and other human beings—in a more realistic way[197]. Given the current state of my reflections, that is all I have to offer; actually such sketches are not more than blueprints, which delineate some regulative ideals toward which I try to advance—if only indirectly, as in the case of the present chapter, by highlighting the problems of other (if more finished) pictures, which on many occasions caught my own attention—helping myself of a set of texts of which the unity lies precisely in their authors's conviction that philosophy too can serve as a pretext to repress the anxieties or evade the burdens characteristic of the human condition.[198]

[197] The qualification 'realistic' here is meant to echo Cora Diamond's take on the 'realistic spirit'—something which is not to be confused with a philosophical doctrine, but amounts rather to an attitude that 'ties thought to practice', and that is 'clear headed, practical, down to earth, rather than vague, speculative, or superstitious' (I borrow this description of Diamond's view from Anthony Rudd's useful summary in 2003, p. 87).

[198] This text has benefited from many comments to previous versions, conveyed orally and / or in written form. Special thanks go to Alexandre Noronha Machado, André da Silva Porto, Carlos Moya and Paulo Faria, for very helpful remarks made on two occasions in 2008. To the latter, as well as to prof. João Carlos Brum Torres and Rogério Passos Severo, I thank for having read and made also very helpful comments on previous written drafts.

Epílogo: Lições aprendidas, e prolegômenos a uma metafísica futura

> *Ao filosofar, tenho de trazer a minha própria linguagem e a minha vida à imaginação. O que exijo é um apanhado dos critérios da minha cultura, para confrontá-los com minhas palavras e com minha vida, do modo como as levo e como posso imaginá-las; e, ao mesmo tempo, para confrontar minhas palavras e minha vida como as levo com a vida que as palavras da minha cultura podem imaginar para mim: confrontar a cultura consigo mesma, nas linhas em que ela se encontra em mim.*
>
> *Essa me parece uma tarefa que merece o nome de filosofia. E é também a descrição de algo que poderíamos chamar de educação. Frente às questões suscitadas em Agostinho, Lutero, Rousseau, Thoreau. . . , somos crianças; não sabemos como acompanhá-los, ou que terreno podemos ocupar. Vista desse modo, a filosofia se torna a educação dos adultos.*
>
> Stanley Cavell[199]

Abri esta tese evocando uma passagem de Unamuno, a qual impugnava a suposição de que há (ou *deveria* haver) uma resposta única e geral para a pergunta "o que leva alguém a filosofar?"—em particular, a difundida concepção da filosofia como busca desinteressada de conhecimento, guiada apenas ou primariamente pela razão. Prossegui articulando a suspeita de que essa concepção da natureza da filosofia poderia estar fundamentada em um (igualmente difundido) auto-engano, relacionado com certa imagem da própria "essência humana" que suprime (ou, talvez melhor dizendo, reprime) os traços decorrentes do fato de que somos seres finitos, sujeitos a toda uma variedade de condições que sobredeterminam nossos projetos em qualquer área da vida humana, incluindo a própria filosofia. A questão final suscitada por essa reflexão é se seria possível superar esse auto-engano, adotando uma filosofia genuinamente disposta a reconhecer e aceitar nossa condição finita—em especial, o fato de que temos *corpos,* e com eles vontades, desejos, temores, fixações e sentimentos *que não escolhemos*, e que informam nossa racionalidade e moldam nossas atitudes em relação ao mundo e aos demais sujeitos.

[199] CR 125.

A reflexão resumida acima serviu como pano de fundo para meu procedimento subsequente, o qual consistiu em tomar um núcleo de problemas filosóficos—aqueles relacionados com a possibilidade, e a própria inteligibilidade, do solipsismo—como *exemplares* para extrair lições mais gerais sobre a natureza da filosofia, e dai sobre a própria natureza humana—com a ressalva de que em nenhum desses casos tive a pretensão de *encerrar* a questão, no sentido de apresentar condições *necessárias e suficientes* para que algo possa ser considerado 'filosofia', ou 'humano'; em vez disso, meu objetivo foi simplesmente apresentar algumas *amostras* capazes de serem reconhecidas como tais por outras pessoas (aquelas em cujas perplexidades e dificuldades espero que meu texto encontre alguma ressonância). Uma condição essencial para o sucesso dessa empreitada é a suposição de que um indivíduo pode, legitimamente, tomar a si mesmo como um *representante* de uma certa comunidade—neste caso, a comunidade dos indivíduos incomodados com questões filosóficas—de modo a extrair conclusões universalizáveis. Mas como garantir a satisfação *dessa* condição? Ora, não me parece que existam garantias *a priori*, ou *infalíveis*[200]; na verdade, não vejo outro modo de fazê-lo senão *na prática* e *dialeticamente*—ou seja, por "tentativa e erro", compartilhando minhas próprias dificuldades, reações e (auto)questionamentos, apresentando-as da maneira mais detalhada e clara possível, como *candidatas* ao reconhecimento de outros indivíduos, buscando estabelecer um diálogo com eles. É claro que existem *várias* maneiras de se fazer isso que acabo de descrever, mas minha opção foi fazê-lo respondendo às preocupações de outros filósofos que admiro, tomando a eles próprios (e a seus escritos) como casos exemplares de reflexão detida e cuidadosa sobre as questões que me incomodam—por conseguinte, tratando-os como os interlocutores iniciais de um diálogo que pode ser posto em marcha novamente por alguém que se engaje com minhas próprias leituras e respostas.

Visando a avaliar os resultados obtidos por meio desse procedimento, penso que será útil retomar a listagem e a caracterização geral das dificuldades que informaram minhas reflexões e respostas até este ponto. São elas: (i) que minha experiência do mundo é sempre parcial, e, por conseguinte, limitada; (ii) que sou incapaz de alterar o passado ou de prever o futuro, de modo que por vezes me sinto simultaneamente impotente e

[200] Como esclarece Paulo Faria (ver 1994, pp. 225-227), há pelo menos uma condição *necessária* para esse procedimento, a saber, "que o exemplo possa, em princípio, ser escolhido *arbitrariamente* na extensão d[o] conceito" que se quer representar.

sobrecarregado pela necessidade de escolher um curso (presente) de ação que poderá muito bem vir a mostrar-se desastroso; (iii) que as pessoas (incluindo eu mesmo) podem dissimular seus pensamentos e sentimentos, ou simplesmente escondê-los, de modo que por vezes me sinto incapaz de "acessá-los diretamente", como se estivessem *ocultos*—talvez ocultos justamente pelos corpos dessas pessoas; (iv) que posso sentir-me incapaz de articular e de exprimir (e, portanto, de compartilhar) os meus próprios sentimentos e experiências, terminando por me sentir desconhecido, e incapaz de me fazer conhecer, de modo que minha humanidade parece estar em risco; e ainda (v) que aquilo que expresso pode ir além de meu controle, e contrariar minhas intenções, de modo que minha própria identidade, ou auto-concepção, pode estar em risco.

Em diferentes contextos, caracterizei as dificuldades listadas acima como 'existenciais', 'afetivas', 'práticas', e 'cotidianas'; contudo—e como espero que a ressalva feita acima tenha deixado claro—isso não significa que as considero universais *em ato*—é perfeitamente concebível, é uma questão de fato e *contingente*, que tais dificuldades jamais se apresentem a alguns indivíduos. (Wittgenstein possivelmente diria desses indivíduos que sofrem de uma "falta de problemas"[201]; suponho que, se tais indivíduos filosofassem, o fariam de uma maneira completamente diferente da que aqui estou propondo.) Seja como for, o ponto que gostaria de salientar é este: como *possibilidades*, as dificuldades listadas acima parecem características permanentes de seres finitos, e cientes de suas limitações (obviamente nem todos os seres que satisfazem a primeira condição satisfazem a segunda—seja porque simplesmente não são autoconscientes, seja porque reprimem, ou, possivelmente, são capazes de superar esse conhecimento de alguma maneira). Estar sujeito a essas dificuldades implica estar sujeito a enfrentar aquilo que caracterizei como a ameaça da solidão, ou do isolamento, ou da perda de sintonia em relação ao mundo e aos demais sujeitos; e é essa ameaça que, como vim tentando sugerir, parece estar na base de certas reações intelectualizadas, as quais conhecemos como "posições filosóficas". No limite—e é revelador que nenhum filósofo de carne e osso pareça ter alcançado esse limite—tais reações intelectualizadas podem levar à "posição" que conhecemos como solipsismo—ou seja, a tese segundo a qual o sujeito e os conteúdos de suas experiências são *tudo o que existe*: em outras palavras, que não há separação entre o sujeito e (seu) mundo.

[201] Ver Z 456.

A escolha dos autores e dos textos analisados nesta tese foi, pelo menos em parte, subordinada ao objetivo de explorar a sugestão feita acima—visando, em particular, a extrair algumas lições acerca de *como lidar* com as dificuldades que mencionei, de modo a obter resultados filosóficos (espero) menos sublimados, e, nessa medida, uma metafísica mais autêntica e realista[202]. Segue uma breve recapitulação das lições que pretendi ter extraído dessas leituras.

Lendo Strawson, aprendi que uma descrição adequada de nosso esquema conceitual não deve—justamente sob o risco de tornar-se *insuficientemente descritiva*—prescindir de um exame atento das circunstâncias *práticas* que constituem o pano de fundo contra o qual nossos conceitos adquirem uso e significado. Essa é uma lição geral, mas que se aplica particularmente à análise daqueles conceitos que, como o próprio Strawson nos mostrou em *Individuals*, constituem a *armação* da estrutura conceitual que usamos para descrever nossa experiência de maneira objetiva. Embora o próprio Strawson tenha acenado para a necessidade dessa complementação já em *Individuals*, e tenha dado alguns passos iniciais nessa direção em escritos posteriores (sobretudo 'Freedom and Reesentment' e *Skepticism and Naturalism*), penso que podemos (na verdade, devemos—se quisermos herdar e levar adiante o projeto de uma metafísica descritiva) ir além, dando maior importância ao tipo de dificuldade que, como sua reação naturalista ao ceticismo indica exemplarmente, Strawson não parece disposto a levar suficientemente a sério. Para seu crédito—e esta é uma outra lição importante que aprendi com esse autor—o próprio Strawson foi o primeiro a salientar que é extremamente difícil obter um quadro completo da "verdade em filosofia", e é justamente por isso que acredito que a sugestão metodológica que apresentei no final do capítulo 1—a de buscarmos uma compreensão de nossa condição que envolva não apenas nossos intelectos, mas também nossas sensibilidades—pode ser vista como uma proposta de *continuação* do projeto de metafísica descritiva.

[202] Que haja *algum* grau de sublimação envolvido em atividades humanas, particularmente em atividades altamente reflexivas, como a filosofia, é algo que não parece sensato negarmos; por outro lado, se nossa finalidade for a clareza e a obtenção de autoconhecimento, segue-se que é desejável perseguirmos o ideal regulativo de uma (auto)consciência maximal—ainda que o progresso nessa direção seja sempre assintótico.

Lendo Wittgenstein aprendi não uma, mas sim *diversas* técnicas que me parecem eficazes para preencher o tipo de lacuna apontado na análise da abordagem strawsoniana. Não tentarei fornecer uma enumeração ou uma caracterização geral dessas técnicas aqui, justamente porque penso que a maneira correta de aprendê-las é por meio da análise de suas aplicações em casos concretos—que elas devem servir propriamente como *amostras*, como casos *exemplares*, e não como instâncias de um procedimento geral. (Que não exista um procedimento geral para *evitar* as "doenças do intelecto" é algo que, como tentei mostrar, Wittgenstein ele próprio só veio a reconhecer tardia e gradualmente. Entretanto, como também sugeri, parece que ele estava ciente, pelo menos desde o *Tractatus,* de que a *cura* para doenças já existentes é um procedimento bastante complexo, e envolve o domínio de uma certa "arte", que ele buscou incessantemente melhorar e desenvolver em seus escritos posteriores.) Em vez de uma caracterização geral, gostaria de salientar uma única característica—um ponto de partida metodológico—que me parece compartilhado por essas variadas técnicas—a saber, o reconhecimento de que os "problemas" e as "posições" filosóficas, assim como as dificuldades e perplexidades práticas que as originam, são traços inextirpáveis da finitude da condição humana, e, como tais, não devem ser dogmaticamente menosprezados na busca por uma terapia eficaz. (Nesse sentido, alguém poderia objetar, contra Wittgenstein e contra a leitura que dele vim fazendo, que a própria ideia de "doenças do intelecto" a serem tratadas é infeliz—afinal, para algo ser considerado uma *doença* isso deve nos sobrevir *contingentemente*, e, além disso, para que faça sentido pensar num *tratamento*, essa condição deveria ser *curável*; mas não parece sensato supor que possamos simplesmente renunciar, *de uma vez por todas*, ao desejo de transcender nossa finitude—uma lição que aprendi primeiro de Kant. É por isso, no entanto, que em mais de um contexto apresentei a ideia de uma tarefa *contínua* (e falível) de busca de autoconhecimento e de aceitação de nossa condição; é nesse sentido, portanto, que acredito que a filosofia deva ser vista como uma busca cujos resultados são *sempre* provisórios.[203])

No capítulo final procurei pôr em prática algumas das lições metodológicas obtidas anteriormente, visando a combater certas imagens que podem motivar a aceitação de

[203] Agradeço ao professor João Carlos Brum Torres por ter-me apresentado essa dificuldade, permitindo assim que tentasse esclarecer minha posição.

posições anti-individualistas, tão correntes na filosofia de nossos dias, sobre significado linguístico e conteúdo mental. Com esse fim em vista, minha estratégia consistiu em mostrar que, não obstante as (aparentemente colossais) diferenças entre tais posições e a doutrina solipsista de imersão total do sujeito no mundo, ambas podem ser vistas como respostas intelectualizadas a uma dificuldade existencial comum—a saber, a ansiedade criada pelo fato de que somos, individual e pessoalmente, responsáveis por tentar *superar* a ameaça da solidão, ou da privacidade, encontrando (e mantendo) significados *compartilháveis* por outros indivíduos, tentando criar acordos com eles, de modo a estabelecer (e manter) uma comunidade de falantes dotada não apenas de conceitos mas (sobretudo) de *juízos* compartilhados sobre o mundo e sobre os demais sujeitos (essa sendo justamente a função dos critérios wittgensteinianos). Nesse sentido, pode-se dizer que o capítulo final consistiu em uma nova tentativa de explorar a ideia de que, possivelmente contra as expectativas que acalentamos (pelo menos em alguns estados de ânimo) o *sentido* (do mundo, de nossas experiências, de nossas palavras, juízos e ações—e finalmente de nossas vidas) não é impessoal e externamente imposto ou assegurado ("pelo ambiente" ou "pela comunidade"). Contra esse "modelo impessoal do significado", e o (novo) tipo de fundacionismo que ele parece constituir, procurei oferecer um contraponto, tratando de lembrar-nos de nossas responsabilidades individuais, permanentes e imprevisíveis na busca de significado e de sentido—um resultado que não é exatamente cético, mas que reconhece e até mesmo simpatiza com as motivações que estão na base do ceticismo, as quais têm a ver com o reconhecimento de nossos limites, particularmente de nossa real separação e distância em relação ao mundo e aos demais sujeitos. (Não fosse *possível* o ceticismo, teríamos justamente uma situação (solipsista) de total absorção do mundo pelo sujeito, ou —o que finalmente *dá na mesma*, como notou Wittgenstein já no *Tractatus*—do sujeito pelo mundo.)

Embora os resultados (re)apresentados acima sejam, pelo menos em grande medida, negativos, espero que eles também possam ser vistos como uma espécie de "prolegômenos a uma metafísica futura"—que há de caracterizar-se por uma atitude mais aberta e autoconsciente em relação à finitude humana e às ansiedades que daí decorrem, e, por conseguinte, procurará avançar lançando mão de uma metodologia mais sensível a essa condição. Estou ciente—em parte, devido ao contato (algo tardio) que venho tentando

estabelecer com filosofias mais radicalmente abertas ao reconhecimento dessa condição—de que meu tratamento dessas questões ainda está muito aquém do desejável. Por isso, gostaria de concluir este estudo registrando algumas tarefas que ficarão na agenda, e mencionando alguns autores em cujos escritos continuarei buscando educação.

Ainda há muito trabalho a ser feito para caracterizar satisfatoriamente o tipo de relação com o mundo e com os demais sujeitos que caracterizei como *mais fundamental* do que a relação cognitiva ou teórica. Penso que um bom ponto de partida para isso seja a análise do tratamento heideggeriano dessa questão, condensado por meio da fórmula "o *Dasein* é ser-no-mundo"—a qual sugere um afastamento ou até mesmo uma inversão da imagem de um "ego" colocado diante de um mundo de objetos que se lhe contrapõe, em prol de uma imagem na qual o próprio *envolvimento* com o mundo faz parte da constituição fundamental do que significa ser humano—na qual o *Dasein* é visto como *abertura ao mundo*, e este, por sua vez, como algo que se anuncia como estando "à mão", isto é, como um espaço de envolvimento prático com os objetos, como o lugar da experiência comum, a qual parece ter sido esquecida não apenas pela investigação científica, mas também pelas metafísicas modeladas nesse tipo de investigação. Visando a superar essa imagem teórica e cognitivista, e a obter uma compreensão e uma descrição mais realista de nossa condição, faz-se necessário proceder a (algo como) uma *fenomenologia* da nossa experiência do mundo, pautada pelo ideal de máxima fidelidade àquilo que se mostra, e que parta do reconhecimento de que nosso contato primordial com o mundo não é a experiência de um espectador olhando para objetos desprovidos de valor; pelo contrário, primeiro apreendemos o mundo *praticamente*, como um mundo de coisas que são úteis e acessíveis, e que estão imbuídas de significado e valor humano. (Uma condição fundamental para o desenvolvimento de uma fenomenologia nesses moldes é o reconhecimento do modo como nossos *corpos* e nossas *habilidades* determinam nossa experiência; um tratamento exemplar dessa questão é fornecido por Merleau-Ponty.)

Um outro ponto insuficientemente desenvolvido no meu texto é o resultado estoico a respeito da absoluta contingência e independência do mundo em relação à nossa vontade—

e da consequente necessidade de se buscar um reconhecimento desse aspecto de nossa finitude, contra a imagem (solipsista) que coloca o sujeito, ou ego, no centro do universo (uma tarefa que é tanto *metafísica* quanto *ética*). Há algum material de Wittgenstein (além do próprio *Tractatus*) que pode ser analisado com vistas a esclarecer esse ponto, mas certamente um tratamento mais aprofundado exigirá o estudo dos próprios estoicos antigos e seus leitores contemporâneos[204].

A última questão de fundo que gostaria de mencionar é a articulação da concepção quintessencialmente existencialista a respeito da precedência da *existência* humana em relação à sua *essência*—um ponto inicialmente apresentado em uma nota ao capítulo 1, na qual contrasto essa concepção com a posição de Strawson, e retomado algo mais implicitamente no meu último capítulo, por meio da alusão à tese pascaliana (e, como sugeri, wittgensteiniana e cavelliana) de que o *hábito* (e apenas ele) constitui a nossa "natureza"—ou seja, que não há limites *a priori* para o que pode ser considerado uma vida genuinamente humana. Além da obra do próprio Pascal, penso que essa questão poderia ser aprofundada com o estudo de autores como Dostoiévski, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger[205] Sartre e Camus[206], além de seus leitores contemporâneos—particularmente aqueles preocupados em estabelecer pontes com a "tradição analítica", dentre os quais Stanley Cavell, Stephen Mullhal, e Hubert Dreyfus.

[204] Representantes importantes sendo William B. Irvine, especialmente em *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy*; Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*; Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*; Pierre Hadot, *Exercices Spirituels et Philosophie* Antique (agradeço a Paulo Faria pelas três últimas indicações). Também ficará na minha agenda de leituras futuras o comentário de Aubenque *A Prudência em Aristóteles*, que aparentemente desenvolve uma leitura afeita às minhas próprias preocupações (sou grato a Fabian Domingues por esta indicação).

[205] O texto de Heidegger em *Ser e Tempo* é suscetível de ser lido de uma maneira que pode parecer torná-lo incompatível com uma concepção existencialista da condição humana. Esse, contudo, não me parece ser o caso—vide sua definição inicial do *Dasein* como "o ser para o qual o próprio ser está em questão"; que os *resultados* ontológicos de sua investigação em *Ser e Tempo* sejam mais robustos (ver acima) tampouco acarreta uma incompatibilidade com o ponto existencialista, contanto que se compreenda o procedimento investigativo peculiar levado adiante nessa obra, o qual constitui justamente um *exemplo* de tomada de consciência e de adoção de uma postura autêntica a respeito do que é *para o autor daquelas reflexões* (e para quem quer que *refaça* seu caminho reflexivo) ser humano. (Agradeço a Giovani Godoy Felice por indicar essa possível dificuldade.)

[206] E de cineastas como Ingmar Bergman, Terrence Malick, Stanley Kubrick, Ridley Scott...

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