

Struggling for publicity:

How Wright, McDowell and Minar understand
Wittgenstein's insistence on the publicity of language

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“Sometimes a sentence can
be understood only if it is
read at the *right tempo*. My
sentences are all supposed
to be read *slowly*.”

Wittgenstein

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| | |
|--|-----------|
| Acknowledgements | 3 |
| 1 Introduction..... | 5 |
| The progression of this essay..... | 6 |
| Some main themes of Philosophical Investigations | 6 |
| WHAT ROLE DOES PUBLICITY HAVE IN RULE-FOLLOWING? | 9 |
| 2 The background of the Wright-McDowell debate..... | 9 |
| Kripke..... | 9 |
| 3 Wright's view | 12 |
| Ratification dependence | 13 |
| 4 Critique of Wright | 16 |
| Argumentative reasons | 18 |
| Crusoe..... | 18 |
| New words..... | 20 |
| Exegetical reasons | 21 |
| 5 Uncovering McDowell's positive view | 23 |
| McDowell's diagnosis of Wright's problem | 24 |
| Understanding as interpretation..... | 24 |
| Anti-realism..... | 25 |
| Summary of McDowell's view | 26 |
| The problems..... | 28 |
| 6 Correction of McDowell | 30 |
| The rule-following considerations as a <i>reductio</i> argument..... | 32 |
| The paradox of understanding the paradox..... | 34 |
| What we should learn from the rule-following considerations..... | 38 |
| The impossibility of standing outside of language | 39 |
| The diversity of language | 43 |
| The craving for generalised answers | 44 |
| Quietism and learning to live with groundlessness..... | 46 |
| The perspective on the McDowell/Wright debate | 48 |
| Wright..... | 48 |
| McDowell..... | 49 |
| What role <i>does</i> publicity have in rule-following? | 51 |
| THE NEW CONCEPTION OF PUBLICITY APPLIED..... | 53 |
| 7 The potential of the new conception of publicity | 53 |
| 8 Applying the new conception of publicity | 54 |
| How we learn new words | 57 |
| Pointing and naming..... | 57 |
| Extending the use of a word already there..... | 61 |
| The grammar of words for and words for emotions | 64 |
| Bibliography | 68 |

1 Introduction

All philosophical questions have started as simple and naïve musings. Philosophical questions about words for emotions are no exception. For example, it is quite common to hear someone say: “I thought I knew what longing was, but now that X has happened I for the first time know what it *really* means”. We also hear people emphatically exclaim “I have this emotion I can’t put into words, and it’s really frustrating”. From sayings as these, those of us that are curious and inquisitive by nature, start philosophising.

A central idea of Wittgenstein’s book *Philosophical Investigations*¹ is that philosophical questioning and argumentation is riddled with *linguistic* confusion. Words can play tricks with us and lead us astray. Wittgenstein famously said that “Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of our language”. (§109) Wittgenstein indirectly asks an important question about the relationship between professional philosophy and its origins in inquisitiveness and naïve musings.

My aim in this essay is to see how a Wittgensteinian perspective could change naïve, but philosophically ‘contaminated’, questions. To narrow down the scope of the essay I have chosen philosophically contaminated questions words for emotions as the example we will be dealing with. Wittgenstein has, beyond doubt, many interesting things to say about words for emotions, so we have to set some further boundaries for this essay. The first reservation I have to make is that I will focus on how is it that language is public rather than tackling the Private Language Argument in itself. The discussion will not be on whether the Private Language Argument is valid, but where and how *publicity* enters the picture in (our natural) language. The idea is that since there cannot be a private language, then (our natural) language must in some way be public, i.e. the opposite of private.

The last reservation I have to make is that in the discussion about the publicity of language, is that eminent philosophers like Kripke, Crispin Wright and also to some extent John McDowell, will not be given a full treatment that cover all the nuances of their readings of Wittgenstein. In particular, Kripke and Wright will in this essay be used more as the backdrop of a criticism of some problematic ideas about language, than being

¹ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. “Philosophical investigations”. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001. Here after referred to as PI. All references a “§” and a number are to PI unless otherwise noted.

subjects of a thorough examination. I will expound their ideas only to the extent that is needed to make the argumentation of this essay clear. The criticisms that are made could have been spelt out in detail, but this essay is not the place for that.

The progression of this essay

This essay is divided into main parts. The first deals with what role publicity has in rule-following and in the second the lessons from the first are applied in an examination about words for emotions. In chapters 2 through 6 it is argued that McDowell's understanding of Wittgenstein's insistence on the publicity of language is better than that of Crispin Wright. Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein is given a short presentation as a background for the debate between Wright and McDowell. The discussion of McDowell is complicated by the fact that he on one important point later changed his mind. It is shown that this change is best understood by contrasting McDowell's reading of Wittgenstein with the one of Edward H. Minar.

Finally, in part two of this essay, the ramifications of the discussions in part one are explored with an examination of words for emotions as an example. It will also be shown that a taking Wittgensteinian outlook on philosophy leaves us with a whole range of unexplored possibilities of examinations of human life that have great potential.

Consequently, this essay can be read equally well from two different perspectives: The first is to read part one as a preparation for part two. It is possible to read the discussion of the publicity of language as a necessary preliminary to a study of words for emotions. The second way of reading this essay, is to read it as an inquiry into the publicity of language, and taking the passages about words for emotions as an example of the fruitful consequences of the this first discussion.

Some main themes of Philosophical Investigations

A sketch of some of the main concepts in PI will make the detours later in the essay fewer and less tedious.

One of the background ideas in PI is that using language is, in some way or another, going by rules. There must be a consistency in how we use words, and where there is consistency there are rules. Wright seems to prefer the word 'pattern' over 'rule', but you

have to dig deep to find the difference. This intuitive idea is easily developed into a Platonistic account of language. ‘Platonistic’ here means that the meaning of a word is thought of as something constant that we can appeal to whenever we are in doubt.² An example: reading McDowell I notice he has a peculiar way of writing essays and I decide to baptize this way of writing ‘McDowellian’. Then the meaning of the word ‘McDowellian’ is what corresponds with my baptismal intentions. And language consists of the baptismal intentions behind the words, and the consistent use of words so that the words always lean on the same baptismal intentions.

A private language is, by Wittgenstein’s definition, a language where the words refer to my inner experiences (of which emotions are the concern of this essay), so that no one else can understand what it (really) means. Such a language would be private, not only because it would be *hard* for other people to understand what I say, but because the words in such a language would refer to states that are *essentially* private and not only ‘hidden’ or difficult to understand. Wittgenstein’s criticism of such a private language is relevant for an inquiry into words for emotions because words for emotions are obvious candidates for being for ‘private’ words. No one can look up my experience to check if we mean the exact same thing when we talk about the, as far as we know, same emotions. At least that seems to be the thought behind sayings like “I think I know what you mean, but I’m not sure because I have never (for example) lost someone close to me”. Or so the newborn philosopher might think, as she probably already is engulfed by semi-philosophical vocabulary.

Combining the idea of language as rule-following with the idea of a private language, we could say that when we want to convey the occurrence of a particular inner state, we can use the name given to this particular inner state. This is only possible if the baptismal intentions behind a word are stable in such a way that what a word refers to does not change over time. This need for stable baptismal intentions is what Wittgenstein attacks with the so called *is right/seems right problem*. The *is right/seems right problem* is that: in

² See for example: Kripke (Kripke, Saul A. Wittgenstein: On rules and private language. Oxford: Basil, Blackwell, 1982.), page 54; Arrington (Arrington, Robert L. “Following a rule” in Wittgenstein: A critical reader, 119-137. Edited by Hans-Johann Glock. Malden: Blackwell, 2001.), page 134; McGinn (McGinn, Marie. Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations. London: Routledge, 1997.) page 80: “...the view, sometimes known as Platonism, that meanings are abstract entities that determine or show how a word is to be applied...”.

a private language the only way we have available to check that the baptismal intentions behind a word stay the same is by relying on our memory; but there is no way of knowing whether we actually remember right or just believe we remember right.

The answer to the is right/seems right problem has often been that we must find what it is that in fact does secure stability in the baptismal intentions, and thereby a consistent use of the word. The most widespread answer to this challenge is to say that language must in some way be public. Only then can we avoid the is right/seems right problem. Concepts such as ‘public’, ‘publicity’, ‘communal’, ‘community’ are used in answering what the opposite of ‘private’ is. Closer descriptions of what the ‘publicity of language’ consist in use concepts such as ‘practice’, ‘communal practice’, ‘institution’ and ‘shared form of life’ in an attempt to describe how language can be the opposite of private, and thus avoid the is right/seems right problem. Most of these concepts will be discussed later.

The last topic of this brief sketch of the main themes of PI is Wittgenstein’s attitude towards philosophy, exemplified by the quote above: “Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of our language”. (§109) In the same spirit Wittgenstein maintains that we should *dissolve* philosophical problems and not answer them (§133). Furthermore he says that we in philosophy should not put forward theses (§128), but disentangle the philosophical problems. It is difficult to understand exactly what the difference between disentangling questions and answering them is supposed to be. Is Wittgenstein saying that philosophical questions are uninteresting? Should philosophy as a discipline close itself down? From Wittgenstein’s attitude towards philosophy arises the question about the relationship between those questions we know from the history of philosophy, and the musings and questions of everyday life.

The question of the connection between Wittgenstein’s attitude towards philosophy and his unconventional style of writing is important. I will in the following argue that this question is the Achilles heel of the so called ‘community view’ readings of Wittgenstein. It could perhaps even be said that the question of Wittgenstein’s attitude towards philosophy has been *the* problem that has caused most difficulties for readings of PI. We will in the following see that this is just what the problem is for both Kripke’s and Wright’s reading of Wittgenstein.

What role does publicity have in rule-following?

2 The background of the Wright-McDowell debate

The papers we will be looking at are McDowell's "Wittgenstein on following a rule" and Wright's "Wittgenstein's later philosophy of mind: sensation, privacy, and intention".³

One of the most important targets of Wittgenstein's attacks is the philosophical propensity for a Platonistic account of language. This much is fairly uncontroversial in the exegetical literature. What is controversial is what *dialectical role* his attacks play. What, if any, alternative does Wittgenstein indirectly point to in his attack? All the alternatives insist on the "publicity of language". McDowell summarizes the disagreement in the question of "how does Wittgenstein's insistence on publicity emerge?" To understand Wright and McDowell we have to first take a look at Kripke.

Kripke

A good starting point for examining the differences is with their disagreement over Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein and especially his reading of the so called is right/seems right problem. According to Kripke, Wittgenstein gave a sceptical argument by showing the impossibility of following rules in language. And since having a language is to follow rules, this threatens the foundations of a theory of language.

The main passage for Kripke is the first paragraph of §201:

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.

An example: I take my little sister to the library to teach her the difference between hardback and paperback books. I show her a deluxe edition of Kant's first critique and

³ McDowell (McDowell, John. "Wittgenstein on following a rule" in Mind, value and reality, 221-262. Cambridge, London and Harvard: University Press, 1998.), page 260. Wright (Wright, Crispin. "Kripke's account of the argument against private language". The Journal of Philosophy, (1984): 759-778.).

say “this is a hardback book”; and then show her a Penguin Classics edition of Kant’s first critique and say “this is a paperback”. Then she points at several books and categorizes them correctly until she finds a copy of Bukowski’s “The post office”. This particular copy is a paperback, but the cover has been given a thick and stiff coat of plastic by the library. My sister puts this book in the hardcover category, even though it clearly is a cheap Penguin Classics edition. I would say this mistake was a result of her interpreting my instructions wrongly. But she could reply that her interpretation of the rule I told her about is better than mine, because the book does have a hard cover. So we have a situation where the only way we could decide which interpretation of the rule is correct, is by appealing to another interpretation. And an infinite regress seems unavoidable. The same can be said of the rule for the use of any other word.⁴

According to Kripke, Wittgenstein’s answer to this *sceptical* argument is a *sceptical* solution. There is no proper response that refutes the sceptical argument, so we will have to do with the only alternative left, a sceptical solution. Kripke’s sceptical solution consists of, according to McDowell, two points. The first is that “we must reform our intuitive conception of meaning, replacing the notion of truth-conditions with some notion like that of justification conditions.”⁵ The second is that we avoid linguistic anarchy by only accepting other people into the linguistic community when we have reasons to believe they use words in the same way as us. Or, to put the point in a common-sensical way, if we can make sense of what they say, then we suppose, until it is otherwise proven, that we use words in the same ways. Kripke is, in other words, not saying that we *have* normativity only that we *call* something “right”.

Kripke’s argument is intriguing enough on its own terms, but as both Wright and McDowell point out, it is clearly at odds with PI.⁶ We need not look further than the rest

⁴ Dr. Marie McGinn pointed out to me that this example might not preserve Wittgenstein’s intentions would not use such a common-sensical example. He would probably prefer to use as an example a case where doubt would not normally arise, a case where only a philosophical sceptic would question the result. The reason it might not preserve Wittgenstein intentions is that Wittgenstein would probably prefer to also operate with a philosophically *innocent* notion of rule-following. The example in question *might* be seen as such a philosophically innocent example of rule-following, whereas what Wittgenstein wants to attack is a philosophically laden notion of rule-following. I do support such a reading of a Wittgenstein, but I will leave the discussion for later.

⁵ McDowell, “Wittgenstein on following a rule”, 227. This is one of the main points of Wright’s essay “Kripke’s account of the private language argument”.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 229.

of §201 to see strong indications that Wittgenstein's hint at a solution is not a hint at a *sceptical* solution:

It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; (...). What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, (...).

The sceptical paradox rests on a misunderstanding. And what it shows is that there must be 'grasping of rules' without interpretation, by the way of something like a *reduction ad absurdum*. (The *reductio* argument being that language is governed by rules, yet rules cannot be a foundation for normativity because there can always be given at least two interpretation of any rule.) What Wittgenstein gives us as his alternative are the enigmatic remarks that "... also 'obeying a rule' is a practice." (§202); and that "I have been trained to react to this sign in a particular way, and now I do so react to it." (§198)

According to Kripke, Wittgenstein gave us two alternatives. The first option is that of a platonistic account of language but this option, considering Wittgenstein's criticism, is no longer a viable option. The only other alternative, says Kripke, is a sceptical solution. However unsatisfying, it is, what we will have to do with. We have a two-horn dilemma and we choose the least unsatisfactory option. Both Wright and McDowell deny that this seemingly unavoidable dilemma represents the only two alternatives. The third option is rejecting the hidden premise Wittgenstein hints at when he says "It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here..." So, McDowell says, "there are three positions in play: the two horns of the dilemma, and the community-oriented conception of meaning that enables us to decline the choice."⁷ Exactly what role the community plays, and how it enables us to avoid the dilemma, is what McDowell and Wright disagree on.

The is right/seems right problem is discussed in two different ways at different points in the PI. The first is in § 201, and the second is in the paragraphs surrounding 258 (commonly known as the Private Language Argument). Kripke puts the emphasis on the attack Wittgenstein makes on the rule-following picture as he puts it in §201. The normativity of words cannot be grounded in interpretation of rules since a rule can always be interpreted in at least two ways. A similar attack is found in §258 where the reader is

⁷ Ibid., 243.

asked to imagine a situation where someone names a recurring sensation by concentrating on the sensation and giving it a name. The purpose of this naming is of course to remember the connection *right* in the future. Wittgenstein then asks how we can be so sure that we do remember the connection rightly. What guarantees do we have that we do not misjudge that it is the same sensation that reappears on a later occasion? Since my memory is the only thing I can appeal to, there is no guarantee that my memory will not deceive me.

The result of the argument is that establishing some kind of ‘official rule’ or issuing a ‘linguistic decree’ about what a word means will get us no where because we always could misremember the word without noticing our mistake. The argument of §201 is similarly that it is useless issuing a ‘linguistic decree’ because it can always be interpreted in at least two different ways. There are certainly important differences between the arguments of §§ 201 and 258, but those will not be discussed here because the conclusion of the essay does not depend on it. This short comparison will be sufficient as we enter into the discussion between Wright and McDowell.

3 Wright’s view

There is, unfortunately, not room for an extensive survey of Wright’s point of view. The reading of Wright will only be as detailed as is necessary to understand McDowell’s critique, so as to understand McDowell’s own positive view. We will be concentrating on the essay “Wittgenstein’s later philosophy of mind: Sensation, privacy, and intention”⁸ and not the book “Wittgenstein on the foundations of the philosophy of mathematics”⁹. Even though tracing the development and change of Wright’s thought would be interesting on its own, it will have to be postponed to another occasion.

Wright approaches the is right/seems right problem from a different angle than Kripke. Wright’s paper is mainly concerned with discussing such topics as the ‘infallibility thesis’ about judgements of inner states and its consequences for the is right/seems right

⁸ Wright pages 631-633. (Wright, Crispin. “Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy of Mind: Sensation, Privacy, and Intention”. The Journal of Philosophy, vol. 86 (1989): 622-634.)

⁹ Wright, Crispin. “Wittgenstein on the foundations of mathematics”. Duckworth: London, 1980

problem. The ‘infallibility thesis’ is that, since we have ‘direct’ access to our intentional states,¹⁰ it seems quite probable that we should err less in our judgements about our own intentional states than in judgements we make using our senses. Wright discusses whether a weakening of the infallibility thesis might leave the *is right/seems right* problem innocuous. The idea being that, if we refrain from claiming that we have *infallible* access to knowledge about our intentional states, then cases of misremembering would be less of a problem for a theory of language. And, hence, the *is right/seems right* problem would be built on a false intuition, namely that we always ‘know’ our intentional states. We shall not spend time on the details of that argument but concentrate on what is about Wright’s view of language that he believes enables him to avoid the *is right/seems right* problem.

One of the most basic philosophical puzzles about intentional states is that they seem to straddle two paradigms: the paradigm of sensation (...) and the paradigm of psychological characteristics...¹¹

The deceptive premise that generates this puzzle is the idea

...that there has to be a substantial epistemology of intentional states, a mode of cognitive access to those states which is distinctively available to their subject and which is somehow able to measure up to the epistemic security with which sincere avowals of intentional states are standardly credited.¹²

Wright does not take up to discussion the question whether we have a first person *authority* over judgements about our own intentional states or not. Rather, he questions how easily we turn this intuitive idea into detailed theories about how it can be that we have this ‘complete and infallible authority’. It is this propensity towards a substantial epistemology of intentional states that is the target Wittgenstein’s attacks, according to Wright.

Ratification dependence

Wright never gives a *detailed* definition of what a ‘substantial epistemology of intentional states’ is. His first sketchy attempt is that: “A subject’s sincere dispositions of avowal –

¹⁰ Let, for the moment, this problematic notion pass. It will be discussed later.

¹¹ Wright, “Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy of Mind”, 631.

¹² *Ibid.*, 631.

or, better, his beliefs – would stand by default, unless there was positive reason to reject them.”¹³ Wright mentions two reasons for sometimes the disbelieving someone's believes. The first is a two part criterion. 1a: “...the inability of the intentional system so determined to rationalize his [own] behaviour satisfyingly” together with 1b: “...the ability of an alternative system, generated by discarding the suspect ascriptions,...” to rationalize his own behaviour in a more satisfying manner. A second type of reason “might be provided by internal constraints of harmony and intelligibility working within the system as a whole.”¹⁴

Wright does not give an example of how this might work, but we could try to think of one for him. An example of the first type of reason could be: Let's say Mr Sinclair is looking at Meredith Williams' book on Wittgenstein and says to himself: “I really like that yellow”. An example of the first type of reasons could be: Sinclair suddenly remembers that he showed the book to his friend Mr Sheridan the other day and recalls that he at that time called the colour of the book “orange”. So he now knows he has an inconsistency in his belief system. So he adjusts his use of “yellow” and “orange” and decides that the book is yellow. A dark orange-like shade of yellow. An example of the second type of reasons would be if Mr Sinclair showed the book to Ms Ivanova and told her “I really like this yellow”. If Mr Sheridan at that moment walked in the door he would say “But yesterday you told me that the colour of the book was orange”. Then Mr Sinclair would have to adjust his use of the words “yellow” and “orange”, and we have an example of the second type.

To understand why Wright brings in the concept of ratification-dependence, to understand what weakness it is meant to mend, we need to take a step back and take a look at the big picture.

Wright believes that patterns in language, i.e. rules for how to use words, are *ratification-dependent*. That means that our use of any words is subject to ratification by other language users, which is at philosophical way of saying that other language users can correct us if we use a word incorrectly. Wright believes that we, by allowing for words to be ratification-dependent, can avoid the is right/seems right problem. Since other people

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

will correct us if we use a word incorrectly, we now have a way of distinguishing between actually following a rule and merely seeming to oneself to do so and the is right/seems right problem is no longer a threat. It is because the community of language users is given such an important role that we might call Wright's view a 'community view'. An important difference from Kripke's account is that Wright sets out to "save normativity", whereas Kripke's sceptical solution only *describes* the situation and he does not intend to "save" anything.

Such a theory of ratification-dependence seems to be begging the question of how words for private experiences are possible. Such words seem to be clear counter-examples to the coherency of the insistence on ratification-dependence. Wright can, of course, not allow for any exception of words for private experiences if he wants to 'salvage' language as we know it. But, an objection might go, it seems quite counter intuitive that other people are in a position to correct my use of words that, *per se* require a first person perspective - words for 'private' states 'happy', 'melancholic', 'distressed', etc. One might say: "Only I know what kind of emotions *I* have, and therefore it does not make any sense say that other people could possibly know what *I really* meant when they think I used a word incorrectly."

This is what Wright's denial of "substantial epistemology of intentional states" is meant to correct. Wright argues that we are misleading ourselves when we believe we can pick out and refer to intentional states as something clearly demarcated. One of the targets of Wittgenstein's argumentation is, according to Wright, the idea that we have a *substantial* epistemology for intentional states. If we abandon this idea, then the temptation to appeal to *private* rule-following disappears alongside it. The thought is that if we reject the idea that we can point at *clearly demarcated* private intentional states, then we would not have any private 'things' the baptismal intentions build on. And others to not need to have access to anything 'private' to be able to correct us.

Wright wants to replace the idea that we have a substantial epistemology of intentional states with a much weaker conception where "the authority standardly credited to a subject's own beliefs, or expressed avowals, about his intentional states are a *constitutive*

*principle...*¹⁵ The constitutive principle “...enters primitively into the conditions of identification of what a subject believes, hopes, and intends” and is not something that is “a by-product of the nature of those states”.¹⁶ So, yes *I* am by default in a better position to identify *my* beliefs, intentions, etc., than others, but what I ‘identify’ are not clearly demarcated states. And, consequently, when Wright says that our language is ratification dependent, he does not have to say that others are accessing my (private) states. Because not even I ‘access’ my own experiences.

Thus Wright hopes to avoid the is right/seems right problem by emphasising the ratification-dependence of language. At the same time he allows for a first person authority over utterances about ones ‘inner’ life while denying that these indicate that we could have a substantial epistemology of intentional states.

4 Critique of Wright

So, McDowell says, “there are three positions in play: the two horns of the dilemma, and the community-oriented conception of meaning that enables us to decline the choice.” Kripke sees no other alternatives than the two horns of the dilemma: 1 no interpretation is authoritative because a rule can always be interpreted at least two ways, so we end up with linguistic anarchy, 2 or we could go for a Platonistic explanation of rules in language. Wright correctly saw that Wittgenstein wants us to decline the choice and find a third of alternative that does not rest on the same premise that make both of Kripke’s alternatives wrong. So far McDowell agrees with Wright. But, he argues, that Wright, to save the coherency of his theory, has to deny a strong intuition about correctness. And in denying this intuition he makes normativity in language impossible. We shall see that there are strong reasons, not only exegetical but also argumentative, to reject Wright’s theory.

To backup his claim that Wright does not save normativity, McDowell rewrites §406 of PI as follows:

¹⁵ Ibid. Wright’s own italics.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Could the justification of an action as fulfilment of an order run like this: “You said ‘Bring me a yellow flower’, upon which the picking of this one received approval from all the bystanders; that is why I have brought it”? Wouldn’t one have to reply: “But I didn’t set you to bring the flower which should receive approval from everyone else after what I said!”?¹⁷

Where Wright seems to assume that there is little difference between meaning and consensus, McDowell tries to drive a wedge in between the two. The thrust of this argument relies on appealing to the untenability of rejecting the intuition that, if something *is* correct, then it is correct regardless of what other people say. Something is correct or incorrect regardless of how many people believe so. The implausibility might be even clearer if we rewrite §460 to be parallel to the example of §185 where the pupil has to complete the series of numbers. So, the pupil could say,

“You said ‘Write down a series of on numbers of the form 0, n, 1n, 2n, 3n, etc where n is +1’; upon which the series ‘0, 1, 2, 3, 4 etc’ received approval from all the bystanders; that is why I wrote it that way”? Wouldn’t one have to reply: “But I didn’t set you to complete the series which should receive approval from everyone else after what I said!”?

So when the pupil write 1004, 1008, etc he will not receive approval from the bystanders. But Wright would have to say that if enough people agree with the pupil, then he *is* right. What is correct and not only depends on whether a majority thinks so or not.

There are both strong exegetical and argumentative reasons to say, with McDowell, that: “...it would be a serious error (...) not to make a radical distinction between the significance of, say, “This is yellow” and the significance of, say, “This would be called ‘yellow’ by (most) speakers of English”.¹⁸ We will first discuss whether Wright is committed to denying such a distinction and what coherency problems it might result in. Then we will look at some of the exegetical reasons for rejecting such a view.

¹⁷ McDowell, 234. Wittgenstein’s original §460 is: “Could the justification of an action as fulfilment of an order run like this: “You said ‘Bring me a yellow flower’, upon which this one [i.e. a yellow flower] gave me a feeling of satisfaction; that is why I have brought it”? Wouldn’t one have to reply: “But I didn’t set you to bring the flower which should give you that sort of feeling after what I said!”?”

¹⁸ Ibid.

Argumentative reasons

First, let's take a closer look at how McDowell's yellow flower example is an argument against Wright. Wright might object that all he said was that we must allow for correcting each other, not that we must have a referendum when making up new words. Perhaps we could say that one person could do the baptising, and then others might correct him if he, in the future, should loose his grip on his baptismal intentions. Unfortunately, such a scenario seems plausible only on an assumption Wright is not entitled to make. We can only make sense of Wright's theory when we *already have a language* there. We can only *enviseage* how his alternative might work if we take as a starting point the normativity there actually is in language; a normativity Wright's theory cannot explain. Wright's alternative makes good sense only if the scenarios in which we picture in his theory applied are taken from everyday situations, and he gets into trouble if we imagine more extreme circumstances. If we try to get Wright's theory *started* in a setting where there is no language to build upon, then it is at best unclear how

...Wright's reading of Wittgenstein has the means to make it intelligible that there should so much as be such an action as calling an object "yellow".¹⁹

Wright never says that we must only use situations from everyday life when envisaging his proposal. This requirement is not an integral part of Wright's theory, but the problem is that, without it, it is on collision course with some strong intuitions we have about language. We will look at two the examples of how much Wright's theory rests on an assumption he is not entitled to make.

Crusoe

Let us imagine a person that for some reason is cut off from contact with other humans (and newspapers, radio, etc) for a long period of time. Like Robinson Crusoe. Since Mr Crusoe is no less prone to conceptual recidivism²⁰ than the rest of us, he is bound to sooner or later misremember the baptismal intentions behind, for example, "yellow". He could start classifying some shades of orange as yellows. If we assume he stays alone for

¹⁹ Ibid., 235

²⁰ Wright, "Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy of Mind", 628. "Conceptual recidivism is, evidently, merely a special case of a more general possibility: departures from the system of concepts enshrined in the linguist's original practice may take all kinds of, perhaps unprecedented, directions."

decades, then this could happen with a range of words. Wright's explanation would be that this happens because there is nobody there to correct Crusoe's incorrect use of words.

The question now becomes how we diagnose what is happening to Crusoe's language. Is his language *changing* or is it *dissolving*? The common-sensical answer would be that his language is changing. Wright, on the other hand, is forced to say that it is dissolving because he *grounds* meaning in communal assent.²¹ Without community there is no normativity and without normativity there is no language. Wright is therefore obliged to contradict the strong intuition that Crusoe's language is only changing and not deteriorating and dissolving.

The reason this is not evident in Wright's text is that his argumentation tacitly rests on the help it gets from the fact that we picture such correction happening in a setting where language is already there. The thought experiments argument calls for seem reasonable because we imagine them in a normal setting where we have an established language. Furthermore, he believes that to admit that Crusoe's 'new language' has normativity would be to play the ball directly in to the arms of the private linguist. For Wright, ones own (private) baptismal intentions do not ground the meaning of a word. Only the community's assent of my use of a word grounds its meaning. In Crusoe's case there no longer is a community and that, for Wright, becomes a problem when Crusoe loses sight of his original baptismal intentions. Because it seems that a solitary language user indicates that private languages are possible.

We could explain the same point using a metaphor: We could imagine, using words in the same way as other people, as something much like marching in line with them. Then our challenge for Wright would be what he could say if somebody is marching all alone. Would it no longer be marching? Or rather, would it no longer be rhythmical walking? Would it be random stomping? The challenge for Wright is: If Crusoe experiences conceptual-recidivism, are all of a sudden his words just random noises? Wright would of course answer the question in the negative. It is too obviously wrong. But what then are

²¹ Kripke says we "sign a contract" saying we will use words the same way as other. Wright weakens this position by saying that we are generally right, and the only thing the community does is to correct our occasional mistakes.

these ‘new words’? Wright would probably not deny that Crusoe’s ‘new words’ are words in *some way*.

Maybe he could appeal to the psychological stability of the human mind and say that a massive breakdown of language would take a too long time so as to be observed. Crusoe would not experience conceptual recidivism on a big enough scale to make it a significant counterexample. This rebuttal misses the point. It is *meaning*, it is *normativity*, Wright grounds in communal assent. What is at stake for Wright is not whether Crusoe’s language might be changing or not, but whether Crusoe even makes sense to *himself*, when he uses a ‘new word’. Wright, to be consistent has to say that without communal assent, there is no normativity, and without normativity there is no language, and without language we cannot be making sense even to ourselves. If we want to keep hold of the intuition that Crusoe’s language is only changing, and not dissolving, we will have to look for other alternatives than Wright’s theory.

The reason this is not obvious on first sight when reading Wright is that his theory, probably unintentionally, exploits a gap between the theory in itself and how we *picture* it playing out. If we try to see before our inner eye, a situation where a person correct someone else’s conceptual-recidivism, then we unconsciously take a *normal* situation, where there *already is* language, as our starting point. And we have no problem whatsoever seeing the situation play out before our inner eye. The problem is that Wright is not justified in using, as examples corroborating his theory, situations where there *already is* normativity, since his theory *concerns* the very foundations of normativity, and not just the correction of mere mistakes.

New words

If using a Robinson Crusoe as an example seems a bit far-fetched, we have a parallel problem closer to our everyday life. When Crusoe started using a word in a new way, i.e. really making up a new word, he would still be able to explain his new use. This means that there is some regularity, i.e. normativity, to the new use. It is not just a random noise. The same could be said of people that are *not* isolated on an island, people that are in a situation where they *could* be corrected by others. If I, for example, all of a sudden started classifying shades of orange with the yellows I *would* be able to explain that new use. My utterance would not all of a sudden be nothing but a noise. So there is *some* normativity

there.

While it is quite clear that Wright would say that a Crusoe who has suffered conceptual-recidivism no longer has a language, he would still maintain that a word that has undergone conceptual-recidivism is still a word. At least they must stay words for a while, since it only makes sense to say that other people might correct my incorrect use of a word if they recognize it as a word. Furthermore, conceptual-recidivism is never completely random. The ‘new’ word has a close resemblance to the ‘old’ word. If I experience conceptual-recidivism and start using a word in a peculiar way, it would of course be inconvenient since it would result in misunderstandings. But the intuition we have, at least most of us, is that the peculiar use of some sound combination would still be a word. It would be a word, not a random noise. So there is *some* normativity behind any ‘new’ word.

This means that the question Wright needs to answer is the same as in the case of Crusoe: is Wright’s ‘communal meaning’ really ‘meaning’ at all? If normativity in language, i.e. meaning, is nothing but communal assent, then what should we say about our intuition that Crusoe’s language is only changing and not dissolving? What should we say about our intuition that a ‘new’ (use of) a word only means we are wrong, not that the word is dissolving into random noise?

Wright’s reading of Wittgenstein seems unable to cope with these questions. Wright’s alternative does not have the means to explain normativity and so we have Argumentative reasons for believing that Wright’s reading of Wittgenstein is wrong.

Exegetical reasons

We have looked at the coherency of Wright’s views as they stand on their own. Now we will look briefly at a few exegetical reasons for believing Wright is wrong.²² Perhaps the best indication that Wright is on the wrong track is §241:

²² Wright has also openly expressed doubt about whether Wittgenstein’s intention of not doing positive philosophy be abandoned. See pages 244-246 of Wright, Crispin. “Wittgenstein’s Rule-Following Considerations and the Central Project of Theoretical Linguistics” in *Reflections on Chomsky*, edited by A. George, 133-164. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. I found this quote in Minar: Feeling at home in language; footnote 10 on page 419.

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

For Wright the concept of 'form of life' seems to be little more than publicly expressed opinions with a sufficiently great number of adherents as to take on a foundational character. Such a conception of 'form of life' misses the radicality of Wittgenstein's idea. Agreement in opinions does not *convert* into a foundation. That 'form of life' is more than convergence in opinions is also the point of the following quote from "Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics":

...it has often been put in the form of an assertion that the truths of logic are determined by consensus of opinions. Is this what I am saying? No. There is no *opinion* at all; it is not a question of *opinion*. They are determined by consensus of action: a consensus of doing the same thing, reacting in the same way. There is a consensus but it is not a consensus of opinion. We all act the same way, walk the same way, count the same way.²³

Similarly, the point of Zettel²⁴ §431 is that opinion polls cannot be used in establishing the meaning of a word:

Does human agreement *decide* what is red? Is it decided by appeal to the majority? Were we taught to determine colour in *that* way?

For Wittgenstein 'form of life' is the common ground we humans have from where we *can* go in different directions. It is because we *have* a framework that we can have different *opinions*, not the other way around.

No dispute breaks out over the question whether a proceeding was according to the rule or not. It doesn't come to blows for example.

This belongs to the framework, out of which our language works (for example, gives a description).²⁵

²³ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Wittgenstein's lectures on the foundation of mathematics*, Cambridge 1939, notes by R. G. Bosanquet, N. Malcolm, R. Rhees and Y. Smythies. Edited by Cora Diamond. Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1976. Pages 183-184.

²⁴ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Zettel*. Edited G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967.

²⁵ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Remarks on the foundations of mathematics, Revised edition*. Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1978. § VI-21 (page 323). Quoted by Minar in (Minar, Edward H. "Wittgenstein and the "contingency" of community". *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 72 (1991): 203-234) page 225.

Several more passages of Wittgenstein's writings could be given to show that Wright's reading is at odds with Wittgenstein's intentions. But it is more fruitful to try and understand what Wittgenstein did mean, than what he did not mean.

5 Uncovering McDowell's positive view

In this essay I have chosen to concentrate on the four essays by McDowell that correspond to chapters 11 through 14 in the book "Mind, value and reality". Those essays were or originally published between 1984 and 1993. Of those essays I have chosen to focus on the earliest one, "Wittgenstein on following a rule", because it is this essay that deals directly with Wright. So when I in the following say "according to McDowell", or something like it, I will mostly be speaking of this essay, unless otherwise noted. This is important because, as we shall see, McDowell's reading of Wittgenstein has changed over time. McDowell's later papers are closer to what I believe is a correct reading of Wittgenstein, and also what I take to be Minar's reading of Wittgenstein. But, as it is the essay from 1984 that McDowell's disagreement with Wright is most thoroughly discussed, this is the essay that will be the focus in the following.

McDowell, in the essay from 1984, repeatedly insists that: "Wright makes nothing of Wittgenstein's concern – which figures at the centre of my reading – to attack the assimilation of understanding to interpretation."²⁶ If we give this point due attention we both avoid the problems of Wright's view and arrive at a far more enlightening interpretation of Wittgenstein. Unfortunately, giving an account of McDowell's own positive view is not as easy as we might hope. McDowell seems to assume that we see his positive view in his critique; and so he does not say much other than as a critique of Wright. The best way of exploring McDowell's positive view is therefore to look at his diagnosis of what leads Wright astray. Hence we have to uncover rather than just recapitulating McDowell's arguments.

What complicates matters is that McDowell, in a later paper, admits that he is no longer satisfied with the paper from 1984, where his main concern is to criticize Wright:

²⁶ Ibid., 261.

Commentators often suggest that the concept of a custom and its cognates figure in Wittgenstein as elements in a constructive philosophical response to questions like “How is meaning possible?” According to some versions of this reading, Wittgenstein actually gives the response; according to others, he points towards it but does not give it, out of a quietism that must stand exposed as inappropriate by the sheer fact that the questions are (supposedly) good ones. I am committed to regarding this as a misreading. [In a footnote to this paragraph he adds:] I now think Essay 11 above [the one we will be discussing] is too hospitable to this kind of reading.²⁷

So, while making sense of McDowell’s few positive remarks, we will have to keep in mind his later view. Firstly we will look at his diagnosis of what goes wrong in Wright’s view and from that say something about McDowell’s own view. Then we will try to pin down what he later became dissatisfied with. Finally we will adjust McDowell’s view, so as to accommodate for his concessions, using Edward H. Minar’s writings on Wittgenstein.

McDowell’s diagnosis of Wright’s problem

Of all the topics that could have been discussed under this heading, only two will be discussed. These two are the assimilation of understanding with interpretation and Wright’s anti-realism. McDowell believes these two are closely connected and that most of the other smaller problems in Wright’s reading of Wittgenstein stem from these. So, although we have already seen reasons for rejecting Wright’s views, we need to take a look at what McDowell believes sends the right in the wrong direction, so as to understand McDowell’s own view.

Understanding as interpretation

Both McDowell and Wright agree that Kripke misses an essential point in his reading of §201. This is where Wittgenstein, after stating the rule-following paradox, goes on to say that, the presence of a paradox, shows that we are making a mistake.

This was our paradox; no course of action could be determined by a rule, because any course of action can be made out to accord with a rule. (...)

It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if

²⁷ McDowell, “Meaning and Intentionality in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy”, 275.

each one contended us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another one standing behind it. What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which is exhibited in what we call “obeying the rule” and “going against it” in actual cases. (§201)

Wright uses the first half of the second paragraph of §201 as an argument against Kripke. Wittgenstein cannot be giving a sceptical solution because he openly says that the paradox rests on a misunderstanding. Oddly enough Wright never expends much energy on explaining what *he* believes Wittgenstein could have meant by the *last* sentence of the same paragraph - that there must be a way of grasping a rule, which is not an *interpretation*. Instead of spending time on Wittgenstein’s slightly mysterious remark, Wright suggests that what leads to the paradox is our alleged craving for a “substantial epistemology of intentional states”. It is not clear why Wright chooses not pursue Wittgenstein’s own hint at a solution. Why he does not spend more than a parenthesis on Wittgenstein’s quick and sketchy answer but instead goes through all the trouble of denying we have a substantial epistemology of inner states, proposing ‘the constitutive principle’ as a replacement, etc. According to McDowell it is Wright’s anti-realist stance that is to blame.²⁸

Anti-realism

Giving a full exposition of Wright’s and McDowell’s considerations of the realism/anti-realism debate is beyond the scope of this paper. For our purposes a short summary of the most relevant points will have to suffice.

According to McDowell, the anti-realist view of language, claims that belonging to a linguistic community is nothing more than having matching exteriors. The anti-realist cannot appeal to anything beyond the surface. Because, if being an anti-realist is believing that we cannot ‘reach out to’ objects, then whatever description we give of the object in question, it cannot be more than one possible interpretation. If all we have is the surface, then there will inevitably be more than one interpretation.

²⁸ McDowell, “Wittgenstein on following a rule”, 247 and 262.

A better option for McDowell is having a “non-anti-realism”²⁹ about meaning. This means that a

...shared command of a language equips us to know one another’s meaning without needing to arrive at that knowledge by interpretation, because it equips us to hear someone else’s meaning in his words.³⁰

Since McDowell is not committed to anti-realism, he is comfortable appealing to ‘the meaning itself’ whenever Wright would have to resort to interpretation. So what McDowell *believes* he accomplishes by discarding Wright’s anti-realism is obvious enough. Another question is whether the argument is convincing. McDowell never explains in detail what he means by “hearing someone else’s meaning in his words”. So it seems that he assumes the correctness of this assumption on the basis that it is the opposite of the anti-realist view, which he has shown to be wrong. But if McDowell is simply stating how things must be, that we do hear the meaning in each others words, he is simply *asserting* his position. Some, may be for example Wright, might think that he by this simply is begging the question. What McDowell, on the other hand, probably *intends* to do is to *reject* (§§128 and 133) the question. We will shortly look at those questions McDowell’s argument seems to be begging; and farther down try to explain what the difference between ‘begging the question’ and ‘rejecting a question’ is.

Summary of McDowell’s view

What in McDowell’s view is it then that puts him in a better position to say how understanding can be something other than interpretation? What about his non-anti-realist conception of a linguistic community is it that is different from Wright’s anti-realist conception? McDowell says:

In the different picture I have described, the response to Wittgenstein’s problem works because a linguistic community is conceived as bound together, not by a match in mere externals (facts accessible to just anyone), but by a capacity for a meeting of minds.³¹

²⁹ Ibid., 253.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

McDowell never explains what a “meeting of minds” is and we might wonder why since it hardly is self-explanatory. One reason might be that he just has not worked out the details yet. A more probable explanation is that he simply believes it is an explanation good enough and that nothing is missing. That Wittgenstein has an outspoken ‘anti-philosophical-theses’ stance, makes this the most probable explanation for McDowell’s silence. If so, we could take McDowell as saying that, when we discard the anti-realist’s insistence on only describing the linguistic community by ‘mere externals’, then we can see that having a language is the “capacity for a meeting of minds”. Or, in other words, once we get rid of the anti-realism we can be happy with the common-sensical explanation that “I understand what you are saying”. The assumption seems to be that, since the anti-realist only has externals to deal with, he will always have interpretation. Such a reading is supported by the last paragraph of McDowell’s paper:

... makes it impossible for Wright to accommodate for Wittgenstein’s insistence that understanding need not be interpretation – is the anti-realist conception of our knowledge of others.³²

Without the anti-realist need for looking at understanding in terms of interpretation we are free to accept explanations of normativity in language that do not use the notion of interpretation. McDowell, of course, has a proposal. It is that “obeying a rule is a practice”.³³ We hear the meaning in words, without interpretation, because of the “‘custom’/‘practice’/‘institution’ that is language”.³⁴ For McDowell publicity enters the picture as the place where we in fact *do* have normativity in language. Wright, on the other hand, *brings in* publicity to mend a (anti-realist) theory of how normativity in language is possible. McDowell does not ‘add’ publicity to his theory “oils the wheels and produces” normativity. He points at the public nature of natural language and says: this is where there *is* normativity and we do not need any explanation in non-normative terms to ‘save’ it. Wright is right that it is in publicity that we find normativity, but only accidentally right. McDowell believes that Wright asks the wrong question, because 1. He is an anti-realist, and therefore ends up looking for the wrong answer in the right place; 2. He looks for a *constructive* account of how normativity in language is possible. He this on the right airport but on the wrong plane.

³² Ibid., 262.

³³ Ibid., 239 .

³⁴ Ibid., 242.

Wright ends up with a conception of community that does not have the means to explain normativity. Wright, correctly, believed that there cannot be normativity in a private language. He then, not all that different from Kripke, assumed that Wittgenstein's point was that seeing language as '*mass rule-following*', we could explain where normativity enters the picture. It is essentially the same problem the private linguist has, that plagues Wright's 'community view'. In the case of private languages the problem was that "whatever is going to seems right to me is right". (§258) In the case of Wright the problem is that: "Whatever is going to seem right to *us* is right."³⁵ The Achilles heel of Wright's reading is that it goes against the intuition that something is not right only because a lot of people say so.

McDowell and Wright agree on the importance of 'publicity' in understanding language. But they disagree on how the publicity of language enters into consideration.

“But if Wittgenstein’s position is the one I have described in this section, it is precisely the notion of a communal practice that is needed, and not some notion that could equally be applied outside the context of a community. The essential point is the way in which one person can know another’s meaning without interpretation.”³⁶

Unfortunately, problems arise when we try to spell out what it might mean that we can "know another's meaning without interpretation".

The problems

If we attempt to specify what it is to say that "one person can know another's meaning without interpretation", there seem to be two slightly different paths we could follow.

The first would be that Wittgenstein simply *asserts* that it is in community that normativity is established. We need to just maintain, in the face of the repeated questions by sceptics of the common-sensical, that there indeed *is* normativity in our everyday use of language. Any search for a further foundation will be fruitless because we do not *need* anything other than our everyday use of language to explain normativity. Such a way of

³⁵ McDowell says this in a footnote on page 255.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 254.

specifying what the early McDowell says, gives Wittgenstein's notion of community a positive role to be played.

The similar, yet importantly diverging way of specifying McDowell's view, would be to emphasize that it is the *search* for a foundation of language that leads us astray. Yes, normativity in language *is* 'provided' by the community,³⁷ but Wittgenstein is not giving 'the community' as an *answer* to the search for a foundation for normativity in language. On this alternative reading the rhetorical role of 'community' (or 'publicity') is that of dissuading the reader from looking for a mechanism *behind* language as what 'generates' its normativity. On this reading the notion of community has only a *rhetorical* role in an argument *against* something, not a constructive and assertive one as in the first alternative.

It is not clear which of these options the early McDowell favoured and this vagueness is what creates problems. McDowell seems to believe that his arguments does the philosophical work sketched in the second alternative, however the wording of the arguments themselves lend themselves more towards the first alternative. The differences between these readings might seem trivial, but as we shall see in section five, they reveal a gap in McDowell's reading of PI. At the beginning of this chapter four, we quoted a later essay by McDowell where, with regards to the question 'How is meaning possible' he says that:

According to some versions of this reading, Wittgenstein actually gives the response; according to others, he points towards it but does not give it, out of a quietism that must stand exposed as inappropriate by the sheer fact that the questions are (supposedly) good ones. I am committed to regarding this as a misreading.³⁸

McDowell's alternative to Wright, in the essay we have been looking at, seems to assume that the question "How is meaning possible" is a good question. Or, more modestly, it is at least not clear that McDowell could explain, to his adversaries, why it is a bad question. At least, saying that Wright is answering the question "how is normativity possible" in the wrong way, seems to be an indirect acceptance of the question. The early McDowell does

³⁷ "Provided" by the *community* (the sum of people in a specific area) meaning "as opposed to provided by a governmental committee, a professor of linguistics, my own ostensive definitions, etc".

³⁸ McDowell, "Meaning and Intentionality in Wittgenstein's later philosophy", 275.

not clearly enough distance himself from an idea such as that “the only thesis Wittgenstein allows us to have, and it is the thesis that our ordinary language does not need a foundation for the normativity it exhibits”, so as to remove all doubt that this is not what he thinks. This is probably one of the things the later McDowell wanted to correct.

This is indeed close to Wittgenstein’s own view, or what I take to be his view, but there is still something missing. A quote from a later essay by McDowell probably expresses this best:

Readers of Wittgenstein often suppose that when he mentions customs, forms of life, and the like, he is making programmatic gestures towards a certain style of positive philosophy: one that purports to make room for talk of meaning and understanding, in the face of supposedly genuine obstacles, by locating such talk in a context of human interactions conceived as describable otherwise than in terms of meaning or understanding. But there is no reason to credit Wittgenstein with any sympathy for this style of philosophy.³⁹

6 Correction of McDowell

In this chapter I will argue that McDowell’s problem is that he did not realize *why* and *how* Wittgenstein’s views are connected to his style of writing in PI. McDowell does say that Wittgenstein’s style is important and should not be ignored, but the connection between style and method in PI is seldom listed as justification for the particular reading of some paragraph of PI. Wittgenstein’s insistence on the connection between style and method is noted, but seems to have been lost somewhere on the road to exegesis of particular passages. He later realises he is on the wrong track, as the quote above shows, but never articulates what exactly he has changed his mind about. The following is an attempt at such an articulation.

I can only speculate on why McDowell did not realize his mistake in the early essay, but one suggestion might be that he was more occupied with refuting Wright’s anti-realism

³⁹ Ibid., 277. Minar says something similar: “Elements of this view occur in Crispin Wright, Wittgenstein on the Foundations of Mathematics (...) and in John McDowell, “Wittgenstein on following a rule” ...” Minar, “Wittgenstein and the “contingency” of community”, Footnote 11 on page 218.

than reading Wittgenstein carefully. McDowell's some reading of Wittgenstein suffers from a lack of incorporation of passages like §109:

It was true to say that our considerations could not be scientific ones. (...) And we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all explanations, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems.⁴⁰

I do not believe McDowell is giving an 'explanation' in the sense of 'explanation' as 'a constructive account of normativity', but he seems to be giving something much *like* a description when he *asserts* that it is in the publicity of language we 'in fact do find normativity'. What I would like both early and later McDowell to explain is exactly *why* Wittgenstein wants to do away with *explanations*, 'explanations' understood as 'constructive accounts of normativity in non-normative terms'. Even though McDowell does speak out against 'explanations', his silence on this point is probably the reason that he sometimes, at least *seems* to be, giving a *theory* of some sort of where normativity comes from. McDowell does *reject* to answer questions like 'How is meaning possible?', as opposed to Wright who tries to answer them. But the rejection of these questions takes on a dogmatic character since McDowell only shows us *that* the questions to lead us astray, but not *why* answering them ends up in confusion.

McDowell is not the first one to be in this kind of trouble. The difficulty with passages such as §109 has not to do with *acknowledging* that these remarks must be taken seriously, rather the problem is *making sense* of them. Most commentators say they want to take §109 seriously and often accuse their opponents of not doing so. Yet they often end up with what look like theories.⁴¹ So the challenge is not to keep these remarks in mind, but to see how they relate to Wittgenstein's overall argument - to *implement* them. We must answer questions like: "But don't we unavoidably have theories just by having an opinion?" "Will not any description also be an explanation?"

⁴⁰ A similar passage is §133: "For the clarity we are aiming at is indeed complete clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should completely disappear."

⁴¹ The most famous example of this is probably Norman Malcolm's 1954 discussion of PI. More examples could be given, but space does not allow for it. (Malcolm, Norman. "Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations". Philosophical review, vol.63 no. 4, (1954): 530-559.)

Edward Minar seems to me to give a good explanation for the reason for *why* style and method are so tightly connected in PI. The arguments of the rest of this chapter rely heavily on his papers.

The rule-following considerations as a *reductio* argument

A good place to start the examination of the link between style and content, is the rule-following paradox of §201. This is a good starting point because both McDowell and Wright spend considerable time on it, and both readings are debatable. The rule-following paradox is also a good way to show how Edward H. Minar's reading of PI puts on the agenda something that Wright failed to notice, and McDowell does not write about.

Minar believes that "...rules serve as a "best case" for the kind of picture Wittgenstein wants to uproot."⁴² So much is uncontroversial, at least at first sight. The bolder claim is that Wittgenstein "...fights the picture of meanings as rule-like items not so much by showing it wrong as by pointing to its emptiness..."⁴³ Now that might not seem controversial either, but when played out it is clearly contrary to what Wright, and to some extent the early McDowell, say and supplements McDowell's later reading of Wittgenstein. According to Minar, Wittgenstein is in the rule-following discussion, not so much giving a *reductio*, as forcing "...us to try to articulate what we find missing in our practices."⁴⁴ This is not a denial of the claim that Wittgenstein is making *some* kind of *reductio ad absurdum* argument in §201. What is up for discussion is what *dialectical* role the *reductio* argument has in the overall argument of PI.

The rule-following discussion in PI is a perfect example of Wittgenstein's way of giving an argument. He is not, as many commentators seem to assume, giving *definite* and *exhaustive* arguments against a certain philosophical position, say that of Russell or of Frege. Reading through PI, it is clear to the careful reader that Wittgenstein does not *make* blatant prohibitions. He does not say "this is allowed" or "this is nonsense". Rather he goes along with the first steps of his opponents' arguments and invites them to articulate

⁴² Ibid., 204.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 210.

more clearly what problem they are trying to solve. Through this Wittgenstein hopes it will become clear that his opponents are ‘lost in their own words’.

Minar believes that “The view that §201 represents a *reductio* of a particular position (...) is at best misleading.”⁴⁵ He gives two reasons for this. The first is that it “seems to me to leave too many paths of resistance available to those seriously tempted by the idea of determinate meanings underlying our uses of expressions.”⁴⁶ One such “path of resistance” could for example be that the only thing the paradox proves is that we have a lot of work to do, not that finding a foundation for normativity in language will forever be impossible. An imaginative opponent could probably come up with several more objections. Interpreting the rule-following discussion as a *reductio* of some particular position cannot be what Wittgenstein intended because, firstly, he does not give a detailed argument against each of *all* the philosophical positions that might disagree with him, and secondly, his claims are more radical. He aims for “... *complete* clarity. But this means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear.”⁴⁷ (§133) Such a radical break as Wittgenstein is aiming for is not achieved by arguing against *one* philosophical argument. The problem has to be taken at the root. And the root is not only the Augustinian picture of language, or Russell’s picture of language, etc, but the motivation behind them. Wittgenstein is in the rule-following considerations indirectly saying something about philosophy more than he is arguing against a particular position in the history of philosophy.

This leads us on to Minar’s second reason for being reluctant to saying that §201 presents a *reductio* argument. He says that:

...to depict §201 as a *reductio* that serves to show the falsehood of a definite and clearly stateable presupposition or conception runs the risk of distorting the *kind* of criticism in which Wittgenstein is engaged here. (...)
Wittgenstein is certainly tracing the potential effects of certain pictures, reminding us of their dangerous (or even absurd) applications; but to see his

⁴⁵ Minar, “Paradox and Privacy”, 45. (Minar, Edward H. “Paradox and Privacy: On §§201-202 of Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations”. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. LIV (1994): 43-75.)

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁷ “It is not our aim to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of words in unheard-of ways. For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear.” It is Wittgenstein’s own emphasis.

treatment of the paradox of §201 as an argument for a particular and definite (negative) conclusion may lead us astray.⁴⁸

The emphasis is on what *kind* of criticism Wittgenstein is making. Is Wittgenstein's argument of the kind where we state *definite* and *exhaustive* arguments, as the proponents of the standard *reductio* reading presuppose? After all, the traditional view seems to be, that a *vague* *reductio* argument would not *be* a *reductio* argument. If we attempt to reduce some argument to an absurd conclusion, then each step has to be rigorously convincing. The thesis of this essay is that Wittgenstein wants us to become unsatisfied with our questions more than he wants to prove us wrong, because attempting to 'prove' anything inevitably leads us astray.

The difficulty of writing on and arguing for the plausibility of such a position is that it would be odd to try to give definite and exhaustive reasons for why definite and exhaustive reasons cannot be given. So I will have to *show* that Minar's point makes sense rather than *proving* him correct.

One way of showing rather than proving Wittgenstein's point is what we might call "the paradox of understanding the paradox".

The paradox of understanding the paradox

We need to look at Wittgenstein's argument on two levels. The first level is the long lines that run throughout PI and the second level are the local argument. If we ignore the basic 'long lines' level then we get problems at the local level. McDowell, in the paper we are looking at, and especially Wright, get the local point of the paragraphs leading up to §202 wrong because they overlook the long lines of the PI. We could put the point humorously by saying that the 'paradox of understanding the paradox' is a *reductio* argument against the classical reading of §201 as a *reductio* argument.⁴⁹

In §185 Wittgenstein asks us to imagine teaching a pupil to write down a series of numbers of the form 0, n, 2n, 3n, etc., n being +1. And we ask him to go on till he reaches

⁴⁸ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁹ By a standard or classical reading of §201 as a *reductio* argument I think of readings of Wittgenstein's as those of Wright, Kripke, Meredith Williams, Baker and Hacker, etc. and not those of, for example, Marie McGinn, Cavell, Diamond and Conant, etc. The lists could easily be expanded, and some names perhaps moved a round, depending on what essays we read, but that will have to be left for a later occasion.

1000. Then we are to imagine asking the pupil to continue a series from 1000 and upwards with “n” as “+2”. The pupil then writes 1000, 1004, 1008, 1012, etc. and not 1000, 1002, 1004 as we expect him to. The following discussion then takes place between the teacher and the pupil:

We say to him: “Look what you’ve done!” –He doesn’t understand. We say: “You were meant to add two: look how you began the series!” –He answers: “Yes, isn’t it right? I thought that was how I was meant to do it.” (§185)

This situation occurs because the pupil has *interpreted* the teacher’s instructions in another way than they were meant. Hence the pupil’s remark about ‘meant’. The result is the rule-following paradox stated by Wittgenstein in §201.

This was our paradox; no course of action could be determined by a rule, because any course of action can be made out to accord with a 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.

The discussion of this paragraph has mostly revolved around what could *replace* interpretation as the normative basis of rule governed language use. Minar, as an answer to this, points out what we could call the paradox of understanding the paradox.

The example with the pupil serves its purpose because we understand the absurdity in the pupil’s inability to grasp the correct continuation of the series. We do see, without *any* hesitation, what the teacher intended. There is no doubt that it is the pupil that has Ms. understood the rule. If there had been any doubt about who was correct, the example could not have served its purpose. We know what is right, but not how to justify it. If we were in doubt about who was right, we would discuss *that* and not how we know that the teacher is right.

What makes the situation strange is if we try applying the supposed lesson from the example, that any “course of action can be made out to accord with a rule”, to the example itself. In Minar’s words:

But if every way of understanding an interpretation depended on a yet deeper interpretation, how could we ever understand what the original

interpretation dictates? This in turn leads to the important question: How, then, would we understand the problem of interpretation at the outset?⁵⁰

Spelling out what the premises and conclusion of the usual reading of the rule-following considerations are might make Minar's point clearer.

- (1) Whenever we act on a rule, we first interpret it.
- (2) We want to make a series of numbers using the rule of adding 2 at each step.
- (3) One interpretation of this instruction is, "when arriving at 1000, continue it by writing 1002, 1004, 1006, etc".
- (4) Another interpretation of this instruction is, "when arriving at 1000, continue it by writing 1004, 1008, 1012, etc".
- (5) Any arbitration between these incompatible interpretations of (2), would itself be an interpretation and therefore not be of any help as the arbitration itself would have at least one competing interpretation.
- (6) Since we know that it is (3) and not (4) that is the right interpretation of (2), there must be something wrong with (1).
- (7) Since there is something wrong with (1), we cannot use the concept of 'interpretation' as a foundation for the concept of 'acting on a rule'.

The standard reading consequently focuses on what Wittgenstein wants to replace 'interpretation' with. The problem with this reading lies in the antecedent of (6): That the teacher's way of completing the series is right and the pupil's is wrong. We could specify (6) as follows:

- (6 a) The teacher's interpretation of how the series should be continued has authority over the pupil's interpretation.
- (6 b) We *just know* that it is the teacher that is right, and not the pupil.
- (6 c) Since (6 a) and (6 b), then there must be something wrong with (1).

The problem is that proponents of a standard reading, in premise (6 b), allow themselves a temporary pause from the demand of 'interpretation-free justification' (as specified in (5)). They allow themselves a pause from what is the kingpin of the argument as a whole. The problem is that (7) not only undermines (1) but also (6 b), and so the argument destroys itself. Had we truly believed that what was at stake here was the normativity of language, that what was at stake here was preventing linguistic anarchy, then how could we accept (6 b) without question when it is precisely the intuitive confidence of (6 b) that we are trying to make a foundation for?

⁵⁰ Ibid., 58.

Wittgenstein chose the example of completing a series of numbers because it is a situation where doubt about the correct way continuing the series would normally not arise. He says that: "Such a case would present similarities with one in which a person naturally reacted to the gesture of pointing with the hand by looking in the direction of the line from finger-tip to rest, not from wrist to finger-tip." (§185) Wittgenstein deliberately chose as an example a situation where only philosophers, only sceptics, would accept as a good question "How can we know which continuation of the series is right?". When (7) undermines not only (1) but also (6 b) it is precisely because (6 b) rests on the common-sensical knowledge even we philosophers have, that the pupil's continuation of the series is a very strange one, that the rest of the argument gets off the ground.⁵¹

The "paradox of understanding the paradox" faces all those that base their arguments on the *understanding* of the paradox of rule-following, and yet argue that it shows that there can never be such a thing as understanding *per se*, because Wittgenstein has shown us that *no* interpretation can be given priority over another. The "paradox of understanding the paradox" shows that those who focus too narrowly on the argument have ended up in confusion about what dialectical role it plays in Wittgenstein's overall argument. Because he seems to be sawing off the branch he is sitting on.

Where a standard reading looks for something to replace 'interpretation' with, a full appreciation of the argument makes us realise that Wittgenstein's point here cannot be that we should swap 'interpretation' with something else. Or, to weaken this perhaps too strong assertion, we could say that in a standard reading of the rule-following paradox it is *too open to interpretation*, whether it is the concept of 'interpretation' that is the problem, or whether it is a particular version of the idea of "language as rule-following" that is the problem.

Those who focus too much on what might replace 'interpretation' miss the most important lesson to be learned from the rule-following discussion. Namely, that is,

⁵¹ When I introduced the notion of rulefollowing in the beginning of the essay I used as an example classification of books into paperbacks and hardbacks and brought out the case of paperback books that have been covered with a hard layer of plastic as a case of doubt. Now we can see why Wittgenstein did not choose as an example a situation where doubt about how to follow the rules normally arises.

About this Minar's says: "Here again, the problem is only intelligible if our rule-following practices are, for the most part, in order, if, that is, our applications of rules do not, generally speaking, require justification by a standard prior to and independent of our actual practices." *Ibid.*, 59.

showing us how philosophers try to question, in some places, what they tacitly take for granted in other places. Proponents of a standard reading accept the challenge in Wittgenstein's question "How can we decide which interpretation is the authoritative one?" and accept that it dissolves into a *reductio* argument. The conclusion they draw is firstly that 'interpretation' cannot serve as a foundation for rule-following, and secondly that there therefore is something wrong with the question. And, yes, there is something wrong with the question, but not in the way that Wright for example believes. What Wittgenstein primarily wants to show us in the rule-following discussion is how we in philosophy ask questions that do not arise in the everyday use of language and how these questions are artificial. 'Artificial' meaning that these questions arise only when we impose a different standard of justification on language than we do on philosophy.⁵²

We need to distinguish between the different levels of Wittgenstein's argument, not only to understand the long lines but also to make sense of his local point. So, yes, Wittgenstein *is* giving a *reductio* argument against theories that depend on using the term 'interpretation'. But that is not all that there is to it. Wittgenstein could not just put a negation sign in front of the theory he is attacking in the rule-following discussion, and be satisfied with having said something true. It is not only the answer he wants to show that is wrong, it is the question that demands the wrong kind of answer. We must keep in mind the *way* Wittgenstein argues throughout PI to get it right. What Wittgenstein's way of arguing *is*, is the question we will now turn to.

What we should learn from the rule-following considerations

If Wittgenstein is not primarily giving a *reductio* argument, what are then the lessons to be learned from §§185-201? According to Minar Wittgenstein had two main goals: Firstly, he wanted to show that "...locating a basis for what we do in a "deeper" level will accomplish nothing."⁵³ Secondly, "...Wittgenstein challenges the *need* to find a foundation for rule-following; the search is unmotivated."⁵⁴

⁵² See PI §§ 89-133, but especially §§ 97, 89 and 91.

⁵³ Minar, "Wittgenstein and the "contingency" of community", 215.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 215. My emphasis.

The first lesson is little more than the uncontroversial point that whatever we posit as a basis for meaning, there can be at least two different interpretations of it.⁵⁵ That if “...everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it” (§201) means that we must give up making a foundation of language that uses interpretation as a basic notion. The second lesson might seem innocent enough too at first sight. We need to trace the reasoning behind it to see how it is a different solution from the classical reading, like that of Wright. Furthermore, it is a correction of McDowell’s early reading of Wittgenstein and an attempt at filling out the blanks of the sparse comments he makes about what he has changed his mind about in his later writings. The following is therefore not merely an exposition of Edward H. Minar’s views, but first and foremost, an attempt to explain why Wittgenstein’s method is so important, and an elucidation of how this helps us make better sense of the rule-following paradox and PI as a whole.

With the danger of seeming ironic, I will present four theses for how to make better sense of Wittgenstein.

The impossibility of standing outside of language

A condition for theorizing about how language works is that we can take some kind of temporary meta-position. Wittgenstein challenges this very idea of the possibility of taking *any* kind of meta-position on language. The danger of arguing for this particular point of Wittgenstein’s view is that the denial of the possibility of having a meta-position, could easily look like another meta-point itself. I hope in the following to tread carefully enough to not put my second foot in the quicksand while trying to free the first one from the mud.⁵⁶

Minar puts the point of the impossibility of taking a meta-position in the following way:

⁵⁵ See for example Minar “Wittgenstein and the “contingency” of community”, 215: “...locating a basis for what we do in a “deeper” level will accomplish nothing. In particular, self-interpreting interpretations which operate “by themselves,” beneath our practices, do not serve to show what a rule determines at a particular point.”

⁵⁶ Or else we could end up with what Wittgenstein warns against in §91: “It may also be put like this: we eliminate misunderstanding by making our expressions more exact; but now it may look as if we were moving towards a particular state, a state of complete exactness; and as if this were the real goal of our investigation.”

Wittgenstein has by his own lights no general standpoint from which he can demonstrate the illicit nature of the pictures that inform philosophical questioning.⁵⁷

That is the point we stand in risk of missing if we focus too narrowly on §201 as a reductio ad absurdum argument. Wittgenstein is asking “Does it make sense?” and is not declaring “This is wrong!”. He is doing so because he has realized that he is in no position to *prove* anything. The reason we cannot have an outside perspective is that language is not one single phenomenon, but a tangle of different types of human interaction and activities. Wittgenstein’s project in PI is that he tries to make us *aware* of the plurality of language and make us realize that we therefore cannot have a perspective on language outside of language.

If Minar is right in saying that Wittgenstein believed that he could not demonstrate that his opponents were wrong, then there must, of course, be textual evidence for it. Probably the best textual indication that Minar is right is as vague as it is telling. If we read PI slowly, in continuity, taking in the all details, it becomes evident that any suggestion that Wittgenstein is trying to find a secure foundation for language is contrary to the *tone* of PI. Now, bringing in the *tone* of a text as an argument is probably a wholly unsatisfactory argument for any opponent of either Wittgenstein himself or readings of him like the ones Minar, Marie McGinn and Cavell propose. Yet it is imperative for a sensible exposition of PI that we do not dismiss the difficult, strange and seemingly misplaced remarks but keep in mind that Wittgenstein spent considerable time changing and polishing this text.⁵⁸ The elaborate argumentation is there for a reason and should not be dismissed as unfinished and brute.

Unfortunately the tone of PI difficult to show by copying a few quotes from different parts of the text. The minute yet important details that give PI its characteristic tones are best shown through dialogue. The best that can be done in a written text is to call to attention a few passages that *exemplify* the tone of PI.

⁵⁷ Minar, “Paradox and Privacy”, 48.

⁵⁸ With the possible exception of the lost paragraphs of PI that section II where meant to replace. See the “editor’s note” of PI.

Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from one side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about. (§203)

This remark, as well as stating the point I am trying to make, is an example supporting it. If Wittgenstein's position had been that he thought he could demonstrate the falsehood of the premises backing his adversaries' conclusions, then why would he think such un-argumentative remark would be convincing? Why would he "waste" his time with such a vague and opaque remark right after he has said what is the heart of the supposed reductio argument (in § 201)? Why could he not just spell out the argument in a "nice and orderly" way? Is Wittgenstein simply being stubborn about writing philosophy in an unusual style? Of course not. It is a direct result of Wittgenstein's realisation that he cannot give an 'objective' overview of language any more than his opponents can.

A more indirect textual indication is §200:

But now imagine a game of chess translated according to certain rules into a series of actions which we do not ordinarily associate with a *game* – say into yells and stamping of feet. And now suppose those two people to yell and stamp instead of playing the form of chess that we are used to; and this in such a way that their procedure is translatable by suitable rules into a game of chess. Should we still be inclined to say they were playing a game? What right would one have to say so?

Note, that while it is clear that Wittgenstein's answer to the question "Should we still be inclined to say they were playing a game?" is 'no', he is not making any *prohibition* against calling this peculiar 'dance' a game of chess.⁵⁹ He asks if we would still call it a game. It is obvious that the questions are rhetorical ones and we understand that he wants us to answer respectively 'no' and 'none'. What then if we answer 'yes' to the first question? *Would* Wittgenstein then say that it is a question we *cannot* answer in the

⁵⁹ Baker & Hacker have a very odd, if not wrong, reading of this paragraph. First they say that two people sitting by a chessboard moving the pieces, but not moving the according to any rules, would seem to be playing something even though they where not. Then they say: "Conversely something that did not *look* remotely like a game, let alone a game of chess, might, in certain circumstances, be one. Imagine a mapping of chess moves on to yells and stampings of feet. One can imagine two people yelling and stamping in such a way that if their behaviour is translated into chess moves a coherent game result. Are they playing chess? Again, knowing nothing of their form of life, we would not say so." From this it seems the Baker and Hacker are assuming that it *really* is a game of chess they are playing, only we cannot *know* because it is so strange. But Wittgenstein's question indicates the opposite: "What right would one have to say so?" Baker & Hacker page 122. (Baker, G. P. and P. M. S. Hacker. Wittgenstein: *Rules, grammar and necessity, An analytical commentary on the Philosophical Investigations*, vol 2. Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985.)

affirmative? What if we now decide that we from now on do want to call this playing a game? It seems we *could* decide to do so. We would, at least for a long time, think of it as funny, i.e. not normal, but it is not impossible to imagine it happening. What Wittgenstein's last question "What right would one have to say so?" shows is that Wittgenstein here is arguing on two levels at the same time. The first level is that, yes, we could call it playing a game from now on and where there would be nothing problematic about it. The second level is that Wittgenstein, with the question "What right would one have to say so?", is challenging the assumption that we can abstract the rules from the context and still keep what is 'essential' to chess.

What eludes those that are not sufficiently attentive to Wittgenstein's style is that Wittgenstein also argues on level one and not only level two. Wittgenstein asks questions *not only* as a rhetorical manoeuvre to ridicule his opponents. He asks us because he *has to* ask us. He does not have an outside point of view of language from where he can point to any use of language and say 'this is correct use of a word' and 'this is wrong use of a word'. Had he had such an opportunity, there would be a lot less questions in PI. The important thing to see is that he is indirectly *challenging* us, he is *asking* us if we think it makes sense to call this 'dance' 'chess'. He is forcing us to think about how much we can extract from a practice and still say it is the same. But he has to ask because this is a practice we also share, and therefore can decide to change. Wittgenstein's point would be just as valid if we, who are talking together here, decided to start using the language game surrounding chess in a slightly new way. But he has to ask us our opinion because he does not have access to any 'objective answer' about the use of language, because there is no such thing.

Another example of the tone of PI is §197:

"It's as if we could grasp the whole use of a word in a flash." –And that is just what we say we do. That is to say: we sometimes describe what we do in these words. But there is nothing astonishing, nothing queer, about what happens.

Here Wittgenstein has to modify his first reaction to the interlocutor by saying that "we sometimes describe what we do in these words". He has to make the qualification because he is aware of the fact that he does not possess an objective knowledge of the English language. Because there is no such outside position available. Why this is so, is what the

next section is about.

The diversity of language

To make “The diversity of language” more than an empty slogan Wittgenstein tries to, firstly, show that the idea that language is ‘one thing’ is not as intuitive an idea as many think and secondly, he parades concrete examples of the diversity of everyday language use. PI is riddled with examples where Wittgenstein is challenging us to take in the complexity of language and the uniqueness of words. Paragraphs 11 and 12 are some of the passages where Wittgenstein tries to demonstrate the plurality of language by using a metaphor. They are also, in my opinion, some of the most beautiful rhetorical passages of PI. I therefore quote at length.

§11 Think of the tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screw-driver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails and screws. –The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects. (And in both cases there are similarities.)

Of course, what confuses us is the uniform appearance of words when we hear them spoken or meet them in script and print. For their *application* is not presented to us so clearly. Especially when we are doing philosophy!

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

All these different things we do that involve making sounds, etching marks on paper, gesticulating, and so on, that we have thrown into a big box marked “language”, all have different origins and purposes. Wittgenstein wants to cast doubt on the idea that they can all be analysed as one system of concepts. To use Wittgenstein’s metaphor: How can it possibly be useful to try to explain the function of a hammer by explaining how glue works? But such arguments might not convince Wittgenstein’s adversaries.

§65 “Here we come up against the great question that lies behind all these considerations. –For someone might object against me: “You take the easy way out! You talk about all sorts of language-games, but have nowhere said what the essence of a language-game, and hence of language, is: what is common to all these activities, and what makes them into language or parts of language. So you let yourself off the very part of the investigation that

once gave you yourself most headache, the part about the general form of propositions and of language.”

And this is true. –Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same words for all, -but that they are related to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all “language”.

Thus Wittgenstein renounces *the* crucial assumption of the philosophy of language of his adversaries. Wittgenstein denies that all the instances of ‘making meaningful noises’ can, and should, be analysed as one phenomenon. Furthermore, in the absence of a unified phenomenon to be analysed, the notion of ‘explanation’ becomes superfluous. Since the concept of ‘explanation’ presupposes some generality in the phenomenon to be explained, Wittgenstein proposes to “do away with all explanations” and let “description alone” take its place (§109).

The craving for generalised answers

Wittgenstein believes philosophy starts off wrongly because we want to find what is common to all words and we ask questions like “What is meaning?”. Furthermore, Wittgenstein says, philosophers assume that “the answer to these questions is to be given once and for all; and independently of any future experience.” (§92) Philosophers further assume that since this is a good question, and I am not objecting that it is not a good question, there *must* be an answer to it. And an answer to such a question must of course abstract away from the contingencies of language so we get a generalised and definite answer. Or else we feel we have not answered the question properly.

To this Wittgenstein says, in §91:

But now it may look as if there were something like a final analysis of our form of language, and so a single completely resolved form of every expression. That is, as if our usual forms of expression were, essentially, unanalysed; as if there were something hidden in them that had to be brought to light. When this is done the expression is completely clarified and our problem solved.

It may also be put like this: we eliminate misunderstanding by making our expressions more exact; but now it may look as if we were moving towards a particular state, a state of complete exactness; and as if this were the real goal of our investigation.

So we end up craving an answer, a *type* of answer, to the question “*What is meaning?*” that unfailingly will violate the plurality of language.⁶⁰

A possible objection might go like this: If what Wittgenstein is saying is that we cannot have a meta-language because we are, so to speak, caught in the diversity, then he is on collision course with a strong intuition. Even though parts of languages have very specific functions there still is a core we can analyse. The core of a language being all those words that are mostly detached from particular customs and that can be used in many different types of sentences. From an analysis of the core we could then give specific explanations of the anomalies at the ‘outer rims’ of language.⁶¹ An objection such as this has not realised how deep the diversity of language runs. The diversity Wittgenstein is talking is more than Austin’s ‘speech acts’, or the differences between sosiolects.

Firstly, such a ‘communicative core’ can only be characterized as such by being a core, not by specifying a set of words and expressions that it would consist of. There are not words that are typically ‘members’ of the core and words that belong to the outer rim of language. The communicative core consists of the same list of words that we find at the outer rims of language, and so an analysis of the core words would also be an analysis of the outer rim words. Consequently, an attempt to analyse only ‘core words’ would have to handle the diversity of language to the same extent that an attempt to analyse the outer rim words would.

Secondly, the idea that there is a core where words are less dependent on the context is dubious. The diversity Wittgenstein is talking about is not only, for example, that

⁶⁰ Stanley Cavell says on page 188: “I think that what Wittgenstein ultimately wishes to show is that is *makes no sense* at all to give a general explanation for the generality of language.” (Cavell, Stanley. *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, skepticism, morality, and tragedy*. New York and Oxford: University Press, 1979.)

⁶¹ I believed this is something like the objection Cappelen and Lepore make against so-called radical contextualist in their book “*Insensitive semantics*” chapter 8, although they most certainly would use other more guarded words. I have found their book most thought-provoking and hope to some day adapt their objection to a Wittgensteinian context. Not all of their arguments will fit as well against Wittgenstein as against the radical contextualists, but the core question might be left: “However much of the meaning of a word or sentence we can show depends on the context, not everything can depend on the context because we could not use just *any* word whatsoever to convey the same meaning.” I believe the arguments below would stand up against Cappelen and Lepore’s objection, although two meager paragraphs are not nearly enough to discuss the problem properly.

Cappelen, Herman and Ernie Lepore. *Insensitive semantics: A defense of semantic minimalism and speech act pluralism*. Maldon, Oxford and Carlton: Blackwell, 2005.

indexicals depend on the context for their meaning. Wittgenstein is saying more than just that the context ‘fills out’ the meaning of a word. Explaining the differences in detail would require an essay on its own, but one example could be the word ‘think’. It is not a word that depends very much on the context seen from the point of view of Austin or formal semantics. Yet Wittgenstein has no problem spending considerable time on the showing its complexity. (See §§316-340.) In §316 Wittgenstein says that:

In order to get clear about the meaning of the word “think” we watch ourselves while we think; (...). –But this concept is not used like that.

The idea that there is one explanation for a word is not an idea that language itself gives us, so to speak, but it is an ideal we think *must* be there. “How else could it be?” We *impose* our ideal on language.

Description must take the place of explanation because we in ‘explaining’ demand a generality of language that we think ‘must’ be there, but which on close examination is foreign to natural languages.

Quietism and learning to live with groundlessness

Wittgenstein's appeal to only give descriptions and not ‘explanations’ is often met with objections like: “Is Wittgenstein saying that we just should stop asking questions? Is he denying that there are good questions? It certainly seems like there are!” We can now meet such objections as the discussion above has shown us that it is our incapacity to stand outside of language that prompts Wittgenstein into saying that these questions are misguided. The traditional readings of Wittgenstein has taken him as saying that we ought to “leave the questions alone”, because they will only confuse us. A slightly caricatured way of putting the point would be to say that Wittgenstein has been believed to think that we ought to exercise some sort of philosophical self-control and stop asking questions that will lead us nowhere. This is not far from what Wittgenstein does say, but the full picture must include the rationale behind it: Not only is the diversity of language overlooked in questions concerning the generality of language, but we ourselves do not have any meta-perspective on this diversity from which we can give an answer of the *kind* the question craves. Not only is there no answers to such questions, the questions themselves are confused.

Wittgenstein's ‘quietism’ is thus a result, more of the impossibility of answering these

questions, than that the questions themselves are bad. A question that cannot be answered might be a good question in the sense that it is an interesting question, and still be bad in the sense that there must be something wrong about it if there cannot possibly be an answer to it.⁶² Wittgenstein's 'quietism' is a result of his realisation that we inevitably distort language if we think we should find a generalised answer. Just because a language lends itself to asking misguided questions, does not mean that language allows for meaningful answers to them. The 'quietism' concerns giving the *type* of answers that philosophers have traditionally demanded.

The reason we are you using the word "quietism" in quotation marks is that the idea that there is a quietism in PI, rests on the lack of understanding the importance of connection between style and content in PI. Wittgenstein is not just 'refusing to speak'. The elaborate though strange style of PI shows that he is doing just the opposite. But doing so in the only way left open for him. Understanding the rationale behind the style of PI, opens up for the realisation that what is interpreted as "quietism" is and imperative part of conveying the ideas of PI.

Wright does not seem to have any suggestion – at least any explicit suggestion – as to what Wittgenstein's reason for his 'quietism' is. The early McDowell on the other hand, has a clearer, though only implicit, assumption. He seems to be assuming something like that we simply have to learn to live with groundlessness: there is no foundation for language, because language does have normativity even without any *theory* of what it is. The customs and practices that constitute language are foundation enough.⁶³ McDowell, in the later essays, is much clearer on that the so-called quietism is not a *dogmatic* restriction Wittgenstein puts on himself, but a misinterpreted result of Wittgenstein's attempt at us by other means than a 'argument' in the traditional sense. More on this below.

We could say , with Minar, that what all these considerations add up to is that:

⁶² §79: "Should it be said that I am using a word whose meaning I don't know, and so am talking nonsense? -Say what you choose, so long as it does not prevent you from seeing the facts. (And when you see them there is a good deal that you will not say.)

⁶³ Probably the closest McDowell comes to openly express such an assumption is the last sentence of the second last paragraph on page 242 of: "Wittgenstein on following a rule".

Properly understood, Wittgenstein awakens us to the realization that we have no standpoint from which to raise a general demand for independent normative standards for our practices. More specifically, he elicits the recognition that the effort to express such demands comes to grief; in effect, we do not know what we mean to be asking for when we require or seek ‘foundations of language’.⁶⁴

The perspective on the McDowell/Wright debate

Wright

According to Minar, community views like the one Wright has, are mistaken because they want something “that points behind our practices, or goes beyond the explanations we offer in our everyday dealings.”⁶⁵ The community view starts from the assumption that, since Wittgenstein says that private rule-following is impossible, he *must* be saying that language is something we have in a community. Because that is the only alternative the proponents of the community view see.

One of McDowell arguments against the community view is that there cannot be normativity in a ‘community language’ more than in private language, because the ‘is right/seems right’ problem is just as much of a problem for the community view as for the private language.⁶⁶ My guess is that the proponents of a community view are not convinced by such an argument because they cannot see *why* Wittgenstein should refuse to have a theory of how normativity is possible. There are two main problems for the community view. The first is that it overlooks the diversity of language by expecting that one analysis can be given for all of it. They do not realise that it is the diversity of language Wittgenstein is trying to show when he asks questions like “Is that how we use it? Look at how we ordinarily use it!”⁶⁷. The second problem is that they do not realise this because they have not understood that Wittgenstein himself has no standpoint from where to *prove* the diversity of language, so he has to *show* it. Proponents of the community view, at least Wright, seek a constructive account to questions like ”How is

⁶⁴ Minar, “Paradox and Privacy”, 43.

⁶⁵ Minar, ”Wittgenstein and the “contingency” of community”, 206.

⁶⁶ “Whatever is going to seem right to us is right.” See the section with the summary of McDowell’s view.

⁶⁷ See for example passages like §§66, 78, 313, 327, 340; and countless other like them.

meaning possible?”, not understanding that Wittgenstein ‘is not in the business of giving constructive accounts’.

McDowell

According to McDowell, his disagreement with Wright revolves around the question of where publicity enters the picture.⁶⁸ On other occasions he mentions Wright’s failure to appreciate the importance of having a concept of understanding that does not involve interpretation. (Which is what Wittgenstein asks for in §201.) Where Wright only has external facts to deal with, and therefore inevitably ends up with interpretation at some point, McDowell has the ‘meeting of minds’.⁶⁹ Accordingly, publicity enters Wright’s picture as the place where mutual correction, and therefore genuine rule-following, occurs. For the early McDowell publicity enters the picture as the place where it is that we in fact do have normativity in language. Publicity is not there to ‘secure’ that we avoid the is right/seems right problem the way it does for Wright. What ‘secures’ normativity are the *practices* they are founded in. Language is therefore public in the sense that practices are something we have in a group of people. For McDowell the key to avoid saying we always *interpret* rules is by belonging to a custom, practice, or institution.⁷⁰ The argument seems to be that, if we realize, the fundamental character of (linguistic) practices, we will be able to see that we do not interpret rules for words but act on them directly.

A brief comment on what “custom, practice, or institution” mean is needed before we complete McDowell’s argumentation. For Wittgenstein these words mean something slightly different than they ordinarily do and misunderstandings here might lead to a rejection of Wittgenstein’s overall point. For Wittgenstein custom means something more than custom in the sense of buying gifts for Christmas, that a bride often has a white dress at the wedding, etc. When he uses custom he does not mean it in the way that we might agree or disagree with a given custom. For example I might not like using a suit at big

⁶⁸ McDowell, “Wittgenstein on following a rule”, 260.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 253.

⁷⁰ “How can a performance both be nothing but a ”blind“ reaction to a situation, not an attempt to act on an interpretation (avoiding Scylla); and be a case of going by a rule (avoiding Charybdis)? The answer is: by belonging to a custom (PI §198), practice (PI §202) or institution (RFM VI-31).” Ibid., 242. “RFM” is McDowell’s abbreviation for Remarks on the foundations of Mathematics by Wittgenstein.

family gatherings, and apart from my mother's irritation, there is no problem with that. For Wittgenstein custom is the common ground we all share. They are those things we have as a starting point from where we might disagree. Similarly, institution is not primarily such things as the judicial system, the university, etc. Such institutions can be changed, closed down and forgotten. Institutions such as the family, the pupil teacher relationship, etc, are closer to what Wittgenstein has in mind, but these too need some sort of social ratification. What Wittgenstein needs in the notion of institution is the 'unconscious starting point' side of it. What we all take for granted in such a degree that we do not even think about it.

The last concept is 'practice'. This is the best word to use as Wittgenstein's use of it is not as far from everyday use as 'custom' and 'institution' are. A practice is something we do regularly. It does not have some much of a 'contingent' feeling about it as 'custom' and 'institution'. We do not, for example, vote over a practice. It is something we just do. Often almost without thinking about it because it is so natural for us to do so. If a stranger on the street asks us for the time, we answer her. If someone calls our name we turn to see who is calling. A practice is for Wittgenstein all those things we do that are so much part of just being a person, in a specific culture at a specific time, that we seldom think consciously about it but simply act on them. Much more could of course be said about this, but it has to be left for another occasion although I will touch indirectly on the same issue in chapter three under the heading "How we learn new words".

Having in mind the foundational character of practices it is easier to understand how McDowell can say that we do not interpret practices, we act on them directly.⁷¹ The foundational character of practices is also what prompts the early McDowell to say that there is a "meeting of minds".⁷² This is possible, the implicit assumption seems to be, because normativity is found in that words are a result of practices. And had they not been, there would not be normativity. The crucial difference from Wright is that he wants

⁷¹ See for example §§ 216, 219 and 240: "Disputes do not break out (among mathematicians, say) over the question whether a rule has been obeyed or not. People don't come to blows over it, for example. That is part of the framework on which the working of our language is based (for example, in giving descriptions)."

⁷² "In the different picture I have described, the response to Wittgenstein's problem works because a linguistic community is conceived as bound together, not by a match in mere externals (facts accessible to just anyone), but by a capacity for a meeting of minds." Ibid., 253.

to *explain* normativity in terms of practices, he wants to give a reductive analysis of normativity in language in terms of mass-rule-following.

There is much that is correct in the idea from McDowell's early essay; that normativity is found in that words are a result of practices. It is indeed much closer to what Wittgenstein intended than the community views. However, it does too easily invite objections. The main problem is that it does not carry much *persuasive* force because it is unable to give the rationale for the 'quietism'. Consequently there does not seem to be any intolerable cost attached to simply rejecting the imperative "to stop asking questions". The stubborn opponent might simply say that he would prefer to face difficult questions rather than just stop asking them.

Minar's view has an advantage in that, in contrast to the early McDowell and as a supplement to the later McDowell, he illuminates Wittgenstein's rationale for his supposed quietism and makes evident the cost attached to asking questions demanding generalised answers. The cost is that they inevitably lead us astray. They lead us astray because questions demanding generalised answers by definition overlook the diversity of language. We have no meta-point from where to even *ask* such questions, let alone answer them. Talking of normativity as 'meeting of minds', at as the early McDowell does, looks suspiciously much like something that can only be said from a meta perspective. In Minar's words:

Wittgenstein, on my reading, makes us realize that we do not even understand the point of view from which we thought the challenge could be advanced. There is no failure, because there is no coherent task.⁷³

What role *does* publicity have in rule-following?

The question from the heading of chapter two has not yet been answered: what role *does* publicity have in rule-following? Or maybe we should ask whether the question demands the wrong type of answer? Is the question "What role does publicity have in rule-following?" a question Wittgenstein would have asked? In light of the discussion up to now it seems that we have to of answer this in the negative.

⁷³ Minar. Footnote 15 on page 223 of: "Wittgenstein and the "contingency" of community".

We could answer the question of the title by saying that "Language is public in the sense that its origins lies in our common human nature" if we, for a moment, leave aside the philosophical connotations such a sentence would evoke. If this assertion had been made by a literate though philosophically uneducated friend, Wittgenstein might have agreed. But the instant the same friend tried to specify what 'public' meant, he would be at odds with what Wittgenstein writes in PI. Wittgenstein could say that language in some sense is something public, but such formulations must never be taken as an analysis of how normativity is achieved in natural languages. We would then be doing the same mistake as the early McDowell, by making it look as if Wittgenstein *is* answering the question "How is normativity possible?".

The philosophical force of PI lays not in the *conclusions* that are reached, if we even want to say that there are any conclusions, but in *how* they are reached. Wittgenstein is impeded from arguing in a "normal manner" and is "forced" to use a therapeutic argumentative style because of the nature of his conclusion. Consequently, quite a few passages of the PI have a "best before" rhetorical limit to them. Some of the arguments of PI serve temporary goals. An example of such a temporary goal is the argument against the possibility of a private language. It serves the purpose of undermining the "ostensive definitions" model of language. The same is true of the rule-following discussion. That means that trying to answer the question "What role does publicity have in rule-following?" inevitably will lead us astray. We should only answer the question as a part of a process of *showing* the plurality and "un-generalisability" of language. Therefore, stating as an answer to the question of the heading that "Language is public in the sense that its origins lies in our common human nature" must not be considered as the *closing* words of the discussion.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ There is however a philosophically innocent way of talking about language as rule-following that should be mentioned. I take it that Wittgenstein would be fine with saying things like "In Spanish, the rule is to always put the emphasis on the second last word in a sentence". Language *is* rule-following in such a commonsense understanding of 'following a rule'. Playing with language rules is perhaps the most important tool when, for example, writing poetry. The conception of language as rule-following becomes problematic in the context of an 'ostensive definitions' model of language.

The new conception of publicity applied

7 The potential of the new conception of publicity

A common complaint against Wittgenstein, a frustration that is expressed more often in seminars and discussion than in writing, is that Wittgenstein takes the fun out of philosophy. It is complained that Wittgenstein dictum against theses, generalisation and explanation takes away three of the most important tools in philosophy. And if that was not enough, he does not even put forward a proper *argument* for his views, but leaves us with nothing but vague remarks about “dissolving questions” and “philosophy as therapy” (§133). Consequently, some philosophers seem to think, Wittgenstein must be wanting to put an end to philosophy, or at least putting an end to philosophy as an academic discipline where thorough argumentation is the ideal.⁷⁵ This is sometimes even equated with giving up *understanding* and *inquisitiveness* as such. Even though such imputations are a result of frustration over Wittgenstein’s style of writing more than anything else, and those that make the complaints realise that there must be something they are missing, they express a prevailing sentiment against Wittgenstein.

Accusations as these are unequivocal symptoms of that we are dealing with readings of PI that are unable to explain the *rationale* behind the connexion between Wittgenstein’s style and his ideas. This rationale is exactly what is illuminated in the readings of Wittgenstein proposed by Minar, McGinn and McDowell in his later essays. As we have already seen, understanding this rationale is the piece of the puzzle that completes the picture enough so as to enable us to understand where Wittgenstein is headed at when he argues against seeing rule-following as a constitutive of normativity in language. Furthermore, understanding the connection between Wittgenstein’s style of the writing and his views allows us to form a much more positive view on what philosophy after Wittgenstein can be.

Wittgenstein’s views on philosophy do not mean the “end of philosophy”. It is the complete opposite; a whole new field of investigation opens up! Now that the illusion that

⁷⁵ Minar makes the same observation in ”Feeling at home in language”, 416.

only generality can cast light on a subject is gone, the world lies open for descriptive investigations of all the phenomena that make up human life. Giving up making theses does not mean giving up inquisitiveness and systematic thinking. It only means that we have to be careful about being captured by words and that ‘progress’ in philosophy is not of the ‘scientific kind’ that for example Russell wanted. A new Wittgensteinian outlook on philosophy will give answers, not of the kind employing generality, but give answers in the sense that our inquisitive nature will be satisfied. What follows is an attempt at an exemplification of how Wittgenstein's perspective on language can satisfy our inquisitiveness concerning words for emotions.

8 Applying the new conception of publicity

In the introduction I gave some example of questions a non-philosopher might ask about how words for emotions work. It is already clear that Wittgenstein would say that these simple questions already have taken us a few steps down the path to confusion. My hope is to in the following, give an *example* of how the lessons from McDowell, Minar and Marie McGinn can be *applied* to the subject of emotions. The following is therefore less an investigation of what Wittgenstein has to say about these subjects, than an attempt at an *exemplification* of the *fruitfulness* of a reading of Wittgenstein of the sort that McDowell, Minar and McGinn propose. Not only is their approach more exegetically accurate, but most of all, it opens up for a new way of doing philosophy. What comes below should therefore be read from two perspectives. Firstly, it exemplifies how I believe we can do philosophy in a way that is sensitive to Wittgenstein's insights. Secondly, it shows that a Wittgensteinian approach to the subject of words for emotions is enlightening. It leaves our inquisitiveness satisfied. This second point needs a clarification before we go on to the task itself.

We have already discussed the reason Wittgenstein only wants to give ‘descriptions’ and not ‘explanations’. one of the questions Wittgenstein's argumentation on this topic leaves us with, is the question of what the goal of philosophy of language is. What should a successful philosophical argument achieve? Exactly what it is a good theory of language will put us in a better position to understand? the answer to this question has been unclear right from when analytic philosophy of language started by Russell's criticism of Frege.

Are we constructing a semantics for a language that is supposed to fill some specific role? Are we describing how natural languages work? Or is the role of philosophy of language to see how much of natural language we can reductively describe by using the tools invented for constructing a semantics of a artificial language? A clarification of what the task of philosophy of language is, is long overdue. Hopefully this is a subject I will be able to work with on a later occasion.

To avoid disappearing in to a discussion about the role of philosophy of language I have chosen to show the potential of a Wittgensteinian approach to philosophical questions by looking at how he could handle the philosophically laden yet naïve questions of a philosophical layman. I have chosen to in the following work with two such questions. I believe questions of this kind are questions both Wittgenstein and his adversaries will think of as questions deserving philosophical examination. I thus hope to be able to exemplify the potential of a Wittgensteinian approach to philosophical questions while avoiding to have to say anything about what the ‘ultimate goal of philosophy’ is. Questions as these are also of particular interest from a Wittgensteinian point of view since Wittgenstein believed that philosophical confusion starts with asking just those naïve yet confused questions.

To make the discussion easier I have chosen to formulate both of the naïve yet philosophically laden questions on the background of a passage from the book “The city of the red cloak” by the Turkish writer Asli Erdogan. The story of the book takes place in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. The main character is walking on a usually busy street that is empty because everybody is watching the football match between Brazil and Russia. Then, in the pouring rain, she sees a homeless person lying across a small pond on the sidewalk outside the movie theatre Cinelandia. To say that life has not been kind to him would be a cruel understatement. He is starved and is struggling to reach over to his vomit, looking for pieces he can eat. The narrating main character then writes:

I have to tell about a man I encountered over by Cinelandia half an hour before the Russia – Brazil match, at a specific point in time and place; I have to tell it to everybody, whether they want to listen or not. I have to pay for the scream that stuck in my throat. (...)

However, now that I look at the letters I have lined up, on the white emptiness in front of me, I cannot see that man. I am still in lack of a language in which to tell about him. I am not strong enough, cruel and merciful enough. I haven’t starved enough. Words cannot give him his life

back, but they can at least re-establish his name: He was a Human.⁷⁶

This passage could be interpreted and analysed in several ways, but I will concentrate on one. The first aspect I want to emphasise is that the author says that she “lacks a language” in which to express her experience. She is unable to find words that cover what she wants to communicate. The idea I want to pursue is that we sometimes blame the lack of appropriate words for our inability to psychologically cope with a situation. I find the passage above as a good example of that, although other interpretations of course are possible.⁷⁷

The first naïve yet philosophically inclined question I want to ask is: “*Why can't we just make up a word to cover the emotion we want to express? Couldn't our desperate need to express ourselves be satisfied if we just ostensibly baptize the emotion we have no word for, and thus have a word to express it with?*” The second aspect the philosophical layman might want to emphasise is that, even if the author *had* been able to express *her* impression perfectly, we readers would still not have the *same* emotion after having read it as the author had when she wrote it. The philosophically inclined layman might put the point bluntly by saying that: “*We cannot link into each others minds and communicate our experiences directly*”. This truth could, and has been, expressed as “only I know what I feel”. The layman might agree and add: “*But how is it then, that we are able to communicate emotions at all?*”

Wittgenstein, beyond doubt, believes that these simple questions already have taken us a few steps down the path of confusion. We should therefore not attempt to answer the questions as they stand. We will in the following look at how understanding Wittgenstein

⁷⁶ Erdogan, Asli. *Byen med den røde kappa*. Translated from Turkish by Gunvald Ims. Oslo: Gyldendal, 2004. Pages 139-140.

The book has not been translated to English and I have therefore translated the text from Norwegian to English. I am grateful to the Norwegian translator of the book, Gunvald Ims, for making important adjustments to the translation. The Norwegian translation reads: “Jeg er nødt til å fortelle om denne mannen som jeg kom over ved Cinelandia en halvtime før Russland-Brasil kampen, altså på et bestemt tidspunkt i tid og rom; jeg må fortelle det til alle, om de vil høre på eller ikke. Jeg må betale noe som veier opp for det skriket som satte seg fast i halsen. (...) Men nå, når jeg ser på bokstavene jeg har stilt opp på det tomme, hvite papiret, får jeg ikke øye på han. Jeg mangler fortsatt språket til å fortelle om han. Jeg er ikke sterk, grusom og barmhjertig nok. Jeg har ikke sulta nok. Ord kan ikke gi han livet tilbake, men kan i det minste gi han et navn: Han var et Menneske.”

⁷⁷ I understand the sentences “I am not strong enough, cruel and merciful enough. I haven't starved enough.” as indicating, not that having some particular experience would put her in a position where she could communicate, but as indicating the psychological shock of a middle-class woman encountering such a brutal example of poverty.

can change the motivation behind questions such as these. We will respect the philosophical layman's craving for a satisfaction of his inquisitiveness, while still not answering the questions with the kind of answer he would expect. A kind answer for example of Wright would give him.

I will in the following focus only on two topics Wittgenstein discusses that are relevant for the two questions above: the first is how we learn new words and the second is how the first person/third person asymmetry of words for emotions is rooted in their grammar. ('Grammar' in Wittgenstein's sense.) That is not to say that what follows is an exhaustive commentary on everything Wittgenstein has to say about the subject of words for emotions. Topics that are obviously relevant like the inner/outer distinction, the private language argument, colour words, etc., are left out or only treated indirectly. This is an *exemplification* of how a Wittgensteinian outlook on philosophy is both productive and useful; an exemplification taking words for emotions as a subject.

How we learn new words

Discussing how we learn new words will cast light on the topic of words for emotions for two reasons. Firstly, it provides an example of how Wittgenstein's style is connected to his overall point in PI. That, according to Wittgenstein, language is a bundle of phenomena and giving one analysis of all language is not possible. What is similar for all those phenomena we call language is, firstly, that it has been invented by us humans and, secondly, that it is closely interwoven with our customs and practices.

The second reason that how we learn words is interesting for understanding words for emotions is that learning a new word seems to be the thing we want to when we try to express an unfamiliar emotion.

This section relies heavily on chapter seven, "Excursus on Wittgenstein's vision of language", of Stanley Cavell's book "The claim of reason".

Pointing and naming

The backdrop of Cavell's discussion is the Augustinian picture of language that Wittgenstein describes in the first paragraphs of PI. For Augustine, learning ones mother tongue is not all that different from learning a foreign language. You see something you

want to say something about, point it out and ask for its name.⁷⁸ If we, with this picture as our background, try to answer the first naïve yet philosophical question above, we immediately run into trouble.

First of all we need to ask if it is possible to just name an emotion something. Could we see it happening in real life? The common sense answer to this is yes. I believe Wittgenstein would answer yes too. What Wittgenstein attacks in the Private Language Argument is not the idea that we *could* name some hitherto un-named emotion, but the idea that what *really* happens is that we connect the stream of sounds with an mental state by way of making a rule about it. For the philosophical layman, it is the *inclination* towards thinking about language as this kind of rule-following that is the first step towards confusion.

The second step is the idea that it is a *lack of appropriate words* that prompts the author to write: “I am still in lack of a language in which to tell about him”. If all we do when we learn a word is point to something and connect what we point to with a stream of sounds, then would the author feel she *has* expressed her experience in a satisfactory way? Above I said that Wittgenstein *could* save that we can invent names for our emotions, but now I have to qualify that. It is possible to come up with names for till now un-experienced emotions, but is it coming up with and *name* that (usually) gives us emotional peace? So yes, we can find a name for an emotion, but blaming a “lack of language in which to express something” will usually be a linguistic camouflage for some other psychological need.

From what the author says about “not having starved enough”, etc., it seems quite obvious that she would not be satisfied with simply making some stream of sounds a symbol for a past experience. What is interesting here is not primarily whether inventing a new word would communicate what the author wants to say to her readers, but if she herself would feel satisfied with the new word. Would she, which writes: “However, now that I look at the letters I have lined up, on the white emptiness in front of me, I cannot see that man. I am still in lack of a language in which to tell about him.”, feel that, as she now has

⁷⁸ When I write about “Augustine’s view of language” I keep to Wittgenstein’s exposition of him. I am aware that an apology for Augustine is possible to make, but the views of the philosopher Augustine’s are not what is at stake here.

ostensively baptized the emotion, she finally has a “language in which to tell about him”? Would she feel she has expressed her desperation if she just decides to name the hitherto inexpressible emotion, for example with the following random juxtaposition of letters, ‘compa’? Of course not. So Wittgenstein could say that we can name any emotion whatever we want, but that such a baptism might not give us the benefits we thought it would give. One of the result of the process the author has to go through to be able to deal with her experience might be that she finds a word that describes the situation, but that word would not do the same “psychological work” for someone who has not gone through that process.

The first vaccination against the pointing and naming idea of language is that we need to “...reconsider the obvious fact that there is not the *clear* difference between learning and maturation that we sometimes suppose there is.”⁷⁹ For example, there are certain things that need to be in place *before* we can start learning words.⁸⁰ These things we are *taught*. When we as infants learn the word ‘food’ we thereby do not know what all types of things are foods. And that some food is liquid, but not everything that is liquid that we put in the mouth is food, that some food must be cut, etc. The word ‘food’ is part of a whole system of practices and words. When we learn a second language we do not need to learn more than what the equivalent for ‘food’ is in that other language to be able to use it. But when we learn it for the first time we have to learn not only what food *means* but also what food *is*. Augustine assumes too much when he believes that all we need is the labels for the categories ‘we already have’.

Augustine makes this mistake because he, probably amongst other things, assumes that language is *one* thing. Had it been, it would have made sense to look for one or a few mechanisms by which we make new words. For example by ostensive definitions. Having realised that language is not one unified phenomena, but a bundle of phenomena, a search for *the* mechanism for making new words is no longer natural. We learn language in just as many different ways as there are different parts of language, so we should learn to appreciate and study the diversity rather than trying to find the common denominator. A few examples might make this less cryptic.

⁷⁹ Cavell, “The claim of reason”, 171.

⁸⁰ See for example §32.

When a child for the first time sees a horse its father will probably point at it and say “Horse! Horse! See the Horse. That’s a biiig horse.” If the child then smiles and says ‘horse’, or something that sound a bit like it, has it then attached a mental label to the visual impression of it? When an infant cries out something that sounds like ‘mama’ for the first time it is not because it already knows the word. It is because it is any easy sound combination to make. If the mother then looks into the eyes of the baby and smiles and repeats ‘mama, mama’ while pointing at herself, does it suddenly dawn on the infant that it now knows the label for that person that is smiling at her? When a father takes his son to a football game for the first time and screams at the referee and throws popcorn at the field, is he then teaching his son alternative labels for a referee?

Wittgenstein says we learn language by being initiated into practices. The father at the football game is *influencing* his son into becoming a football supporter by *displaying* a way of being. Learning is not the isolated intellectual process that many philosophers seem to tacitly suppose. Learning a language is a complex process involving the culture, the body with its necessities and limitations, the age of a person, our relation to those that teach it to us, what we like and dislike, and so on practically ad infinitum. If we look at how language works it is clear for everybody to see how little of language is attaching labels to things.⁸¹ Cavell summarizes the point beautifully:

In “learning language” you learn not merely what the names of things are, but what a name is; not merely what the form of expression is for expressing a wish, but what expressing a wish is; not merely what the word for “father” is, but what a father is; nor merely what the word for “love” is, but what love is. In learning language, you do not merely learn the pronunciation of sounds, and their grammatical orders, but the “forms of life” which make those sounds the words they are, do what they do – e.g., name, call, point, express a wish or affection, indicate a choice or an aversion, etc.⁸²

An interesting corroboration of this view can be found in the writings of the psychologist L. S. Vygotsky (1896-1934). Under the heading “Internalization of higher psychological functions” he says that:

A good example of this process [of internalization] may be found in the development of pointing. Initially, this gesture is nothing more than an

⁸¹ Cavell page 174: “But what I take Wittgenstein to be suggesting is: Take the label analogy seriously; and then you’ll see how little of language is like that.”

⁸² Cavell, “The claim of reason”, 177-178.

unsuccessful attempt to grasp something, (...). (...) When the mother comes to the child's aid and realizes his movement indicates something, the situation changes fundamentally. Pointing becomes a gesture for others. The child's unsuccessful attempt engenders a reaction not from the object he seeks but from another person. (...) At this juncture there occurs a change in that movement's function: from an object-oriented movement it becomes a movement aimed at another person, a means of establishing a relations. The grasping movement changes to the act of pointing. (...) Its meaning and functions are created at first by an objective situation and then by people who surround the child.⁸³

What Vygotsky calls “internalization of higher psychological functions” seems to be parallel to what Wittgenstein calls “being initiated into a practice”. If nothing else, the comparison helps bring to light a misconception of Wittgenstein's concept of ‘practice’: that practices, like customs, are things we can reject or accept on the basis of personal preferences. In the quote from Vygotsky it is obvious that an “internalization of a higher psychological function” is not something we can decide whether or not to act on, because we are talking of the *formation* of mind, not just of its instantiations in the activities anthropology describes.

When I take the quote from Vygotsky as a corroboration of Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein, it is because I believe that showing that language is not learned primarily by ostensive definitions is a *strong indication* that the language of an adult is as tightly knit to practices as when it is learnt. It is only less obvious. There is little doubt that Wittgenstein, from an exegetical point of view, sees this as a strong reason for rejecting the view that words can be analysed independently of these practices. Only because ‘mama’ can be symbolized by the four letters “m a m a” does not mean that the word mama can be broken down and analyzed in non-”mama-practice” terms.⁸⁴

Extending the use of a word already there

Seeing language as a complex jumble of words with different origins not only means we have a different picture of how language came into being, but we also have a different

⁸³ Page 56 of: Vygotsky, L. S. *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Edited by Cole, Michael, Vera John-Steiner, Sylvia Scribner and Ellen Souberman. Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London: Harvard University Press, 1978.

⁸⁴ The arguments of this paragraph obviously need to quite a lot of fleshing out. This is something I hope to do on a later occasion. Although I am not as convinced of the argument as Wittgenstein seems to be, I believe it is a train of thought worth pursuing.. See also the footnote in the section of ” Craving generalised officers ” concerning Cappelen and Lepore.

picture of how language evolves. Much of our language use involves classifying new phenomena into the categories we already have. On the Augustinian picture this would mean something like finding a good category for a phenomenon or inventing a new category for it. On the Cavellian reading of Wittgenstein the situation is more complex. His view is best illustrated by an example.

Cavell asks us to think about how we use the word ‘to feed’.⁸⁵ When we feed a dog we either put something edible in its tray or give it some snack directly from the hand. When we feed a baby we use a spoon. We also feed a slot machine when we insert coins into it. And we feed the monkeys at the zoo when we throw peanuts into their cage. We might also say that we are feeding the family when someone asks us why we do not quit a boring job. All these examples use the word ‘feed’ but finding one thing common to them all would be hard. We could say that we both ‘feed’ the monkeys and the baby because we give them something to eat. But that excludes ‘feeding’ the slot machine. Likewise, throwing peanuts at a baby would not be ‘feeding’ it, neither would stuffing coins in the mouth of a dog. The key to understanding how language actually is, is that there is a family resemblance (see §§66 and 67) between all these instances of ‘feed’. Once we have been initiated into a practice involving certain words we continuously apply the words we know to new instances that are similar in *some* respects. In Cavell’s words:

I am trying to bring out, and keep in balance, two fundamental facts about human forms of life, and about the concepts formed in those forms: that any form of life and every concept integral to it have an indefinite number of instances and directions of projection; and that this variation is not arbitrary.

...to say that a word or concept has a (stable) meaning is to say that new and the most various instances can be recognized as falling under or failing to fall under that concept...⁸⁶

Instead of saying that the diversity of language and heavy reliance on family resemblance is something we can explain *after* we have made an analysis of the core of language, like Augustine might say, Wittgenstein’s puts diversity at the centre of his conception of language. Whether the new use of a word is recognized as falling under or failing to fall under that concept cannot be established by a semantic analysis (alone), but only from

⁸⁵ Cavell, “The claim of reason”, 181.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 185.

inside those practices, i.e. by a person who has the language in question as to her mother tongue. This is what happens in §200 where Wittgenstein asks us if we would call it playing chess to ‘dance along the rules of chess’.⁸⁷

Rejecting the ostensive definitions model has consequences for how we look at naming emotions. Writing poems and books, making movies, painting, composing is not simply a matter of *naming* emotions. Learning the name of an emotion is a discovery we make when we learn more about ourselves. Finding ways of expressing emotions is not separate from maturing emotionally and making more fine-grained distinction in our emotional lives. Naming a new emotion is not just a matter of attaching a label, but of going through a process - a process which will be different for different kinds of words. A process, moreover, which will include our personal history, our cultural surroundings, the framework of the human biology, etc.

In the quote from Asli Erdogan’s novel the narrating main-character said that:

However, now that I look at the letters I have lined up, on the white emptiness in front of me, I cannot see that man. I am still in lack of a language in which to tell about him. I am not strong enough, cruel and merciful enough. I haven’t starved enough. Words cannot give him his life back, but they can at least re-establish his name: He was a Human.

The sentence “I am still in lack of a language in which to tell about him.” lends itself towards interpreting her problem as being that it is the language as such that does not ‘accommodate’ her experience. On this background I suggested that a philosophically inclined layman might ask something like: “*Why can’t we just make up a word to cover the emotion we want to express? Couldn’t our desperate need to express ourselves be satisfied if we just ostensively baptize the emotion we have no words, and thus have a word to express it with?*”

The first point about this is that a Wittgensteinian response to the philosophically inclined layman is that, just because the main-character says that she “lacks a language in which to tell about him” does not mean that that is the real ‘problem’ here. Our language can sometimes confuse us and make us look for answers in the wrong place. In the example above the wording makes it seem like (on at least one interpretation) a ‘better’ *language*,

⁸⁷ See pages 41-42 for a discussion of §200.

or at least a different language, might remedy the acute need for expressing the experience.

The second point is that what is needed in the narrator's case is not some word that will make everything fall into place. What is needed is an emotional and psychological maturation process.

Adherents of views on language that Wittgenstein would oppose will of course not deny that a maturation process is essential when naming emotions. Wittgenstein would probably argue that they cannot have their cake and eat it. They cannot insist on analysing language by reduction to non-normative terms and still claim they want to leave the diversity of language untouched. But this is one of the topics I wanted to avoid by leaving for some other occasion to discuss what the role of philosophy of language is.

What I hope to illustrate is that we from a Wittgensteinian view on language can make a contribution to the understanding of different phenomena of language. What for some seems like a stern outlook on the possibility of doing philosophy is the exact opposite: an opportunity for a fresh outlook and a productive examination of the world we live in. Wittgenstein is not only talking about language as an assemblage of words but "about the entire body and spirit of human conduct and feeling which goes into the capacity for speech".⁸⁸ That leaves us with a lot more, not a lot less, to study.

The grammar of words for and words for emotions

We have now looked at the question: "*Why can't we just make up a word to cover the emotion we want to express?*" The second question was roughly: "*If it had been possible to point to an emotion and name it, would that guarantee that others would understand the same by the word as I?*" Had it been possible to 'capture' the emotion in the baptismal process, then the listener/reader should supposedly grasp what the name was a name for. But, of course, language does not 'transfer' the essence of emotions into the heads of our listeners/readers. Such an idea might seem slightly more plausible when talking about concrete objects like 'horse', 'Rolls Royce', 'knife', etc. These objects can all be displayed on demand to a listener in a much more concrete way. The case with

⁸⁸ Ibid., 168.

emotions is not parallel, although crying or smiling does give us a good indication of at least what kind of emotion we are dealing with.

Wittgenstein expends a great deal of energy discussing the philosophical idea of ‘private objects’ in the sections known as the Private Language Argument. The idea is that the ‘privateness’ of things like emotions is the reason they cannot be communicated in the same way as physical objects. They cannot be displayed and pointed to in the same way. With ‘private objects’ there is a first person/third person asymmetry. ‘I’ have a first person *authority* when it comes to saying what ‘I’ feel.

The thesis that will be discussed in the following is that the reason for this asymmetry is not that objects are private but that it is the *grammar* of certain words that contain the asymmetry. The word we will concentrate on is “pain”.⁸⁹ A good starting point is Zettel §545:

Suppose someone explains how a child learns the use of the word “pain” in the following way: When the child behaves in such-and-such a way on particular occasions, I think he’s feeling what I feel in such cases; and it is so then the child associates the word with his feeling and uses the word when the feeling reappears. –*What* does this explanation explain? Ask yourself: *What* sort of ignorance does it remove? –Being sure that someone is in pain, doubting whether he is, and so on, are so many natural, instinctive, kinds of behaviour towards other human beings, and our language is merely an auxiliary to, and further extension of, this relation. Our language-game is an extension of primitive behaviour. (For our language-game is behaviour.) (Instinct).⁹⁰

Wittgenstein is here not denying that we learn the word “pain” because our parents repeat it to us. The sound combination “p-a-i-n” would not appear out of nowhere by itself. The idea Wittgenstein is trying to dissolve is the idea that words stand for things, and that learning and language is learning what sounds stand for what. Wittgenstein is making a point about the word “pain” that is similar to the point Vygotsky makes in the quote

⁸⁹ Wittgenstein mostly talks of the sensation pain and not the emotion pain. Although there are differences between the two, they do not concern the asymmetry.

⁹⁰ A similar point is made in the §§302 and 315 of PI:

§302: “If one has to imagine someone else’s pain on the model of one’s own, this is none too easy thing to do: for I have to imagine pain which I do not feel on the model of the pain which I do feel.”

§ 315: “Could someone understand the word “pain” who had never felt pain? –Is experience to teach me whether this is so or not? –And if we say “A man could not imagine pain without having sometimes felt it” –how do we know? How can it be decided whether it is true?”

above about pointing. The far better conception of how we learn, not only what “pain” is the name for, but what pain *is*, is when we see that it is an *extension* of primitive behaviour. The word for pain was not invented by some genius who thought it would be useful to have a word to express “that type of uncomfortable sensation” with. The primitive pre-linguistic pain behaviour is *inseparable* from and prior to the *word* ‘pain’.

It is this often overlooked connection between the pre-linguistic and language that is Wittgenstein’s reason for bringing in the concept of grammar. By grammar Wittgenstein means something more than whether a word is a verb or a noun. Wittgenstein has something more than such a surface analysis in mind when he talks of the grammar of a word. For Wittgenstein talking about the grammar of a word is supposed to shed light on the relationship between the word itself and its connection with the pre-linguistic features of human life. Such features are not only pre-linguistic *behaviour*, but also how the human body works, the physical environment, the psychological environment, etc. In short everything that affects us as humans.

The concept of grammar is supposed to take into account the evolutionary history, so to speak, of a word. Knowing the information about a word that is listed in a dictionary is only part of the picture, and might even be misleading, if we believe that it lists all that it is necessary to know in order to understand a word. Describing the grammar of a word would be to give a long list of examples of when we can use the word, and what would be a non-primary use. We would have to stick primarily to giving examples because there cannot be given an exhaustive list of criterions for when to use a word, and when not to use it.

By painting a broad picture of the grammar of words like pain, the temptation to see pointing and naming as the essential feature of language, dwindles away. Since we cannot separate the word ‘pain’ from all the things we do while we are in pain, like gestures, wincing, crying out uncontrolled, etc., it is no longer so clear what was so obvious about the pointing and naming idea. At least that is what I take to be Wittgenstein’s point. Consequently the questions I suggested a philosophical layman might ask inspired by the example above from Erdogan’s novel, lose their force. The idea is no longer to explain how a name for an emotion can transmit information, but how the word ‘pain’ is an extension of the pre-linguistic expression of pain. In the pointing and naming picture of language it would seem like an incredibly lucky coincidence if I mean ‘the same’ as you

when we ‘exchange information’ about our emotional states. We need to put away the picture of words as entities that carry what I want to express over to my listeners, and replace it with a focus on the grammar of words.

The question we were looking at was : “*If it had been possible to point to an emotion and name it, would that guarantee that others would understand the same by the word as I?*”.

Whether “we mean the same by a word that names some emotion” is a problem that is heavily coloured by the idea that what words do is to *transmit* information. That understanding each other depends on whether our words point towards the same thing. This is of course true, and quite trivially true on a *surface* level. It is highly problematic if it is taken as being *the* mechanism behind language. Emotions, like for example pain, do not merely correspond with states and experiences but form an integral part of them. The word “ouch” cannot be separated from being in pain and analysed independently of the practices that make us act the way we do when we are in pain.

When Wittgenstein proposes that we do grammatical investigations of words, he wants us to ”make a map” of how and when a word is used, so as to make ourselves aware of which practices the word in question is part of. A grammatical investigation of the word ”pain” would be an investigation of when and which practices it is a part of. Such an investigation reveals that the first person/third person asymmetry of ”pain” is a grammatical fact about the word and the practices it is a part of, and not a fact about the world.

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