

# WITTGENSTEIN'S PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS

## A skeleton

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### 1 Language (1–133)

*We study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of applications, in which one can command a clear view of the aim and functioning of the words: language games (5,7)*

Language games are not preparatory studies, or first approximations, but rather objects of comparison (130).

To imagine a language game means to imagine a form of life (19).

### Meaning (1–45)

*The meaning of a word is its use in the language (43)*

St. Augustine's idea (in the *Confessions*) that every word has a meaning (namely, the object for which the word stands for) (1) has its root in a primitive idea of the way language functions; or in the idea of a primitive language (2): one where words are taught ostensively, by establishing an association word-thing (6).

Such words are *names*, that is something attached like a label to a thing (15). But to confound the meaning of a word with the thing associated to it is to confound the meaning of a name with the bearer of the name (40). In any case, an ostensive definition can always be variously interpreted (28), and it explains the meaning of the word only when the overall role of the word in language is already clear (30). Thus naming is only preparatory to the use of a word (26,44), and the meaning of a word is its use in language (43).

### Simples and analysis (46–64)

*It makes no sense to speak of 'absolute' simples (47)*

Socrates (in the *Theaetetus*) talks of the idea that there are simple elements, and that names signify simples (46). But what are the component parts? That depends on what one understands by composite. It makes no sense to speak of ‘absolute’ simples (47): simple refers to a particular analysis. If one has only an unanalysed form, then one misses the analysis; but an aspect of the matter (the synthesis) is lost also if one has only the analysed form (63).

### **Definiteness of sense (66–88)**

*A word must have a family of meanings (77)*

We can draw a boundary for a special purpose. Does it take that to make the concept usable? Not at all! (69) Is it always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture by a sharp one? Isn’t the indistinct one often exactly what we need? (71) What does it mean to know something and not being able to say it? Is this knowledge somehow equivalent to an unformulated definition? (75)

A word must have a family of meanings (77). I have, so to speak, a whole series of props in readiness, and I am ready to lean on any. I use the name without a fixed meaning (79). Inexact does not mean unusable (88). There must be a perfect order even in the vaguest sentence (98).

### **Language (65–66)**

*Language is a family resemblance of language games (65, 67)*

What is the essence of language? Not what all language games have in common, since there is nothing in common to them all (65). What we call language has not the formal unity that I imagined, but is the family of structures more or less related to one another (108): a *family resemblance* of language games (67), i.e. a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing (sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities in detail) (66).

### **Logic and philosophy (89–133)**

*Our investigation is a grammatical one (90)*

Logic explores the nature of all things: we do not seek to learn anything new by it, but only to understand something that is already in plain view (89). Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one: to clear misunderstandings away (90), by making our expressions more exact (91). Grammar expresses *essence* (371), and tells us what kind of object anything is (theology as grammar) (373).

We are trying to understand the essence of language (its function, its structure) as something that already lies open to view and becomes surveyable by a rearrangement, not something that lies beneath the surface (92). We are under the illusion that what is peculiar, profound, essential in our investigation resides

in its trying to grasp the incomparable essence of language. Whereas, of course, if the words ‘language’, ‘experience’, ‘world’ have a use, it must be as humble as that of the words ‘table’, ‘lamp’, ‘door’ (97). We bring the words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use (116).

We must do away with all explanation, and description alone must take its place (109): *don't think, but look!* (66)

Philosophy is a battle against the *bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language* (109). It cannot give foundation to the language, but only describe it (124). Philosophical problems arise when *language goes on holiday* (38), and a real discovery is one capable of making a philosophical problem completely disappear (133).

My aims in philosophy are: to *show the fly the way out of the fly bottle* (309); to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense (464).

## 2 Knowledge (134–242)

### Understanding (134–184)

*Understanding has more in it that its own manifestations: it is an experience of the because* (152, 176)

We understand the meaning of a word when we hear it or say it: we grasp it in a flash (138), we say things as ‘Now I know it’, or ‘Now I understand’ (151). But on the other hand isn’t the meaning of a word also determined by its use? How can what comes before our mind in an instant fit a use (139) which is clearly prescribed only in normal cases, and becomes more doubtful in more abnormal ones (142)?

The understanding is a state which is the source of the correct use (146), something by which we explain the manifestations of knowledge (149) but that must have more in it than these manifestations (152). In the sense in which there are processes (including mental ones) which are characteristic of understanding, understanding is not such (mental) processes (154). It is as if at first all these more or less inessential processes were shrouded in a particular atmosphere, which dissipates when we look closely at them (173): *in order to find the real artichoke, we divest it of its leaves* (164).

I have the feeling that what is essential about understanding is an *experience of the because*, but I do not want to call any phenomenon the ‘experience of the because’ (176). Thus words as ‘Now I can go on’ do not mean ‘I have an experience’ (179), but are rather a signal, and we judge whether it was rightly employed by what one goes on to do (180).

## Following a rule (185–242)

*Every course of action can be made to accord with the rule: thus interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning. Obeying a rule is a custom, an institution, a practice* (198, 199, 202)

What at any stage do we call ‘being in accord with a rule’? How is it decided what is the right step to take at any particular stage? (186) We do not want to say that we thought of all possible steps (187), that the act of meaning the rule had in its own way already traversed all those steps (188). There is nothing astonishing, nothing queer, about what happens. It becomes queer when we are led to think that the future development must in some way already be present in the act of grasping the use, and yet is not present: there is no doubt that we understand the word, and on the other hand the meaning lies in its use (197).

*Paradox.* No course of action can be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made to accord with the rule (201): whatever we do is, on some interpretation, in accord with the rule. *Answer.* Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning (198): there is a way of grasping the rule which is not an interpretation, and is exhibited in what we call ‘obeying the rule’ and ‘going against it’ in actual cases (201).

*The training argument.* Obeying a rule is a custom, an institution (199), a practice (202). It is like obeying an order: we are trained to do so, we react to it in a particular way (206). When we obey a rule, we do not choose: we obey it blindly (219). The words ‘agreement’ and ‘rule’ are related to one another: by teaching someone the use of one word, he learns the other with it (224).

*The public check argument.* To understand a language means to be master of a technique (199). The common behavior of mankind is the system of reference by which we interpret a language (206). Human beings agree in the language they use: not an agreement in opinions (to decide what is true or false), but in forms of life (241).

## 3 Private Experience (243–314)

*The essential thing about private experience is really not that each person possesses his own exemplar, but that nobody knows whether other people also have this or something else* (272).

To think that one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. It is not possible to obey a rule privately, otherwise thinking one was obeying the rule would be the same as obeying it (202).

Could we imagine a *private language* in which a person could write down or give vocal expression to his inner experiences (his feelings, moods, sensations) for his private use? The individual words of this language are to refer to what

can only be known to the person speaking, to his immediate sensations. So another person cannot understand the language (243).

How does a human being learn the meaning of the names of sensations? Words are connected with the primitive natural expressions of the sensations, and used in their place: they do not describe the sensation (244). How do I use words to stand for my sensations? As we ordinarily do? In that case my language is not a private one: someone else might understand as well as I (256).

*The argument of justification.* Is it that my education has led me to it by drawing my attention to feelings in myself, and now I transfer the idea to objects outside myself? That I recognize that there is some thing in me which I call in a certain way, without getting into conflict with the way other people use this word? (283)

*The argument of irrelevance of the object.* Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a 'beetle'. No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says that he knows what a beetle is by looking at *his* beetle. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all: the boxes may all contain something different, or even be empty (293).

The paradox disappears only if we make a radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts (304).

## 4 Mental Concepts (316-430)

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

### Thinking (316–362)

*We are not analysing a phenomenon (thought) but a concept (thinking), and therefore the use of a word (383)*

In order to get clear the meaning of the word 'think' we watch ourselves while we think; what we observe will be what the word means. But this concept is not used like that (316). Misleading parallel: the expression of pain is a cry, the expression of thought is a proposition.

The question: 'What happens when a man suddenly understands?' is badly framed (it might mean: what are its characteristic physical accompaniments?) (321). What should interest us is: how do we compare experiences of understanding, which criterion of identity do we fix for their occurrences? (322)

What does one include in 'thinking'? What has one learnt to use this word for? If I say I have thought, need I always be right? What kind of mistake is there room for here? (328)

Is thinking a kind of speaking? It seems to be an accompaniment of speech, a process which however may go on by itself (330). What happens when we make an effort, say in writing a letter, to find the right expression for our thoughts? Does one have the thought before finding the expression? If so, what did it consist in? (335) In so far as I intend the construction of a sentence in advance, that is made possible by the fact that I can speak the language in question (337). Thinking is not an incorporeal process which lends life and sense to speaking, and which would be possible to detach from it (339).

A machine surely cannot think. We only say of a human being and what is like one that it thinks (360).

Thought does not strike us as mysterious while we are thinking, but only when we say, as it were retrospectively: how was it possible (for it to deal with the very object itself)? We feel as if by means of it we had caught reality in our net (428).

### **Imagining (363–411)**

*One ought to ask, not what images are or what happens when one imagines anything, but how the word 'imagination' is used (370)*

The mental picture is the picture which is described when someone describes what he imagines (367). One ought to ask, not what images are or what happens when one imagines anything, but how the word 'imagination' is used (the first question also asks for a word to be explained, but it makes us expect a wrong kind of answer) (370).

If you say that you see something red in imagination, then it will *be* red. The difficulty is not that I doubt whether you really imagined anything red, but that we should be able, just like that, to point out or describe the colour we have imagined (386). In what sort of circumstances should we ask: what actually went on when this was imagined? And what sort of answer do we expect? (344)

There is a lack of clarity about the role of imaginability, namely about the extent to which it ensures that a proposition makes sense (395). In what sense have you got what you are talking about? (398) You have a new conception, and you interpret it as being a new object; you interpret a grammatical movement made by yourself as a quasi-physical phenomenon which you are observing (401).

### **Consciousness (412–430)**

*What am I believing in when I believe that men have souls? I don't dispute the correctness of the underlying picture; but what is its application? (422, 424)*

When does feeling of an unbridgeable gulf between consciousness and brain-process occur? It is when I, for example, turn my attention in a particular way

on to my own consciousness and, astonished, say to myself: *this* is supposed to be produced by a process in the brain! (412)

Whom do I really inform, if I say ‘I have consciousness’? What is the purpose of saying this to myself, and how can another person understand me? (416)

Can’t I imagine that the people around me are automata, lack consciousness, even though they behave in the same way as usual? (420) What am I believing in when I believe that men have souls? There is a picture in the foreground, but the sense lies far in the background (422): I don’t dispute its correctness, but what is its application? (424)

## 5 Unsatisfied Concepts (431–693)

Expectation is unsatisfied, because it is the expectation of something; belief, opinion, is unsatisfied, because it is the opinion that something is the case, something is real, something outside the process of believing (438).

A wish seems already to know what will or would satisfy it, even when that thing is not there (437).

### Expecting

*It is in the language that an expectation and its fulfilment make contact.* (445)

Anyone who perceived my expectation would necessarily have a direct perception of what was being expected. That is to say, he would not have to infer it from the process he perceived! But to say that someone perceives an expectation makes no sense. To say of an expectant person that he perceives his expectations instead of saying that he expects, would be an idiotic distortion of the expression (453).

### Believing

*Let us look and see what are the consequences of a belief, where it takes us. Then we shall know what belief in the proposition amounts to.* (578)

A proposition, and hence in another sense a thought, can be the ‘expression’ of a belief. But believing isn’t thinking (574).

Ask yourself: what does it mean to believe? What does a belief consist in? In a feeling of certainty as we state or hear it? That would not interest us. I should like to ask: how does a belief connect with a proposition? Let us look and see what are the consequences of this belief, where it takes us. Then we shall know what belief in the proposition amounts to (578).

Does it make sense to ask: how do you know that you believe? And is the answer: I know it by introspection? In some cases it will be possible to say some such things, in most not (587).

## Intending

*Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a proto-phenomenon. That is, where we ought to have said: this language game is played. The question is one of noting a language game, not of explaining it by means of our experiences. (654, 655)*

‘Before I was interrupted, I was going to say ...’. If I do know now, and say it, that does not mean that I had already thought it before, only not said it (633). Was only one continuation possible in these circumstances? Of course not. But I did not choose between interpretations: I remembered that I was going to say this (634). I remembered various details, but not even all of them together show my intention (635). And yet I don’t read from some other process which took place and which I remember. Nor am I interpreting that situation and its antecedents, for I don’t consider them and don’t judge them (637). I no longer remember the words I used, but I remember my intention precisely. What does my memory show me, what does it bring before my mind? (648)

By telling about an intention I want to tell something about myself, which goes beyond what happened at that time. I reveal something of myself when I tell what I was going to do (659).

## Meaning

*‘To mean it’ does not mean ‘to think of it’. But now the problem is: how are we to judge whether someone meant such-and-such? (692)*

When we consider what is going on in us when we mean (and don’t merely say) words, it seems to us as if there were something coupled to these words, which otherwise would run idle. As if they, so to speak, connected with something in us (507).

What does it mean to say: If I mean it, surely it must make sense? One wants to say: a significant sentence is one which one can not merely say, but also think (511). It looks as if we could say: word-language allows of senseless combinations of words, but the language of imagining does not allow us to imagine anything senseless (512).

I have  $n$  friends and  $n^2 + 2n + 2 = 0$ . Does this sentence make sense? This cannot be seen immediately. This example shows how it is that something can look like a sentence which we understand, and yet yield no sense (513). Many mathematical proofs do lead us to say that we cannot imagine something which

we believed we could imagine. They lead us to revise what counts as the domain of the imaginable (517).

To say 'this combination of words makes no sense' excludes it from the sphere of language, and thereby bounds the domain of language (499). When a sentence is called senseless, a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation (500).

## **Willing**

*'Willing' is not the name of an action.* (613)

One would like to say: Willing is merely an experience. It comes when it comes, and I cannot bring it about. What can I bring about, then? What am I comparing willing with when I say this? (611)

I can't will willing; that is, it makes no sense to speak of willing willing. 'Willing' is not the name of an action, and so not the name of any voluntary action either (613).

In the sense in which I cannot fail to will, I cannot try to will either (618).