

Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

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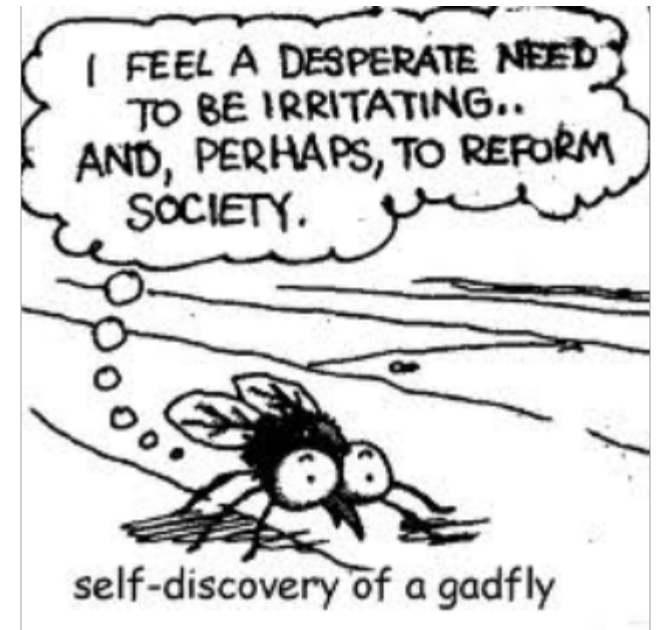
Academic Life

- Wittgenstein began his academic life as a student of Bertrand Russell at Cambridge University.
- He turns instead to a 'skeptical' approach to the understanding of language.
- In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein argues that meaning is use.
- Works backwards. Instead of getting language out of sensation like we have seen before, he argues the opposite.



Method in *Philosophical Investigations*

- A break from the traditional approach to philosophy
- Thought-experiments as dialogue
- Reader can come to realize conceptual confusions in language philosophy
- When reading the *Investigations*, it resembles a Socratic Dialogue.
- "To shew the fly out of the fly bottle" (§309)
- Philosophical therapy
- This style allows for multiply readings and literary interpretations



The Shopkeeper Example

- " ...think of the following use of language: I send someone shopping. I give him a slip marked 'five red apples'. He takes the slip to the shopkeeper, who opens the drawer marked 'apples', then he looks up the word 'red' in a table and finds a colour sample opposite it; then he says the series of cardinal numbers—I assume that he knows them by heart—up to the word 'five' and for each number he takes an apple of the same colour as the sample out of the drawer.—It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words—"But how does he know where and how he is to look up the word 'red' and what he is to do with the word 'five'?" Well, I assume that he 'acts' as I have described. Explanations come to an end somewhere.—But what is the meaning of the word 'five'? No such thing was in question here, only how the word 'five' is used." (§1)

Language-games

- There are lots of different uses for language
 - lots of different language-games
- "But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question, and command? - There are *countless kinds*: countless different kinds of use of what we call "symbols", "words", "sentences". And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten...Here the term "language-*game*" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life." (*Philosophical Investigations* §23).

Language-games

- Game analogy: How do we define game?
- This resembles language
- We do not need a definition for a game because regardless of whether we have one, we communicate with the word successfully.
- We are so familiar with the notion of a game that we can categorize new things as either games or not. The same is true in our use of language.
- “Augustine, we might say, does describe a system of communication; only not everything that we call language is this system.” (§3)

Masonry Village (Language-Game)

- Imagine a language-game that is meant to serve as a means for communication between builder A and assistant B.
- The words in the language consist of:
 - The four different materials builder A needs: "block", "pillar", "sandwich", "beam"
 - The series of numerals (1-9)
 - The words "there" and "this" (which are used in association with a pointing gesture)
 - And finally different colors



Ostensive Teaching of Words

- In order to teach the language a teacher points to each object and says the word connected with that object (“ostensive teaching of words”).
- This process can definitely be said to establish an association between a word and that thing.
- In the case of the Masonry Village, the intended purpose of the word is not to evoke images. The intended purpose is to command the student to get the object for builder A.
- With different ostensive training, the word in question could be understood in vastly different ways.

Rules

- Language use certainly follows conventions
- Following a rule is a social activity in which we conform to the expectations of a particular language-game
- There is no right or wrong way to follow rules:
 - "this was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here." (§210)

Wood Sellers example

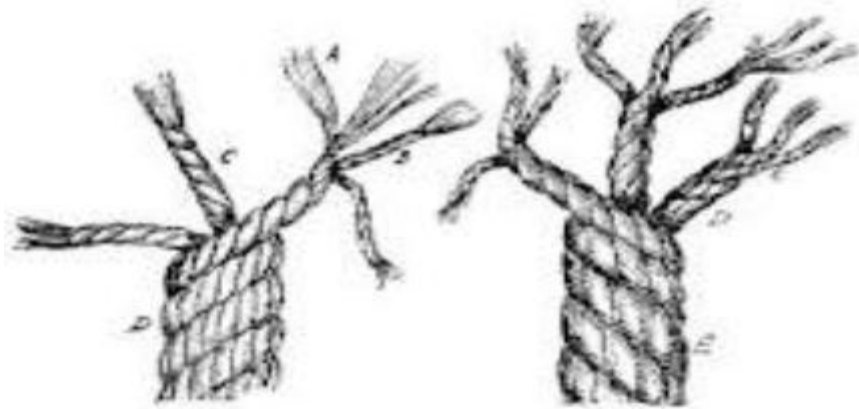
- Wood sellers who sell by surface area and not by volume
- "How could I shew them that - as I should say - you don't really buy more wood if you buy a pile covering a bigger area? - I should, for instance, take a pile which was small by their ideas and, by laying the logs around, change it into a 'big' one. This *might* convince them - but perhaps they would say: "Yes, now it's a *lot* of wood and costs more" - and that would be the end of the matter. - We should presumably say in this case: they simply do not mean the same by "a lot of wood" and "a little wood" as we do and they have a quite different system of payment from us." (*Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics I §150*)
- Blinded by our own convention, we do not recognize the potential validity of the wood seller's
- Decisions determine rules, not pre-established transcendent meanings

Family Resemblance

- Consider some examples of the use of 'water':
 - Parched man
 - Burned finger
 - Sister crying
- Specific social situation present
- Here, no ostensive definition can provide us with a meaning for water, but we can witness understanding in its use



Meaning as Use



- Thread analogy
- Language functions like this as well
- Words are used in a variety of contexts without a single ostensive definition
- Language as a whole is also comprised like this analogy
- Through this lens the meaning of words and language truly are found in use
- Our private individual understanding seems dependant on the public uses of language.
- Rather than think of ourselves as communicating meaning to each other, we should think of how language is used in its natural habitat.

Questions and Reflections

Are Wittgenstein's examples sound?

- Consider the math problems in the wood sellers example
- the counting problem in the shopkeeper example

How does this influence the philosophy of mind?

-Wittgenstein argues that language is transcendental and that our mental states are intimately connected to our experience

Do you see the relation to Strawson and Quine?

- contextual language use
- loose interpretation of meaning

How would Russell and Frege respond?

- need for systematic language
- definitions