# WITTGENSTEIN'S PHILOSOPHY OF HUMILITY. PART II: THE PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS AND THEREAFTER

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> *The **edifice of your pride** [LW's emphasis] has to be dismantled. And that is terribly hard work* (Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*).

Philosophers tend to be a proud lot and why should they not be? After all, whereas the other sorts of thinkers and scholars, physicists, chemists, mathematicians, psychologists, biologists, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, etc., each investigate their own particular region of reality, philosophers investigate the nature of reality itself.

The philosopher is not content to discover particular facts about this or that region of the world, e.g., that momentum equals mass times velocity. The philosopher has contempt for mere facts. The philosopher insists on asking the most *fundamental* questions one can possibly ask, e.g., questions about the very *nature* or *essence* of matter, mind, knowledge, language, logic, numbers, values, the divine, etc., questions that are *prior* to the questions of these other disciplines, e,g., metaphysics asks questions that are prior to those of mere physics.

Philosophers even refuse to be confined to reality and must also investigate the nature of unreal entities in literature, poetry, and dreams. Philosophers investigate both the nature of the real and the unreal. No self-respecting philosopher would limit themselves to the investigation of mere reality. There is literally nothing, neither being nor non-being, that escapes the philosopher's scrutiny (and judgment).

Ludwig Wittgenstein, however, is something of an exception to the rule. Although Wittgenstein battled his own prideful feelings, one of the most basic motivations of his philosophical work in both his earlier and later periods, is to defend a more humble vision of philosophy, one that acknowledges the *limits* of human understanding.

In Part I of the present series, this case is argued for Wittgenstein's *Tractatus-logico-philosophicus*, specifically, that his *Tractatus* is not a "proud" defense of the "omnipotence" of physical science as the "logical positivist" Rudolf Carnap and others believed, but, rather, that it is a humble reminder of the complete *impotence* of human reason to solve the deep "problems of life."

However, in Wittgenstein's second period, beginning with his *Blue and Brown Books* and *Philosophical*

*Investigations*, but including his *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, *Zettel*, *On Certainty* and other "later" works, he develops a new philosophical view critical of his earlier *Tractatus*.

It may be a bit simplistic to distinguish an earlier and a later period in Wittgenstein but it should be sufficient for present purposes, for, as Norman Malcolm points out in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, Wittgenstein makes this distinction himself. For simplicity, call these, respectively, Wittgenstein's "early" and "later" philosophies and call the Wittgenstein of the "later" philosophy "(the later) Wittgenstein!" The present paper argues that Wittgenstein's "later" philosophy represents a more consistent and refined philosophy of humility but the case is not quite the same for his earlier and later periods because his views have undergone considerable evolution.

**I. The "Ethical" Interpretation Of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus***

> *In his correspondence with Ficker, Wittgenstein [says] that we [can] relate to language in three ways, two of which he considers legitimate, the third of which is not. We can assert what is or is not the case; we can be silent about [the] transcendental issues that arise in ethics and logic, concerning which we can only show things by our mode of procedure; or we can babble about the things we ought to relegate to pregnant silence.* Alan Janik, *Essays on Wittgenstein and Weininger*.

Although Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* has been seen, almost universally, as a treatise on the philosophies of logic, language, mind and science, and by Carnap and others, as "proudly" stating the "omnipotence" of the rational natural sciences, it is argued in the first article in this series that Wittgenstein meant what he said to Ficker, that the *Tractatus* is an "ethical" work, where the central part of its ethical" message is that the rational sciences are impotent to solve any of the great "ethical," in a broad sense, "problems of life."

The "ethical" interpretation also holds that although the vast bulk of the *Tractatus* is an extensive detailed account of all of the sorts of things that can be expressed in meaningful propositions, where the true meaningful propositions turns out to coincide with the (factual) propositions of the natural sciences (4.11), Wittgenstein told Ficker that the book delimits the "ethical," broadly understood, by being silent about it. That sounds paradoxical but Wittgenstein's idea is that by specifying precisely the domain of the (factual) natural sciences and drawing a line around it (the line representing the limits of meaningful language), he thereby shows that none of the important "ethical" "problems of life" (6.52) are

even touched by anything within that scientific domain.

Wittgenstein's method in the *Tractatus* may seem quite peculiar, even perverse, but not if one looks at it from his perspective. For, if one *really* believes that the "ethical," broadly speaking, is "mystical" and "unsayable," how does one mark out its limits? One cannot do it by listing all the "ethical" propositions because, *ex hypothesi*, the "ethical" cannot be expressed in propositions. One can only do this, therefore, by delimiting the domain of everything that can be "said" and then pointing out that there is nothing "ethical" in there. It is only in this way that one can "show" "by one's procedure" that "the ethical" cannot be expressed in meaningful language (*Tractatus*, Preface, 6.54, 7). Anything else would be the sort of "babbling" about ethics that consumes the lives and careers many professors. But does he retain this view in his "later philosophy?"

**II. The Official "View" Of Wittgenstein's "Later Philosophy"**

> *Don't ask for the meaning [of a word], ask for the use* (Wittgenstein, quoted in Garth Hallett's *A Companion to Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*).

The very form of Wittgenstein's "later" works, beginning with the *Philosophical Investigations*, is entirely different from that of his early *Tractatus*. Whereas the *Tractatus* is presented as a series of numbered "propositions [*Sätze*]" linked by a complicated, sometimes bewildering, numbering, system, Wittgenstein's later works are usually, with a few minor exceptions, presented as a series of numbered paragraphs. The interlocutor in these paragraphs often moots a certain typical philosophical claim. This is followed, sometimes in the same paragraph, sometimes in later paragraphs, by a critique of that claim.

For example, *Philosophical Investigations* (para. 46) begins by raising the view that names really signify "simple" objects. Plato's *Theaetetus* and unnamed works by Bertrand Russell (clearly Russell's works on logical atomism) are cited as examples of other philosophers who held such views, but he could have cited his own *Tractatus*. This suggests that in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein is often critiquing his own earlier views in the *Tractatus*.

The odd format of the *Philosophical Investigations*, therefore, conforms, to a degree, with Plato's description in the *Sophist* (263e-264a) of thinking as "the soul's dialogue with itself." Wittgenstein

confirms this: “Nearly all my writings are my private conversations with myself” (*Culture and Value*, p. 77). That is, Wittgenstein is often dialoguing with his own earlier self in the *Tractatus*. However, by occasionally citing other philosophers who have held similar views, e.g., Plato, Bertrand Russell, William James and others, (the later) Wittgenstein indicates that he is also critiquing certain recurring types of views in philosophy.

The formulation of these mistaken philosophical views is often followed by a critique of those views. The critique is seldom, however, to the effect, that the view is simply false. For example, in the case at hand, the discussion in para’s 46-47 of the view that names stand for simple objects is followed by a discussion in para. 48 of a kind of case in which one can say *correctly* that names stand for simples. What Wittgenstein describes in para. 48 is a “language game” in which there are 9 colored squares on a board, each of which can be “named “R,” “G,” “W,” or “B” (that is, respectively, “red,” “green,” “white” or “black”). Call this Game 1.

The point is that within the context of Game 1, the squares on the board do resemble simples in a sense because it is *part of the rules of the game* that each of the 9 squares is treated as a *single indivisible (logically simple) patch* and not a composition of more elementary parts. Each square is, so to speak, logically *simple within Game 1* by virtue of its rules. Para. 48, however, goes on to say that one might imagine a similar “game” in which each square is treated as a *composite* of two triangles. Call this Game 2!

Thus, the square that functioned as a simple in Game 1, and, accordingly, was named “R” might, in Game 2, have to be described as “R/R” in order to indicate that each of the two triangles that make up the square are red. In Game 2, therefore, that same patch does not function as a simple but as a composite of two juxtaposed simple triangles!

The point Wittgenstein is making by using these kinds of examples is that the words “simple” and “composite” do not have an *absolute* context-free meaning as he had thought in the *Tractatus*. Rather, he now holds that what is treated as simple or composite is, so to speak, *relative to the “language game”* involved. The implication is that Wittgenstein’s own earlier mistake in the *Tractatus* was to assume that the “words” simple” and “complex” designate context-free absolutes closely associated with the very nature of logic itself. That is, the *Tractatus* purported to be talking, not about something that is simple according to some “human all too human” game (the expression from Nietzsche’s book of the same title), but about absolute simple objects that form part of “the logical scaffolding of the world”

(*Tractatus*, 6.124).

Wittgenstein's aim in his later philosophy is, therefore, analogous to Socrates' mission, as Cicero described it in his *Tusculan Disputations*, to "call" philosophy from the heavens "down to earth." Wittgenstein has come to see that his own view in the *Tractatus* had purported to escape the limitations inherent in the human condition and describe reality from some heavenly (impossible for human beings) point of view. Indeed, on the very first page of his *Blue Book* Wittgenstein uses Cicero's precise language to describe his new Socratic mission in his later philosophy, that is, to bring the baffling questions about linguistic meaning "down to earth."

(The later) Wittgenstein's method is almost always the same. Whenever someone says something philosophically problematic, for example that each human being can know when they themselves are in pain but no one can ever know when someone else is in pain (*Philosophical Investigations*, para's. 303), he asks whether that is how the relevant words, words like "consciousness," "know," "pain," etc., are used in real life. His point is that many philosophical paradoxes are created when, so to speak, language "goes on a holiday" (*Philosophical Investigations*, para. 38), that is, when philosophers use words in novel ways dissociated from human life. Wittgenstein puts this quite forcefully at para. 194 of the *Philosophical Investigations*,

> *When we do philosophy we are like savages, primitive people [Wilde, primitive Menschen], who hear the expressions of civilized [people], put a false interpretation on them, and then draw the queerest [seltsamsten] conclusions from it.*

Wittgenstein's point is that when philosophers generate philosophical paradoxes they *do not resemble themselves*. Rather, they resemble "savages" that do not even know their own language! Surprisingly, the philosopher suffers from a lack of self-knowledge (an embarrassing failure because, beginning with Socrates, self-knowledge was supposed to be the philosopher's specialty). Much alleged philosophical wisdom is in fact a kind of ignorance (about one's self and one's own language).

The philosopher draws these "queer" conclusions from ordinary civilized expressions because they are "bewitched" by their own language: "Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" (*Philosophical Investigations*, para.103). The grammar of natural language misleads one into making false inferences. For example, the grammatical similarity of expressions like "I have a thought in my head" with expressions like "I have a coin in my pocket" misleads one into

incorrectly thinking that just as coins are objects that are in the pockets that contain them thoughts are also objects that are "in" the minds that contain them.

> *Compare the depth grammar, say, of the expression, "to mean," with what its surface grammar would lead us to suspect. No wonder we find it difficult to know our way about.* (*Philosophical Investigations*, para. 664)

The remedy for fake "philosophical" wisdom is always the same,

> *When philosophers [use words in perplexing ways] one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used that way in the language-game that is its original home?—*
> *What we do is bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.* (*Philosophical Investigations*, para. 116).

One particularly important example of these vain metaphysical pretensions in the contemporary world is called "reductionism," the attempt to reduce one sort of phenomena to another sort of phenomena, e.g., biology to chemistry and physics, or mind to matter, or values to social practices, etc.

Since (the later) Wittgenstein largely holds that each kind of "language game" generally plays a particular role in human life he holds that the philosopher should simply describe the way words are used in a language game and show what purpose that use has in the relevant "form" of human life (*Philosophical Investigations*, para's 109, 124-126). As a consequence, (the later) Wittgenstein generally opposes the reduction of one "language game" to another, e.g., the "language game" of biology to those of chemistry and physics. For this reason (the later) Wittgenstein opposes "scientism," that view that one "language game," that is, the language of the natural sciences, takes precedence over all the others (See Gordon Baker and P.M.S. Hacker, Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning. Volume 1, p. 281).

The vain pretensions of "metaphysicians" are actually fed by the *misuse* of words. This misunderstanding of the "grammar" of one's own language is misconstrued as a great *discovery* when in fact it is only a *comical* new way of talking disconnected from human life,

> *Let us ask ourselves: why do we feel a grammatical joke to be* ***deep*** *[LW's emphasis]? (And that*

> *is what the depth of philosophy is)* [*Philosophical Investigations*, para. 111].

These vain pretensions can be corrected by demanding that metaphysicians explain the meanings of their words by reference to the uses of those words in their "everyday" "language-games." In the following section, it is shown that (the later) Wittgenstein conceives of his attempt to combat the philosopher's misplaced pride in explicit ethico-religious terms.

**III. The Ethico-Religious Dimension Of Wittgenstein's "Later" Philosophy**

> *Here again [in thinking about the problem of other minds] we get the same thing as in set theory: the form of expression we use seems to have been designed for a god, who knows what we cannot know; he sees into human consciousness. For us, of course, these forms of expression are like pontificals which we may put on, but cannot do much with, since we lack the effective power that would give these vestments meaning and purpose* (*Philosophical Investigations*, para. 426).

The philosopher "bewitched" by the problems of philosophy suffers from a lack of knowledge of how their own language works and, therefore, has a massive lack of self-knowledge of their own limitations. They have literally forgotten what they know in everyday life and must be "reminded" of it (*Philosophical Investigations* (para's 89, 127, 253). The error generally takes a certain form. The philosopher believes they have achieved insight into a level of truth that far transcends that level available to ordinary human beings,

> *We are under the illusion that what is peculiar, profound, essential in our investigation resides in the incomparable essence of language. That is, the order existing between the concepts of a proposition, word, proof, truth, experience, and so on. This order is a* ***super****-order between—so to speak—****super****-concepts* [all emphasis, LW's] (*Philosophical Investigation*s, para. 97).

(The later) Wittgenstein's point in describing this order as a "super" order and these concepts as "super" concepts is that this order and these concepts are, so to speak, for use in the heavens, not by mere human beings down on the dark earth. Such super-concepts are, to borrow Aristotle's words from Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, "too high for man." It would seem that the philosopher has a very hard time remembering that he or she is a human being as opposed to a privileged inhabitant of the bright

celestial spheres. For example, *Tractatus* (6.124) purports to state the absolutely objective truth about "the logical scaffolding of the world" from what Hilary Putnam in *Reason, Truth and History* (p. 74) calls a "God's eye" point of view,

> The propositions of logic present [**darstellen**] the scaffolding of the world [**Gerüst der Welt**]. … It is clear that certain combinations of symbols … are tautologies. This contains the decisive point. We have said that some things are arbitrary in the symbols that we use and some things are not. In logic it is only the latter that express: but that means that logic is not a field in which we express what we wish with the help of signs, but rather one in which the nature of the natural and inevitable [**die Nature naturnotwendigen**] signs speaks for itself [**aussprechen**].

It is important to recognize that the *Tractatus* holds that no mere mortal wrote the *Tractatus*. The fiction that the mere mortal named Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote the *Tractatus* is needed for the purposes of publication where it is necessary, borrowing Bishop Berkeley's expression from his *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, to "speak with the vulgar." But, as the author of the *Tractatus* saw it, the book was, so to speak, dictated to him by "the natural and inevitable nature of the signs" (the tautologies) that "speak" for themselves. The only thing Wittgenstein had to do was figure out how to hear what "the natural and inevitable nature of" the signs was expressing to him.

The quasi-religious symbolism here should not be ignored. Wittgenstein was, so to speak, only the vessel through which the absolute necessary essence of the signs speaks. Further, since the tautologies are absolutely true, that is, trivially analytically true by virtue of the meanings of the terms involved (6.11), and since they "present [*darstellen*]" "the logical scaffolding of the world," the *Tractatus*' descriptions of the "logical form of language and the world" shares in the absolute necessary character of the tautologies that "present" it. There is no more room for human error here than if Wittgenstein had gone to the mountain and heard the *Tractatus* dictated to him by a voice coming from out of the heavens.

The moral is that the philosopher all too readily gets into the position of thinking that they can see the world as God would see it (see epigraph above). The author of the *Tractatus* feels entitled to this hubris because the views in the *Tractatus* are derived from the crystal-clear nature of modern truth functional logic itself. (The later) Wittgenstein gives this *Tractatus*-view as an example of one of those "grammatical jokes" mentioned in the preceding section,

> *Thought is surrounded by a halo.—It's essence, logic, presents … the* ***a priori*** *order of the word: that is, the order of* ***possibilities****, which must be common to both world and thought. But this order, it seems, must be* ***utterly simple****. It is* ***prior*** *to all experience, must run through all experience, no empirical cloudiness or uncertainty can be allowed to affect it—It must rather be of the purest crystal. But this crystal does not appear to use as an abstraction; but as something concrete, indeed, as the most concrete, as it were, the hardest thing there is* (*Tractatus-logico-philosophicus* 5.5563) [all emphasis, LW's], (*Philosophical Investigations*, para. 97).

As shown in § II, Wittgenstein's method in his "later philosophy" for combating this kind of quasi-religious *hubris* that he later came to recognize in his own earlier *Tractatus* is to ask how the words that make up such superlative philosophical claims, words like "knowledge," "object," "experience," "structure," "world," etc., are actually *used* in real life. His aim, following Socrates, is to bring such superlative philosophical claims "down to earth" where the people who use those words live, and not just any place on earth, e.g., not just to the philosophy classroom that all too often remains sublimely other-worldly, but, into people's homes and everyday lives *where language meshes with human activities*. Once one does so one always finds the same thing,

> *Of course if the words "language," "experience," "world," have a use it must be as humble a one as that of the words, "table," "lamp," "door"* (*Philosophical Investigations*, para. 97).

Wittgenstein's "later" philosophy of language is, like that in his earlier *Tractatus*, a philosophy of humility. However, although *Tractatus* may have espoused a philosophy of humility, its residual *hubris* had to be purged. Indeed, it is an important part of (the later) Wittgenstein's message that there is an important sense in which the philosopher needs to be humbled if they are to find the truth – just as the author of the *Tractatus* had to be humbled if he was to evolve and state a purified philosophy of humility in the *Philosophical Investigations* and thereafter.

Wittgenstein's new method in his "later" philosophy is to demand of every philosopher, including the author of the *Tractatus*, that they show how one is to use their metaphysical words in everyday linguistic contexts, to show how the use of these words meshes with human activities. It is important to see that (the later) Wittgenstein does not object to any philosophical or metaphysical statements. In his "Big Typescript" (*Philosophical Occasions*, p. 161), he stresses that "philosophy does not lead me to any renunciation for I do not refrain from saying something …." (The later) Wittgenstein is not led to "any" renunciation at all. The metaphysician is free to say what he or she will.

They might assert that "Reality is an illusion," or that "Reality is not an illusion." It does not matter what one asserts. One of (the later) Wittgenstein's most important insights is that *it matters not a whit what sentences one utters but only what role those utterances play in human life*. If the relevant sentences have a role in human life, no matter what that role is, then those utterances have as much meaning, and the kind of "meaning," determined by that role. If, however, those utterances have no actual use, no actual role in human life, then no matter how impressive those utterances sound, no matter, that is, how useful those utterances are for impressing undergraduate students, they have no genuine meaning for us.

Thus, what (the later) Wittgenstein will do in the case of each of these utterances is demand that the philosopher or metaphysician who made them explain how their words and sentences are to be used in actual concrete linguistic contexts, that is, explain what role they play in human life, for it is in human life, in human activities, that, borrowing a metaphor from the *Tractatus* (2.1515), language "touches reality."

(The later) Wittgenstein provides a useful mathematical example of just such an utterance in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (IV. 9),

> *We only see how queer [**seltsam**] the question is whether the pattern … '770' … will occur in the infinite expansion of π when we try to formulate the question in a quite common or garden way.*

The context to this remark is the following. Let it be assumed that we have calculated the expansion of π up to several thousand places and have not come across the sequence "770." Since π is an infinite sequence, the question arises whether that sequence "770" occurs anywhere further out in that infinite expansion. At *Philosophical Investigations* (para. 352) the interlocutor (who changes the sequence from "770" to "7777" (which has no bearing on the philosophical point) takes the "Platonist" view that although human beings may never know the answer to this question, one can be entirely certain that there is an answer, i.e., that the entire infinite expansion of π is already there, fully determinate, even though no human being will ever know it all,

> *"In the decimal expansion of π either the group '7777' occurs or it does not—there is no third possibility." That is to say, God sees but we don't know.*

Recall that this is the interlocutor's statement, not (the later) Wittgenstein's. Rather, (the later)

Wittgenstein is criticizing the interlocutor's invocation of the "God's Eye" point of view. For the sake of example, take the *negative* claim that "770" does *not* occur in the expansion of π. (The later) Wittgenstein's reply to the interlocutor is that they are uttering a statement that *they literally do not know how to use*. That is, as they admit, there is no conceivable circumstance in which they or any human being at any time could be in a position to assert that "770" (or "7777") does *not* occur in the infinite expansion of π. For even if human beings have calculated the expansion of π to the one billionth place and not encountered "770" (or "7777"), it is always possible that somewhere further out, perhaps near one hundred trillionth place, "770" (or "7777") occurs.

By contrast, (the later) Wittgenstein's "use-criterion" of meaning requires that the meaning of words is limited by the human condition. Since no human being could ever conceivably be able actually to use the sentence, "'770' does not occur in the expansion of π," that sentence has no meaning for us. Yes, it looks like a meaningful sentence. The grammar resembles that of a meaningful sentence. One gets certain images of long lines of numbers stretching into the distance when contemplating that sentence. However, since we can cite no "common or garden" circumstance in which we could actually apply it, it is cognitively meaningless for us! The philosopher, seduced by the possibility of speaking a certain picturesque way, can assert that "'770' does not occur in the expansion of π," but such expressions "are like pontificals which we may put on, but cannot do much with, since we lack the effective power that would give these vestments meaning and purpose."

Similarly, the claim that we might not be able to see the entire infinite expansion of π but that there has to be a determinate answer to the question whether "770" (or "7777") occurs in that infinite expansion because God already sees the entire infinite expansion gets one no further. All one does in this case is substitute one statement that we do not know how to use about what God allegedly knows for another statement that we do not know how to use about what is not in the infinite expansion of π. These two related metaphysical statements are, in fact, a perfect example of what (the later) Wittgenstein means when he talks about language "going on a holiday," that is, a holiday from human limitations:

> *We have got onto slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk; so we need friction. Back to the rough ground!"* (*Philosophical Investigations*, para. 107).

The frictionless crystalline purity of the logical ideal in the heavens is always tempting. Unfortunately, that crystalline ideal in the heavens is not meant for human beings with their human limitations. The

philosopher needs realize that they cannot, so to speak, fly with the gods and come, instead, back down to earth where they can humbly "walk" (i.e., speak and think in terms suitable to human beings).

The effect of (the later) Wittgenstein's application of his "use-conception" of meaning is to undermine the vain metaphysical pretensions of philosophers. Human language is thereby brought down to earth. The beliefs of certain logicians, scientists and philosophers like Carnap in the "omnipotence" of human reason is exposed as "a superstition (not a mistake)" (*Philosophical Investigations*, para. 110), the superstition that linguistic meaning can be detached from the use of words in the world and contemplated purely intellectually. Indeed, this is not merely a "superstition." It is exposed as a "grammatical joke."

**IV. Wittgenstein's Method**

> *It is not our aim to refine or complete our system of rules for the use of words in unheard of ways. … Instead, we now demonstrate a method, by examples; and the series of examples can be broken off.—Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a single problem* (*Philosophical Investigations*, para. 133).

The present interpretation is founded on the view that there are certain similarities, but also certain differences, between Wittgenstein's views in his earlier *Tractatus* and the views beginning with his later *Philosophical Investigations* – specifically, that whereas both earlier and later philosophies defend a philosophy of humility, the view of the later philosophy is a more consistent and more refined view that eliminates some of the residual hubris of the *Tractatus*. One way to show this is to compare the way each of Wittgenstein's two philosophies stands up to Carnap's criticism that the *Tractatus* is inconsistent because Wittgenstein there tells us that whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent and then instead of being silent he writes a whole philosophical book.

Recall that Carnap's criticism has a certain plausibility because the *Tractatus* does appear to "say" the things that it claims cannot be "said," e.g., that "Objects are simple" (2.02). In order to be completely clear, recall that on the "traditional interpretation" of the *Tractatus*, Carnap is misguided. For, the "traditional interpretation" holds that the *Tractatus* is not really inconsistent because it only attempts to "show [*zeigt*]" these "unsayable" things. Yes, the way it uses language makes it look like it attempts to "say" what by its own lights cannot be "said" but this misconstrues the fact that the language in the *Tractatus* is, so to speak, "showing" language, not "saying" language. I believe that, with a lot of

additional qualification and commentary, this "traditional" view is basically correct (See Richard McDonough, *The Argument of the 'Tractatus'*, §'s VIII.2 and VIII.3). However, there is a sense in which the purified philosophy of humility and the associated more humble way of using language in Wittgenstein's "later" philosophy escapes Carnap's criticism at an even more basic level.

The reason is that whereas the *Tractatus* does make *prima facia* philosophical assertions, e.g., "Objects are simple" (2.02), it is essential to Wittgenstein's "later" philosophy that it *makes no philosophical assertions at all*. (The later) Wittgenstein does not assert that objects are simple or that objects are not simple. He is not interested in denying his earlier views in the *Tractatus*, indeed, in denying anything at all: "What gives the impression we want to deny anything?" (*Philosophical Investigations*, para. 305). At para. 128 of the same work he implies that it is not even possible to state "*theses* [LW's emphasis]" in philosophy.

Wittgenstein's aim in the later philosophy is different than Plato's in his *Republic*, Aristotle's in his *Metaphysics*, Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* or Russell in his *Lectures on Logical Atomism*… and so on. All of these philosophers, and many others, attempt to state philosophical theses of one sort or another. Plato tells us in the *Republic* that physical objects are imperfect perceptible images of immaterial Forms. Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* tells us that the most ontologically basic category is that of substance. In the "First Analogy" in the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant tells us that the quantum of substance in Nature is neither increased nor decreased. Russell in his *Lectures on Logical Atomism* (Chap. VIII) tells us that the entities physicists speak of, the smallest bits of matter like electrons and protons, are "logical fictions" and do not exist, and so on. Wittgenstein's own *Tractatus* (1.1) tells us that the world divides into facts, not things. By contrast, (the later) Wittgenstein does not state any theses at all but only attempts, humbly, to provide one with a method for dealing with philosophical problems.

> *We remind ourselves … of the* ***kind of statement*** *that we make about phenomena. Thus Augustine [in his investigation into the nature of time] recalls… the different kind of statements that are made about the duration, past, present or future, of events. (These are, of course, not* ***philosophical*** *statements about time, the past, the present, and the future* [All emphasis, LW's] (*Philosophical Investigations*, para. 133).

Rather than, with Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Russell or his own *Tractatus*, pontificating about the nature of reality, (the later) Wittgenstein does not state any theses whatsoever about reality but only provides one with a *method* for dissolving philosophical puzzlement. This is why in para. 133 of the *Philosophical*

*Investigations* he states that "Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a single problem." (The later) Wittgenstein is not attempting to solve any "single problem." He does not attempt to solve the "problem of perception" and then move on to the "problem of the false proposition" and then move on to the "problem of the mathematical infinite" and so on. Rather, he provides his readers with a method that can then be used whenever anyone raises any philosophical problem whatsoever: "not a single problem!"

The normal situation goes something like this: Someone makes a philosophical assertion, perhaps that the basic objects in the world are logically simple. Call this assertion "P." (The later) Wittgenstein neither affirms nor denies "P." Rather, he asks what "P" can mean. He uses at least 3 techniques for showing what "P" might mean. In the first of these, he simply reminds this philosopher about the multiplicity of ordinary sorts of examples in which one might say that something is simple. The fact that there will normally be a many different contexts in which such assertions of "simplicity" are made is already enlightening for it breaks the grip of the idea that the word "simple" has some single essential sense: "The main cause of philosophical disease [*Krankheiten*]—a one-sided diet: one nourishes one's thinking with only one kind of example" (*Philosophical Investigations*, para. 593).

In the second of these methods, (the later) Wittgenstein asks how one *learned* the meaning of that word: "In such a [philosophical] difficulty always ask yourself: How did we *learn* [LW's emphasis] the meaning of this word ('good' for instance)?" (*Philosophical Investigations*, para. 77). In the case at hand, how did one learn the meaning of the word "simple?" It will normally turn out that one learns to use the word "simple" in a great variety of contexts using a great many of very different kinds of examples.

In the third of these methods, (the later) Wittgenstein asks whether and in what sense sentences using that word can be verified: "Asking whether and how a proposition can be verified is only a particular way of asking 'How d'you mean?' The answer is a contribution to the grammar of the proposition" (*Philosophical Investigations*, para. 353). Note that (the later) Wittgenstein does not here assume that all meaningful propositions can be verified. This is no logical positivist "verifiability theory of meaning." The point is rather that if a proposition, for example about God, cannot be verified, this contributes to clarifying whether and in what sense it means something. It says something about the meaning of the statement, "you can't hear God speak to someone else, you can only hear Him if you are being addressed (*Zettel*, para. 717)," that it cannot be verified in the way a statement about the movement of projectiles in gravitational fields can be verified.

The most important point for present purposes is that (the later) Wittgenstein makes no philosophical assertions whatsoever. Instead, he gives one a method, or, to be more precise, several methods, for showing what words and sentences mean: "There is not a [LW's emphasis] philosophical method, though there are methods, like different therapies" (*Philosophical Investigations*, para. 133). (The later) Wittgenstein does not, for example, say with the *Tractatus*, that "Objects are simple" (2.02) or that "There are indeed things that cannot be put into words" (6.522).

Since (the later) Wittgenstein makes no philosophical assertions but only gives one several methods for examining philosophical assertions by reminding one of the ordinary meanings of the relevant words, the criticism Carnap made of the *Tractatus*, that it is inconsistent because it says that one cannot "say" philosophical things and then writes a whole book about what cannot be said, does not apply. Since (the later) Wittgenstein does not make any philosophical assertions, he cannot be accused of trying to "say" what cannot be said.

(The later) Wittgenstein really is silent about all these "unsayable" things and, therefore, is, in that sense, more consistent than the *Tractatus*. Carnap's criticism of the *Tractatus*, that it tries to "say" what by its own lights cannot be "said," fails completely against (the later) Wittgenstein's more humble and consistent "later" philosophy. Both Wittgenstein's "early" and his "later" philosophies are philosophies of humility, but this is perfected the "later" philosophy to the point that (the later) Wittgenstein's silence about all the important "ethical" matters in the "later" philosophy is unbroken.

**V. Wittgenstein's "Later" Philosophy As A Personal Confession**

> *For Wittgenstein, all good philosophy, insofar as it is pursued honestly and decently, begins with a confession. He often remarked that the problem of writing good philosophy and thinking well about philosophical problems was more one of the will than the intellect – the will to resist the temptation to misunderstand, the will to resist superficiality* (Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, p. 365).

Although both Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and his "later" philosophy are philosophies of humility, the latter takes a very specific form not shared by the former. Whereas the former takes the form of a set of numbered "propositions [*Sätze*]" organized according to a curious mathematical numbering system, Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* takes the form of a personal confession.

(The later) Wittgenstein hints this by beginning the *Philosophical Investigations* with a quotation from St. Augustine's *Confessions* in which the "name theory" of linguistic meaning, also found in his *Tractatus*, the view that words have meaning by virtue of naming an object, is defended. Note, however, that (the later) Wittgenstein only raises this theory of meaning in order to critique it. He is, so to speak, confessing one of his earlier mistakes in the *Tractatus*. (The later) Wittgenstein could have begun the Philosophical Investigations with a quotation from other great philosophical works by Plato, Frege, Russell, or his own Tractatus that state versions of the "name theory" of linguistic meaning (Garth Hallett, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations*," pp. 73-74), but he chose a quotation from St. Augustine's *Confessions* to hint that he was beginning a process of confession analogous to that found in Augustine's *Confessions*.

To be sure, Augustine's *Confessions* concern sins in the more ordinary sense of the word, such as lust and greed, whereas Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* concern the sorts of "thought-sins" he had committed in the course of his earlier philosophizing in the *Tractatus* period. These "thought-sins" might not be sins in the ordinary sense, but, as Monk points out in *The Duty of Genius* (p. 365), (the later) Wittgenstein thought that error in philosophy is not so much due to an error in intellect, e.g., a logical mistake, but to an error in will, specifically, a failure to resist the temptation to superficiality and making thinking easy for oneself with some completely unhelpful generalization, e.g., "All linguistic meaning is like naming an object." (The later) Wittgenstein was influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche (*Culture and Value*, 9, 59) and his view here is similar, in some respects, to Nietzsche's view, referring to philosophical thinking generally, that "Error is not blindness…. Error is cowardice (*Ecce Homo*, Preface, § 3).

Although (the later) Wittgenstein's view is more cautiously stated, both agree that there is an essential *ethical*, in a broad sense, dimension to philosophical thinking. It is not the person with the highest IQ and education that is best suited to achieve philosophical wisdom, but, rather, certain "ethical," broadly speaking, strengths of character, such as courage and determination, are required if one is to do so.

As a consequence, (the later) Wittgenstein felt that the errors he had come to see in his *Tractatus* reflected his own "ethical" shortcomings at the time he wrote that first book. Writing the *Philosophical Investigations* is, therefore, a very personal act for (the later) Wittgenstein. Just as he had stated many years earlier that writing the *Tractatus* is an ethical deed, so too, writing the *Philosophical Investigations* is a new "ethical" deed in which he confesses and corrects some of the mistakes he had come to see in his earlier attempt at an "ethical" deed.

(The later) Wittgenstein makes explicit that many of the specific "sins" he wishes to "confess" in the *Philosophical Investigations* were made by himself in the *Tractatus*. In the *Philosophical Investigations* (Preface) he states that he even wished to publish his *Philosophical Investigations* alongside his earlier T*ractatus* because he had become aware of "grave mistakes" in his first book and felt that "the latter [new thoughts] could only be seen in the right light by contrast with and against the background of my old way of thinking [in the *Tractatus*]." Note that this is an extremely strong statement. It is not merely the statement that it would be *useful* for understanding his "new" way of thinking in the *Philosophical Investigations* to compare it with the views in his earlier *Tractatus* but rather that if one is to understand his "new" thoughts it is *necessary* to compare and contrast them with those in the *Tractatus*. This advice has not always been heeded by scholars of (the later) Wittgenstein. (The later) Wittgenstein also explicitly mentions the criticism of his *Tractatus* in the body of the *Philosophical Investigations* (para's 23, 97 and 114).

Although that one might balk at the idea that the *Philosophical Investigations* is, so to speak, (the later) Wittgenstein's "confessions" of his earlier philosophical "thought-sins," in fact, the notion of a confession plays a very large part in (the later) Wittgenstein's conception both of an ethical life and of a philosophical life (*where the latter requires the former*). This is because he holds that "all good philosophy, insofar as it is pursued honestly and decently, begins with a confession" (Monk, *The Duty of Genius*, p. 365). This also illustrates his quasi-Hegelian view that "One must start with error and convert it into truth ("Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough," in *Philosophical Occasions*, p. 119).

(The later) Wittgenstein believes this because he holds that we all live, so to speak, in a *de facto* state of sin and must struggle to escape it: "We don't want anyone else to look inside us because it's not a pretty sight in there" (*Culture and Value*, pp. 46). Since human beings exist in a *de facto* fallen state, achieving the philosophical truth requires a conversion from the false to the true, from the sinful to the sinless. Thus, the necessary form of a philosophical life is this: One must "convert" one's present "sinful" state into a more ethical state.

Further, confession is important to Wittgenstein's later philosophy because, as he wrote in 1931, "'a confession' has to be a part of your new life" (*Culture and Value*, p. 18). One might object that philosophy only concerns how one thinks, not what kind of person one is. However, although that might be the standard view, (the later) Wittgenstein disagrees,

> *Working in philosophy – like work in architecture in many respect – is really more a working on*

> *oneself. On one's own interpretation. On one's way of seeing things. (And what one expects of them).* [*Culture and Value*, p. 16].

That is, writing the *Philosophical Investigations* is not merely (the later) Wittgenstein's attempt to solve some academic philosophical problems (such as the "problem of the false proposition"). Since philosophy, like architecture, is a kind of working on oneself, on "one's way of seeing things," and since genuinely improving one's self must begin with a confession, philosophizing, or, to be more precise, philosophizing "honestly and decently," must begin with a confession.

If, however, one is to understand the sense in which the *Philosophical Investigations* essentially involves a confession of (the later) Wittgenstein's earlier philosophical "sins," one must understand how he saw the context, both external and internal (to himself), in which he makes this confession. In the Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*, (the later) Wittgenstein is very pessimistic that the publication of the book will actually help anyone understand anything better,

> *It is not impossible that it should fall to the lot of this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of this time, to bring light into one brain or another—but, of course, it is not likely.*

It is significant that references to one's own spiritual "poverty" and to "the darkness of this time" are expressions often used in religious contexts. For example, Augustine, in his *Confessions*, refers to his own poverty and the darkness of his own time. One can therefore infer that (the later) Wittgenstein sees an analogy between the spiritual "poverty" and the darkness" of his time with the spiritual poverty and the darkness of Augustine's time. Specifically, (the later) Wittgenstein writes the *Philosophical Investigations* in full awareness of his own fallen state and the fallen state of the world in which he writes. These are together so bad that he does not merely doubt that his book will help anyone but he states that "of course" it is not likely his book will help anyone. The worldly situation is so dark that the pessimistic conclusion is simply taken for granted. It would not be "news" if no one learned from his book. It would be "news" if one person did.

This is not a man who proudly proclaims that his book will solve the problems or make the world a better place. Recall that he did do something like that in the Preface to the *Tractatus* when he stated that "I … believe myself to have found, on all essential points, the solution to the [philosophical] problems." The tone in the Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations* has become much more humble, even pessimistic and dark. Indeed, in a 1944 remark in *Culture and Value*, very close in his "later" period

to the publication of the *Philosophical Investigations*, (the later) Wittgenstein gives a hint how he poorly thinks of his own fallen state,

> *The Christian religion is only for the man who needs infinite help, solely, that is, for the man who experiences infinite torment. The whole planet can suffer no greater torment than the single soul. The Christian faith – as I see it – is a man's refuge in this ultimate torment. Anyone in such torment, who has the gift of opening his heart rather than contracting it, accepts the means of salvation in his heart. Someone who in this way patiently opens his heart to God in confession lays it open for other men too. In doing this he loses the dignity that goes with his personal prestige and becomes like a child. That means without official position, dignity or disparity with others. A man can bare himself before others only out of a particular kind of love. A love which acknowledges, as it were, that we are all wicked children. … We don't want anyone to look inside us since it's not a pretty sight in there. Of course, you must continue to feel ashamed of what's inside you, but not ashamed of yourself before other men. No greater torment can be experienced than One [LW's capitalization] human being can experience. For if a man feels lost that is the ultimate torment.*

(The later) Wittgenstein could have departed the world, as Carnap saw him, as the proud author of the *Tractatus*, one of the most powerful philosophical books of the 20th century, and as the author of the *Philosophical Investigations*, a powerful sequel to the *Tractatus* that adds new dignity and pride to its author, the originator of two entirely different philosophical movements in the 20th century. That may be how others see (the later) Wittgenstein but it is not how he sees himself.

(The later) Wittgenstein sees himself in the "ultimate" and "infinite torment" of one who is "lost." He does not suffer from the illusion, common among intellectuals, that because he has written great books he is a great man. Since he believes that our age is dominated, not by great cultural figures but by the "crowd" (*Culture and Value*, p. 6), he believes that the esteem in which he is held by his contemporaries is virtually meaningless. (The later) Wittgenstein knows, painfully, that he needs "infinite help." He knows, painfully, referring to himself, that "it's not a pretty sight in there [inside himself]." He knows, painfully, that he needs a "refuge." He knows, painfully, that he needs "salvation." But he also knows that in order to achieve his salvation he must be able to "open his heart to God in confession" and "lay it open for other men too." He knows that in order to do this authentically he must "lose the "dignity" and "disparity with others" that goes with [his] personal prestige as the great philosopher and "become like a child."

In fact, all of this language comes out of the Bible. The same language is also found in Augustine's *Confessions* which Wittgenstein "revered" (Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*). One can give only a fraction of the Biblical references here. There are numerous references, as at 1 Peter 2:25 to the "lost sheep." Luke 15:20 refers to being "lost" and then "found." Psalms 31:10 refers to living in spiritual poverty due to one's own iniquity. Isaiah 9:1 refers to the difficulties of living in a time of darkness. Proverbs 22:11 refers to the necessity of loving out of a pure heart. Matthew 18:4 states that anyone who humbles himself as a child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven, which, in fact, is a way of stating (the later) Wittgenstein's main point that humility, true humility, not posturing, is necessary for salvation.

In order to understand the Preface to (the later) Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* one must recognize its Biblical language. It is clear that he takes this Biblical language as describing his own fallen state. (The later) Wittgenstein believes himself to be suffering from spiritual poverty and living in a time of spiritual darkness. Since all changes in one's life must begin with a confession, he publishes the *Philosophical Investigations* as a confession that constitutes the first step towards his journey of salvation. This is why he humbles himself in the Preface by explicitly confessing his doubts and his own spiritual poverty.

Even his remarks in the Preface that his "vanity" had been stung by seeing some of his ideas circulated in mangled or watered down form is a confession of his own tendency towards being prideful, something he must combat. And the final sentences of the Preface he confesses that he "should have liked to produce a good book" but "this has not come about" and he can no longer make it any better. Given his own view discussed earlier - that philosophical error is a failure of will to avoid the temptation towards superficiality - that is another confession of his "ethical" shortcomings.

One can only infer that just as he conceived of the publication of his *Tractatus* as an "ethical deed," he also conceives of publishing the *Philosophical Investigations* as a new ethical deed, specifically, as the first step towards his new journey of salvation. The self-depreciating words in the Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations* are not, therefore, simply the standard scholar's statement of debt to others: "I was helped immeasurably by so and so and by so and so and by secretary so and so and typist so and so but of course all the errors are mine."

Rather, in the Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*, (the later) Wittgenstein humbles himself by confessing in front of the whole world that he does not regard himself as the great philosopher who

impressed Bertrand Russell and wrote the *Tractatus* but as, so to speak, a sinner who has given up any "official position, dignity or disparity with others" and has, so to speak, willingly "become like a child." He has done this, so that he can offer the *Philosophical Investigations* to the world in the right spirit of an "open heart," that is, with that "particular kind of love …that acknowledges that we are all wicked children."

Note that nowhere in the Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations* is it stated or implied that he will be *successful* in this new journey of salvation or that his confession will actually be given in the right spirit. To do so would be another act of pride. Rather, (the later) Wittgenstein's words from the 1944 remark from *Culture and Value* describe his ideal confession, which does not mean that he can himself measure up to it.

On the other hand it is illuminating to recognize that (the later) Wittgenstein does not publically grovel in his confession in the Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*. The reason for this is that, as he also states in that 1944 remark from *Culture and Value*, one "must continue to feel ashamed of what's inside you, but not ashamed of yourself before other men." There is no need to grovel publically before other people because they are all "wicked children" too. If (the later) Wittgenstein grovels, it will be silently before himself or before God.

His remarks about suffering "infinite torment" in *Culture and Value* hint that he does grovel in silence: "No cry of torment can be greater than the torment of one man" (*Culture and Value*, p. 45). It is hard not to see that as an autobiographical remark. Indeed, if he were to publically grovel in his confession that could be seen as another act of pride: "Look at how great I am in the degree to which I can debase myself before the world by trumpeting my enormous torment!" Even the fact the he is confessing his former "thought-sins" in the Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations* cannot be made explicit because there would be no point in doing so except to glorify himself. Thus, (the later) Wittgenstein does not even use the word "confession" in the Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*.

That the *Philosophical Investigations* is a confession is something that can only be "shown" rather than said out loud. That is, it can only be "shown by [his] mode of procedure" in, among other things, beginning the *Philosophical Investigations* with a quotation from a classic book of spiritual confession while being silent about the true nature of his own book (see the epigraph from Alan Janik to § I above). For, confession, if it is to be done in the right spirit, not proudly, must be done silently to oneself, before God, not trumpeted to the world. Thus, it is precisely his silence in the *Philosophical Investigations* about

its status as a personal confession that "shows" that it is a philosophy of humility.

(The later) Wittgenstein does not even try, as he had in the *Tractatus*, to write a book filled with deep sayings about logic or mysticism. The time for posturing or, as he had earlier said to Ficker, "babbling" about these "ethical" matters is over. The time to impress the world with one's deep sayings is long past. That is replaced by "a quiet weighing of linguistic facts" (*Zettel*, para. 447), that is, weighing the various kinds of statements human beings make about objects, facts, mind, knowledge, ethics, aesthetics, God, etc., while humbly remaining silent about one's own views or virtues. If one is authentic only one thing is important at this point: "Attend to making yourself more honorable!" (*Culture and Value*, p. 30).

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*The featured image shows, "The Conversion of Saint Augustine," by Fra Angelico; painted, ca. 1430-1435.*