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# Ethics as Grammar: Changing the Postmodern Subject

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# ETHICS AS GRAMMAR



*Changing the  
Postmodern Subject*

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ONE



## WORKING ON ONESELF

*A book is a mirror; if an ape gazes into it, of course no apostle  
looks back out.*

—Lichtenberg

*Working in philosophy . . . is really more a working on oneself.*  
—Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*

There is an oddness to Wittgenstein's corpus that derives from its history. For many years the bulk of its unsorted stacks lay in a steamer trunk under G. E. M. Anscombe's bed. These stacks are indicative of Wittgenstein's perfectionist and labor-intensive editing process (a process which prevented him from publishing anything in his lifetime after the *Tractatus*); they render apt the book title "*Zettel*" (the German word for "scrap of paper")<sup>1</sup> and deprive his later works of any sense of finality—a trait symptomatic of all his posthumously published writings. The closest thing to a "finished" manuscript after 1929 appears to have no more structure than a series of numbered paragraphs. This oddness can tempt us to think of Wittgenstein's later writings as nothing more than an aggregate of stand-alone aphorisms.<sup>2</sup> The carefree stance we are often guilty of taking toward his work assumes that

any remark by his hand merits equal attention for the light it throws on his philosophy; as if his genius were a natural phenomenon which



could not fail to express itself with equal power in all its manifestations. This attitude, however, makes one neglectful of Wittgenstein's own intentions, of the fact that he was actively striving to develop his thought in certain directions, as is made evident by the continual revising and reordering to which he subjected his remarks.<sup>3</sup>

With these words, Lars Hertzberg advises us to be alert to marks of ongoing development in Wittgenstein's thinking as we read the later corpus. I suggest that any development in Wittgenstein's later thought cannot be fully appreciated if his later works are read in isolation from the high point of his early period, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Granted, Wittgenstein's later thought constituted a revolution against the received philosophical paradigm of the early twentieth century. However, the nature of this revolution is widely disputed. I maintain that Wittgenstein's revolution is best told as the story of character transformation and conceptual metamorphosis that assumes one kind of unity between Wittgenstein's early and late works.

The suggestion of unity between the "early" and "later" Wittgenstein is certainly not new. There is enough ambiguity in Wittgenstein's writings for nearly any philosophical position to find a resting place. Yet many who argue for a unity do so either by conceiving it in terms of a conceptual continuity (as if all the later works could be distilled into theses that oppose the earlier *Tractatus* on a common ground) or by trying to assimilate both periods in his thinking under a different rubric altogether. For example, soon after its publication, the *Tractatus* was hailed as the final piece in the logical positivist's jigsaw puzzle. Less famously, Bernard Williams and Norman Malcolm debate the lingering effect of Kantian idealism on Wittgenstein's writing.<sup>4</sup> But there is something very un-Wittgensteinian about all such projects.

Unfortunately, when we look for continuity in Wittgenstein's work we are tempted to look for a theoretical continuity. Thus Williams sees a latent idealism, Malcolm hedges toward realism, James C. Edwards sees Wittgenstein's progressive emancipation from "rationality-as-representation," Fergus Kerr locates Wittgenstein's work in reaction to the myth of the solitary wordless Cartesian ego, and so on.<sup>5</sup> But can any author claim to have uncovered what Wittgenstein is really up to by framing the putative "theory" lying underneath his writings? I suspect that each "discovery" of a supposed central feature of Wittgenstein's thought has the grip it does on each author not because he or she has an objective grasp on Wittgensteinian truths, but because Wittgenstein has a subjective grasp on them as readers; each "dis-

covery" is but a manifestation of their particular "cure." Reading Wittgenstein rightly leads to diverse convictions because maladies differ; each author champions the "Wittgensteinian theory" that most reflects the way that he or she has escaped his or her own fly-bottle. Wittgenstein cannot be subsumed without remainder under any theoretical framework because, as we shall see, the unity his work displays is a narrative rather than a theoretical one.

Rush Rhees is said to have once remarked that the chief work of Wittgenstein's later period, the *Philosophical Investigations*, has the unity of a conversation. Ordinarily, it would not dawn on us to treat a conversation as an exercise in propositional logic. ("Yes, I see that your decision to set the orthodontist appointment for Tuesday follows from your claim that blue is your favorite color and that Siberia may still have snow on the ground.") If asked to "outline" a conversation we would be hard pressed to know what to do. Typically, conversations cannot be reduced to their "essence" without great loss nor can they be fully "explained" apart from simply repeating all the words of the dialogue. We can't even imagine that the topics touched on betray a thematic unity that might be thought to underlie a conversation. Rather, conversations are woven from a cornucopia of topics by speakers who detect ways in which each sentence has bearing upon the others. The only thing that guarantees the continuation of a conversation is the skill of the interlocutors to go on.

This metaphor aptly describes the unity of the entire Wittgensteinian corpus. The linguistic (or narrative) unity of his philosophy is an expression of Wittgenstein's own ability to "go on." Three unresolved tensions in the *Tractatus* foreshadow the direction of his conceptual development. For the remainder of this chapter I will show that his conceptual transformation involved the migration of the human subject to the very center of his attention. Wittgenstein's revolution in philosophy was not simply that he had succeeded in changing the topics of philosophy but that he sought to change its subjects. As Wittgenstein's outlook matured, it became more intentionally ethical—not in the sense of providing an ethical theory, but in the sense that he as philosopher functioned as a moral sage whose therapy assisted the character transformation of concrete human selves.<sup>6</sup>

## MIGRATION OF THE SUBJECT

One of the ways Wittgenstein mystifies contemporary thinkers is that he defies classification within the theoretical space mapped out by Enlightenment



thinkers. Whereas critical thinking seeks objectivity in knowledge, Wittgenstein's postcritical philosophy came to be preoccupied with the unavoidably messy way that particular human subjects are entangled with acts of knowing. Wittgenstein's conceptual journey along these lines was foreshadowed by tensions in the content, style, and "storyline" of the *Tractatus*. These tensions resulted in Wittgenstein's experimentation with pedagogy and ultimately precipitated a clear therapeutic method in philosophy. But the direction that his later philosophy was to take seems very difficult to envision, given the way the *Tractatus* treats human selves as virtually invisible.

### The Invisible Self

There is some ambiguity in speaking of the "migration of the subject" in Wittgenstein's early works, since the *Tractatus* referred to human subjects in two distinct ways. On the one hand, there is the "psychological I," which is the human being, the human body, the human soul with all its psychological attributes.<sup>7</sup> This "I" is the human self whose identity is bound up with the history of a particular community. One outspoken Wittgensteinian commentator, D. Z. Phillips, explains, "As D.Z.P. I am one of a human neighborhood. I am given a name by my neighbors. I cannot ask, 'What is history to me?' My identity is my biography. It is one biography among many."<sup>8</sup> However, at another level, the fact that a person can call the world "my world" (as in TLP 5.62) leads many to assume there must be a metaphysical subject doing the possessing, a subject to whom the "my" refers. This is what Wittgenstein called, on the other hand, the "philosophical I":

5.641     The philosophical I is not the man, not the human body or the human soul of which psychology treats, but the metaphysical subject. . . .

In contrast to the psychological "I," the "philosophical I" has no character, no history, and no neighbors. Wittgenstein explained that the metaphysical subject is as elusive as mercury squeezed between one's fingers.

5.631     If I wrote a book "The world as I found it," I should also have therein to report on my body and say which members obey my will and which do not, etc. This then would be a method of isolating the subject or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject: that is to say, of it alone in this book mention could *not* be made.

- 5.632 The subject does not belong to the world but it is a limit of the world.
- 5.633 *Where in the world is a metaphysical subject to be noted?*

As Phillips correctly points out, the metaphysical subject cannot be a part of the world of experience, as the psychological "I" can be, because it is the putative subject of *all* experience. Even the "mineness" of experience is itself an experience. Therefore, this subject necessarily lies *outside* the world of experience; or better, "it is a limit of the world." Whereas the psychological I is irrelevant to philosophy, the philosophical I appears to be invisible to philosophical scrutiny.

The Tractarian presumption concerning the invisibility of the subject may be seen in the shocking transition seen from statements 5.641 to 6 (Routledge edition):

- 5.641 There is therefore really a sense in which in philosophy we can talk of a non-psychological I.

The I occurs in philosophy through the fact that the "world is my world".

The philosophical I is not the man, not the human body or the human soul of which psychology treats, but the metaphysical subject, the limit—not part of the world.

- 6 The general form of truth-function is:

$[p, \xi, N(\xi)]$ .

This is the general form of a proposition.

In one fell swoop, Wittgenstein jumped from the nature of the self to symbolic logic. How could Wittgenstein tolerate this abrupt change of topics in an otherwise predictably syllogistic argument? Does this constitute a breakdown in the argument? I think Wittgenstein *does* proceed reasonably. If the metaphysical subject is simply an extensionless point coordinated with the world, then it is not worth troubling over; it simply drops out of view. Wittgenstein wanted to discard the subject altogether and even proposed that language dispense with the word "I."<sup>9</sup> In statement 6 Wittgenstein was simply gathering threads from his earlier discussion about the world and the logical form that makes talking about it possible.<sup>10</sup> Discussion about the philosophical self and "its" world reduces to discussion about the world, which, in turn, reduces to discussion about logical form and truth-functions.



The upshot of this tidy analysis is that the early Wittgenstein intentionally tried to minimize any attention paid to his own reader—the concrete human subject who willfully leafs the pages of the *Tractatus*. This conclusion is also supported by the physical structure of the *Tractatus*.

First, no first-person pronoun occurs in any primary statements (those numbered 1, 2, 3 . . . 7) or secondary statements (those numbered to the first decimal place, as in 1.1, 1.2, etc.).<sup>11</sup> The tenor of the logically important propositions is consistently objective, impersonal, and universal in such a way as to imply that concrete human persons are incidental to the discussion.

Second, the presence of first-person pronouns in the elucidatory remarks shows that concrete human selves attract Wittgenstein's reluctant attention only to the extent that their stupidity threatens to blind them to Wittgenstein's views. It is easy to get the impression that if everyone thought as clearly on matters as Wittgenstein himself, he could have trimmed the "ponderous" eighty pages down to seven simple statements, and then again down to just one: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." Yet, the fact that Wittgenstein paid even reluctant attention to his readers foreshadowed the way concrete human subjects were to become his later obsession.

The primacy, here and now, of concrete human persons will be shown in later works by Wittgenstein's explicit attention to unraveling conceptual puzzles that entangle his particular students. But surprisingly, this shift is already anticipated by the concessions he grants to the readers of the *Tractatus*. His use of extra white space is deliberately arranged to assist *readers* to make connections between major logical sections. Thus, for example, he breaks the text this way:

5.5563 . . .

5.557 . . .

[white space]

[four unnumbered lines of text]

[white space]

5.5571 . . .

5.6 . . .

Indeed, the fact that he includes elucidation at all may be an indication of his willingness to compromise the philosophical silence for the benefit of the reader.

Of course, if the only challenge I can muster to a picture of Wittgenstein as one committed to the invisibility of the human subject in the practice of philosophy consists in the appearance of personal pronouns (coupled with judicious use of white space) in the elucidatory remarks aimed at accommodating obtuse readers, then the picture of Wittgenstein that emerges from the *Tractatus* is one of an Enlightenment thinker *par excellence*. To effectively defend my claim that the unity of Wittgenstein's philosophy can be narrated as the migration of the human subject that begins in the *Tractatus*, I must uncover three kinds of tension in the *Tractatus* that only make sense as anticipations of Wittgenstein's later turn to the subject. First is the logical puzzle of the book's conclusion. The second is the tension between the book's content and its style. The third tension arises from the hidden storyline of the *Tractatus*.

### Surmounting the *Tractatus*

First, it is easy to feel cheated when one reaches the conclusion of the *Tractatus*:

- 6.54      My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless. . . .

How does Wittgenstein imagine himself to have defended such a claim? He cannot say, "I have now accurately described the way the world *really* is and therefore you, Oh reader, are compelled to accept the conclusion that based on *this* structure of the world, spelled out in my former propositions, the former propositions themselves are nonsensical!" This is precisely what his teacher Bertrand Russell thought he was up to. During Wittgenstein's doctoral Viva Russell charged that Wittgenstein was inconsistent for claiming to have expressed ineffable truths by means of nonsensical propositions. Wittgenstein's reply is telling: "Don't worry, I know you'll never understand it."<sup>12</sup> Was Wittgenstein's reply an instance of sophomoric arrogance, or was something else going on? Surely Wittgenstein knew that the basis for accepting a set of propositions as senseless can never be the sense of those very propositions. That a proposition lacks sense means precisely this, that its "meaning" cannot enter into its own justification.

Yet when he reached the point in the *Tractatus* where he claimed that everything he has said up to that point was literally *meaningless*, we are tempted to play the part of Anselm's Boso and ask, "What did he mean by



that?" Is this an unfair question? Not if there is another way that ineffable truths can be communicated to us. Wittgenstein claimed that language is coterminous with the world; the limits of language are the limits of the world.<sup>13</sup> If we take him literally for a moment, we must conclude that it makes no sense to *speak* about the limits, because both the boundary and what lies beyond the boundary are off limits to language. And if discursive reasoning is a function of language, then we cannot even "think" the boundary: "for, in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit."<sup>14</sup> Now, there is no problem in the fact that we are invited, even exhorted, to contemplate the world as a limited whole so long as contemplation (*Anschauung*) is linked to feeling (*Gefühl*) rather than thought.<sup>15</sup> But there is a problem in using *language* to make such an offer since the phrases "the world *sub specie aeternitatis*" or "the world as a limited whole" (6.45) are literally "inexpressible" (6.522). All such notions—the limits of the world, *das Mystische*, logical form, God,—are metaphysical terms; to speak them is to speak unintelligibly (*unsinnig*), for they are terms lacking reference (*Bedeutung*).<sup>16</sup> Wittgenstein concluded that correct application of philosophy is the policing of language: sentences must be restricted to those of natural science, while putative metaphysical claims must be debunked. However, the sentences of *Tractatus* belong neither to natural science nor to metaphysics. And for this reason, the *Tractatus* was just as self-stultifying as were the principle of verifiability (which was itself unverifiable) and the principle of falsifiability (which was itself unfalsifiable).

Somewhat surprisingly, Wittgenstein acknowledged this problem but did not confess it as a fault. Why not? Midway through the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein made the distinction between *form* and *content*. Propositions which are false with respect to their content can nevertheless precipitate trustworthy conclusions by virtue of their form.<sup>17</sup> The sentence, "The basketball is green," when, in fact, the basketball is orange, is an example of a sentence that is false with respect to content. However, such a sentence still correctly conveys the fact that basketballs are the sorts of things that are colored. This fact is conveyed by means of the sentence's participation in the logical form of basketballs. Apparently Wittgenstein thought the same possibility holds for *senseless* propositions.<sup>18</sup> The senseless propositions of the *Tractatus*, insofar as they express (*ausdrücken*) logical form, can still direct those who surmount them to see the world rightly.<sup>19</sup>

Thus the escape route taken by Wittgenstein to avoid the inconsistency with which Russell charged him had to do with the ability of language to show what it is unable to say:



4.022 The proposition *shows* its sense.

The proposition *shows* how things stand, *if* it is true. And it says, that they do so stand.

In this way language can possibly communicate the inexpressible. But there is another way to read the *Tractatus* that circumvents self-stultification. This can be best illustrated by a short detour into the literary method of Stanley Fish.

Fish makes a convincing case that a reader-response model of literary criticism can best account for what otherwise might be an embarrassing spot in Plato's *Phaedrus*. Translator Walter Hamilton reminds us that "the *Phaedrus* has sometimes been described as Plato's farewell to literature," largely due to Socrates' explicit conclusion in the final section of the dialogue:

To believe, on the one hand, that a written composition on any subject must be to a large extent the creation of fancy; that nothing worth serious attention has ever been written in prose or verse . . . to believe this, I say, and to let all else go is to be the sort of man, Phaedrus, that you and I might well pray that we may both become.<sup>20</sup>

The problem, of course, is that Socrates' pronouncement against all literature seems to consign the *Phaedrus* itself to the same problematic status. However, Fish argues that the *genre* of *Phaedrus* demands that we look for its unity not in its formal structure, as if *Phaedrus* were a self-contained artifact, but in its coherence as a function of the interplay between the reader and the text. Taking this approach will enable us to see that

Rather than a single sustained argument, the *Phaedrus* is a series of discreet conversations or seminars, each with its own carefully posed question, ensuing discussion, and firmly drawn conclusion, but so arranged that to enter the spirit and assumptions of any one of these self-enclosed units is implicitly to reject the spirit and assumptions of the unit immediately preceding.<sup>21</sup>

Fish is not simply saying that the reader imaginatively enters into the dialogue at the same level as a main character (Phaedrus), so that the growth of his or her knowledge is simply the same incremental, piecemeal path taken by Phaedrus. Rather, the reader stands in a dialectic *with the text as a whole*, something Socrates' student would have been unable to do.

For example, Fish explains that early on the reader is forced to deal with a contradiction of which Socrates and Phaedrus are simply unaware. Phaedrus recounts a speech he heard given by Lysias, which receives Socrates' just criticism for its sloppy structure. However, when Socrates offers a well-crafted substitute, he is forced to criticize his own version for being simply a piece of rhetoric. Fish summarizes: "In other words, Lysias' speech is bad because it is not well put together and Socrates' speech is bad because it is well put together." While the observant reader may detect that the criterion for "good" has changed between these two criticisms, the clever reader will realize as well that the introduction of the new standard "invalidates the very basis on which the whole discussion . . . had hitherto been proceeding."<sup>22</sup> However, the point of this tension in the reader's experience of the text, claims Fish, is to urge the reader not to *go back* and re-evaluate Lysias' speech by the new criterion, but to *go on*:

At that moment, this early section of the dialogue will have achieved its true purpose, which is, paradoxically, to bring the reader to the point where he [or she] is no longer interested in the issues it treats—no longer interested because he [or she] has come to see that the real issues exist at a higher level of generality. Thus, in a way peculiar to dialectical form and experience, this space of prose and argument will have been the vehicle of its own abandonment.<sup>23</sup>

Fish's analysis of *Phaedrus* illustrates the difference between showing and saying that we have already encountered in Wittgenstein. Claiming that a text shows what it cannot say is an allusion to the performative nature of language. As the ordinary language philosopher John L. Austin put it, the written text becomes a speech-act whose felicity depends, in part, on the uptake by its readers.<sup>24</sup> To be sure, there are issues such as the reader's eyesight, intelligence, and literacy that affect uptake. But the reader's "vision"—the reader's penchant for seeing some aspects rather than others—plays a central role in his or her ability to "get it." The genius of Plato, as expressed in the pages of *Phaedrus*, is shown by the way he utilized the reader-text dialectic to shape the manner in which the reader perceives. The *Phaedrus* is not processing an argument but transforming the reader's vision.

Further, in order to transform the reader's vision effectively, the dialectic which exists between reader and the-text-as-a-whole must initially engage the reader at his or her particular point of departure. "Going on" from here is not a simple matter of the reader systematically abandoning



“false” beliefs and embracing “true” ones, but a matter of transcending the conflict between rival beliefs by seeing matters in a deeper way. But this means that if the dialectic is successful, then, as the reader’s outlook is changed, he or she will reach the end of a section of a dialogue and discard it as “elementary.”

To read the *Phaedrus*, then, is to use it up; for the value of any point in it is that it gets you (not any sustained argument) to the next point, which is not so much a point (in logical-demonstrative terms) as a level of insight. It is thus a self-consuming artifact, a mimetic enactment in the reader’s experience of the Platonic ladder in which each rung, as it is negotiated, is kicked away.<sup>25</sup>

The question remains, “To what extent does the *Tractatus* function as a self-consuming artifact?” Wittgenstein appears to answer this question in an uncharacteristically straightforward manner.

- 6.54      My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)  
*He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly.*<sup>26</sup>

Yet we must also ask how much Wittgenstein thinks that the enlightening power of the *Tractatus* is wrapped up in its *structure*. In other words, is the “ladder” suitable for climbing because of its logical structure or, rather, because its “point” can only be gotten by the reader whose outlook has been transformed via engaging the text-as-a-whole, dialectically in the manner described by Fish? As evidence of the former, we can point to the meticulous attention Wittgenstein paid to the logical rigor of the primary propositions, each predicate becoming the subject of the following statement, and so on. However, there is at least one compelling reason for rejecting this option.

Gottlob Frege, who possessed one of the brightest logical minds of Wittgenstein’s day, was judged by Wittgenstein to have entirely misunderstood the *Tractatus*. In a letter written to Russell dated August 1919 Wittgenstein confided that “I gather that he [Frege] doesn’t understand a word of it all.”<sup>27</sup> How can this be? Perhaps we have here a clue that a dialectical reading is more important to correct exegesis than attention to the logical



structure of the *Tractatus*. For surely Frege could have followed the logical machinations of the *Tractatus* as well as, or better than, anyone.

Frege has been credited with the removal of the human subject from philosophy of language by discarding John Locke's "idea"-idea as mere psychologism.<sup>28</sup> Locke had suggested that objects and events gave rise to ideas in our mind. We then subsequently affix labels to these ideas in the form of speech. The upshot of the Lockean scheme is the impossibility of a public measurement of the correspondence between a speaker's ideas and words, for only the speaker has unmediated access to his or her own ideas. But in consequence of Frege's suggestion, modern philosophers of language no longer troubled with the middle term of the "word—idea—world" chain but purported, instead, to do philosophy of language "objectively," by considering only the relation between *public* sentences and *public* states of affairs.

In telling correspondence with Wittgenstein, Frege claimed that Tractarian statements 1 and 2 had identical meanings. Wittgenstein responded, "The sense of both propositions is one and the same, but not the ideas that I associated with them when I wrote them."<sup>29</sup> By the words, "when I wrote them," Wittgenstein may have been trying to draw attention to the stance a given reader takes toward the text and the fact that any such stance could (as his notebooks show to be true in his own case), and ought to, change. Wittgenstein felt it absolutely necessary to get past the propositions of the *Tractatus* as he himself had done. Only by doing so might one see the world rightly.<sup>30</sup> The use of the adverb "rightly" (*richtig*) here to modify the verb "to see" (*sehen*) was deliberate: Wittgenstein's aim was that the reader attain a correct *manner* of viewing rather than secure a correct picture of reality, because, as he would summarize some years later, "the search says more than the discovery."<sup>31</sup>

It should not be surprising, on this account, that Frege, who tried to engage the text on purely objective terms, was bound to miss the point. And it is likewise not surprising that Wittgenstein himself should go beyond the *Tractatus* in search of a more fitting pedagogy.

## Content vs. Style

If we accept Wittgenstein's distinction between showing and saying, then we can get past the question of whether the *Tractatus* is self-consistent in what it *says* in order to address the second, deeper tension in the *Tractatus*: Does what the text *show* fit its manner of expression?

Imagine leafing through a philosophy journal which contains an article arguing that the "real" meaning of some particular poem can be stated by proposition X. Imagine further that the argument offered by this author analyzes the poem, line by line, reducing each line to symbolic logic. Once the symbolization is complete the author applies the appropriate logical calculus, retranslates the symbolic logic into propositional form, and "Presto!" the logically validated conclusion is miraculously identical to the author's thesis. Frankly, we wouldn't know what to make of such an article. The genre in which the poem is discussed is so distant from poetry that we would be justified in wondering, not merely whether the author is reading this particular poem rightly, but whether the author knows what it means to read poetry at all. This illustration shows the way genre and style must "fit" the message if the text is not to be self-defeating. Lawrence Hinman puts it in the strongest terms:

what one is saying sets the limits of valid philosophical discourse. A philosophical style is wrong when it naively steps outside the limits which are being established by what is being said, i.e., when the pre-suppositions of a certain mode of speaking contradict what is being said.<sup>32</sup>

Are the style and genre of the *Tractatus* "wrong"? Wittgenstein certainly chose his style deliberately. Fearing the readers might miss the logical scaffolding of the text (by reading it as a uni-dimensional treatise), Wittgenstein refused to have the *Tractatus* published in stages (as one potential publisher offered<sup>33</sup>) and also refused to omit the decimals.<sup>34</sup> Only in its final form did Wittgenstein think that the *Tractatus* counted as both philosophy and the sort of literature that in its artform could show what could not be said, namely, the relation of language to the world.<sup>35</sup> Wittgenstein had already grasped the intrinsic difficulty of using language to say how language relates to the world (a "discovery" sometimes attributed to the Wittgenstein's "later" philosophy), since there is no way to transcend language to speak about it. The naive realist claims that language "pictures" the world but is then hard-pressed to produce a criterion by which the putative correspondence between a proposition and a state of affairs can be measured. (Where could one stand to make such a call? And with what language might *this* be expressed?) Thinkers from Bertrand Russell (Wittgenstein's mentor at Cambridge) to Polish logician Alfred Tarski have typically answered this objection by positing a higher order language (what Tarski calls *metalanguage*) comprised



of words like 'represent' and 'correspond' in order to refer to the relationship between "lower-order language" and "the world." But, of course, it is always fair to ask for the criteria against which metalanguage can be checked for correct employment. Thus an infinite regress.

Wittgenstein avoided the problem of correspondence altogether. He began with the claim that there is no way to utilize language to describe the extra-linguistic means by which it corresponds with states of affairs.

- 4.12        Propositions can represent the whole reality but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to represent it—the logical form.

To be able to represent the logical form, we should have to be able to put ourselves with the propositions outside of logic, that is outside the world.

- 4.121        . . .  
The propositions *show* the logical form of reality.  
They exhibit it.

Granted, Wittgenstein assumed that language models or "pictures" the world, but of greater interest to him was how this picturing works.<sup>36</sup> He reasoned that the way pictures represent is by holding something in common with what is pictured. Both the picture and the pictured have the same "form." For example, the form that a photograph shares with the room it depicts includes things like spatial relations (e.g., "to the right of") and color relations (e.g., "is bluer than"). For Wittgenstein, "form" connoted the entire logical space that a state of affairs embodies. The logical form marks the boundaries of the world, that is, of the limits of all logically possible arrangements. To the extent that language pictures the world, it too shares this form. Thus, the only correspondence worth troubling about is the correspondence between the form of the world and the syntax of language. Here it would be better to say that the "correspondence" of language to the world is the co-participation of language and world in logical form. This is why Wittgenstein could write that for all sensible propositions, "the propositions '*p*' and '*~p*' have opposite senses, but to them corresponds one and the same reality."<sup>37</sup>

So then, in Wittgenstein's thinking, "reality" or "the world" encompasses all possible cases, and this world is bounded by logical form.

- 5.61        Logic fills the world: the limits of the world are also its limits.



However, since language also embodies this form, we cannot say what logically we cannot think.<sup>38</sup> The difficulty that faced Wittgenstein became apparent in his realization that if "form" is the means by which representation occurs, then form itself cannot be represented, pictured, or spoken. But by the same token, how can he claim to know it and even be so presumptuous as to give it a name? Again the distinction between showing and saying comes to the rescue.

In Wittgenstein's early view, we perceive form directly without the mediation supplied by language. To put the point differently, if we grasp a proposition (or a photograph) *as a picture*, rather than as an artifact, we have *already* grasped its form. We would not know what to make of a person who said, "Yes, I see that is a picture of Mt. Rainier, but how do I know the form is the same in both cases if I can't spell it out?" Form is not elusive for being unsayable but is everywhere immediately present to us in each recognition of a picture *as a picture*.

Wittgenstein hoped that for all its literally nonsensical propositions about unsayable things, the *Tractatus* shows what cannot be *said*. If the *Tractatus* is a picture, it must already embody in its crystalline structure the form of the world. Hinman describes it this way:

Thus the grammatical simplicity of the main propositions in the *Tractatus*, the orderliness of the presentation, the way in which certain propositions stand out as fundamental and others are given as derivative, and the very finality that characterized Wittgenstein's pronouncements are all aspects of his style which seem to reflect the basic claims about the relationship between language and the world developed in the *Tractatus*.<sup>39</sup>

The logical structure of the *Tractatus*, which constitutes, in part, its genre, succeeds in showing the logical scaffolding of the world. Yet, in the midst of this showing, as Frege complained, the theses appear to lack adequate support.<sup>40</sup> This, of course, anticipates Wittgenstein's later claim that if there were such things as theses in philosophy, they would be self-evident.<sup>41</sup> But in the *Tractatus*, this lack shows something that is of the greatest importance to Wittgenstein. Seen in all its logical relief, the seven theses of the *Tractatus* display the limits of language.

Wittgenstein's style in the *Tractatus* is dictated by two considerations: on the one hand, the ultimately simple and univocal character of the

relation between language and the world means that that which shows itself here can indeed show itself once for all in its fundamental form; on the other hand, the fact that saying must be replaced by letting something show itself means that language in this context must almost have the terseness of a gesture.<sup>42</sup>

So far, so good. Once Wittgenstein began to think in terms of the human capacity to perceive form directly, the focal point of philosophy also began to change for him. Increasingly, the big question of philosophy of language was not whether the correspondence between language and world could be demonstrated in some subject-neutral way, but whether we as human speakers were skilled enough to recognize the limits of language. Thus, the first two tensions in the *Tractatus* can be understood as anticipating Wittgenstein's turn to the subject. The third tension that undermines the apparent Tractarian message that human subjects are incidental to philosophy is the fact that the style of the *Tractatus* also displays the narrative shape of Wittgenstein's own conceptual journey. This tension became unbearable for Wittgenstein and ultimately drove him to return to academia after his premature "retirement" from philosophy.<sup>43</sup>

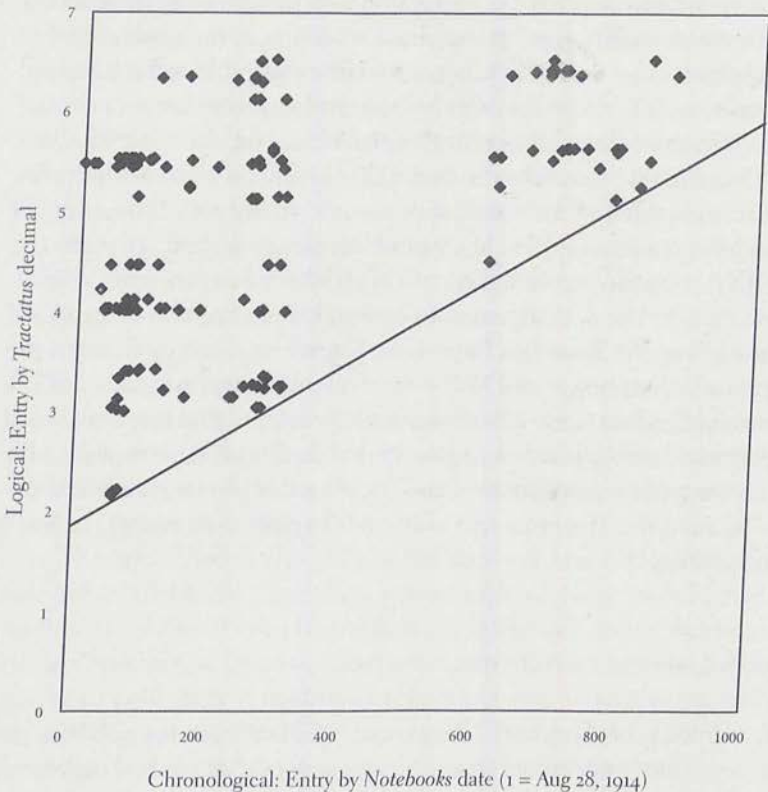
### The Storyline of the *Tractatus*

In a letter to Ludwig von Ficker, probably written in November 1919, Wittgenstein explained that the *Tractatus* contained "that which really occurred to me—and how it occurred to me."<sup>44</sup> At face value this may only mean that Wittgenstein claimed these thoughts as his own. But it also may be an allusion to the fact that the "logical" progression of the *Tractatus* was roughly an autobiographical one. We can discover the relation between the logical progression of the *Tractatus* and the chronological progression of his sourcebook for the *Tractatus*, the *Notebooks* 1914–1916, by mapping the decimal number of each Tractarian statement against the date of the parallel entry in the *Notebooks*: statement 2.17 corresponds with the entry for October 20, 1914, statement 3.001 with that of November 1, 1914, and so forth.<sup>45</sup> What we find is expressed by the figure that follows.

There are two striking features of the distribution. First is the 198-day gap in entries between June 22, 1915, and April 15, 1916.<sup>46</sup> Second, despite this gap, the development of Wittgenstein's thought during the entire period is expressed by the straight line that diagonally bisects the graph. I am not suggesting that this correlation is proof positive of an explicit historical development in Wittgenstein's thinking. The correlation itself may reflect



Chronological-Lölogical Correlation: *Notebooks* 1914–1916 and *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*



nothing more profound than that Wittgenstein simply stopped thinking about each Tractarian thesis once he had gotten it down on paper. Rather, I am suggesting that the figure illustrates the possibility of an intrinsic relationship between his life story and the logical structure of the *Tractatus*. On this view, Wittgenstein's own life reflected what the *Tractatus* advocates; as his thinking advanced in time he systematically discarded each "rung" of the ladder he had constructed. In other words, the *Tractatus* chronicles Wittgenstein's own conceptual transformation en route to the ineffable realm of *das Mystische*. His decade-long hiatus from philosophy after writing the *Tractatus* is evidence that he had surmounted the entire ladder. This surprising result reveals that the *Tractatus*, despite its austere, objective, and totalizing logical structure, nevertheless contains a hidden map of Wittgenstein's own life. Far from being marginalized, the philosophizing subject—namely Ludwig Wittgenstein—is at the very heart of the *Tractatus*. 1



What can be concluded from these data? First, if my suggestion is correct, Wittgenstein's explicitly dismissive attitude toward human subjects engaged in philosophy stands in lasting tension with the autobiographical flow of the *Tractatus* itself, a tension that draws attention to the possibility that human subjects such as Wittgenstein could undergo profound conceptual transformation. The hope for such transformation was to become central to his rapidly maturing philosophical outlook. Second, the overt structure of the *Tractatus*—as shown by the decimals—barely conceals the narrative structure embedded in the elucidative remarks of the text. If the unity of the *Tractatus* is neither logical nor topical but *narrative*, then, *a fortiori*, the unity of Wittgenstein's early and later works is likewise the unity of Wittgenstein's own life. Third, Wittgenstein wrote in his preface that he expected only readers of the *Tractatus* "who have themselves already thought the thoughts which are expressed in it—or similar thoughts" would be able to understand the *Tractatus*. Therefore, if the *Tractatus* contains a record of Wittgenstein's own journey toward the ethical (and other aspects of *das Mystische* expressed by propositions 6 and 7), then it is possible—even preferable—to read the *Tractatus* as a manual for assisting its readers to make similar journeys.<sup>47</sup>

## PLAYING WITH PEDAGOGY

I have spilled a lot of ink correlating tensions in the *Tractatus* with Wittgenstein's own early conceptual journey. Wittgenstein's later period began with an experiment in a pedagogical style that, in effect, inverted the priority of the *Tractatus*'s logical structure: the formerly insignificant elucidations became the chief means in dissolving philosophical puzzles, while the formerly paramount philosophical theses come to be exposed as language-gone haywire. This can be seen very clearly in his "Lecture on Ethics" (1929), *Philosophical Remarks* (ca. 1930), and "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough" (begun in 1931). But perhaps the most important work for seeing his changing style is the so-called *Big Typescript* (1932–34).

The historical context of the *Big Typescript* is far different from that of the *Tractatus*. The latter was drafted in the isolated and austere mountains of Norway and then pieced together while Wittgenstein was on the Russian front. During this period, Wittgenstein was joined to the greater academic community only by an occasional letter. In contrast, the *Big Typescript*—the bulk of which has been recently published in English as the *Philosophical Grammar*—was constructed after Wittgenstein had returned to

philosophy from a decade hiatus and deeply ensconced himself in Cambridge academic life, having honed his pedagogical skills on two years of live classroom lectures. The aroma of "lecture" permeates the *Big Type-script* and gives it more the look and feel of an introductory textbook than any of the rest of Wittgenstein's writings. Wittgenstein himself admitted as much in a marginal note uncovered by Rush Rhees: "My book might be called: *Philosophical Grammar*. This title would no doubt have the smell of a textbook title but that doesn't matter for behind it there is the book."<sup>48</sup>

Among those features that contribute to the "textbook smell" is the attention paid directly to the reader-as-pupil. As in his Cambridge lectures, Wittgenstein does all the talking. The reader is treated as a merely passive recipient of information. However, that the reader is included in the frequent "we" and "us" that litter the pages is a notable departure from the terse gestures of the *Tractatus*. The *Philosophical Grammar* does not quite fit the dialogical genre of the later works (for instance, the *Investigations*), nor does it match the autobiographical musings of the *Philosophical Remarks*. Rather, the genre of *Philosophical Grammar* might more appropriately be labeled "transcribed lecture."

The organization also adds to the textbook feel of the *Philosophical Grammar*. Unlike the *Tractatus*, whose table of contents (had one been written) would have been identical to the book itself, the table of contents in the *Philosophical Grammar* does not summarize an argument but, rather, displays a collection of landmarks reminding one of the journey taken, or anticipating one to be taken, by the reader.<sup>49</sup> In this way, the *Philosophical Grammar* is organized "geographically" and the table of contents serves as its roadmap or guide book. However, the quest Wittgenstein imagined for his reader differs from the sort of transformation Wittgenstein will later seek for readers of the *Investigations*. For one thing, the starting points of the journey—those confusions that are bewitching the mind of the reader of the *Philosophical Grammar*—as well as the endpoints for each stage along the way are fixed by Wittgenstein in advance. This is why the *Philosophical Grammar* does not "live" like the later dialogical *Investigations*; the *Philosophical Grammar* can only engage a reader who fits Wittgenstein's stereotype of "the confused pupil." Perhaps this is also why he never was satisfied sufficiently with the manuscript to publish it: since the route was so clearly mapped out for the student in advance, the book smacks of being governed by the very sort of theoretical agenda that Wittgenstein was trying to repudiate.

Imagine that a former reader of the *Tractatus* picks up the *Philosophical Grammar* and, thumbing through it, pauses to read the conclusion to



Part I, Section III: "What interests *us* in the sign, the meaning which matters for us is what is embodied in the grammar of the sign." What Wittgenstein is talking about is ambiguous. This is because only an insider—one of the "us"—can properly decode the message. This is but one example of his new pedagogy: the summary statements at the end of each section of the *Philosophical Grammar* are not conclusions of arguments. If they were, anyone could get an inkling of their sense and take the further trouble to read the entire section only if he or she wanted to follow the justification of the position that the conclusion summarized. But the remarks which terminate a given section of the *Philosophical Grammar* do not function as the conclusion of an argument (let alone as a self-evident truism). Rather, they function as a quiz to test the student's clarity of thought at just this stage of his or her intellectual journey. As such, they are never final destinations, but rather temporary docking points that signal the completion only of a particular leg of a longer journey to be continued by engaging following sections. Thus what look like philosophical theses in the *Philosophical Grammar* are not, because they are not universally accessible.

While the conclusions are not universally accessible, Wittgenstein does seem to begin the book with a particularly afflicted student in mind. For students of philosophy since Frege have been carefully schooled to believe, mistakenly, that "understanding" (whatever *that* is) is separable from "language":

- §1        How can one talk about "understanding" and "not understanding" a proposition? Surely it is not a proposition until it's understood? . . .
- §2        We regard understanding as the essential thing, and signs as something inessential. . . .

The uninitiated reader is likely to answer the question of §1, "Surely it is not a proposition until it's understood?" in the affirmative, that is, as a restatement of Frege's view that a sentence achieves the status of "proposition" if and only if there can be correlated to it something called its "meaning." To such a person, §1 might also suggest that the technical term "proposition" be reserved for each string of words that possesses a correlative meaning. But surprisingly, and on the contrary, §1 expresses a *double entendre* foreshadowing where Wittgenstein wanted to take the reader. He was interested not in delineating the logical status of propositions (as he was in the *Tractatus*) but in clarifying the notion we commonly call "understanding." He plans to move the student from Frege's mistaken view to his



own view that "understanding" is inextricably bound up with the *use* of language.

After this intentionally duplicitous start, Wittgenstein parades a series of illustrations and questions before the reader to nudge him or her from the received account of understanding as "seeing" to Wittgenstein's own account of understanding as that which is embodied in one's use of language. Consider the following progression of quotations (see p. 32) from the opening pages of the *Philosophical Grammar* coupled with descriptions of the reader's evolving conception of "understanding."

In a scant eight pages of text, the concept of "understanding" has metamorphosed several times. First, the notion of "mental seeing" changed to something like "translation" and then again to a concept so fluid it defies definition. Wittgenstein then drew attention to the behavioral component of understanding, and, by linking understanding with the ability to answer questions like "What does this sentence say?" he suggested that readers provisionally consider understanding as some type of *precondition* to application. Finally, Wittgenstein guided his readers to take the now manageable step to embrace his conclusion that understanding is best thought of as the actual application of language.

The ambiguity with which Wittgenstein began the *Philosophical Grammar* was central to his developing pedagogical method. First, the initial paragraph was deliberately open to a misreading which his following parade of remarks systematically untangled. Second, the fact that the opening sentence was vulnerable to contrary literal readings *showed* the point he tried to make explicit: to possess understanding is to possess the skill necessary for using a string of words according to a range of grammatically allowable combinations within a given context. Third, it served as a reminder of the lesson learned. Having read it once, the student who goes back to review sees something entirely different from the uninitiated person who reads it for the first time. The answer to "Surely it is not a proposition until it is understood?" (§1) is still "Yes," but the tutored student now realizes that the reason this is so is because "understanding the meaning" is bound up with the proposition (i.e., its use) and not separable from it, as initially presupposed.

The pedagogical style that the opening pages illustrate is consistently maintained throughout the *Philosophical Grammar*. To repeat, of all of Wittgenstein's writings, this one most resembles a textbook. The table of contents is not an analytical outline showing the logical relation of parts. The logical relations within §1 and between §1 and §2, as well as those between Section I and Section II, and again between Part I and Part II, are not

"... Understanding would be something like seeing a picture. . . ." (§2)

"In certain of their applications the words 'understand', 'mean' refer to a psychological reaction while hearing, reading, uttering etc. a sentence. In that case understanding is the phenomenon that occurs when I hear a sentence in a familiar language. . . ." (§3)

"Understanding a sentence is more akin to understanding a piece of music than one might think." (§4)

"How curious: we should like to explain that understanding of a gesture as a translation into words, and the understanding of words as a translation into gestures." (§5)

"Do we understand Christian Morgenstern's poems, or Lewis Carroll's poem 'Jabberwocky'? In these cases it's very clear that the concept of understanding is a fluid one." (§5)

"To understand a sentence can mean...to be able to answer the question 'what does this sentence say?'" (§6)

"We speak of the understanding of a sentence as a condition of being able to apply it. We say "I cannot obey an order if I do not understand it".... (§8)

"'Understanding a word' may mean: *knowing* how it is used; *being able* to apply it." (§10)

"When someone interprets, or understands, a sign in one sense or another, what he is doing is taking a step in a calculus (like a calculation). What he *does* is roughly what he does if he gives expression to his interpretation." (§13)

- *(the assumed starting position of reader: understanding-as-mental-sight)*
- *understanding is taken to be a mental event but, importantly, a mental event which accompanies the activities of using language.*
- *understanding-as-hearing. What is required to achieve understanding may not be insight but a trained ear or skillful hearing.*
- *understanding as familiarity with the connection between words and gestures.*
- *understanding as a fluid concept; what understanding amounts to depends upon each context in which language is used.*
- *understanding as possessing a behavioral component (e.g., to give a verbal response in answer to a question)*
- *understanding as a precondition to the application of language.*
- *understanding as the skill of knowing how to apply language.*
- *understanding is identified with the actual application of language.*



self-supporting. Rather, the firmness of these logical connections is supplied by the incrementally enlightened mind of the reader. As a result, the table of contents is an assemblage of reminders—sometimes phrases, sometimes whole sentences—of the lessons to be learned in the reading of the whole.

In this way, the *Philosophical Grammar* is a “self-consuming artifact” in a different, though related, sense from that used by Fish: the *Philosophical Grammar* consumes not itself, but the human selves that move through the volume. The reading of the *Philosophical Grammar* presupposes at every point that the reader has reached a certain level of conceptual clarity requisite for the next pericope. For example, Section II of Part I asks, “Can what the rules of grammar say about a word be described in another way by describing the process which takes place when understanding occurs?”<sup>50</sup> This sentence only makes sense to someone who conceives understanding in terms of the rules of grammar and is not in danger of slipping back into the sort of mentalism that was discarded in the reading of §§1–13. An uninitiated reader cannot simply dive into a middle section and “follow the argument.” This is not because the argument is untenable or unclear, but because participation requires a reader of a certain sort—one who has been acclimated to the discussion by the entire sequence of discussion which precedes a given section.

The pedagogical style of the *Philosophical Grammar* makes it very demanding reading. Its structure is hierarchical rather than logical: numbered paragraphs are rungs of a ladder scaling a section; sections are rungs on a ladder scaling a part; and each part is a rung on a ladder which scales the whole. The ladder metaphor is, of course, borrowed from the *Tractatus*. However, in the *Tractatus* the point of the metaphor was to urge readers to discard the ladder once a certain conceptual elevation had been attained, namely, a God’s-eye view (*sub specie aeternitatis*). In contrast, here the point is in the climbing.

Climbing is strenuous, and one gets the feeling that Wittgenstein expected as much from his reader as he did from those live bodies who struggled along during his half-day lectures. One of his students reminisced:

Usually at the beginning of the year Wittgenstein would warn us that we would find his lectures unsatisfactory, that he would go on talking like this for hours and hours and we would get very little out of it. Plainly he was sensitive to the sort of audience he had. He wanted a small group of people who, knowing what was in store for them, were prepared to put in a full strenuous year with him learning philosophy. Visitors, even distinguished visitors, who wanted to attend a few lectures



to "find out what sort of thing Wittgenstein is doing" were not welcome, but anyone was welcome who seriously wanted to learn [to do] *philosophy* (and not just to hear Wittgenstein). And, if we worked hard, Wittgenstein worked tremendously hard.<sup>51</sup>

Wittgenstein's emerging pedagogical style displayed in the *Big Typescript* betrayed the fact that he had shifted his attention in philosophy from striving after a view of the world *sub specie aeternitatis* to striving after an alteration of the sensibilities of concrete human beings.

So far, I have tried to show that the movement of the subject from the periphery to the center of Wittgenstein's philosophical vision is shown initially by tensions internal to the 1922 publication, the *Tractatus*, and more fully in his experimentation with pedagogical style after 1929. The shift in style shows that the point of doing philosophy had changed for Wittgenstein: "A present-day teacher of philosophy doesn't select food for his pupil with the aim of flattering his taste but with the aim of changing it."<sup>52</sup> The goal of doing philosophy is not to produce a literary artifact replete with timeless truths but to clear up confusions in others' minds. In 1933 he wrote "philosophy ought to be written only as poetic composition."<sup>53</sup> Although Wittgenstein was never satisfied that his work ever attained this level of artistry, nevertheless, his work does make the same sorts of demands on a reader that proper reading of poetry does. Readers have to approach his writings deliberately and creatively, with the commitment to invest time and attention to nuance and subtle detail. At times one's investment seems fruitless. But as Wittgenstein once commented to Drury, "Philosophy is like trying to open a safe with a combination lock. Each little adjustment of the many dials seems to achieve nothing, only when all is in place does the door open."<sup>54</sup>

Evidently Wittgenstein felt justified in placing large demands on his would-be students precisely because of the way he came to conceive philosophy. Students during the Michaelmas Term 1930 quoted Wittgenstein as saying: "The nimbus of philosophy has been lost. For now we have a method of doing philosophy, and can speak of *skillful* philosophers."<sup>55</sup> Wittgenstein did not have a philosophical theory. Rather, he proposed a *method* by which conceptual confusions in the minds of concrete subjects might be dissolved. Philosophy becomes, in short, a kind of conceptual "therapy."<sup>56</sup>

Wittgenstein felt that he had reached a "real resting place" in his conception of philosophy as therapy.<sup>57</sup> When philosophy is deemed "good," the term is not a stamp of approval on a book's argument but an adjective that

praises the skill of the therapist who helps others clarify their cloudy thinking. However, Wittgenstein grew uneasy with the textbook feel of these first attempts at therapeutic philosophy. What emerges in Wittgenstein's most mature works might be called *aporetic philosophy*. In these works we see Wittgenstein's true genius displayed. Rather than creating more textbooks to serve as self-help manuals for students beset by a particular set of confusions, in the later works Wittgenstein reproduced conversations he had had with himself that, because of their aporetic character, engage readers who suffer from a wide range of befuddlements.

### CHANGING THE SUBJECT

The development of Wittgenstein's later thinking is partially obscured by the nature of his posthumously published works. In nearly every case, each volume was originally conceived as notes for lectures given during his tenure at Cambridge. The trouble with lecture notes, of course, is that as the years pass a teacher is constantly having to begin at the beginning with a new, which is to say uninitiated, batch of pupils. For this reason, any progress Wittgenstein himself made in cracking problems that were as "hard as granite" would be lost on new students until they had first worked through easy problems en route to grappling with the more difficult ones.<sup>58</sup> Of course, there can never be enough time in the course of even a bright student's tenure to catch up with the likes of Wittgenstein. Because of this distance, the lectures, even those he dictated, were for Wittgenstein the pedagogical equivalents of middle axioms, comments that were tailored to nudge a particular group of students along but for whom the step to conceptual clarity was too great to be made all at once. Therefore, these comments may be at times poor reflections of Wittgenstein's own thoughts. We are thus amiss to read the *Blue and Brown Books*, or the *Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* as transcriptions of Wittgenstein's mature thinking. As he explained to Russell, he dictated the notes known as the *Blue and Brown Books* so that *his students*, not the rest of the world's readers, would have something to take home in their hands.<sup>59</sup> In fact, Drury reports that Wittgenstein feared that student notes might be published as a record of his considered opinions (such as was done in the case of *Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*).<sup>60</sup>

I am not suggesting that Wittgenstein thought that publishing a philosophical book was impossible. Rather, he thought that it must be a work of



genius. Only §§1–188 of the *Philosophical Investigations* came close to meeting Wittgenstein's own rigorous standards.<sup>61</sup> The distinguishing mark of the *Investigations* is its genre. Gone is the severe architectonic of the *Tractatus* and in its place is a string of numbered paragraphs that cannot even be summarized by a table of contents (as per *Philosophical Grammar*). The invisibility of an explicit organizing principle and the apparent lack of thematic unity give the *Investigations* the appearance of randomness — as if each pericope were a stand-alone aphorism or thought-for-the-day journal entry. However, Wittgenstein deliberately crafted the *Investigations* and regretted that its style in particular had become for him a source of vanity.<sup>62</sup> What was this style and why was it brilliant?

First, in a manner far more explicit than that found in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein's later style displays the *narrative*, or *autobiographical*, unity of the work. When Wittgenstein compiled the *Investigations* from his journal entries, he took great pains to preserve the diary-like quality of the text. He knew that his notebooks were not simply a compendium of isolated proverbs. Rather, his entries were the unified expression of his own story, his own "journey" to conceptual clarity; they were, so to speak, his own *Confessions*.

→ Wittgenstein was quite taken by Augustine's *Confessions*. Drury reported that he knew his way around the Latin text well enough to find favorite passages quickly.<sup>63</sup> Even the casual reader must acknowledge that the *Confessions* is not a theological treatise but an autobiographical account of the path taken by one who *came to be* "made gentle by [God's] books" and whose "wounds had been treated by [God's] soothing fingers."<sup>64</sup> But whereas Augustine's *Confessions* are retrospective musings after the fact of his character transformation, the *Investigations* is a record of conversations Wittgenstein had with himself in the course of his struggle toward character transformation. Only the transformation of character readied one for the search for truth, because character alone was the lens that could concentrate whatever light was available into a single "burning point."<sup>65</sup> Wittgenstein viewed character as the courageous and self-denying manner in which a person faced truth with practiced regularity:

No one *can* speak the truth; if he has still not mastered himself. He *cannot* speak it; — but not because he is not clever enough yet.

The truth can be spoken only by someone who is already *at home* in it; not by someone who still lives in falsehood and reaches out from falsehood towards truth on just one occasion.<sup>66</sup>



The quest for character, therefore, was for Wittgenstein a passionate quest for a certain kind of life. Quoting Lessing with great emphasis, Wittgenstein remarked to Drury:

If God held closed in his right hand All truth, and in his left the single and untiring striving after truth, adding even that I always and forever make mistakes, and said to me: Choose!", I should fall humbly before his left hand and say: "Father grant me! the pure truth is for you alone."<sup>67</sup>

Wittgenstein acknowledged the unending nature of his struggle when he admitted that "My thinking, like everyone's, has sticking to it the shriveled remains of my earlier (withered) ideas."<sup>68</sup> The fact that Wittgenstein was aware of his own conceptual transformation, one which was both progressive and yet ever incomplete, gives the *Investigations* an open-ended texture. As we shall see, the *Investigations* was more than simply autobiographical. Clearly, the sense of progress one gets by moving from page to page through the text is not a property of the text *qua* text, as if the *Investigations* were organized topically or logically or chronologically. But it is also more than a record of Wittgenstein's journey. Rather, the sense of progress involves the self-awareness that I, as a reader, am also having my way of seeing re-tooled and thus I am coming to conceive the world differently; the progress is *my own* conceptual transformation. Only to the extent that the *Investigations* maps out my journey will I be able to see its narrative unity.

Second, Wittgenstein's style is explicitly *dialogical*. Jane Heal argues that if the typical aim of philosophy is to construct firmer positions on life's most important questions by means of discursive rationality, then Wittgenstein's choice of a dialogical genre is self-defeating.<sup>69</sup> It has been suggested that Wittgenstein's deliberate obscurity was intended to overturn "philosophy as discursive reasoning" in favor of insight gained some other way (perhaps by means of poetry or mysticism).<sup>70</sup> As we have seen, there is more than a hint of this strategy in the *Tractatus*. But Heal rightly notes that this alternative simply sets up a dichotomy between insight gained discursively and insight gained in other ways. In fact, the later Wittgenstein is challenging this dichotomy altogether; clarity in thinking is achieved not by a passive flash of insight (whatever that might mean), but by active participation of the human subject in both practical and theoretical activity.<sup>71</sup> Heal concludes that

the dialogical form is particularly appropriate for Wittgenstein not just because it is lively and gets the reader engaged but because of something about the content of 'the message' he is trying to get across, or, better, something about the nature of the state which is the hoped-for upshot of an attentive and sympathetic reading.<sup>72</sup>

In other words, it is of no use to discuss *general* types of insight when the only species of understanding is that which is possessed by this or that human subject under this or that set of conditions. Wittgenstein is not trying to construct a stand-alone argument in the *Investigations*. Rather, he is trying to cultivate a skill (conceptual clarity) in his readers. While he bemoans that he lacks the sort of artistic genius that can coerce one to see a work of art in the right perspective, his strategy is no less brilliant.<sup>73</sup> He parades past the readers a seemingly endless series of paragraphs (which, at best, bear a family resemblance) and a battalion of 784 questions with only 110 answers, 70 of which are intentionally wrong!<sup>73</sup> Although no text can guarantee that it will succeed in teaching its reader how to think rightly—and surely there is a bewildering variety of opinions as to what the later Wittgenstein was up to—nevertheless, one thing is certain: the attentive reader must *struggle* if he or she is to read Wittgenstein rightly.

The point of philosophy for Wittgenstein, then, is not the conclusion of an argument, but the struggle itself. As Stanley Cavell aptly quips,

[Wittgenstein's] philosophy is interested in questions in its own way—call it a way in which the answer is not in the future but in the way the future is approached, or seen to be unapproachable; in which the journey to the answer, or path, or tread, or the trades for it, are the goal of it.<sup>75</sup>

Hence, while there are scattered and inconsistent marks of an interlocutor(s) in Wittgenstein's "dialogue," the true interlocutor of the *Investigations* is the reader whom Wittgenstein seeks to engage in life-transforming struggle.

This, then, shows the second way Wittgenstein's later-period writings express the centrality of the human subject for his philosophy.<sup>76</sup> Not only does his style admit to possessing a "narrative unity"; by employing a version of dialogue, Wittgenstein sets before his reader an obstacle course the purpose of which is to reconfigure his reader's way of seeing.<sup>77</sup> This way of putting things makes Wittgenstein out to be more of a moral sage than an analytic philosopher.<sup>78</sup> There is some credibility to this charge because, in



addition to being autobiographical and dialogical, Wittgenstein's style of philosophy is, third, deliberately *therapeutic*.

Paul Engelmann, an architect by trade but, perhaps, one whose greater claim to fame was to have been numbered by Wittgenstein among the few who truly understood the *Tractatus*, notes in his memoirs the great similarity between Wittgenstein and the turn-of-the-century Viennese journalist Karl Kraus. Kraus insisted that the moral character of the artist was essential to his or her craftsmanship. When a defect was evident in an artist's work, that defect ought to be understood as a manifestation of a moral defect in the artist's character. Kraus further maintained that this happens nowhere more frequently than when the artistic medium is that of language. According to Engelmann, Kraus's claim that "I cannot get myself to accept that a whole sentence can ever come from half a man" shows that "Kraus adopts the only attitude that makes sense by judging the morality not of an individual act, but of the person acting, and it is the latter which is unerringly revealed to Kraus through language."<sup>79</sup> Kraus's primary concern was to "preserve the purity of a language born of creative poetical experience."<sup>80</sup>

That Wittgenstein shared Kraus's views concerning the relation of the artist's character to the quality of his or her work is evidenced by his comment published as the foreword to *Philosophical Remarks*:

I would like to say "This book is written to the glory of God," but nowadays that would be chicanery, that is, it would not be rightly understood. It means that the book is written in good will, and in so far as it is not so written, but out of vanity, etc., the author would wish to see it condemned. *He cannot free it of these impurities further than he himself is free of them.*<sup>81</sup>

Wittgenstein intentionally poured his life into his writing. His writings were not simply an accidental reflection of Wittgenstein's character. They were the product of a certain kind of devotion, perhaps even religious devotion.<sup>82</sup>

That Wittgenstein considered his book as needing to be purged of its impurities in order to be a fitting oblation was but an indication that he regarded himself as requiring purification. Although Wittgenstein was powerless to take his book further than he himself had gone, he had come this far. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein sought to protect language from the meddlesome hands of metaphysicians, logical positivists, and others who attempt to specify things that can only be shown. Wittgenstein's original project, as I read the *Tractatus*, was to circumvent defective use of language by showing the limits beyond which philosophical language cannot tread.



But his "revolution" consisted in this: From the *Blue Book* on Wittgenstein did not simply seek to prevent the expression of a speaker's moral defects in his or her use of language but sought rather to cure the moral defect itself, that is to say, to transform the speaker's character by engaging him or her in a struggle for conceptual clarity. Here "conceptual clarity" is not simply a cognitive state (for cognitively impaired people can develop character) but additionally involves adopting the right sort of stance (or "good will") toward the world—for example, the courageous surrender of one's craving for explanation or of one's craving to say what can only be shown—the progressive attainment of which stance constitutes one's character.

Perhaps now we are in a position to see the way in which "the centrality of the subject" in Wittgenstein's later work determined the similarity he saw among ethics, aesthetics, and philosophy. In the *Tractatus* 6.421 Wittgenstein wrote: "Ethics and aesthetics are one." This ambiguous claim is open to several lines of interpretation. First, a common turn-of-the-century reading assumed that ethics, religion, and aesthetics shared the common fate of being literally meaningless. A strict theory of representationalism delineated between those statements that could be empirically verified and those statements (not only ethical, religious, and aesthetic statements, but "countless" kinds of statements, as Wittgenstein would wryly observe later) whose only possible significance was assumed, by default, to lie in their function as expressions of human value, experience, or emotion. In this view, all such "pseudo-propositions" were unified by not being *about* anything at all.<sup>83</sup>

If the first way to read the enigmatic "Ethics and aesthetics are one" is to consign both to the fate of being about nothing, a second way to read this statement is to understand ethics and aesthetics as sharing equally multifarious origins. This is the tack taken by D. Z. Phillips in his essays collected under the title *Interventions in Ethics*.<sup>84</sup> While aesthetic taste can, to some degree, be schooled, ultimately words such as "beauty" name a family resemblance that defies general treatment. The same holds for judgments of ethical value. The real danger, warns Phillips, is the distortion that arises when we succumb to our craving for generality and try to subsume ethics (or aesthetics) under a general theoretical framework. Moral (and aesthetic) judgment can be schooled, but since each instance of moral education presupposes a correlative communal form of life, aspiring to trans-communal (or, in Phillips's case, acommunal) moral judgment would be pointless. If the real danger for ethics and aesthetics lies in the distortion that a unifying theory brings to incommensurable value judgments, then the philosopher

is obliged to perform interventions to thwart theoretics and leave everything as it is.<sup>85</sup>

But there is a third way of understanding the unity of ethics and aesthetics that is more in line with Wittgenstein's emphasis on changing human subjects. Benjamin Tilghman links the meaning of the Tractarian maxim to the broader context of the *Tractatus* and shows that ethics and aesthetics are unified by a joint concern for the truly important in human life. Since the realm of value cannot be spoken, but must be shown, Tilghman speculates that for Wittgenstein, only through art can these values be shown. This is possible because art *expresses* the human spirit in the same way that my world is an expression of my spirit when I view it *sub specie aeternitatis*.<sup>86</sup>

As described above, Wittgenstein abandoned the hope of viewing the world from a God's-eye view (*sub specie aeternitatis*), but retained the view that contemplating the interconnectedness and limited character of the world was of utmost ethical importance. The upshot of this line of reasoning is that the morally good life is one lived in agreement or cooperation with these limits. Art celebrates our ability to *see rightly*, or in the right perspective, by *showing* all the connections of an object with its surroundings. Conversely, grasping a work of art is much like contemplating a world in miniature:

The work of art shows us the *essence*; it shows us the object in its necessary *connections* with other things and it shows the scene portrayed as the logically necessary unity of the various artistic elements that compose it. And it is tempting to believe that this is part of what it means to see the object in right perspective.<sup>87</sup>

And perhaps this is what Wittgenstein meant by saying, "a work of art forces us—as one might say—to see it in the right perspective."<sup>88</sup> Because a work of art manifests all the connections of an object with its context, it is, in one sense, a self-contained world. But in contrast to a work of art, whose hermeneutic key is internal to the work itself, life strikes us as an *unsolvable* riddle. Tilghman argues that Wittgenstein used this comparison of art (aesthetics) and life (ethics) to display the point that *there is no riddle for us to solve*.<sup>89</sup> The real problem is the *how*, not the *why*, of living. Consequently, on Tilghman's view, to live rightly is to look at the world rightly, which is to say, under an aspect that dissolves the "riddle." Tilghman describes Wittgenstein as seeing ethics and aesthetics internally related to the character



of the human subject, because both require judgments that are expressions of character:

A person's view of the world and that person's character are intimately intertwined; they are, to all purposes, one. A person's view of the world determines his character; his character and hence his view of the world, is revealed in his deeds. The important thing is not so much what is done, but how it is done and the spirit with which it is done. Without this link of character, spirit and vision to action there can be no ethics and no moral assessment of a deed.<sup>90</sup>

This is a good description as far as it goes. However, Tilghman misses the *social* character of ethical and aesthetic judgment. Wittgenstein is quite explicit on this point. In his *Lectures & Conversations* he (reportedly) said, "In order to get clear on aesthetic words you have to describe ways of living."<sup>91</sup> I contend that Wittgenstein maintained throughout his life that the unity of ethics, aesthetics, and religion was a unity derived from the fact that all rely on the same sort of skills upon which the social medium of language depends.

Certainly by 1933 Wittgenstein had come to think of aesthetics as descriptive. "All that Aesthetics does is 'to draw your attention to a thing', to 'place things side by side'."<sup>92</sup> Here the connections manifested by a work of art are such that to see it rightly means seeing its connections with life — though not connections with the artist's inner life only, but with the history, context, culture, and conventions of artistic practice as well. However, the person who has come to grasp these connections cannot be said to have a handle on the *causal* connections as if he or she possessed an answer for what *makes* something beautiful. Rather, those who grasp the connections between a work of art and its broader context can be said to have developed a sort of fluency in the language of the craft. Thus, Wittgenstein views the apprehension of a composition's "meaning" as a trained capacity or skill. For example,

The direction: "Wie aus weiter Ferne" in Schumann. Must everyone understand such a direction? Everyone, for example, who would understand the direction "Not too quick?" Isn't the capacity that is supposed to be absent in the meaning-blind man one of this kind?<sup>93</sup>

Wittgenstein's point is that only the skillful are able to rightly judge what Schumann meant by "playing a piece as if from afar" or when the tempo

is "not too quick." Such a skill, or fluency, is developed by a certain sort of training.<sup>94</sup> "You can make a person see what Brahms was driving at by showing him lots of different pieces by Brahms, or by comparing him with a contemporary author."<sup>95</sup> In other words, induction into the practice can tune one's ears to the language of music.

Suppose you hear a piece of music in which you judge the bass to be "too heavy." In making such a judgment, Wittgenstein observed that "what we are trying to do is to bring the bass 'nearer to an ideal', though we haven't an ideal before us which we are trying to copy."<sup>96</sup> Judgments of "beauty" are not straightforward procedures as one might check the spelling of words on this page by looking up each word in a dictionary. Rather, aesthetic judgments are expressions of *skill*. This is not to say that beauty in art is simply an expression of solitary human preference, for judgments are shared: agreement in judgment of beauty is one species of the reflexive sort of agreement upon which language depends.<sup>97</sup> Wittgenstein would later comment:

There is a lot to be learned from Tolstoy's bad theorizing about how a work of art conveys 'a feeling'. — You really could call it, not exactly the expression of *a* feeling [i.e., the artist's emotional state], but at least an expression of feeling or a felt expression. And you could say that in so far as people understand it, they 'resonate' in harmony with it, respond to it. You might say: the work of art does not aim to convey something else [e.g., the artist's psychological state], just itself.<sup>98</sup>

Wittgenstein calls this an expression of "feeling" rather than of "*a* feeling" precisely because it is shared. Nevertheless, it is not feeling in general. Rather, art is conventional in nature and expresses the accidental form of a particular culture's life. We might say that for Wittgenstein, aesthetics is neither universal nor individualistic, but *ethnocentric*. G. E. Moore recalled Wittgenstein's words:

He said that such a statement as "That bass moves too much" is not a statement about human beings at all, but is more like a piece of mathematics; and that, if I say of a face which I draw "It smiles too much," this says that it could be brought closer to some "ideal" . . . and that . . . would be more like "solving a mathematical problem."<sup>99</sup>

Aesthetics and ethics are judgments of value, but such a value is neither a self-subsistent ideal, nor the property of the lone individual, nor a general feature of humans *qua* humans. Rather, the values that aesthetic and ethical



judgments expose are those shared by a community. In an important sense, these values (or at least, agreement in judgments of them) is what makes a group a community. This being the case, there is only a nominal difference between skillful aesthetic and ethical judgment and skillful participation in other social-conventional practices (such as mathematics and language), which together constitute membership in community. This way of viewing things shifts the focus of aesthetics (or ethics) from the values expressed by an artifact (or in an instance of moral reasoning) to the question of whether one has the skill deemed adequate for rendering judgments that stand in agreement with those of the community.

It is no secret that Wittgenstein considered mathematics to be *about* an agreement in judgments. In the late 1930s Wittgenstein described his brand of mathematical constructivism with these words: "a mathematician is always inventing new forms of description. Some, stimulated by practical needs, another from aesthetic needs,—and yet others in a variety of ways." This makes the mathematician out to be more of an inventor than a discoverer.<sup>100</sup> The mathematician is not a discoverer, since, on Wittgenstein's view, there is no uncharted wilderness ("out there") to explore. Similar claims could be made for ethics, aesthetics, and philosophy. Wittgenstein distanced himself from the common notion that ethicists, artists, and philosophers are pioneers into previously uninhabited metaphysical jungles. Ethical, aesthetic, and philosophical puzzlement are not instances of someone being lost or of something being hidden. Rather, puzzlement points to a deficiency in human skill to see what is already before one as the solution itself. In a parenthetical remark, Wittgenstein stated:

Here we stumble on a remarkable characteristic phenomenon in philosophical investigation: the difficulty—I might say—isn't one of finding the solution; it is one of recognizing something as the solution. We have already said everything. Not something that follows from this; no, just *this* is the solution!

This, I believe, hangs together with our wrongly expecting an explanation; whereas a description is the solution of the difficulty, if we give it the right place in our consideration. If we dwell upon it and do not try to get beyond it.<sup>101</sup>

Accordingly, the task of philosophy is to cure human subjects of philosophical barbarism: "A present-day teacher of philosophy doesn't select food

for his pupil with the aim of flattering his taste, but with the aim of changing it."<sup>102</sup>

The goal of cultivating good taste—a goal which makes the human subject the centerpiece of the philosophical task—meant that Wittgenstein's approach in philosophy resembled training in art appreciation. Moore paraphrases:

He went on to say that, though philosophy had now been "reduced to a matter of skill," yet this skill, like other skills, is very difficult to acquire. One difficulty was that it required a "sort of thinking" to which we are not accustomed and to which we have not been trained—a sort of thinking very different from what is required in the sciences. And he said that the required skill could not be acquired by merely hearing the lectures: discussion was essential. As regards his own work, he said it did not matter whether his results [concerning some particular grammatical investigation] were true or not: what mattered was that "a method had been found."<sup>103</sup>

No fine arts instructor can discursively prove the greatness of, say, Rembrandt's "The Return of the Prodigal Son." Rather, an instructor shows the students the painting itself and supplements this showing with descriptions that frame the painting in a family of other similar paintings and within the historical practice itself. This descriptive pedagogy at once leaves everything as it is and yet forever alters the students' way of seeing (even if this alteration goes no deeper than that the student thereafter takes Rembrandt as one benchmark for "good" art).

A reader of Wittgenstein's playful examples of language-games faces a similar opportunity. In order to grasp what Wittgenstein was up to in the opening pages of *Investigations*, the reader must, provisionally at least, come to conceive of *meaning* (e.g., of "Slab!") as *use* (i.e., the builder's request) *within a given form of life* (namely, the construction of a building). But to think this way requires the student to suspend both the craving for a general definition and the presupposition that general definitions cover all the cases. To learn, even imaginatively, the moves internal to Wittgenstein's initial (and simplified) example of a language-game constitutes a notion of understanding-as-mastery. Furthermore, this example of a language-game is followed by many others, each of which is but a single rung on the internal ladder that constitutes the *Investigations*. In surmounting each rung, progress can be made; Wittgenstein hopes that readers who scale the book will, at the



book's end, have come to view things so differently that they effectively have kicked away the ladder. Readers who have attained that level of skill and clarity and who look back at the earlier pedagogical examples will immediately discern these examples to be confused, simplistic, or shallow.

The sort of progress Wittgenstein hopes for his readers lends irony to the complaint that Rush Rhees voiced in his essay "Wittgenstein's Builders." Rhees wondered if Wittgenstein's games analogy was too simplistic an account of what it means to speak. Speaking requires more than constructing grammatically correct sentences; it involves having something to say which "bears on" the rest of the conversation. Rhees charged that if the builders' language-game was imagined as a language complete in itself, as Wittgenstein enjoined us to do, then the builders would resemble puppets more than human beings. Wouldn't the builders talk about what the building was for, once the work day was over? Wouldn't they discuss at home snags encountered on the jobsite? Wouldn't they require entirely different language-games for teaching their children? And so on. Rhees concluded that Wittgenstein's analogy did not answer what it is to have a language because it failed to show how language is related to the *rest* of human living.

... if [the builders] speak to one another, the meaning of the expression they use cannot lie wholly in the use or the reaction that it receives in this job. . . . But the remarks they make may have something to do with one another; otherwise they are not talking at all, even though they may be uttering sentences. And their remarks could have no bearing on one another unless the expressions they used were used in other connections as well.<sup>104</sup>

What sort of conclusion can this be? A better question is, What sort of person is drawing this conclusion? Until his recent death, Rhees was one of Wittgenstein's literary executors, not to mention a close personal friend and long-time student. We find in Rhees, therefore, one who has worked his way around the Wittgensteinian corpus many times and in many ways. In short, he is one who has learned to "go on." However, Rhees seems curiously unaware that his own mature facility was his teacher's intention for him all along. In §§1–188 of the *Investigations* (which stands out for being the only section of Wittgenstein's writings with which Wittgenstein was satisfied), the *provisional* character of the exercises is evident throughout. On the one hand, Wittgenstein constructs explicit permutations of the original language-game of the builders (cf. §2 with §8). On the other hand, Wittgenstein also explicitly expands on the *method* expressed in language-game §2

(as in §48). Both kinds of development manifest Wittgenstein's intention to lead his readers on a conceptual journey rather than express once and for all by a single example all that it means to speak. That his goal was for the reader to transcend the opening positions of the *Investigations*' master game is made explicit in the last reference to language-games in this section:

§179 Let us return to our case (151). It is clear that we should not say B had the right to say the words "Now I know how to go on," just because he thought of the formula. . . . And now one might think that the sentence "I can go on" meant I have an experience which I know empirically to lead to the continuation of the series." But does B mean that when he says he can go on? . . .

No. The words "Now I can go on" were correctly used when he thought of the formula: that is, given the circumstance as that he had learnt algebra, had used such formula before. — *But that does not mean that his statement is only short for a description of all the circumstances which constitutes the scene for our language-game. — Think how we learn to use the expressions "Now I know how to go on," "Now I can go on" and others; in what family of language-games we learn their use.*<sup>105</sup>

When juxtaposed with Wittgenstein's set of reader instructions, it is evident that Rhees's charge is beside the point for two important reasons. First, Wittgenstein's account of language-games in §179 *does* achieve the nuance that Rhees sought after; unlike language-game (§2), Wittgenstein here clearly linked the intelligibility of language-games with the circumstances and scenery of the rest of life. Second, this pericope also *shows* Wittgenstein's sense of "understanding" as an instance of mastery ("going on") by the explicit command to the reader ("Think . . .") to finish the string of exercises (which Wittgenstein painstakingly laid out for the reader over the course of these seventy-two pages of text) by going beyond the final position of the text. This Rhees has done.

Rhees's objection falls short in assuming that Wittgenstein's concept of "language-game" holds steady throughout the *Investigations*. The fact that he even makes the charge he does, given Rhees's own level of skill, corroborates the claim that Wittgenstein's philosophical method, as embodied in the *Investigations*, treats ethics and aesthetics as unified in the linguistic skill of actual persons. This unity is one which makes the transformation of the human subject the very heart of the philosophical task. ★