

since he must use language itself. Philosophers should examine the manifold ways we actually use words and families of words. They should study "language games" and show how philosophical puzzles arise when we break the rules without realizing it or try to make words perform jobs they are not suited to perform. (The Editor)

Introduction

It would be hard to overestimate Ludwig Wittgenstein's impact on twentieth-century philosophy. He is credited with being a major influence on two schools of thought: Logical Positivism and Linguistic Analysis. Wittgenstein also made important contributions to the studies of mathematics, logic, psychology, and even engineering. He was noted for his talents as a musician, sculptor, and architect. Many of his contemporaries held him in very high esteem—sometimes even awe. When Wittgenstein returned to teaching at Cambridge in 1929 after a fifteen-year absence, he was first met by the distinguished economist John Maynard Keynes. Keynes recorded the event in a note to his wife: "Well God has arrived. I met him on the 5:15 train." In 1939 Wittgenstein applied for the position of professor of philosophy that was recently opened by G.E. Moore's retirement. The philosopher C.D. Broad remarked, "To refuse the chair to Wittgenstein would be like refusing Einstein a chair of physics."

Although commentators often break Wittgenstein's thought into two distinct periods—"early" and "late"—I think his concept of philosophy changed little, if at all, over the years. In his two main works, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein holds that the aim of the philosopher is to come to grips with the limits of language. In the preface to the *Tractatus*, first published in German in 1921, Wittgenstein wrote, "what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence." In the *Investigations*, published posthumously in 1953, he wrote, "Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by the means of language." For Wittgenstein, the problems of philosophy, such as skepticism, solipsism, and relativism, have their origins in the workings of language, and therein lies their solution. The philosopher tries to show how language actually functions, with the goal of unraveling the convoluted tangle of philosophical threads and providing clarity of thought. Wittgenstein's method attempts to answer philosophical problems, not by proposing a better theory but by removing the confusion that generated the question in the first place.

This method may not seem like traditional philosophy since all of the grand philosophical themes appear to be missing, such as investigations into the existence of God, theories of knowledge, metaphysics, and so on. In a certain sense, all of these ideas are discussed by Wittgenstein, but in a striking

new way. Wittgenstein's approach to these traditional topics of philosophy was so novel that it has often been misunderstood. It has been thought that Wittgenstein was an atheist or a logical positivist who wanted to get rid of these aspects of our thinking. But I don't think this is the case. I would like to show in this essay that Wittgenstein believed that these ideas represent an extremely important aspect of human life that we have been approaching in a very confused way. For Wittgenstein, it is most important for the philosopher to clarify our language surrounding these issues, for only then can truth begin to emerge. However, Wittgenstein wants to show that this truth cannot be expressed in the way that we assume it can. Of all these ideas, I would like to focus on Wittgenstein's treatment of ethics, since this was so pivotal to his thought.

Although Wittgenstein spent the majority of his working life in England and is most often associated with Anglo-American Analytic Philosophy, he was born and educated in Vienna. Many writers have pointed out that Wittgenstein's philosophical searching, particularly his understanding of the nature of ethics, was greatly influenced by the intellectual arena in Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century. Also, I think it will become evident that Wittgenstein's philosophical works were the culmination of an intensely personal search.

Cultural Influences

In 1889, during the waning days of the Hapsburg Empire, Ludwig Wittgenstein was born into one of Austria's, if not Europe's, wealthiest families. Ludwig's father, Karl, was a self-made multimillionaire. His family was of Jewish origin but had converted to Protestantism in his grandfather's time, probably because of the pervasive Austrian anti-Semitism. Ludwig's mother was Roman Catholic, and Ludwig was baptized—though eventually non-practicing—Catholic. The magnificent Wittgenstein home in Vienna was a cultural mecca. Many of the great musicians and artists of the day, such as the composer Brahms, benefited from the family's extensive patronage of the arts.

Culturally and intellectually, the Vienna of Wittgenstein's time was nearly unrivaled in Europe. Over the years it had attracted the likes of Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms, and was home to Schubert, Mahler, and Strauss. In the sciences, Vienna gave us Mach, who had a great influence on Einstein; Boltzmann, the father of statistical mechanics; and, of course, Freud. The list of geniuses is indeed long and impressive, but there was also a darker side to Viennese life. Some of Vienna's most prominent intellectuals, including the aforementioned Boltzmann, committed suicide. Vienna also gave us Hitler.

Vienna during this time was a city of paradox. On the surface, it was a city of magnificent architecture and grand boulevards dotted with cafes

and shops offering the finest in luxuries. Strauss waltzes filled the air. A growing, wealthy middle class, enjoying the benefits of a booming economy, built lavish homes, spent excessively, and patronized the arts to signify their wealth and taste.

But for many, particularly a group of young intellectuals, Viennese culture was all pretense and façade. The middle class's infatuation with art was an attempt to reclaim a bygone era—the glory days of the Austrian Empire. Clearly, wealth alone does not confer nobility, but it does allow one to acquire its trappings. For these young intellectuals, the middle class was interested in art as mere decoration and ornament. The meaning of the art—its depth, particularly any moral significance—escaped them entirely. Since they wanted the art to reflect the past, any innovation was not allowed.

These young Viennese thinkers brought the darker side of life in Vienna into focus, revealing their society as morally bankrupt. Business was most important to the middle class, and it could be quite Machiavellian. Ruthless yet successful, the Viennese businessman enjoyed a decadent, hedonistic lifestyle, yet outwardly insisted on a strict Christian moral code and a fastidious adherence to the manners of Old World European civilization. This patriarchal society developed a repressive educational system in which students were indoctrinated into a rigid Christian value system that the adult population professed but did not practice. Marriage and family life could be quite harsh. A man felt that his marriage was good if the match advanced his business interests; love was not important. The concerns of women were not considered, and they were not expected to have a life outside the home. Children were expected to succeed on their fathers' terms, and failure was not tolerated. As far as the society at large was concerned, there was little compassion for the poor, unfortunate, or unsuccessful. Various political groups openly practiced racism and anti-Semitism. As one might expect, suicide was nearly epidemic, particularly among the young and talented (including three of Wittgenstein's brothers). It is small wonder that Freud's practice was so successful in such an environment (even though it was more or less officially disdained).

Among the Viennese intellectuals who critiqued and tried to alter this state of affairs were Arnold Schönberg in music, Adolf Loos in architecture, and, perhaps most importantly, the journalist and social critic Karl Kraus. Kraus' newspaper *Die Fackel* (*The Torch*) was a lightning rod for the criticism of the superficiality and what he and many others saw as the moral degeneracy of Viennese society.

A thorough examination of these thinkers would be beyond the scope of this chapter. For our purposes, we can say that they shared the view that many of their contemporaries in the arts had been alienated from the arts along with the middle class, for whom art was mere decoration. Art had become all form and lacked content. Even in architecture, function, logical simplicity, and clarity of design had become lost in layers of clutter that was supposed to be beautiful

but was actually useless and without purpose. For the architect Adolf Loos, ornament was literally a crime—a fraudulent substitute for quality in materials and craftsmanship. In general, these thinkers held that art should reject ornamentation and style, and that the artist of every discipline should strive for purity. Above all, the purpose of art should be moral and should reveal the character of the artist, meaning that only a person of integrity could create true art. For Kraus, nowhere was this more evident than in language. Kraus was fond of saying, "I cannot get myself to accept that a whole sentence can ever come from half a man."¹ Language—and any medium of communication—could be seen as a language—revealed the person, and there was no distinction between ethics and aesthetics. The artist who simply manipulated a medium for money, style, or conformity to a particular school was not a person of integrity and therefore was usually the subject of a scathing polemic in *Die Fackel*. Without this personal and moral dimension, no artistic endeavor was worthy of the name. The Krausians extolled the virtues of authors such as Kierkegaard and Tolstoy, whose intensely personal moral dilemmas became the subject of their works and whose lives reflected simplicity and lack of pretense. These ideas were to have a profound effect on the young Wittgenstein.

Tractatus

In 1908 Wittgenstein went to England and registered as a research student in engineering specializing in aeronautics at the University of Manchester. At some point he became interested in logic and the foundations of mathematics. His intense interest in this subject apparently coincided with reading Bertrand Russell's *Principles of Mathematics*, which was published in 1903. After reading Russell's work, Wittgenstein sought out the brilliant and original German logician Gottlob Frege. Wittgenstein was excited by his meetings with Frege, but apparently Frege was more puzzled by Wittgenstein than anything else. He advised Wittgenstein to go to Cambridge and study with Russell, which Wittgenstein did.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Russell and his colleague G.E. Moore started a philosophical revolution at Cambridge that came to be known as "Analytic Philosophy." In a strong reaction to the philosophy of the period, which was dominated by German Idealism, Russell and Moore's approach to philosophical problems called for a logical analysis of the concepts that philosophers use. By using this approach, coupled with a realist and eventually empiricist theory of knowledge, Russell and Moore intended to rid philosophy of what they saw as the convoluted excesses of Idealist metaphysics. In much the same way, the Logical Positivists, such as Moritz Schlick and Rudolph Carnap, turned to logical analysis and empiricism in order to purge scientific discourse of metaphysical speculation. The positivists pro-

posed a theory of meaningfulness. They said that if a word refers to something one might be able to perceive (see, hear, touch, taste, smell), then it is meaningful. But if it doesn't, then it is meaningless. Since words like "God," "soul," "virtue," "human rights," "beauty," and others do not refer to entities or qualities people can perceive, they are all meaningless and should be discarded as metaphysical rubbish. As we shall see, Wittgenstein agreed with the positivists in some ways but not in others.

Wittgenstein began attending Russell's lectures in 1911. At first, Russell did not know what to make of this intense young man who would discuss logic and mathematics incessantly, to the point of following Russell back to his rooms and sometimes continuing the discussion long into the night. But soon Wittgenstein absorbed all that Russell could teach on logic, and Russell began to think of Wittgenstein first as a protégé and then as a colleague. However, Russell may have misjudged Wittgenstein's passion for philosophy, though he certainly witnessed it. He relates one late-night philosophy discussion during which Wittgenstein nervously and silently paced the floor. "Are you thinking about logic or your sins?" asked Russell. "Both" replied Wittgenstein. I don't think Russell appreciated the depth of that remark, but I believe Wittgenstein was absolutely serious. Indeed, for Wittgenstein, as a true Krausian, philosophy, which Wittgenstein now clearly saw as wrapped up in logic, must be a strict discipline that is intensely personal and requires a moral commitment.

By the outbreak of World War I in the summer of 1914, Wittgenstein was already at work on the *Tractatus*. Although he was the son of a wealthy aristocrat and could have avoided active military service, Wittgenstein enlisted in the Austrian army. Apparently Wittgenstein worked on the *Tractatus* continuously throughout the war, carrying the manuscript with him in his knapsack when he was finally transferred to the front after repeated requests. At the end of the war, Wittgenstein had no success in getting the book published. Thanks to the intervention of Russell, the book was published in an English translation with a German parallel text in 1922. Wittgenstein believed he had solved the problems of philosophy once and for all, so he promptly gave it up and settled into a career as a grade school teacher. He was not to return to university academic life until 1929.

What I do here is give a basic overview of the main ideas of the *Tractatus* as they relate to Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy. Wittgenstein's idea in the *Tractatus*, as stated in the preface to the work, is to mark off the limits of language.

The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence. Thus the aim of the book is to draw a limit to thought, or rather—not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts: for in order to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e.,

we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought). It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be drawn, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense.²

What this has to do with ethics may not be immediately obvious. But if we think back to Wittgenstein's Viennese influences, the connection becomes clearer. The culture's focus on ornament and decoration in the arts and language obscured or disguised a morally bankrupt society. The truth demands clarity of expression, and a moral life demands the truth.

In a letter to a potential publisher of the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein states:

The book's point is an ethical one. I once meant to include in the preface a sentence which is not in fact there now, but which I will write out for you here, because it will perhaps be a key to the work for you. What I meant to write, then, was this: My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have not written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one. My book draws limits to the sphere of the ethical from the inside as it were, and I am convinced that this is the only rigorous way of drawing those limits. For now I would recommend you to read the preface and the conclusion because they contain the most direct expression of the point of the book.³

We have already mentioned the preface. Examining the "conclusion" is a little difficult since no section is clearly marked as the conclusion. If Wittgenstein is referring to the last remark of the *Tractatus*—"7. What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence"—then, well, I think we should back up a bit and look at the last few remarks of the book.

6.52 We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course there are then no questions left, and this is itself the answer.

6.522 There are, indeed things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical.

6.53 The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e., the propositions of natural science—i.e., something that has nothing to do with philosophy—and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. Although this would not be satisfying to the other person—he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy—this method would be the only strictly correct one.

I believe this last remark best sums up Wittgenstein's overall approach to philosophy. If we put these ideas together with those in the preface, a picture of Wittgenstein's main point begins to emerge. There are limits to what language can express, and these limits are part of the essence of language. What

language can express is restricted to empirical propositions—the propositions of science. Through an examination of the workings of language these limits manifest themselves, and once we see these limits to language we realize that the major problems of life remain untouched. The propositions of philosophy about the existence of God or the soul, the nature of reality, the Good, and so on attempt to speak about what lies beyond the limits of language, limits that can be shown. Using the method outlined in the *Tractatus*, we dissolve the problems we encounter regarding these ideas. Ultimately we must pass over these ideas in silence.

Three ideas are fundamental to Wittgenstein's analysis of language in the *Tractatus*. Of prime importance is symbolic logic, or Russell and Whitehead's "propositional calculus." Symbolic logic attempts to translate our arguments into symbolic form, thus allowing them to be analyzed and tested for validity with mathematical precision. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein makes a number of important contributions to the development of symbolic logic. The second important idea is sometimes called "logical atomism"—also of Russellian extraction. Finally, we will examine the "picture theory" of the proposition—apparently Wittgenstein's original contribution.

Let us begin with logical atomism. The idea of logical atomism appears in the *Tractatus* as an attempt to show how words acquire meaning by naming what Wittgenstein calls "objects" or what are sometimes more descriptively referred to as "logical atoms." Thus an object for Wittgenstein is not one of the ordinary large-scale objects of our experience—tables, rocks, houses, cars, or the like. Rather, the things of our ordinary experience are composites. As composites, they may be analyzed or broken down into their ultimate components—logical atoms—which are so called because they can't be broken down any further. We use the term "logical atom" here so that we can distinguish what Wittgenstein is doing from what a scientist is referring to by "atom." These are two similar concepts, but they should not be confused. An atom for the physicist might be seen as a fundamental building block of nature. But a logical atom or object is closer to a component of a theory of knowledge than it is to physical theory. What Wittgenstein has in mind was probably inspired by Russell's sense-data theory of perception. In this theory, derived from John Locke, a perception such as "snowball" is seen as being composed of several distinct and irreducible elements given to us through our senses. In this case, we might say that the elements or data are the distinct sense experiences such as round, hard, cold, and white. The perception snowball is a construct of these distinct experiences. For Russell, these distinct experiential components of the perception snowball are his logical atoms. In some texts he refers to these atoms as "particulars." The *Tractatus* and *Investigations* call Russell's idea "individuals." (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 5.553, *Philosophical Investigations* # 46).

Wittgenstein states that his objects are similar to Russell's individuals. The world, as we mentioned, is composite and so can be broken down into

its ultimate constituent components—or objects. Thus, reality is ultimately composed of objects. Whether object here means more than sense data and possibly refers to a metaphysical constituent of reality is an interesting and open question.

Wittgenstein's analysis of meaning in the *Tractatus* revolves around the naming relation a word has to an object. A word is meaningful if it names an object—or something that can be broken down into its constituent objects. If not, then it has no actual referent and must be considered nonsense. Meaningful propositions are built out of meaningful words or names. A proposition is meaningful or has sense not simply because of reference but because it "pictures" or models reality or a "state of affairs," as Wittgenstein puts it. That is, the relationship between the names in a proposition that has sense correctly corresponds to or mirrors at least a possible relationship between objects in reality. Thus, a meaningful proposition correctly expresses a fact or the possibility of a fact. Another way of looking at this would be to note that an essential feature of the sense of a proposition is that it may be true or false. What accounts for this feature is the structure of the proposition that enables it to picture reality, that is, possible or actual states of affairs or facts. Thus, the proposition "says" something about the world, and its sense is "shown" in its structure—an idea that will become clearer momentarily, when we discuss Wittgenstein's picture theory of the proposition. The proposition displays its sense. To explain or try to understand the sense of a proposition through language is pointless since this would require a further proposition, and then we would have to explain that proposition. To try to understand the sense of a proposition this way would require an infinite number of propositions, which would get us nowhere. This distinction between showing and saying is central to the *Tractatus*.

The story goes that the picture theory came to Wittgenstein when he witnessed a model being used to explain a traffic accident in a courtroom. The model conveyed what happened in the accident because there was a one-to-one correspondence between the components of the model and their relationship to each other and to what had actually happened in the accident. Propositions, Wittgenstein thought, work in the same manner. Looking at the simple proposition, "Fred throws the ball," we realize we might draw a simple picture that would in fact say the same thing—like something you would see in a children's book that teaches reading. If you set up the picture from left to right—Fred, his arm pointing to the right, the ball traveling to the right—and then labeled the picture in that order, the proposition and the picture would be, practically speaking, indistinguishable. The constituent members of the proposition stand in the same relation to each other as do the constituent objects in the actual activity. In this way, propositions represent reality and so convey meaning. We can see that since the words "God," "the soul," "the Good," and so on do not name objects in the above sense, for Wittgenstein there can be no meaningful propositions about them. For example, since the

word "God" signifies something spiritual, it does not name an atomic element of reality or even a composite of such elements or objects. The proposition "The snowball hits the tree" can be broken down into simple objects of our experience—things we can point to. While we can imagine something in connection with the proposition "God resides in heaven," there is nothing in the proposition to which we can actually point. This lack renders the proposition meaningless; however, as we shall see, this does not mean that such ideas are unimportant.

The simplest possible propositions, those that cannot be broken down any further, are what Wittgenstein calls "elementary propositions." For ease of understanding, we can think of elementary propositions as connected using Russell and Whitehead's symbolic logic. What Wittgenstein says on the topic of logic is complex and often original—he made many improvements on Russell's original idea—but to develop these ideas fully would take us beyond the scope of this essay. The gist of the idea is that elementary propositions are connected using logical connectors or operators such as "and," "or," and "if-then." So we would have propositions like "Fred threw the ball and hit the batter," "Fred will throw or Fred will catch," "if Fred throws wildly then he will hit the batter," and so on. Theoretically, at least, any number of propositions may be connected in this manner. Clearly, "and," "or," and the like do not name objects or components of reality and are not meaningful through reference. There is nothing in our experience to which we could point that could correspond to "and" or "if-then." These logical connectors are merely useful in connecting propositions. Propositions have sense because they picture at least a possible state of affairs. If we think of the above propositions—"Fred will throw or Fred will catch," and so on—in a purely formal way (that is, as "A or B," and "If A then B"), then we can see that propositions of logic do not picture states of affairs. Since propositions of logic do not picture states of affairs, they do not have sense—they do not say anything about the world. But again, this does not make logic unimportant. Logic shows its meaning or usefulness because it is a necessary device for connecting propositions.

Thus, propositions about the world are meaningful through their application as pictures of reality. These propositions are connected logically. Logic itself says nothing about reality, and logical propositions are not meaningful in the way propositions about the world are meaningful. Logic for Wittgenstein is more like a set of mathematical equations. It is merely the scaffolding on which we hang our propositions.

From the preceding we can, it is hoped, see something of the grand scheme of the *Tractatus*. Propositions are meaningful if the arrangement of names that make up the proposition correctly represents an arrangement of objects. Propositions can be meaningfully connected only through the correct application of logic. Outside of this there is only nonsense. Thus, the sentences of, say, metaphysics or theology, since they are neither pictures of reality nor combinations of such pictures, must be considered nonsense.

The relationship of the above to ethics may not be immediately obvious. It may be very difficult to see that the "point of the book is an ethical one." One difficulty is that all this sounds very much like the ideas of the Logical Positivists and Analytic philosophers, whose aims were to rid discourse of metaphysical terms. Of course, there are similarities here. But there is also a crucial difference. Wittgenstein does not want to limit metaphysical or ethical discourse because these ideas are not necessary, but rather because these ideas are vitally important.

We should look at a few more of the closing remarks of the *Tractatus*:

6.41 The sense of the world must lie outside the world.

6.421 It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental.

6.43 If the good or bad exercise of the will does alter the world, it can only alter the limits of the world, not the facts—not what can be expressed by means of language.

6.432 How things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference to what is higher. God does not reveal himself in the world.

Careful attention should be paid to these remarks. If what is beyond our propositions has no meaning or importance, why should Wittgenstein waste any time on them? Why would he call attention to the fact that the sense of the world is beyond the world if there is nothing there? Why talk about the good or bad exercise of the will if morality just doesn't matter? He says that God does not reveal himself in the world, not that there is no such thing or that God should be completely ignored. Clearly, he is trying to say that these things are important, yet they are or should be inexpressible.

Again, I think Wittgenstein's intention here becomes clearer if we remember the intellectual concerns of the Vienna of Wittgenstein's youth. There the pretense and façade of Christian values hid an almost complete lack of scruples. Art, indeed language itself, which supported this pretense, was mere ornamentation that failed to further or in fact prevented the attainment of any moral depth. Clearly, ethics must involve the relationship of the self to the world. Once this clutter is removed, the self or character of the person in all its simplicity is laid bare and must be confronted. One is here reminded of the Socratic message "Know thyself." The picture may not be a pretty one, but now it is the responsibility of the individual to achieve his or her own integrity or authenticity. This authenticity is not supplied by the externals of a bankrupt (or any) culture; it must come from within. The *Tractatus* represents Wittgenstein's attempt to restore pristine clarity to language and thus remove the clutter from our philosophizing and writing about ethics. What can be said can be said clearly; the rest we must pass over in silence. Our traditional philosophizing on these topics only clouds what is so important by adding layers of nonsense that can never penetrate these profound mysteries. Unlike traditional philosophy, ethics is not a matter of demonstrating or

proving anything. It is an intensely personal search. I think Wittgenstein might agree that one must be ethical, not just talk about it. The ethical sphere is not reached through talk; the ethical makes itself manifest. Ethics must be shown and not said.

In other words, ethics lies outside what can be said meaningfully. It is nonsense, but clearly important nonsense. If we see the unsayability of ethics, I think we can see why Wittgenstein held St. Augustine—particularly the *Confessions*—in such high regard. In that work, Augustine wrestles with the central problems of faith on an intellectual level and ends up in almost complete despair, since he still finds himself unable to commit totally to an ethical life. It is a mystical experience that is almost totally inexpressible that leads to his conversion and to a whole new world for Augustine, although externally nothing has changed.

Thus, Wittgenstein believed that with the *Tractatus* he had shown the limits of language, and therefore of philosophy. In 1920 he moved on to more practical activities. He took a position as an elementary school teacher in an Austrian village. But his new career wasn't entirely satisfying, and in 1929 he returned to Cambridge to teach philosophy. Chief among the reasons for his return to Cambridge seems to have been that Wittgenstein came to realize that the *Tractatus* was in need of some revision.

Philosophical Investigations

Wittgenstein's 'later' philosophy was transmitted initially through his lectures, and although he discouraged note taking in his classes, some notes eventually did circulate. Wittgenstein also prepared two sets of typewritten notes that became known as the *Blue Book* and the *Brown Book*. He distributed these to select students and sent a copy of the *Blue Book* to Russell. The reaction in all quarters was generally puzzlement since this new work, besides being difficult to understand, appeared to be a radical departure from the *Tractatus*. Russell claimed he could make nothing of it at all. In addition, Wittgenstein made voluminous notes on a variety of philosophical topics. Some of these notes are quite polished, and Wittgenstein intended to work some of these notes into a book to be published during his lifetime. Much of this later material has been published, though it is difficult to say which, if any, Wittgenstein would have thought to be in publishable form. Most scholars agree that *Philosophical Investigations*, which is taken from these notes, is probably closest to something Wittgenstein would have published.

Although the meaning of *Philosophical Investigations* is controversial, Wittgenstein clearly still sees language as the source of our philosophical problems, and being clear about how language actually works is the means to the solution or, rather, dissolution of our philosophical problems. The chief

difference between the early and late work is one of method, which many scholars see as a shift from ideal to ordinary language philosophy. Wittgenstein came to see that the meaning of our ordinary language was not the result of the rigid structure of logical atomism he had envisioned in the *Tractatus*; rather, the meaning of our ordinary language is found in the way the words and sentences are actually used within that language. Language has its own rules or grammar that can be uncovered by analysis. Wittgenstein calls the system of rules and circumstances that delineates the use of a word and therefore shows its meaning a "language game." His analysis in the *Investigations* largely consists of comparing the use of a word in a language game that represented the "philosophical" use of the word with how the word is actually used in the language game that is its original home. The result shows how the philosophical use is misplaced. Thus, the meaning of a word is derived from its original context, and trying to use it outside of that context is trying to get the word to do a job it was not designed to do, resulting in nonsense. Wittgenstein often compares a word to a tool. A tool has its proper use (or meaning) in a specific context, but outside that context it generally will have an unintended result. A hammer is great at driving a nail, but trying to use it to adjust your carburetor will probably result in disaster. So Wittgenstein in the later work is still showing the limits of language, but by looking at language as it stands, not by positing an ideal linguistic structure that must be uncovered. If looked at correctly, language is capable of conveying meaning as it is.

There are many famous examples from the *Investigations* of Wittgenstein's procedure. One such example is Wittgenstein's discussion of "understanding."⁴ Just what our ability to understand is or says about the nature of human beings has long been the object of philosophical speculation. Wittgenstein's main concern is to examine the source of our confusions about the nature of the understanding and, ultimately, to dissolve these confusions. Philosophers, for Wittgenstein, ought not to advance or defend any theories, psychological or otherwise, regarding our ability to understand. Rather, the job of the philosopher is to clear up the various misconceptions about understanding by returning the word "understanding" to the original language game that is its proper home.

This last point is often the source of a great deal of difficulty when reading Wittgenstein, especially the *Investigations*. So we should spend a little time elaborating on the task of the philosopher. In the *Tractatus*, as we noted earlier, for Wittgenstein the propositions of philosophy or logic are not empirical propositions. The propositions of logic are merely tautologies or equations that say nothing about the world. The correct philosophical method shows how propositions of philosophy fail because they try to cross the boundaries of language. This approach may seem very unsatisfactory because philosophers have been advancing theses since the time of Thales, and philosophers have come to think of their discipline as akin to science in that if a thesis is

judged to be wrong then it should be refuted, and a better thesis should take its place. But for Wittgenstein, a philosopher is not like a scientist who performs dissections or uncovers fossils. The tools of a philosopher have always and only been logic, language, and meaning. Once we see this limitation, we must realize that a philosopher must be restricted to the arena bounded by logic and language. Language and meaning are enormously complex but can be understood through logical analysis, which is not an empirical or fact-finding procedure. As we noted above, logic, in the *Tractatus*, is a system of equations, and so a conclusion in logic is not proven the way a scientific theory is proven, that is, by uncovering facts. If it is true that $a = b$ and $b = c$, then I can say that it is true or proven that $a = c$. But this truth or proof relies only on symbols and in the meaning of "=", not on any fact about the natural world. For Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, meaningful propositions are founded on logic, and this delineates what can be said. The job of the philosopher consists in appealing to logic to show these boundaries, and so he or she is not advancing theories that are proved or disproved by facts. The philosopher is only engaging in logical analysis.

Of course, it could be objected that Wittgenstein is not entirely consistent in the *Tractatus*. Logical atomism and the so-called picture theory of propositions are very much like traditional philosophical theories. This tendency to theorize on the nature of language is very likely one of the flaws Wittgenstein found in the *Tractatus* that he tried to correct in the *Investigations*. Thus, in the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein reworks and expands this theme. As we noted above, the chief difference between the early and later work is that Wittgenstein came to realize that clarity of meaning is not derived by uncovering the underlying perfect logical structure of language. Rather, language has its own perfectly good system of rules or grammar that shows how a word is used and so shows the meaning of that word. But the main idea is still the same as it was in the *Tractatus*. Through analysis of grammar or the internal logic of language we show the limits of language—again, not by uncovering any facts about the natural world. Philosophy is not about proving or disproving theses; it is about showing how certain philosophical uses of a word cause confusion and how, through a correct understanding of the logic or grammar of language, this confusion may be dissipated.

Wittgenstein notes that we often think that, for example, "understanding," or any word, derives its meaning by referring to a particular object. This idea, which was at the heart of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein now sees as the source of a great deal of confusion, for it causes us to seek the object that is the referent of the word "understanding," thinking that this object, once found, will explain what understanding is. However, if we look at the various uses of "understanding," no such object readily presents itself. Wittgenstein examines several circumstances in which we would say that someone "understands." For example, we try to teach someone to continue the series of even numbers. At some point the student may say something like

"Now I understand!" and then continues the series on his or her own. We may then agree that our student understands. Notice that this is a perfectly meaningful use of "understand," yet there was no specific object or thing that we could point to that would automatically correspond to the word. If we still insist that there must be a specific referent for the word, then we may think that "understanding" must refer to some mental or psychological process that is for the present hidden and certainly mysterious, but that will reveal itself under philosophical scrutiny. But Wittgenstein sees this as the source of much misguided philosophy—that is, the advancing of various meaningless theses to explain just what this strange process must be. If we give up the idea that "understanding" must refer to an object in order to be meaningful, then this rash philosophical inquiry into this strange mental process will come to an end. When the word is returned to its original language game, it ceases to look so mysterious.

In addition to "understanding," Wittgenstein discusses a number of concepts that would be associated with philosophy of mind. Many writers have pointed out that Wittgenstein in the *Investigations* was dealing with many paradoxes that can arise from modern thought, particularly from Cartesianism and empiricism. For example, Descartes begins his analysis in the *Meditations* by shutting out all sensation and examining his ideas through introspection. He then finds that all of his ideas may be doubted, even those that are very simple, such as where he is or who he is. After all, Descartes argues, although he remembers these things clearly, it is certainly possible that his memory is deceiving him. He could even imagine that there is an all-powerful evil genius who is somehow constantly deceiving him about everything, an idea that leads to absolute skepticism. However, all this doubt does lead him to one absolutely certain proposition—the famous *Cogito ergo sum*—"I think, therefore I am." Even if someone is uncertain of everything, it is clear that only an existing thing can doubt. Absolute doubt or skepticism is wrong because it leads to at least one certain statement: the one who doubts must exist.

But Descartes' problems are far from over. Descartes may have defeated absolute skepticism, but there is a price. A thinker may be certain of his or her existence and the existence of his or her ideas, but whether there is anything in reality corresponding to those ideas can still be doubted. One still might be deceived about what philosophers call the "reality of the external world." Descartes tries to get around this doubt by appealing to the existence of God. If God exists and is all good, then he wouldn't allow me to be deceived about what I clearly and distinctly perceive to be true. However, Descartes' proof for the existence of God seemed far from convincing to many thinkers, and many objected that this reliance on God was contrary to both the spirit of Descartes' writings and that of the Enlightenment, which wanted to ground truths in science, not theology. But without the existence of God, the end result of Descartes' thought as it stands must be skepticism.

Worse yet, many thinkers point out that not only is the existence of an external world in doubt, but also there is no reason to conclude that anything but the original thinker exists. There is no way to demonstrate the existence of other minds. This position, known as "solipsism," is contrary to our experience, but if you fundamentally doubt your experience, the conclusion seems inescapable.

Further, the mind here seems like a very strange thing. For Descartes, bodies take up space and are extended, but ideas do not take up space and are unextended—they have no size, shape, or weight. (The idea of ten pounds does not weigh ten pounds; the idea of ten feet is not ten feet long.) Thus, the mind is not of the same "stuff" as the body; but just what "mind stuff" is or how this stuff is connected to the body Descartes couldn't explain to everyone's satisfaction. This question has perplexed philosophers ever since and is often referred to as the "mind-body problem."

Empiricism represented an alternative viewpoint on these problems. Although there are many versions of Empiricism, most empiricists advocated what is often called a "sense-data" theory of ideas. Empiricists start with the assumption that there is an external world. According to empiricists, our ideas are based on sense impressions derived from our experience of that world. These sense impressions, sometimes called "sense data," include color, texture, and taste. As we noted above, for a sense-data theorist such as Russell, my idea of a snowball is directly linked to my sense experience of a snowball—round, hard, cold, white, and so on. The idea here is that our ideas must be necessarily connected with an external world, and this connection seems to get around the problem of skepticism. But a theory of knowledge that equates ideas with sensations is not without skeptical problems of its own. Aren't sensations internal or private? Don't they happen within the knower? After all, there are no sense impressions outside a perceiver. If this is true, then how do I know that my sense experience is the same as that of anyone else? Maybe my sensations are unique to me, and if that is so, how can I be sure that there is anything beyond my sense experience? I am back in the same old muddle of skepticism and even solipsism.

Wittgenstein attacks this problem not by proposing a more successful theory, but by showing that the basic ideas that are the source of the problem arise from a misinterpretation of language and the way language operates. Although Wittgenstein treats these ideas in various places in the *Investigations*, one famous discussion centers on the idea of a private language.

The "private language argument" follows a discussion on the way words refer to sensation. We should note here that calling Wittgenstein's treatment of a question an argument could be misleading. As with the previous discussion of "understanding," it would be more correct to say that Wittgenstein uncovers many of the previously overlooked assumptions in a picture of how language operates in a particular case. Once all these assumptions are brought to

the surface and followed to their conclusions, we often see that the picture self-destructs. The expressions involved do not or cannot actually do what we thought they could.

Wittgenstein saw that the puzzle over how words refer to ideas and sensations was at the heart of the problems generated by Cartesianism and Empiricism. If we return to Descartes and his *Meditations*, we remember that he begins by shutting out all sensations and focusing only on his ideas. He seems to be able to examine his ideas the way that we would examine an ordinary object, except through an interior examination with what we might call his "mind's eye." At first glance there seems to be nothing wrong with this description. We have often had the experience of mulling over ideas or thoughts while forgetting about the outside world—as in daydreaming. The difficulty arises when we start treating this description philosophically, as perhaps the description of some inner psychological mechanism—as if, say, the "mind's eye" were the name of a part of the mind in the way that the eye is a part of the body. Instead of simply using an ordinary expression for thinking, we think we are referring to something that can be examined almost as if we were doing psychology. This picture, if we think it refers to something real, can make it seem as if our ideas are open to examination (by the mind's eye) in the same way as objects on a table. But the "objects" of the mind are somehow, in this model, private. After all, no one else can look into my mind; no one can know its contents unless I tell them. Thus, it seems as if the language of my ideas refers to something private, and so when I am talking about my ideas, these words "mean" or refer to my private inner experience. But using this model for the language of our mental life is at the root of skepticism and solipsism. We have created an inner world to which only the knower has access. Since my words refer to something within me, then only I can be certain of their correct meaning. When I say I have a certain experience or feeling such as "love" or "pain," and since I can't directly compare my inner experience to someone else's, then how can I ever know whether someone else has the same feeling that I have? Even if we take something simple like the perception of color, we see that with this model, since my perceptions are internal and my color words refer to this inner experience, then it is perfectly possible that everyone sees something different than I do when I say, for example, "I see a red balloon." On this model, I can never make what is important to me—my thoughts, feelings, and experiences—truly known to anyone else. I am cut off and alone.

Wittgenstein dissolves the assumptions leading to this solipsistic conclusion by showing that it derives from the Tractarian idea of language. As we saw in the discussion of "understanding," this is the idea that words have meaning only as names or by referring to things. By using a number of examples and language games, Wittgenstein shows that this Tractarian model would make our thoughts and experiences meaningless or irrelevant. A well-known illustration that Wittgenstein uses to make this point is that of the beetle in the box.

Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a "beetle." No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle.—Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something quite different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing.—But suppose the word "beetle" had a use in these people's language?—If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a *something*: for the box might even be empty.—No, one can "divide through" by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is.

That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of "object and designation" the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant.¹

So, if we think that our words for thoughts are meaningful because they have a private referent, we misconstrue the way we speak about our experiences. In fact, to interpret our subjective experiences using this Tractarian model actually ends up making what we are talking about irrelevant. If the meaning of our words for our experiences was actually based on the model of "object and designation," then our words would be quite meaningless and this is clearly not the case. If you tell a doctor that you are in pain, it is possible that he or she might not believe you, but I'm sure the doctor would know what you mean. Our words cannot have a private definition or meaning. A language so constructed would not be a language at all. We, of course, may keep our thoughts private, but the meaning of our words must be public. We must think in a language, and a language, to be a language, must include the possibility of communicating. Thus, we cannot be logically cut off from the community of language users, and this necessary connection circumvents the problem of solipsism. If I can describe or talk about my experiences, then they cannot be understood only by me—they can be shared.

Many of the problems stemming from Cartesianism can be dissolved once we let go of the notion that when I talk about the mind I am entering a world of unique or privileged access. In a sense, our language will not permit us to give this picture any meaning. It is fine as a metaphor, but we should not confuse this with a pathway to a science of the mind.

Clearly, the problems stemming from Empiricism have the same source and will benefit from a similar analysis. If we think our words are meaningful because they refer to sensations or sense data, we end up in the same "privacy" muddle. The word "red" does not only name or get its meaning from my personal experience of red. If it did, as we saw above, the word would be meaningless.

One of the puzzling things about the relationship of the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations* is the lack of any extended discussion of ethics. Many reasons have been suggested for this lack. That Wittgenstein no longer had any interest in ethics is unlikely since his biographers and students tell us that he was

still passionately concerned with the topic. Some commentators have suggested that his silence on ethics in the *Investigations* corrects a defect in the *Tractatus*. In that earlier work, he counts ethics among those things that we cannot talk about, yet he manages to have quite a lot to say on the topic. The silence of the *Investigations*, then, if he still held the same opinion on ethics, would be more consistent. If, however, we are to treat the language game with ethics as we would any other language game, it is strange that he did not treat it. I tend to think Wittgenstein is discussing ethics in the *Investigations*, but, again, in a novel way that often escapes notice. If we return to the earlier idea that ethics is about the relationship of the self to the world, then we can see from the above that the Cartesian and empiricist paradigms cannot give true knowledge of either. As we saw in the *Tractatus*, the ethical must make itself manifest—it must be shown. Rather than fostering a true understanding and manifestation of the self, the Cartesian and empiricist approaches offer us only roadblocks and detours. Again, I think Wittgenstein is showing that these pictures actually present us with layers of nonsense that must be cleared away before the self and the world can truly emerge. Clearly, the theme of the *Tractatus* remains: our problems are the result of encountering the boundaries of language. I think Wittgenstein would still say that much of what really matters lies on the other side of this boundary and that "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence."

NOTES

1. Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein* (New York: Horizon Press, 1968), 123.
2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1961), 3.
3. Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973), 192.
4. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.F.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 138-155.
5. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 293.

CHRONOLOGY

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| 1889 | born to a wealthy family in Vienna, educated at home up to age fourteen |
| 1900 | <i>The Interpretation of Dreams</i> , by Sigmund Freud |
| 1905 | Einstein publishes his first paper on relativity |
| 1907 | Picasso shows his "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon," develops cubism in painting |