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Wittgenstein and the Problem of Abusive Language

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These days, more and more social movements are focusing on changing the ways we speak. As a result of these movements, words that were once commonplace until quite recently are being pushed out of our language because of their power to hurt people. This tells us that political groups recognize the power of words to greatly damage us. In this paper, I explore Wittgenstein's philosophy of language in order to shed light on how we can use language to insult each other. Both the early and the later Wittgenstein are able to account, in some respects, for how we understand insults. Insults rely first on there being a fact that someone can point out about us and second on an injurious normative judgment about these facts. By outlining Wittgenstein's ideas in both *Tractatus Logico-Philosoficus* and *Philosophical Investigations* we are able to create an account of how we can understand these abusive uses of language. Additionally, we can use the later ideas of the *Philosophical Investigations,* especially his criticisms of his earlier work, to account for how these groups are able to change language and attempt to remove these abusive uses of language.

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Introduction: 'Words Will Never Hurt Me'

Many of us in the course of our lives will be insulted. Whether it is in the school halls, at work, or in the private domain, we can be called numerous hurtful names. Perhaps I am on *The Wonder Years* and someone calls me a loser, perhaps a co-worker heard I have a new romantic interest and calls me a slut, or perhaps I am on the street and a passerby calls me a fag. No matter where we are or where we go there will likely be some way to insult us. The old saying is that 'sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,' but we all know words can be quite powerful. Some people still take this approach and say that instead of changing how they speak and being politically correct others should just learn to be thick-skinned. Of course, these days we recognize hate speech as oppressive speech and do our best to try and limit its usage.

We see, for instance, newscasters lose their jobs for racist remarks or employees file lawsuits against superiors who make sexist remarks. Consider Don Imus. In 2007, while commenting on the NCAA women's basketball championship between University of Tennessee and Rutgers University, Imus referred to the women on the Rutgers team as "nappy-headed hos." Backlash from civil rights groups followed Imus's racist and sexist statement, prompting an apology from him, and culminating in CBS terminating his employment. In a public statement about the events, CBS executive Leslie Moonves stated he had to consider "the effect language like this has on our young people, particularly young women of color trying to make their way in this society."[1] Moonves suggests Imus's statement really is powerful and harming not only the women he was talking about, but all young women of color. Executives believed that the sexist and racist

remark had really damaged the victims. In this example there is the recognition that language has the power to concretely damage people through insults.

These insults, of course, are only one kind of an abusive use of language. Insults themselves can be fairly minor. When someone insults me I may feel hurt, but I may not feel threatened, as though my life is in danger, or like this damages everyone's image of me. We then have to wonder how insults inflict pain in this stronger sense. This is by the insult's interaction with a broader system of language. For instance, we can repeat an insult and add in physical violence to make it bullying. Oppressive speech relies on insults as well, since the whole society takes on the belief that a certain class of people are inferior and therefore treats them as such. There is a linguistic activity in each of them that has been built up and systematized.

This point is more apparent when we look at what insults are and where they fit into our language and our social landscape. In his book on the philosophy of insults, Jerome Nue states that fundamental to an insult is that it is an injury, an attack that is personal, "mental or moral," instead of physical.[2] Throwing an insult is just as harmful as beating someone with sticks and stones. Nue uses this account to link insults to more physical forms of abuse. In particular he addresses how the violation that stems from an insult can translate into a sexual sphere, making it similar to rape, albeit less serious. Though an insult can be a nonlinguistic gesture (as biting one's thumb is in the opening scene of *Romeo and Juliet*) the harm done is not physical. Rather we feel this as emotional harm. We sometimes feel threatened for instance, and we would likely feel a sense of shame about ourselves. Neu's account alludes to this with the use of the word moral. An insult is more than a description of someone, it also makes a judgment about

the rightness or wrongness of that quality. This normative judgement suggests we need to change our behavior. We ought to feel ashamed that our behavior is not different. The insult proclaims the superiority of the speaker and attempts to assert dominance over the target.

This attempt at harm and dominance suggests we can link insults to bullying and oppression as well. In both cases, insults are taken to their extremes. Bullying is "physical or verbal abuse, repeated over time, and involving a power imbalance."[3] Insults are a part of bullying, but bullying goes beyond mere insults by exploiting this power imbalance. In order for insults to become bullying, they must be repeated, which relies on the person who is targeted being unable to stop the insult from being repeated. For example, the bullying could begin with some benign name-calling. The bully observes a longhaired boy and begins calling him a hippie pejoratively. The bully, perhaps either enjoying the longhaired boy's reaction or seeing that he has not changed, repeats the insult over and over again. The insult becomes ritualized, giving it more power. It is also likely that the longhaired boy begins to feel guilty or like the abuse is his fault. Somewhere in the repetition of this insult it became bullying. Were the bully to repeatedly cause physical harm as well, we could point to that as a sign that the longhaired boy suffered from bullying. The point of this example is that repetition increases the harm and power of insults and, by extension, bullies. Through the repetition we start to systematize the insult, so it goes beyond just a momentary injury. The ideas behind the insult are reinforced, which also reinforces the power imbalance.

Similarly, oppression takes bullying a step further by ingraining it into our social and political system. Oppression entails a limitation in options. It is being caught in a so-

called double bind between systematically related pressures.[4] Additionally, it involves recognizing that those who are oppressed are so because they belong to a particular group.[5] The emphasis is on the idea that oppression is made up of a system of limitations. Humans have sets of customs and rituals that degrade and thereby limit a group of people in how they can act. For instance, there could be a ritual where some set of people will go out of their way to open doors for another set of people, or some set of people could be perceived as criminals and mistrusted. Insults play a role in this domination as well. Statements like 'X's are all so lazy,' 'those Y's are dirty, we should send them back where they came from,' or 'Z's are diseased pedophiles' permeate American culture. To some extent they are even ingrained in people's ways of thinking about the world. What happens is that the insult becomes so ingrained and ritualized that it becomes part of the custom. The insult has been taken as close to fact and that imposes limitations on the people the statements target.

Indeed, cases like the Don Imus controversy suggest that we recognize that language can be a form of oppression. Moonves took him to really be hurting a whole class of women as they attempted to better their social standing. Imus' words seem to be limiting their life prospects. Bullying, being sexist, being homophobic, and the like, linguistically constitute an action, not merely a sentence. We could try to say insults are really particular ways of asserting facts, but this misses a portion of what is going on. A truly satisfactory picture must also incorporate the idea that insults are a particular action on top of the factual assertion. Indeed, some insults are not factual at all. As a result, constructing a satisfactory theory of insults requires something beyond the factual realm.

The power of habit or human conventions is what gives these insults their power, and for this reason I have chosen to work within a Wittgensteinian framework.

Wittgenstein's later philosophy is largely built off of this idea of conventions. He places the meaning of a language largely on words' uses in what he calls language-games. These language-games can be fairly simple things like making a joke or giving a description. They are things interwoven with human practices, which he calls forms of life, and which come from some of the natural experiences of human beings.[6] There are numerous overlaps between different language-games, but they are all different because they are contextualized differently based on the culture. Imagine I suddenly stumble upon a society I did not know existed. I find meeting these strangers quite awkward and I attempt to break the ice, so I say 'why did the chicken cross the road? To get to the other side.' Knowing this is a classic joke that no one could ever resist laughing at, I expect laughter. Yet, I only see straight faces. One man even nods and tells me he enjoyed my story, but he does not think chickens act with reason. I try another joke with the same result. Since these people do not have a way of joking in their society, my jokes are doomed to fail. They are useless without any conventions to govern them. Similarly, insults require some conventions to govern them. It is by recognizing the complexity of speech and some of its linguistic aspects that allow us to make jokes and insult one another. In order to recognize these, we need the resources that the later Wittgenstein provides. Thus, part of a satisfactory theory of bullying or insulting relies on a Wittgenstienian framework.

Wittgenstein's view of language provides the ideal framework for this paper because a consequence of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, though it is never

something he explicitly states, is that language becomes political. It is in the public discourse, the language we all understand, that we must understand ourselves and each other. I will argue the politicization is a consequence of his argument against private language. The private language argument tries to overcome a Cartesian view of the individual, namely that we are able build up knowledge based on our own subjectivity and need not rely on anyone else. In order to reject this view, Wittgenstein brings in a broader community in which our concepts have to make sense. Of course, the reliance on the community makes our language part of a broader system, opening us up to Frye's worries in "Oppression" about a restricted set of options imposed on us by the double bind. When language structures our thought and a broad base of individuals is able to determine that language, we seem to open the door to these systematically built up oppressive statements that can permeate a culture. Of course, the private language argument offers a way forward as well. Insults and bullying are predicated on the idea that the pain a bully inflicts cannot be felt by the bully himself. However, society gives us a way to structure our thoughts and show that we are in pain, and we can appeal to a natural human capacity for empathy in order to escape the situation. Since the private language argument leaves the Cartesian view somewhat untenable, we seem to have a way forward in overcoming these harmful ways of speaking.

Even Wittgenstein's early work, which I address in the first chapter, is somewhat helpful in understanding insults. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,*[*] he provides a strong framework for understanding factual language, albeit because all any language can do is picture facts under this view. His first view constructs a robust way for how our descriptions correspond to reality. When I say 'the leaf is green,' for instance, I am

[*] Hereafter I will often abbreviate this title as simply "the *Tractatus.*"

appealing to something in the world that is either true or false. To some extent this can work for insults. When I say 'Ralph is stupid,' I am in some sense describing what he is like. The normative aspect of this statement, however, is much weaker in the *Tractatus.* The way he addresses this is through the distinction between saying and showing. The distinction is able to give us a weak sense of how statements that do not fit the picturing relationship might work, but it seems to require more ideas from his later period.

In the second chapter I explore the consequences of the dichotomy between fact and value and how it led to the development of some of his later ideas. Wittgenstein does not hold that normative statements can in any way be reduced to factual statements, and I find this to be a virtue of his early theory. He initially does this by advancing a sort of mysticism and later suggests what is important is the use other forms of language have in our lives. What ultimately matters are our human practices. This begins to provide a better picture for how value statements work.

In the third chapter, this idea of usage is more fully fleshed out. In this chapter I look largely at Wittgenstein's criticisms of his earlier work as he presents them in the *Philosophical Investigations*.[†] Particularly the criticism that the *Tractatus* is too essentialist. The old theory hinges largely on naming an object and using those names to makes assertions about the world. Rather than rely on this idea, Wittgenstein develops a less logically formal view of linguistic meaning. He suggests that language grows and evolves alongside us. Language is something we do as we interact with the world. This grounds language in our customs and eventually leads to his argument against private language. Here he shows us that language structures our thoughts and experience so that there is no way that only one person can understand a language.

[†] Hereafter I will often abbreviate this title as simply "the *Investigations.*"

Indeed, in the fourth chapter I explore some of the worries surrounding language-games and how we might be able to use them in order to overcome oppressive speech. Though there is a natural propensity to feel pain or to be able to inflict harm, as explained in the third chapter, we are able to create new language-games and adopt new customs to eliminate some of the abusive usages. Though Wittgenstein does not explore how language changes, I look at how we can take language that is private (in a personal rather than inexpressible sense) to public. By doing this we are able to impact our language-games and change hurtful usages.

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[1] Paul Farhi, "Don Imus is Fired by CBS Radio," *The Washington Post*, April 13, 2007 accessed February 12, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/04/12/AR2007041201007.html.
[2] Jerome Neu, *Sticks and Stones: The Philosophy of Insults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3-4.
[3] Emily Bazalon, "Defining Bullying Down," *The New York Times,* March 11, 2013 accessed February 16, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/12/opinion/defining-bullying-down.html?_r=0.
[4] Marilyn Frye, "Oppression" in *The Politics of Reality* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1983), 2-3.
[5] *Ibid.,* 8.
[6] Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations.* Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe. Ed. P.M.S. Hacker, Joachim Schulte. (United States: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009) §23

Chapter 1: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* Wittgenstein presents the view that language is meaningful because it pictures facts in the world, a view he eventually rejected for its being incomplete. Furthermore, he claims that picturing facts is the only way for language to be meaningful. Based on that criterion, this theory of meaning is able to give a partial account of insults. Although it may go some of the way towards explaining how insults and value judgements function, it is only the beginning of a full-fledged explanation. In some sense insults involve picturing facts about us, but to insult someone is to go beyond this and introduce or imply a normative judgement. Since the *Tractatus* presents a theory where language only does this one thing, it lacks any potential for explaining how an insult goes beyond a statement of fact.

The *Tractatus* itself stems from Wittgenstein's work with Bertrand Russell and Gottlob Frege. Wittgenstein's early career was influenced by Russell and Frege's realist philosophies of mathematics, which eventually led him to study under Russell at Cambridge University.[1] Frege and Russell both come out of the tradition in which words refer to real world objects, and their work focused on explicating the logical structure of language. The intention behind this stems from the idea that ordinary language is imprecise and thus imperfect. Russell believed the structure of a language, which both he and Frege thought was a logical structure, could be revealed by analysis.

Consider Russell's sentence 'the present king of France is bald.' Since there is no present king of France it seems like the sentence is false. However, saying it is false is ambiguous because in a straightforward reading that would give us 'the present king of France is not bald,' which would also be false. The problem is that the 'present king of

France' does not refer to anyone, since France is no longer a monarchy. The sentence seems to be meaningful, but we have a problem because how can a sentence about a non-existent thing be meaningful? Russell's solution was to say the 'present king of France' was not genuinely part of a proposition as a singular term. He demonstrated this by presenting an analysis of the proposition in which the phrase 'the present King of France' disappears, hence dissolving the problem. His full analysis presents two propositions. First, that there exists a person, and only one, who is the ruler of France, and second that this person has no hair. Once we break up the sentence we see there are two potential ways for the sentence to be false. The first way is when there is no king of France. The second involves there being a ruler of France, but this ruler has a full head of hair. Russell's analysis indicates that the surface appearance of language masks a deeper structure.

By analyzing the underlying structure of language we can overcome philosophical misunderstandings, which motivates Wittgenstein's primary method in both works. When he wrote the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein followed Russell and Frege in believing there could be a precise structure or an 'ideal language' modeled on mathematics and logic. Russell, for instance, believed that

> In a logically perfect language, there will be one word and no more for every simple object, and everything that is not simple will be expressed by a combination of words, by a combination derived, of course, from the words for the simple things that enter in, one word for each simple component. A language of that sort will be completely analytic, and will show at a glance the logical structure of the facts asserted or denied […] Actual languages are not perfect in this sense, and they cannot possibly be, if they are to serve the purposes of daily life. A logically perfect language, if it could be constructed, would not only be intolerably prolix, but, as regards its vocabulary, would be very largely private to one speaker.[2]

A logically perfect language, which means in this context a fully analyzed one, has several key features. Though a logically perfect language is cumbersome and impractical, it would not mislead anyone with ambiguous sentences the way our everyday language can. Each object is named by only one word. Another feature is that the logical structure of its propositions mirror the logical structure of the facts that are asserted or denied. Russell (as well as Wittgenstein) calls the words for these objects 'logically proper names.' They lack any descriptive content, which makes them the end point of linguistic analysis. A logically proper name only names an object. This contrasts with a definite description like 'the king of France,' which describes an object. Russell believed the objects named in an ideal language were sense data. That is, they are only those objects of which we have direct awareness. As a result, the objects named in the ideal language would be necessarily private for Russell, meaning only one person could really know them, an idea the later Wittgenstein argues is impossible. Many features of Russell's logically perfect language are noticeable in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus.* In particular, I focus in the correspondence between object and word in my summary.

In part, the choice stems from the fact that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein tries to uncover the relationship between language, thought, and the world. He believes language does only one thing, it represents facts in the world. Therefore, in developing his ideal language, he holds an essentialist view of what language does. He begins with the idea that propositions express thoughts. At a glance this seems like a conservative view, since it can be traced back to Aristotle.[3] It seems especially conservative when he bases it on the essentialist assumption that language has a single function. However, there is much in the *Tractatus* that can be viewed as revolutionary. He is able to improve upon some of

Russell's ideas. The ideal language he constructs has a logical structure perfectly mirroring the facts in the world.

Picturing Meaning

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein supports a picture theory of meaning, which holds that propositions picture facts in the world. Wittgenstein was inspired by how French courts represented car accidents them with models. In the model the miniature replicas all correspond to some sort of real world object: miniature cars with real cars, miniature people with real people and so on. This model must in some way correspond to the real thing it represents in order to succeed in representing it. This led him to think that a proposition could similarly serve as a potential model, or picture, for states of affairs.[4] Just as the model in the courts portrays the events of the accident with a reenactment or a painting represents a landscape, Wittgenstein thought propositions could portray reality as a logical picture of facts in the world. Wittgenstein has in mind a particular form of representation: a logical picture. In a logical picture, the propositions mirror the arrangement of objects in the world. How well the propositions correspond to the world determines whether the picture is true or false. If the proposition really does represent the facts, then it is true.

Though Wittgenstein focuses on a logical picture, it is possible for there to be a different kind of picture, like a visual picture. The contrast between these kinds of pictures shows us the some of the peculiar features of the logical picture. In particular, the logical picture relies on a binary of true or false whereas other pictures rely on a continuum of being accurate. For instance, we might say that Jacques-Louis David's *The Death of Socrates* is a more accurate portrayal of Socrates' final moments than Antonio

Zucchi's *Socrates Drinking the Hemlock,* or vice versa. Which one is more accurate depends on the one that has more in common with the actual events. With a logical picture, we do not get this continuum. Instead a logical picture is true or it is not, with no middle ground. Propositions can represent what is the case and what is not the case, and we can determine this by looking at the facts in the physical world.

The starting point of this theory relies on this picturing relationship and asserts that all meaningful language corresponds to the facts in the world. Wittgenstein begins the *Tractatus* with the statement that "the world is all that is the case," which means it "is the totality of facts, not of things."[5] Objects exist in particular relations to each other, which constitutes a fact and the world will be completed by this catalogue of facts. We learn a fact is "the existence of states of affairs" where "a state of affairs (a state of things) is a combination of objects (things)," so objects are the ultimate constituents of reality.[6] The world is structured by objects and how they relate to each other because it is just the states of affairs that exist. Objects build up to states of affairs, which are either true or false. These are simple facts, which build further into complex facts. By analyzing these facts we can analyze the world and understand everything that is the case.

In language we have a similar situation because language mirrors the world. The whole of language can be broken down such that "the totality of propositions is a language."[7] Our language is the set of all the possible combinations of propositions or sentences. They make up our language because they contain everything with a sense that can be said. Propositions themselves are made up of "all that follows from the totality of all elementary propositions."[8] Complex propositions, then, can be decomposed into elementary propositions, so elementary propositions give some structure to the more

complex propositions. The elementary propositions themselves are the smallest possible units that say something. They assert "states of affairs" and are "concatenation[s] of names," which makes them sequences of names that picture simple facts.[9] The elementary propositions are composed of names, and as I said before I can use the elementary propositions to construct complex propositions to the point where I have all the possible propositions. The elementary proposition is made up of logically proper names, which are the simplest symbols in a language because they "cannot be dissected any further by means of a definition," they are "a representative of an object."[10] Logically proper names lack any descriptive content, which prevents an infinite regress where names are just defined in terms of other names.

Without descriptive content it seems like names should be meaningless. Indeed, "only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have meaning," which starts to make sense of names.[11] Wittgenstein does not give an example of a logically proper name or an elementary proposition, but we can get a sense of Wittgenstein's point by using Russell's examples of a logically proper name. Given Wittgenstein's own lack of examples, I think it is important to stress that he probably did not accept Russell's idea that a logically proper name was something like 'this,' 'that,' or 'I.' Still, we can get a grasp on Wittgenstein's point by imagining that we are in an empty white room with another person and I just assert 'I.' Since there is no context for the name, I have not said anything with this assertion. It is nonsensical for me to just assert one word and nothing about it. The logically proper name requires context, the name on its own is not a sentence and cannot express an idea. Though they are meaningless themselves, names build up to elementary propositions, which can then build up to complex propositions.

Hence, the arrangement of names in true elementary propositions noticeably mirrors the arrangement of objects in the world.

We can see both language and the world break down into simpler and simpler parts, which is in part because language and the world have an isomorphic relationship. Just as the world is the totality of facts, language is the totality of propositions. Where facts break down into states of affairs, propositions break into elementary propositions. Finally, we break these down into their smallest parts: objects and logically proper names. True propositions of language picture the world, which is just an arrangement of facts. These propositions are logically isomorphic with the facts they picture. The isomorphic relation allows elementary propositions to picture simple facts and complex propositions to picture complex facts. The world can be decomposed into these facts and further decomposed because smaller facts build up and represent larger ones.

Indeed, this is where the notion of a picture comes into play. When we are confronted with these facts "we picture facts to ourselves," and the "picture is a fact" which is "laid against reality like a measure."[12] That is, pictures are attached to reality and measured against it by using language. We judge the accuracy of these facts/pictures against reality. When we consider the extent to which they correspond to what is real, we are making a judgment of truth value. If I say 'it is raining,' what I said will either be true or false. The way we determine the truth or falsity, then is by measuring propositions against the world. I must ask how the picture 'it is raining' corresponds to the facts of my world. Wittgenstein makes it explicit that "a picture agrees with reality or fails to agree; it is correct or incorrect, true or false," which consequentially means "what a picture represents it represents independent of its truth or falsity."[13] As a result, my picture 'it is

raining,' represents a possible state of affairs whether that state of affairs exists or not. Thus, all propositions can picture all the possible facts, which is everything that can be said.

The totality of propositions contains everything that can be said, but presumably there are some things that cannot be said. One of the first hints of this dichotomy comes from Wittgenstein's assertion that "a proposition *shows* how things stand *if* it is true. And it *says* that they do stand."[14] Later, it is made more explicit that "what *can* be shown, *cannot* be said."[15] Anything that is not formulated in a proposition must be shown. Language is limited, and it cannot make nonfactual assertions. A proposition reflects reality, so a proposition can say what reality is in explicit and factual terms. Those things that lie outside of factual reality are the things can only be shown and not said.

What Wittgenstein seems to have in mind are propositions about metaphysics or logical form itself. The clearest example he offers is through tautologies and contradictions. While they may look as though they have the similar form to a proposition, they are not propositions because they lack the contingency that propositions have. Tautologies are always true and contradictions are always false. Since they are not propositions, they "show that they say nothing," and "lack sense."[16] Though they do not say anything about the world, and strictly speaking they lack sense, they are not meaningless.[‡] He notes that they are as much a part of logical symbolism as zero is in mathematical symbolism. In other words, tautologies and contradictions show us something about logical form and symbolism. In particular, they show the way logical

[‡] We can imagine a nonsensical sputtering of syllables like 'rup hup jup' as something nonsensical and meaningless. Not only do these syllables not say anything in our language, but they do not really show anything either. At least not in a normal context, my using it as an example perhaps allows it to show something when it otherwise would not be able to.

signs and truth conditions work. A proposition, since it just pictures a fact, cannot say anything about logical form because there is no object to correspond to it. Wittgenstein even points out that the *Tractatus* itself serves as an example of saying nothing because by trying to get at the pictorial form of language he could only show it. Since only empirical facts can say something, the *Tractatus* falls into this category of the senseless. This category includes all of philosophy, which tries to get at what can only be shown.

That the *Tractatus* itself is something that can be shown and therefore nonsensical leads some scholars like James Conant to reject a metaphysical reading of the saying-showing distinction. Conant's overall project seems to be a reading of the *Tractatus* that is free of metaphysical doctrines and part of this is directed at the idea of nonsense. Nonsense statements are meaningless because "one piece of nonsense may or may not show that another less self-evidently nonsensical piece of nonsense is nonsense."[17] All nonsensical propositions are equally empty. They do not show us anything because there is nothing for them to show. He wants to argue that Wittgenstein leaves us with empty propositions, so there is no difference between it and ordinary gibberish, which frees us from any philosophical doctrine. This amounts to a complete rejection of metaphysics. The *Tractatus* advances no theses, no metaphysical principles, nor even a semantic theory. Reading it in this way shows us the nonsensical nature of what came before and seemed to make sense. But I find this reading problematic because it creates too weak a saying-showing distinction. That there is nothing behind what we try to show seems to put Wittgenstein into a reductionist camp. Because nonsensical statement are empty, we are unable to express whatever thought is behind them.

Conant's argument for this position relies in part on his own translation of Wittgenstein's assertion in the preface that his book "*ist also kein Lehrbuch.*" Conant translates this as "not a work of doctrine," which is a departure from both standard translations by C.K. Ogden and D.F. Pears with B.F. McGuinness.[18] Both the Ogden and the Pears-McGuinness translations opt for a literal translation of *Lehrbuch* as "textbook." I find myself more inclined to accept the standard translation because of what the image of a textbook implies. A textbook often expresses truths about the world; we take them to be a factual authority on the subject they write on. The *Tractatus,* by contrast, is trying to show something that lies beyond the physical world. Something that is left once we have 'thrown away the ladder,' to borrow Wittgenstein's phrase. That is, he is trying to get at something that is not mere fact, or what can be said.

Marie McGinn attempts to carry forward Conant's metaphysics-free reading of Wittgenstein while adding a positive achievement to Wittgenstein's work. Similar to my interpretation, McGinn takes issue with Conant's treatment of the saying-showing distinction. She sees Conant's interpretation leading to there being thoughts that language cannot express, much as I do. Rather than interpreting the distinction as one between thought and language, McGinn believes the limits of language show themselves in the use of words.[19] Her position roots saying in the physical world, which comes out of his pictorial relationship. There are facts that correspond to the sentences we form, actual things that are often physical. The things that are shown, on the other hand, are things we have a purely practical grasp on. We could see this, perhaps, in the assertion that only in a proposition do words have meanings. What is shown is the way we use words or how the words we use are the ones we use. There is, for instance, no way to explain how the

sentence ‘the dog is barking’ pictures that physical event. Thus, we end up with this seemingly mystical relationship that we cannot express in a straightforward way.

Implications

Having laid out the theory and some of its main features, I will now turn to the implications of this view. To summarize what the theory shows: language is a picture of reality and logically proper names have meaning because there is a real world object that corresponds to them. Additionally, a sentence is meaningful because it gives a picture of reality. For this section, I want to consider the merits and limitations of the picture theory. Particularly, its construction of a language that only describes is indicative of the power of facts. With facts we are pointing out what our world is like, which is not in itself insulting. That I have a certain skin color or gender or that I act a certain way could just be an observation about the world. Since often times insults are used to assert more than a mere description, they sometimes go beyond a mere saying. This requires an exploration into the saying and showing distinction and whether it might be useful for value-based speech like ethics.

The picture theory of meaning provides a strong account of the power of facts. A phrase like ‘my desk is on fire,’ has meaning because there is an object out in the world that is my desk, there is a state of being on fire, *et cetera*. In that case we have a clear description of the facts. This also succeeds in the case of insults as interpreted as factual sentences. For example, a straightforward factual insult can be my younger brother looking me in the eye and saying ‘you are annoying me.’ Presumably I would be doing something that causes him some irritation and he is asserting the fact that what I am doing is irritating to him. Similarly, if I were to talk to him about my impassioned love

for *Manos the Hands of Fate* and he were to call me a nerd, then he is asserting a fact. There is a factual claim that can be fairly unchangeable. For instance, one cannot change the color of one's skin. Facts are fairly set in stone and correspond to these actual qualities about us. In both cases there is a fact about me that he is commenting on and I really ought to feel like I have been shown some sort of disrespect because he is younger than me and making a judgement about my behavior.

This concept of disrespect, however, complicates the picture theory of meaning. First, there needs to be some clarification of what object in the world corresponds to disrespect. Certainly, there are actions we call disrespectful. The action says that it is disrespectful, but there is a wide range of things that are disrespectful. In some countries it might be showing someone the soles of your feet and in another it can be biting your thumb. What constitutes a disrespectful action varies for the most part from place to place. The essentialist might say that the essence of these acts is that they express a low opinion of the person they target. The essentialist account, however, dodges the question because it is a certain kind of action that is disrespectful. Disrespectfulness cannot pick out an action and make that action disrespectful everywhere. Saying that it can ignores the fact that there are few actions that are disrespectful for everyone. Showing the soles of your feet or biting your thumb do not picture a fact, but they are symbolic acts that have meaning in a given context. They require context to capture their more performative meaning. The language Wittgenstein constructed here, the essentialist language, can only do one thing, which makes it difficult to account for an insult.

While there is a factual component to insults, they go beyond that into values. Do not get me wrong though, facts are important. If there were no fact there could not be an

assertion of value against someone. What makes insults painful is that they assert something somewhat factual. This can be a quality about myself that I am insecure about, or something I do not want to be perceived as. However, it seems that with both of these cases we have to bring in a value judgment to get the full effect, such as if someone says 'you're so gay' to me when I walk down the street. If I treat this merely as a proposition. It will either be true or false that I am in fact gay. Then I have nothing to worry about and ought not to be offended. It is perfectly okay to be gay. Indeed, since they are based on fact "all propositions are of equal value."[20] However, that seems to run contrary to empirical fact. If it were perfectly okay to be gay, then no one would be verbally and physically assaulted for their sexual orientation. However, people have been oppressed throughout the past several hundred years for having a queer identity. Additionally insults seem to assert more than mere facts. The 'picture' of insults makes a value judgment. Based on the picture theory of language we can build up complex sentences with simple facts. However we are limited to remain outside the realm of value because we will run into trouble as we try to find facts that correspond to values.

Ultimately, the problem rests in the lack of a mechanism for how values show what they express. In the case of logical form, Wittgenstein appeals to tautologies and contradictions, but for values he has no mechanism. With logic we can clearly get a sense of what the symbols mean based on the propositions that are always true or always false, but in value truth and falsity seem to drop out. For instance, Wittgenstein thought that Tolstoy's *The Gospel in Brief* showed how life should be lived.[21] *The Gospel in Brief* provides numerous moral lessons and an idea of what the true way to live is. He was allegedly obsessed with it and carried it around as one of his most cherished possessions

and thought so highly of its teachings that he would even give it as a gift. His obsession with Tolstoy suggests stories show the path for people to take in life, but this is quite different from logic. Where logic is free of ambiguity, the gospel is open to hundreds of interpretations. Logical truths force themselves upon us by virtue of the rules, but it is not clear that this is true of value statements as well. Marie McGinn's interpretation of saying and showing may offer a solution. The practical grasp she suggests constitutes showing relies on human customs. As a result, the ways human customs impose themselves upon us provide a way for one to show values. This leap however, relies on Wittgenstein's later philosophy in order to truly be a robust mechanism.

As we can perhaps gather from these examples, the notion of a logically perfect language is self-defeating to some extent. When we focus on only the logical structure of language we lose many aspects and functions of language. Of course, the notion of an ideal language seems to recycle through the ages. Our attempts to make language less hurtful is its own search for an ideal language. We have simply been reoriented to a political structure of language rather than a logical structure. Of course, this is quite different from the ideal language of Russell and Frege, which is the ideal logical structure that the *Tractatus* attempts to uncover. Allegedly, Wittgenstein was so confident in his work that he felt he had solved all the problems of philosophy. Upon rethinking his view he felt he was wrong. Rather than analyzing an ideal language, returning metaphysical uses of language to their ordinary uses was the role philosophy should play. The picture theory of meaning leaves us wondering where value statements end up and how they are meaningful. In a famous anecdote, Wittgenstein was convinced to abandon the picture theory of meaning, in part based on insults. It is said that one of Wittgenstein's

colleagues, Piero Straffa "made a Neapolitan gesture of brushing his chin with two finger tips asking: 'what is the logical form of that?'"[22] It seems Wittgenstein was forced to confront the unsatisfactory nature of the Tractarian view of language in providing a foundation for all of language. Those things that are not logically founded have to be accounted for in some other way beyond the claim that they can only be shown.

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[1] Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein*. (London: Allen Lane, 1973), 2.
[2] Bertrand Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism.* ed. David Pears (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985), 58-59.
[3] Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein,* 19-20.
[4] Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: the Duty of Genius* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 118.
[5] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.* Trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (New York: Routledge, 2000), §1, §1.1.
[6] *Ibid.,* §2-2.01.
[7] *Ibid.,* §4.001.
[8] *Ibid.,* §4.52.
[9] *Ibid.,* §4.21, §4.22.
[10] *Ibid.,* §3.26, §3.22.
[11] *Ibid.,* §3.3.
[12] *Ibid.*, §2.1, §2.141, §2.1512.
[13] *Ibid.,* §2.21-2.22
[14] *Ibid.,* §4.022
[15] *Ibid.,* §4.1212
[16] *Ibid.,* §4.461
[17] James Conant, "Throwing Away the Top of the Ladder," *The Yale Review* 79, no. 3 (1990): 345.
[18] *Ibid.*
[19] Marie McGinn, "Saying and Showing and the Continuity of Wittgenstein's Thought," *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (2001): 28.
[20] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* §6.4.
[21] Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: the Duty of Genius,* 115-117, 213.
[22] *Ibid.,* 261.

Chapter 2: Wittgenstein on Value

Wittgenstein's views in the *Tractatus* leave us with a strong dichotomy between fact and value. Since a language's only function is to picture facts, the meaningfulness of ethical language is problematic. There may have already been hints of this in the beginning with the statement that the world is all that is the case and the totality of facts. Because propositions picture facts about the world and on many accounts value statements are nonfactual, it is not clear how these judgements can be meaningful in this framework. As it stands now, meaningfulness seems to require this picturing relationship. It seems that when I say something like 'theft is wrong' or 'you should not steal,' I am not making a picture as I am when I say 'the grass is green.' Without a different way for statements to be meaningful, it seems ethical statements are in danger of being meaningless.

As we saw in the last chapter, in the case of logical statements, which are also nonfactual, Wittgenstein suggests the distinction between saying and showing gives purpose to otherwise nonsensical statements. However, Wittgenstein does not gives us any clues as to how we could salvage ethical statements. There clearly are sentences about right and wrong, but what we have to worry about is whether those sentences are meaningful. Given a picture theory, ethical statements fall into nonsense if we cannot come up with an alternative means of expressing them. However, Wittgenstein's solution, that things that can be said have a sense while those things that are shown cannot be said, also can be applied to ethical language. Thus, value statements cannot be said, but their meaningfulness must be found in what they show.

A Sketch of Wittgenstein's Views

Wittgenstein ends the *Tractatus* with the consequences of ineffable value. The facts are what is the case or is not the case; they are the reality propositions try to picture. Since propositions mirror facts, they correspond to the world, but "if there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and what is the case."[1] Anything with value, like ethics or aesthetics, does not fit into the world that is the totality of facts. Rather, the ethical lies outside of the facts. Because they cannot be pictured with propositions, pictures of facts can always be verified by what is or is not the case, but an obligation cannot. In the case of factual discourse I can say that this proposition is true or that one is false, but there is no empirical fact of the matter for how I should act. Normative statements, for instance, suggest we have no choice in acting this way or that way. We are compelled to act the 'right' way. Thus the meaningfulness of value judgments or imperatives requires that which cannot be said, what must be shown.

This is why "ethics is transcendental" and "cannot be put into words."[2] It is outside of what is the case, it is what ought to be the case. Wittgenstein considers ethics, religion, and other higher things as those things that "cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical."[3] The idea that the mystical cannot be said suggests they have to be shown. Since it "is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists," we seem to have no way to say what the mystical things are like.[4] How the world is has nothing to do with what is mystical. Like the mystical, good and evil are beyond the factual, so they can only be shown. There is no object for an ethical proposition to correspond to, but what an ethical sentence can do is show us something meaningful that is beyond the world of facts.

The sheer incapacity of fact to express value comes across more explicitly in Wittgenstein's "Lecture on Ethics." Unlike Susan Hekman, who believes "the 'Lecture on Ethics' clearly belongs to his later period," I find it difficult to place the lecture anywhere but his early period.[5] Hekman's conclusion seems to rest on the idea that since he gave the lecture in the late 1920s, he had already changed his mind about his view on ethics. While it is true that at the time Wittgenstein was rethinking some of the ideas of his earlier work, many of the ideas emblematic of his later period had yet to appear. Certainly they are not in the "Lecture on Ethics," as Hekman points out. Moreover, the ideas in the lecture are presented as though he is trying to clear up misunderstandings people have about his view in the *Tractatus*.[6] He seems to be working explicitly with those ideas he presented in his early work, in which case it belongs with his earlier career rather than his later career.

In part of this lecture he attempts to show what absolute value would look like. One example he gives is the notion of absolute safety, which "has to be described by saying we feel safe in the hands of God."[7] Allusions to religion, like this one, frequently appear throughout the "Lecture on Ethics," which indicates a strong linkage of the two. Indeed, both are linked in that they lie outside of the realm of science and fact. We cannot talk about either, that is nonsense. They can only be shown to us and hold ultimate value for people's lives. For example, we cannot quantify something like God's power. We have to be shown with examples like the creation of the universe, a bush burning without being consumed, or resurrection. All of these show God's power in a way that is contrary to the factual. These are metaphors that give us a glimpse of what God's power is like. He is so powerful that he can create the universe or do these things that seem

contradictory to the laws of nature. Similarly, in a deleted passage from the lecture there is the idea that "what is good is also divine," which "sums up [Wittgenstein's] ethics."[8] Again, we see a strong linkage between both religion and ethics. Both ethics and religion are supernatural or transcendental.

Another difference between facts and values is that ethical and religious statements hold in an absolute sense whereas the others hold in a relative sense. Wittgenstein illustrates this point with his tennis example. For Wittgenstein a relative value is like playing tennis badly and not wanting to improve, while absolute values are like someone behaving badly and not wanting to improve when they "*ought* to want to behave better."[9] What distinguishes the statement of relative value from the statement of absolute value is that the statement of relative value is a statement of fact and an absolute judgment cannot be factual. If I play tennis well or badly then in either case it is a mere statement of fact. I am performing a particular action in a way that it either is or is not in accordance with whatever factual descriptions make a good tennis player. Statements of the facts like this contain no ethical content. Thus, with absolute statement, there is an obligation to conform to it, like becoming a better person. Such an obligation suggests that we have to correct ourselves to abide by the absolute values. Thus, in ethical and religious statements we try to achieve these absolute values.

Both ethics and religion also seem to function like similes for Wittgenstein. He compares the sentence 'he is a good person' with 'he is a good football player' to highlight the similarity; however, one is factual while the other is not.[10] With a good football player we have a set of criteria that can tell us what exactly that looks like. It can be scoring a certain number of points, succeeding in certain actions on defense,

successfully completing a certain number of passes, and so on. With being a good person it is not exactly clear what those criteria are or if there even are criteria. Wittgenstein gets at this idea by reminding us that a simile usually stands for something like a fact, so I can usually dispose of the simile and describe the fact. However, by trying to describe the absolute value beyond the simile "[Wittgenstein] must admit it is nonsense."[11] There is no clear fact of the matter for how we ought to act or what actions will give everyone a happy life, which dooms ethical statements to the realm of the nonsensical. For instance, I can make a claim that 'Jesus loves me,' which seems similar to 'my mother loves me.' For the statement about Jesus, however, there is no fact to correspond to it. God transcends our world, which means there is no way to verify that God does love me.

However, the pairing of ethics with the religious seems to suggest Wittgenstein wants to subordinate ethics to religion. This seems to be what Albert Levi has in mind when he links the ethical views of the *Tractatus* to the "concern for absolute safety in the [later] 'Lecture on Ethics'" due to the need for "protect[ion] from his threatening homosexual inclinations."[12] Levi's argument suggests ethics stems from the fear of retribution for Wittgenstein. By making these concerns transcendental, human beings are limited in passing judgment on others, and thereby delivering retribution. Rather, God is the only one who can decide what is right and wrong. Thus, ethics become subordinated to God's will.

Of course, this line of reasoning is flawed. The emphasis of Wittgenstein's appeals to God understand God as a transcendent figure rather than a religious one. Cyril Barrett notes this as well and adds that while Wittgenstein did link religious and ethical considerations, there is no clear connection to any particular religion.[13] Granted there is

an intimate connection between the two, but what transcends the world is not explicitly any deity. That is, no deity is determining what is good or bad. If that were the case, then ethics would just be statements concerning God's will and what is or is not in accordance with it. It seems fairly clear that this is not what Wittgenstein is doing. Something else determines the values that transcend the world. Additionally, sentences about religious belief make different statements than ethical ones. The two overlap in the sense that values describe ways of living, but the obligations of religion and ethical obligations are different ways of living. Religion is a ritualistic set of values that bears a relation to an absolute judge or afterlife. Ethics, on the other hand, defines our relationship to other persons. It defines how we should live and treat others while in this finite world rather than how to relate to a figure that transcends the physical world. Returning to the earlier issue, Wittgenstein's ethics are transcendental, but they are not subordinate to his view on religious belief.

Assessing Wittgenstein's View

The transcendental nature of ethics for Wittgenstein seems to open up the problem of how we understand what the absolute values are. We can say for certain that it is not a set of facts because "the *absolute good,* if it is a describable state of affairs, would be one which everybody […] would necessarily bring about or feel guilty about not bringing about."[14] An absolute value coerces us into performing some action. Since a fact is a state of affairs that exists, Wittgenstein uses the language of states of affairs to reject absolute values. If facts are existing states of affairs and "no state of affairs has, in itself, […] the coercive power of an absolute judge," then we have to give up on facts potentially describing absolute values.[15] There are not facts that have the power to coerce us into

acting a certain way. Insofar as we can come to understand ethics it is not through facts. That is, we cannot understand absolute values through facts because no such fact coerces us.

While this presents a potential problem for Wittgenstein's views on ethics, I would first like to consider the virtue of this separation, that it shields us from the danger of ethics and facts being one and the same. When an ethical statement is something we can consider the same as a statement of fact, we can declare it to be either true or false. Danger arises once one person or group says that they know what the truly right values to hold are. The cases where we are able to appeal to facts (or at least seem to) for our ethics being *the* correct ethics are those cases where we force others to either conform to our way of thinking or face horrific consequences. In other words, if we view ethics as consisting of ethical facts derivable from the empirical world, then this could lead to acts of oppression. For instance, if being gay is wrong and some sort of empirical fact, then I seem to be justified in forcing them to change, through any means necessary. By differentiating between the spheres of facts and ethics, Wittgenstein is able to block this problem. If right and wrong are transcendental, and not a part of our empirical discourse, then we are barred from using 'ethical facts' to oppress others.

Ultimately this leads to the conclusion that Wittgenstein is trying to insulate the ethical from rational discourse.[16] Factual statements and value judgments are fundamentally different, and one is ultimately more meaningful for how we live our lives than the other. Facts describe the world whereas value judgments tell us the meaning of the world. Through our value judgments we express our worldview, and what we think is important for life. In order to make these sorts of claims we must go outside the facts.

Indeed, this is where readings like those of the logical positivists, particularly the Vienna Circle, struggle. The logical positivists were influenced by Wittgenstein's thought, particularly his emphasis on the limits logic and philosophy, which led them to regard science as the means of moral progress and to reject metaphysics.[17] The Vienna Circle represents an extreme interpretation of Wittgenstein's theory of meaning. They take Wittgenstein to mean that only sentences that are true or false can have meaning. Metaphysical or transcendental explanations of the world are holdovers from a less enlightened time. Ethical statements are no more verifiable than religious statements, and under the logical positivist view propositions are meaningless if they cannot be verified; otherwise one "does not know what he has said."[18] Insofar as we can make value judgments they must be verifiable.

We can see examples of this in A.J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic,* in which he cites Russell and Wittgenstein as influences and argues a logical positivist position. Ayer identifies three areas of language he sees as potentially problematic: logic and mathematics, metaphysics and religion, and ethics and aesthetics. He deals with each category slightly differently. In the first case, the "truths of mathematics and logic are analytic propositions or tautologies."[19] As analytic statements, logic and mathematics are true by definition, which leaves them devoid of any factual content. In a sense, they become meaningless and say nothing. Though he wants to say that while they are devoid of factual content, they are not senseless in the way that other propositions with no corresponding facts are. Echoing Wittgenstein, Ayer suggests these sorts of statements are meaningful because they show us how we use logical or mathematical symbols.

Despite this commonality, Ayer's treatment of religious statements and value judgements bears a sharp contrast to Wittgenstein's treatment of them. The positivist call for verification leads Ayer and other positivists to the conclusion that "since the religious utterances of the theist are not genuine propositions at all, they cannot stand in any logical relation to the propositions of science."[20] For Ayer there is no way to prove the existence of God. There is no empirical fact that corresponds to God, which makes religious statements nonsensical. This would follow from Wittgenstein as well. For him we cannot empirically verify the existence of God because God lies outside the world. Of course, Ayer's account departs from Wittgenstein's since Ayer seems to use nonsense differently. Rather than something transcendent of the world, Ayer seems to take nonsense to be something that is meaningless. There are no meaningful statements that we can say about God. Not even whether he exists or not. Thus, since God becomes a meaningless term for Ayer, he seeks to eliminate any debates about God.

Ayer takes the *Tractatus'* program in the opposite direction for ethics as well. In order to keep ethical language meaningful, Ayer attempts to reduce value statements into empirical ones by establishing ethical definitions and propositions, ultimately translating them to empirical fact.[21] This reduction of value judgments into empirical facts takes the opposite approach of Wittgenstein. Rather than insulating ethics from fact, Ayer subjects values to factual statements about how we are feeling. As I argued above, there is a certain danger to this approach, a danger about which Wittgenstein attempted to warn us. Moving forward with Ayer's account, statements of value become what he calls emotive. When we have disputes over value, we are rather having disputes over facts, further integrating value judgments into empirical disputes, and leading to his conclusion that

ethics is "nothing more than a department of psychology and sociology."[22] Ayer's conclusion is not only noteworthy for the empirical status he gives ethics, but also its strong linkage to psychology and sociology. His position takes the opposite approach of Wittgenstein's by trying to make ethics into something that can be said rather than leaving it to be shown.

Again, it is important to note that while the Positivists advocate a reductive approach, it is not the approach Wittgenstein wants to take. The reductionist account relies on saying that ethical statements can be reduced to facts about the speaker's emotions. Rather than accept this view, we may think "Wittgenstein's view of what is at work in ethical language" is that it "reveal[s] a perspective on the world."[23] It is worth agreeing with this interpretation for the fact that it says Wittgenstein was not a reductionist. Thus Wittgenstein's view would be that we can only make moral judgments from within our own perspective. Thus, on this interpretation ethics becomes intensely personal. On this account there is no separating my ethical views from my individual experience.

However, this notion of perspective stems from Wittgenstein's mysticism. Wittgenstein gave a glimpse of this when he declared ethics to be transcendental. As B.F. McGuinness points out, the idea that good and evil are not in the world parallels one of Russell's marks of the mystic, as well as the idea of perspective.[24] McGuinness contends that for Wittgenstein good and evil are part of the subject's experience because of this mysticism. This provides an explanation for why the happy man and the unhappy man have different worlds, their subjective experience has a completely different perspective. In trying to come to grips with the seeming dichotomy between the logical portion of the

Tractatus and mystical portion in the last ten pages, he argues that propositions tell us how things are and mysticism tells us the point of these things.[25] Indeed, bare facts cannot tell us anything except what is. The things classified as mystical on the other hand, answer the question 'why?' and give the world meaning. Despite this dichotomy, both fact and the mystical belong to the same realm of experience for Wittgenstein.

Upon his return to philosophy in the late 1920s, Wittgenstein seems to reject the positivist treatment of ethics in favor of a more mystical approach. Indeed, Wittgenstein began to rethink his account of meaning based on positivist interpretations. Much of his later ideas like "his remarks on religious beliefs and his notion of language-games and forms of life could be said to be extensions of his views on ethics."[26] That is, questions about ethics motivated the rethinking of the picture theory of meaning. Since value statements could not be captured by propositions, it was necessary to create a new theory of meaning that captured ethical statements.

A Third Way

Wittgenstein's return to philosophy ultimately led to him rethinking the ideas of the *Tractatus.* In turn, this led to new ideas concerning value in the late 1930s with his lectures on aesthetics and religion. Both of these lectures look much more like his later work in the *Philosophical Investigations* because a focus on the role of the community and an acceptance of a variety of ways in which we use language. Here, he takes more of a descriptive approach rather than the prescriptive approach of the *Tractatus.* Additionally, these statements of absolute value are no longer nonsensical as they had been. Instead, values are situated in the community.

In aesthetics the appeal to a cultural situation comes out rather explicitly. In order to talk about aesthetic judgments "you have to describe a culture," but "an entirely different game is played in different ages."[27] Appealing to good art in one period involves something altogether different today than it did in the Baroque period or the Neoclassical period. For both of them there is a different community standard. What counts and does not count as good is culturally situated as well. For Wittgenstein there are criteria for aesthetic judgments. What counts as a judgment depends on these community standards. It is also by these community standards that the judgments have meaning. No longer are they nonsensical, but they have a clear meaning based on the culture. Thus, value judgments take on meaning based on how they play a role in our lives.

This idea of values taking on meaning based on both community and its role in our lives comes across in Wittgenstein's writings on religion as well. Wittgenstein does this by confronting a view similar to that of the positivists:

> Suppose someone were a believer and said: 'I believe in a last judgment,' and I said: 'Well, I'm not so sure. Possibly.' You would say there is an enormous gulf between us. If he said "There is a German aeroplane overhead,' and I said 'Possibly I'm not so sure,' you would say we were fairly near.
>
> […] Suppose somebody made this guidance for this life: believing in the last judgment. Whenever he does anything this is before his mind. In a way how are we to know whether to say he believes whether this will happen or not?[28]

In the first paragraph, Wittgenstein confronts the idea that religious belief is in some way similar to empirical statements and opposes it. At the heart of it, approaching religious statements as though they are empirical amounts to talking past the believer. With an empirical claim one can always verify whether there is

a plane overhead, but it is impossible for us to do so with belief in the last judgment.

To illustrate this point, consider the two situations. With the German aeroplane the two people understand each other. One thinks there is a plane above them while the other does not. At the heart of it they are making the same kind of claim, so we can say that one is asserting 'X' while the other asserts 'not X.' In the case of the last judgement, it is different. If one believes in the last judgement while the other does not, it is not the same as one asserting 'X' and another asserting 'not X.' The gulf that emerges indicates that it is not the case that one asserts 'X' and the other 'not X.' At work here is the later Wittgenstein's notion of language-games. In the plane example we have a situation where the two parties are playing the same game and making valid moves within that game. In the judgement situation the parties are not playing the same game. With the last judgement situation one is playing one game while the other is playing one entirely different. Wittgenstein thinks that when we are in these situations we cannot contradict one another. It is only when we are in the same system or playing the same game that we can contradict each other.

Moreover, the attempt to show religious discourse is nonsensical fails, which is noticeable in the second paragraph of the above block quote. The man's actions are based on this belief. The belief plays a fundamental role in his life. He does not see it as nonsensical in any sense. Nor can a nonbeliever. The role the belief plays in the believer's life is such that it influences all of the believer's actions. In a sense, the belief has a particular use in the believer's life. This is one

of the hallmarks of Wittgenstein's philosophy in the *Philosophical Investigations:* the focus on practice. Because the belief has a certain use in someone's life, that use is able to give it meaning. By virtue of holding a religious belief, for instance, the believer experiences life differently and acts differently. This is because her holding of the belief will play a unique role in her life. It has the effect where the believer "think[s] differently … say[s] different things to himself… ha[s] different pictures."[29] While a nonbeliever may have the picture of religious discourse being nonsensical, it is different for the believer. The believer experiences a different world from that of the nonbeliever.

D. Z. Phillips notes that this is a rejection of the idea that "what constitutes an intelligible move in one context must constitute an intelligible move in all contexts."[30] This idea indicates that here Wittgenstein is offering a third alternative in the debate between his mysticism and the positivists' reductionism. The way we understand values, now, is through our context. When we have different pictures it is difficult for us to compare them. As a result, this third option creates a stronger foundation for understanding insults. Our language and values become contextualized, which means those words that hurt us get their meaning from context. I develop this further in the next chapter. Holding these different pictures also explains how insults can often be unintentional.

However, if values are contextual, the implication seems to be that the good and the bad are unknowable. For example, 'is it bad that Brutus stabbed Caesar or is it good?' is unanswerable under Wittgenstein's view.[31] To some extent we might say any answer seems dependent on perspective. If you think Brutus has a duty to his country then you

would say he is right to kill Caesar, but if you think he has a duty to his friend he is wrong to kill Caesar. Of course, we typically say that there is a duty to both, in which case it seems impossible to make a decision. Ultimately there is "no way of solving them because we have no way of knowing what goes on in Brutus' mind when he killed Caesar."[32]

This parallels Wittgenstein's worry in the private language argument. In the private language argument, he worries that if language is as a Cartesian would describe it, then how do we know whether or not we understand what someone says or vice versa. Here, we seem to be faced with the same doubts. If I cannot read Brutus' mind, then how can I know whether or not he is right? Thus, ethics is privatized, which the later Wittgenstein wants to reject. Both scenarios present the same epistemological problem. Cartesian privacy blocks our understanding of other minds, and as an extension we worry if we can understand what someone is saying or the ethical. Given the similarity of these worries, the solution must be similar as well. That is, the private language argument must contain the key to Wittgenstein's later view on ethics. By adopting a more descriptive stance and looking at what counts as a final justification we can overcome some of these worries about Cartesian privacy.

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[1] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* §6.41.
[2] *Ibid.,* §6.421.
[3] *Ibid.,* §6.522.
[4] *Ibid.,* §6.44.
[5] Susan Hekman, "The Moral Language Game," in *Feminist Interpretations of Ludwig Wittgenstein.* Edited by Naomi Scheman and Peg O'Connor. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2002), 165.
[6] Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: the Duty of Genius*, 276-7.
[7] Ludwig Wittgenstein, "A Lecture on Ethics," in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*. Edited by James C. Klagge and Alfred Norman. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 42.
[8] Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: the Duty of Genius*, 278.
[9] Wittgenstein, "A Lecture on Ethics," 38-39.
[10] *Ibid.,* 42-43.
[11] *Ibid.,* 43.
[12] Albert W. Levi, "The Biographical Sources of Wittgenstein's Ethics," *Telos* 1978, no. 38 (1978), 73.

[13] Cyril Barrett, *Wittgenstein on Ethics and Religious Belief* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell inc., 1991), 229-232.
[14] Wittgenstein, "A Lecture on Ethics," 40.
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] Allan Janik and Stephen Toulman, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*. (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1973) 193.
[17] P.M.S. Hacker, "The Impact of the *Tractatus"* in *Wittgenstein's Place in Twentieth-century Analytical Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers ltd, 1996) 40-41.
[18] *Ibid.,* 50-51.
[19] Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1950), 77.
[20] *Ibid.*, 117.
[21] *Ibid.*, 102-104.
[22] *Ibid.,* 110, 112.
[23] Matthew Pinanalto, "Speaking For Oneself: Wittgenstein on Ethics," *Inquiry* 54, no. 3 (2011), 260.
[24] B.F. McGuinness, "The Mysticism of the Tractatus," *The Philosophical Review* 75, no. 3, 306-307.
[25] *Ibid.,* 315.
[26] Cyril Barrett, *Wittgenstein on Ethics and Religious Belief,* 229.
[27] Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief,* Ed. Cyril Barrett. (United States: University of California Press, 1967)*,* 8.
[28] *Ibid.,* 53.
[29] *Ibid.,* 55.
[30] Dewi Zephaniah Philips, "Religious Beliefs and Language-Games" in *Wittgenstein and Religion* (Chippenham, Wiltshire: Saint Martin's Press, 1993), 62.
[31] Rush Rhees, "Some Developments in Wittgenstein's View on Ethics" in *Discussions of Wittgenstein* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 99.
[32] Barrett, *Wittgenstein on Ethics and Religious Belief*, 237.

Chapter 3: An overview of "Meaning as Use," Rules and Private Language

As Wittgenstein thought through problems arising from value judgements, and ultimately dissatisfied with the mystical and reductionist approaches, he began to formulate a new theory of meaning in more detail to account for the diversity in how we use language. In order to do so he had to offer a critique of his earlier view, which I will summarize first. When Wittgenstein came to reconsider this view he found that the background assumptions about the nature of philosophy were too primitive, and he needed to reexamine them.[1] Rather than assume philosophy was prescriptive, Wittgenstein began working with a more descriptive notion of what philosophy was and what it could do. This led to a change in his assumption about the nature of language itself. Whereas the project of the *Tractatus* revolved around constructing an ideal language, in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein believes everyday language is fine as it is. As a result, Wittgenstein's later idea of meaning has two notable features. He presents both a less dogmatic approach and a more anthropological approach centered on human customs.

Wittgenstein focuses on the active role of the community in making the symbols of our language meaningful. His appeal to the community rejects the essentialist view presented in the *Tractatus*: that language's one function is to picture meaning. He replaces this with a more pluralistic view of a language with many purposes, often called 'meaning as use.' Though 'meaning as use' is often the simplified phrase for Wittgenstein's later views, it is a mistake to call it a theory. Doing so suggests he has merely moved from one essentialist view to another. 'Meaning as use' really is a genuine shift to a more pluralist view of language. The idea of grounding meaning in its usage

relies on the community using single words in a consistent way, but not all words in the same way. Since words must be used in a consistent way, usage must be grounded in rules. The structure of our language is based on these implicit rules rather than the logical structure of the world. Wittgenstein further argues that the possibility of consensus in following these rules relies on certain natural facts about what it is to be human. Given his conclusion that rule-following is located in this community consensus, I will conclude the chapter by examining an important consequence of this model, the private language argument. Just as the 'meaning as use' idea is supposed to reject the earlier theory of meaning, the private language argument attempts to reject a Cartesian conception of the mind. A private language is one in which a speaker's words refer only to the things she can know, so that she is the only one who can understand it.[2] With the remarks against a private language, Wittgenstein wants to show that language cannot be based on our inner sensations.

Meaning as Use

In the first remarks of the *Investigations,* Wittgenstein rejects dogmatism and states that language in the *Tractatus* is "not everything we call language," rather its view of language is analogous to saying

> 'Playing a game consists in moving objects around according to certain rules…'—and we replied: you seem to be thinking of board-games, but they are not all the games there are. You can rectify your explanation by expressly restricting it to those games.[3]

As we saw above, the picture theory is too narrow. It limits language to factual discourse, which leaves out all other forms of speaking. It ignored many of our different uses of language and the way in which language is embedded in our human conventions. It may not be everything we call language, but that raises the question of what language is like if

not a picture. The game analogy provides the answer to that question. If the picture theory's portrayal of language is like saying all games are like board games, then language can be thought of in terms of games. This metaphor of games is, as hinted here, meant to take one of the first steps in de-essentializing language. The way he thought of language in the *Tractatus,* has to be broadened. The way we are supposed to rectify the picture theory is by finding a way to talk about language that is similar to how we talk about games. Thus, we have to think of the metaphor of games and see the ways it is like a language, which allows him to present his new theory of language-games.

Given the diversity of games, analyzing language in terms of games allows us to see the diversity of language. Wittgenstein uses the concept of the language-game to counter essentialism. There is nothing over and above all the different language-games that defines them all as language. He begins this analysis by sketching 'the language of the builders,' a scenario in which an entire language is just a primitive game of calling out something and having it brought to you.[4] This primitive language is one of the ways in which he uses the term "language-game," and we are to imagine all of language is made up of these primitive language-games.[5] The language-game as it is presented here is quite simple; the builders are only able to call out the words 'slab,' 'beam,' 'pillar,' and 'block.' Of course, our own language is much more complex because we are able to build up and create many more of these language-games, some of which overlap. The language of the builders being just one game shows us that we can understand language is not just one language-game, but a plurality of many language-games.

Already, Wittgenstein has indicated that there is this diversity in the language-games with his remark about the kinds of games there are. There can be a board games as

well as other games like sports or card games. The idea of language consisting in language-games suggests that it consists in many different activities. Indeed, Wittgenstein gives us a list of language-games in part to show us this diversity. Different language-games include "giving orders and acting on them, describing an object […], reporting an event, forming and testing a hypothesis, […] making up a story, acting in a play, […] cracking a joke," and the list goes on.[6] We see a vast array of the different kinds of language-games here. It is not clear what exactly testing a hypothesis has in common with acting in a play except that we can both see them as linguistic activities.

We can also imagine that these are activities that are universal across human cultures. Nearly everyone should have a concept of some of these activities. Indeed, language-games "are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, [and] playing."[7] They are grounded in a naturalistic element. It is natural for us to use language, to report events and crack jokes, and there are many commonalities across language. However, these commonalities are not meant to point to any essence. Rather, the commonalities we see among language-games are the commonalities we see across games.

However, this leads to the question of what encompasses all the possible different ways of playing a game. Of course, that task in itself is not easy. Not all games have a single overarching commonality. If we "don't think, but look" at all the different kinds of games there should not be any single commonality, but "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing."[8] Perhaps a vast majority of them are rule-based or human-created, but Wittgenstein would resist any sort of essentializing theory that holds there is one underlying structure across all of language. To correct the older

picture theory of meaning, a new theory that captures all the complexities of language has to be adopted. Such a theory needs to capture the numerous different ways in which we use words.

The approach is characterized by the notion of "family resemblances" because "various resemblances between members of a family […] overlap and criss-cross," so that "'games' form a family."[9] By extension, language-games have a family resemblance. There is no single commonality between all of them except that we all say they are games or language-games. There are commonalities between games on a small-scale game-by-game basis, but no single element is responsible for it being a game. The same could be said of 'meaning as use' itself. There is no single commonality between all usages of words. If there were, then Wittgenstein would be falling back on the essentialism he is trying to reject. There is no essence in language just as there is no essence in games.

Wittgenstein's view that understanding a sentence means to understand its use in the context of a language-game had two further repercussions. First, it rejects the idea that the meaning of a sentence can be explained based on analysis. Second, if this analysis is rejected, then he also rejects any sort of bedrock that underlies language and represents the endpoint of analysis. Here he has given up on finding some symbol that is the bedrock that underlies language. Once we have done that, we accept that language is situated in our background and the contingencies of our lives. We no longer appeal to an essence, we appeal to what we do. We must see language as it is presented to us and as just something we do. In order to understand the ambiguity I have to understand the game we play. He abandons the metaphysics of there being a final meaning in a sentence that can be explained in a set of symbols. In doing so, we can see further evidence that he

abandons essentialist ideas about language and commits to the idea of a genuine diversity of language-games.

Family resemblance also plays into the idea that meaning is use. When we de-essentialize language, we give up on the idea that the sole function of words is to represent objects in the real world. For instance, in the picture theory we might worry what real world object corresponds to someone flipping the bird or saying 'hello.' The meanings of words become diverse, just like the different games that constitute a language. Wittgenstein explains that "for a large class of cases [...] the meaning of a word is its use in the language."[10] As a result, words in a language are shaped by their regular usage. A word's meaning is a description of its use, which allows for multiple meanings since many words are used in more than one way. This idea may lead some to the criticism that in essence language just is the usages we have.

Such a criticism is unfounded though, because the metaphor of tools illustrates the variety of uses a particular word could have. Our uses of words are "as diverse as the function of [tools in a toolbox.]"[11] A particular word, just as a tool does, functions differently depending on the situation. If I have a wire that needs to be cut I will not grab a hammer out of my toolbox. Instead, I would grab a tool that would serve the function I need it for. Of course, unlike a tool, words are not invented for a specific function. A hammer or a screwdriver are unnecessary until there is a problem we need to solve. With language-games, our words evolve in a more natural way. Words are not often invented to fulfil a specific function; rather they stem from our practices and are inseparable from them. Additionally, words are like levers on a train where they "look more or less alike," but serve different functions.[12] Here, words have a similar, superficial appearance. With

real tools in a tool box, like a wrench or screwdriver, we can just look at them and see they perform different functions. With words, their different uses are not clear from their appearance, like the levers. In order to understand which levers do what, I have to explore them further by actually using them or having someone who knows how to use them show me. The case is the same with words. It is only by using them and exploring them further that we come to understand their functions.

The active role we take in creating language has its place in another hallmark of the later Wittgenstein, the notion of forms of life. Wittgenstein makes the point that when we "imagine a language [that] means to imagine a form of life."[13] The connection between the two is useful for understanding that language is an activity. It is something we do as humans: we create meaning and new-language games. Indeed, the concept of a form of life is crucial for understanding that language is diverse and unfixed. Our connection to forms of life allows us not only to create language, but also to help us understand one another. Our agreement in the rules of language is "not our agreement in opinions, but rather in form of life."[14] Our forms of life enable us to understand one another and to create a background for understanding. They provide the aspects of human experience that is universal to many of us. The agreement in our forms of life is an agreement in this backdrop, and said backdrop enables communication.

As a result, the creation of new language-games and our forgetting of old language-games relies on the possibility that forms of life can change, language is an activity.[15] Our language changes alongside the way we live. For instance, before medical advances if someone were to involuntarily fall to the floor and start convulsing they would be talked about in terms of demonic possession. As society and technology

changed so did the language-games, eventually leading to us calling it a seizure. Because language-games evolve alongside forms of life, Wittgenstein sees language as being in a constant state of evolution. Old language-games are abandoned in favor of new ones. Of course, like any game, language-games need to be structured by rules.

Rules and Private Language

Rules serve as a way to make regular usage in a language-game intelligible. Since meaning can no longer appeal to an object being named as it was in the *Tractatus,* it has to be grounded in our conventions. This conventionalism, is already quite apparent from the outline of 'meaning as use.' Throughout his discussion of rules, Wittgenstein resists the idea that following a rule consists in a mental state. Nor is it interpreting the rule in a particular way. Rather, rules are grounded in human custom. Having established a set of practices around ordinary language, Wittgenstein takes his ideas a step further. These practices give us a way to talk about our inner experiences, allowing Wittgenstein develop his private language argument, an argument in which he rejects the idea that only I can refer to my inner experiences.

Wittgenstein begins his discussion of rule-following with resisting the skeptical implications that may arise from empiricism. Under an older model, like the picture theory of meaning, a partner and I could both have an image of a cube in our heads when the word cube is said, but "the application still [is] different."[16] We have here a classical problem of empiricism, and we can rephrase it any number of ways. Rather than asking if we hold the same image of the cube we could be asking whether we can know if my red is the same as your red. The skeptical problem cannot be taken lightly, because if I accept the possibility that we can refer to different things when we talk about cubes or colors,

meaning itself starts to break down. The picture in the speaker's mind is thus an insufficient ground for meaning. The solution is to differentiate between the uses that lead to different applications, so we end up with a normal application and an abnormal application where only the normal is well laid out.[17] Since the normal case is clearly laid out, we can expect it to be similar as we repeat it. That is, the normal case constitutes a rule to some extent. We can expect, for instance, a 10 pound weight to weigh ten pounds every time we put it on the scale. If it did not, we would likely toss out our scales. Insofar as linguistic practices have rules governing them they are intelligible to us.

To further explain this, Wittgenstein gives us a scenario in which person A must give an order and person B must write down a series of numbers in the progression '0, 2, 4, 6…'. Wittgenstein explores the circumstances where we are prepared to say someone knows how to continue.[18] Person B has to show what he can do with the series in order for us to know he understands a rule. It is only once person B has understood the rules that he can write '0, 2, 4, 6…' without person A's help, but understanding these rules has to be expressed in terms of what B can do. Once person B no longer needs the help of person A and can do it on his own, he has truly understood what person A is saying and communication has occurred. Still, we might be inclined to object to this and say that understanding is a mental state.

Wittgenstein explores this idea and explicitly rules it out. Understanding must be tied to the circumstances in which we can go on.[19] We see understanding in someone's behavior here; it is *showing* that we can go on. Wittgenstein's conception of a mental state like pain or listening, which are fundamentally different from mental predicates such as understanding. For instance, if someone were to give me an anesthetic, I would

pass out and cease to feel any pain. When I wake up from anesthesia I may find that I no longer even feel the pain from before. However, I will almost certainly still understand things I did in the past. Our understanding cannot "be interrupted by a cessation of consciousness or by a redirection of attention."[20] Our mental states, on the other hand, seem to heavily depend on consciousness and attention. The logical grammar of understanding is different than that of a mental sensation. Understanding implies that it is integrated into us, that we can at any time show we understand. A mental sensation, however, is momentary. I can have the mental sensation of being tired, but were I to fall asleep such a sensation would dissipate. Indeed, Wittgenstein's comparison of pain with understanding reveals that the two are fundamentally different things.

Taking this into account, what then are the circumstances in which we can truly say we are ready to go on? To answer this question, we have to consider what exactly that sentence ("now I can go on") means. Wittgenstein begins his answer by exploring whether or not a new intuition or decision is needed as we continue in order to be in accordance with a rule.[21] This exploration involves not only how we follow rules correctly, but how we learn them.

The first path we consider is whether following the rule successfully involves following what the speaker meant. If we are carrying out orders by making a decision at every point then we are attempting to interpret what the rule-giver means when they order us to write down the sequence. Of course, this approach to understanding does not get us anywhere. Such an approach implies that "in meaning it, your mind flew ahead and took all the steps before you physically arrived at this or that one."[22] Meaning it predetermines it, but in order for that to be true it has to anticipate what will happen before it actually

does. If this were the case, however, the statement of a rule would already be an application of it. In the same way that my thinking about doing something or intending to do something are not, in fact, doing them, meaning a rule is not following it.

Wittgenstein thus sees this account as circular. Since he has shown that the meaning relies on use, which in turn relies on rules governing it, it would be circular for him to say meaning a rule is to follow it. He has already defined meaning in terms of rules, so defining a rule in terms of meaning would lead him into a circular definition. Moreover, we can think of Wittgenstein's distinction here as one between intention and action. I can intend to become the President of the United States, but until I am elected I am not the President. If my mere intention was enough, it would invalidate the criteria for being President. I could hold the office simply by thinking that I was president in my head. Thus we cannot use meaning a rule to justify following it. No matter what is in my mind when I understand, that does not guarantee that sensation is understanding.

By incorporating the communal aspect of a rule, we come to see that understanding a rule involves performing in a way that is correct according to the community. We ought to understand the idea of following what someone meant by understanding it as something we are taught.[23] Appeals to what is meant when person A gives the formula rest on our being trained in similar ways to arrive at the same conclusion. How a formula is meant is a function of how we apply it in real cases. It is not incorrect to say that a formula's meaning determines what person B should write, but we have to reconsider what meaning is. Meaning is not a mental state. Instead it is determined by its rule-guided use. It is because we have agreement in how to use a word that communication is intelligible. Wittgenstein further uses the example of the machine

to dispel any misunderstandings we may have about rules. We think a machine contains all its possible ways of moving or operating, but this is a misunderstanding that philosophical thinking brings into the picture because a machine's parts can be distorted and changed.[24] The picture we get from the philosophical tradition is the picture that allows us to think that the rules or the meaning of something are predetermined. This picture, of course, gets us into trouble because the rule or the first meaning is just a starting point. As time goes on the machine can be worn down or improved, which signals that analogously our meanings and rules can change as well. Thus, while meaning is bounded in these rules, the rules are not fixed entities.

Current usage cannot determine future usage causally; rather usage is grounded in human practice. For instance, "chess is the game it is in virtue of all its rules."[25] Chess, as a game, has its own rigid set of rules, and these rules define what chess is exactly. We understand chess by learning these rules and by playing it. When faced with a certain board position, if I have played a lot of chess then I know to react in a particular way. Understanding chess presupposes also that I understand the form of life that involved in playing games. My ability to understand this game comes from my prior exposure to the human practice of playing games. I need to come from a background where I have been brought up to know what games involve. This intimate connection between rules and teaching shows us that "to follow a rule [is a] custom" or a "practice," making it impossible to "follow a rule 'privately.'"[26] Rules are thus public and part of the communal sphere. By saying that our usages are rule governed, human conventions (customs) govern language. Of course, customs necessarily change as human life changes, especially the importance or relevance of a custom. Customs change, and as a

result so do the rules. For example, according to folk history women were thrown into ponds in witchcraft trials, but this custom has been done away with. There are no more accusations of witchcraft, let alone trials. The link with human activity requires that humans shape the rules. No rule is permanent and it is part of our culture to understand it. Despite the changing nature of customs we are able to successfully follow the rules of the language to which we are accustomed. This stems from the grounding in human activity. There are certain natural aspects of human life that structure our understanding of the rules. We implicitly understand the rules of a language just as we implicitly understand the community we are brought up in. We understand our ordinary language as we are brought up in a set of rules.

Commentator Saul Kripke notices this communitarianism in the rejection of older theories of meaning as well. According to Kripke, the rejection of those theories involves a shift from truth conditions to justification conditions.[27] Truth conditions put simply are the circumstances under which a sentence is true. In the picture theory of meaning, these were certain states of affairs. As a result, meaning was grounded in these truth conditions. Since Wittgenstein rejects this older idea, he now grounds meaning in justification conditions, which involve the circumstances where we are allowed to say that X is the meaning. That is, there are conditions under which the linguistic community judges it acceptable to assert a sentence. By grounding meaning in this justification, Kripke opens up the possibility of skepticism about whether one is following the rules or not. He claims the solution to this problem and what justifies someone's ability to attach meaning to a statement is their inclusion in a linguistic community.

Kripke elucidates this point with his own skeptical paradox. He asks how we can know if a calculation like 68+57 is added using the plus function or the 'quus' function.[28] With plus the answer is 125, whereas with quus it is 5. The problem is that if I have never come across this calculation, then based on my past usage of mathematical formulae I cannot be sure if the answer is 125 or 5. The paradox is meant to parallel the one he believes Wittgenstein forms. This is the idea that if rule-following consists in an inner process or interpretation, then we can say that any action satisfies the rule. Indeed, Kripke puts his finger on the power of Wittgenstein's worries about mental states. However, from here he contends that Wittgenstein is willing to concede to the skeptic that rule-following questions are unanswerable and that to solve the paradox we need to give up on truth conditions. This comes with the realization that the community will hold justification conditions for my actions, and so I am not subject to my own authority.[29] Again, Kripke articulates some ideas I think Wittgenstein was trying to show us. I am not just subject to my own authority and I have to appeal to the community. However, I find it misguided to say that Wittgenstein is a skeptic about rule-following. Rather, as I hope to show, Wittgenstein shows that this skepticism is unwarranted.

Kripke argues Wittgenstein explicitly expresses his skeptical hypothesis, but on close examination he can only partially account for Wittgenstein's view. In §201, Wittgenstein reaches the climax of his discussion of whether a rule's meaning can be fixed in its interpretation:

> This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.
>
> It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each

> one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it. What this shows is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which is exhibited in what we call "obeying the rule" and "going against it" in actual cases.[30]

Kripke thinks Wittgenstein states that here there is a paradox that no interpretation can be established as the correct one, and mistakenly argues this is a new form of skepticism that Wittgenstein promotes and accepts.[31] It is this passage that leads him to develop Wittgenstein's skeptical paradox. Since Wittgenstein has repeatedly rejected the idea that a sign can fix meaning throughout the *Investigations,* Kripke's reading fits with Wittgenstein's constant rejections of trying to use signs as a foundation for meaning. However, both John McDowell and Norman Malcolm point out that in the second paragraph of the same section Wittgenstein calls this paradox a misunderstanding.[32] Rather than accepting the paradox, Wittgenstein wants to show that the paradox comes from a certain misconception of the idea of rule-following. Kripke's inability to account for this rejection of the paradox leads to doubts about his skeptical thesis.

McDowell goes further and offers a more palatable solution than Kripke's. He concedes that there is, in fact, a rule following paradox, but Kripke's account assimilates the understanding into interpretation.[33] Wittgenstein wants to show that there is a way to grasp a rule without interpreting it, and really needs to show it for the whole project of the *Investigations* to work. As a result, the dilemma arises when we start to think that understanding a rule depends on giving an interpretation. He sees this as a problem because he reads Wittgenstein as presenting a dilemma between accepting a skeptical paradox and what he calls the mythology of meaning and understanding where there is a rigid meaning that resists interpretation. He thinks there is a middle ground here that Wittgenstein achieves by rejecting the dilemma altogether. Namely that the idea that

obeying a rule is following a practice one has been trained to perform.[34] McDowell thinks that if it were not the case that our being trained and initiated into a custom solves the paradox then there would be no way to distinguish an explanation of our actions from a mere causal description.

Colin McGinn adds to this so-called 'straight solution' by emphasizing the natural features of human beings. McGinn's reading has Wittgenstein explaining language as a natural behavior of human experience.[35] He uses Wittgenstein's example of an arrow to explain this. There is not something mystical that makes us follow the point of the arrow. Rather, following the point is a custom that is built up from our natural behaviors. We have these natural propensities to do certain things like cry when we are in pain, and these become our customs over time. Under McGinn's view, Wittgenstein is freeing us of the mistaken view that "once the natural facts about us are exhausted there remains somewhere else to look for what determines meaning."[36] Meaning is rooted in our forms of life, these natural facts about us. Thus Kripke's reading violates Wittgenstein's point. By focusing on the community, Kripke is giving us something that would have to be built off of our natural facts that will determine meaning. This leads McGinn to contend that it is not Wittgenstein's view that rules need to be explained in social terms.[37]

Norman Malcolm critiques McGinn on this point. Malcolm bases his argument numerous passages in the *Investigations* that show language can only exist in agreement and adds Wittgenstein means this agreement is between different people.[38] Taking this agreement out of the equation is problematic because it suggests that there could be widespread disagreement over objective concepts like mathematics or color. The common agreement in actions fixes the rule according to Malcolm. Following a rule

requires a community. However, I think Malcolm's view struggles with Wittgenstein's thoughts on justification. At a certain point "I have exhausted justifications, I have reached bedrock and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do.'"[39] The point Wittgenstein seems to be getting at here is that at a certain point there is no further fact we can use to justify our actions. It is simply by virtue that I am human that I do this, and were I some other being, I might do something else. Wittgenstein is appealing to these natural tendencies, so it is important to carry forward this naturalism.

This is especially true given some of the consequences of the private language argument. The argument against privacy begins with an argument against the privacy of sensational speech. When we consider the privacy of sensations, our intuition is to say that only we can feel our pains, but then I can doubt whether others are in pain or not. Of course when we ask "how do words refer to sensations," Wittgenstein argues "there doesn't seem to be any problem here."[40] We refer to sensations easily, we can name anything like ecstasy, pain, exhaustion, elation, and so on. In our ordinary, everyday language we have clear names for these feelings. The fact that there is no problem points towards Wittgenstein's effort to demystify and communalize sensations, for which he offers several examples.

First, we can imagine a child genius. The child invents a name for a pain, but the example breaks down because in order for him to give a name to a pain we already have to have formed meaningful concepts of pain.[41] Without a background of meaning that we all understand, the concepts we have for sensations cannot work. I cannot tell someone that I have this or that feeling without a concept that everyone understands. But since we are all human beings, we are able to understand what everyone is talking about with

sensation speech. When someone talks about pain, my natural ability to feel and react to pain allows me to understand them. Thus these seemingly private experiences can be articulated through language.

Since the use of any "word stands in need of a justification which everybody understands," there is no private language that only one person can understand.[42] If someone had a language that only she understood, it would not actually be a language. It would be unintelligible and meaningless because none of us would have the proper communal background to understand. I could ask the child genius 'what you mean when you mean by this term you invented,' and through language he could tell me what he had meant. One must justify what she means in a way that the community can understand.

However, working in a Cartesian framework it is possible to name our own sensations. Descartes' focus on the individual allows me to say that whatever seems to be right to me is right. Wittgenstein shows us that this is mistaken because it does not allow us to distinguish between following a rule correctly versus incorrectly. I could ask a Cartesian how the weather is and he could say hot and mean what I mean by cold. Meaning as a mental process causes this skepticism. Their private language has to have a use I cannot understand, but this is contradictory because language must be necessarily communal.

While there is a communal basis by which we can speak about sensations, we learn this on the basis of some natural facts of being human. We can teach the language of pain, for instance, on the basis of our crying when in pain:

> Words are connected with the primitive, natural, expression of sensations and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain

> behavior […] the verbal expression of pain replaces the crying. It does not describe it.

We base our language off of these unlearned behaviors. A baby, for instance, will cry when it is in pain. No one had to teach the baby to cry, what we had to teach was the linguistic convention. We use the fact that we want to cry when in pain to teach this convention. It allows us to build the language we have. Indeed, as McGinn notes, "different kinds of beings, endowed with different 'forms of life,' could naturally [speak] in different ways with the same training.[43] Because we have the natural propensity to cry when in pain, to laugh when something is funny, or to feel excited when we see someone we have not seen for a while, we only have to teach the convention of how our culture talks about those things. We do not name our own sensations, the community replaces them with their way of speaking about it.

Indeed, the communal aspect of language tries to combat this worry in Wittgenstein's 'beetle in the box' example. The beetle in the box deals with the Cartesian understanding of language. Under the Cartesian model we only know what pain means based on our own experience, it is a private object. To overcome this, we are to suppose that everyone has a box with something called 'beetle' in it. Next suppose that thing is something different for everyone who has a box. If this is the case, then the object 'beetle' has no place in our language, it "cancels out" or "drops out of consideration as irrelevant."[44] The beetle, as a private object, drops out because it lacks a communal way to speak about it.

This means to show that the meaning of a word has to come from its public use. A community lies at the forefront of this example. Without a community trying to peer into my box the problem would dissolve. If I were the only individual there would be no one

trying to understand my beetle, and as a result we would not need a communal way to speak about it. This suggests that I really can know someone else's mind. Thus all that matters is what we learn in our public language. Our beetles *are* things we can speak about publicly, and we lose an absolute epistemic exclusivity on our own private objects. Of course, by doing so, language becomes prone to conflicts within the community, which are political conflicts. Thus by communalizing language, language becomes politicized.

Implications for Insults

Wittgenstein's theoretical framework provides an ideal way to give insults meaning. Rather than relying on factual elements of an insult for its meaning, we can recognize that it has a use in a language-game. From his theoretical insights we can explore the language-game of insults. I will also touch on some of the impacts of these language games.

Language under this theory is an extension of behavior, which includes what we do when people insult one another. Insulting is not merely linguistic, but by virtue of being linked with behavior can be a gesture or simply not following the imposed norms. I can outright say something like 'you are stupid' or I can show someone my middle finger. The insult is itself an activity. My language constitutes a certain way I am acting towards the person I am speaking to. My insults are simply disrespectful behavior. Participating in this language-game creates a situation where I act disrespectful and harm the people I speak to.

This situation also requires a shared, communal, background. Jerome Neu in his work on the philosophy of insults seems to suggest this as well when he notes that "being

[insulted] and feeling [insulted] need not coincide."[45] While he does not cite Wittgenstein much, this idea seems fairly Wittgensteinian to me. One reason for this goes back to the German plane example from the previous chapter. In cases where someone insults me and I am not playing the same language-game, the insult fails to impact me. A gulf emerges because we are not playing the same language-game. I misunderstand what they are saying. This seems to open the door for my feeling insulted despite someone not intending to insult me and my unintentionally insulting someone, both of which Neu tries to account for. In a Wittgensteinian account, we are playing different language-games and do not understand that our conversation partner is playing a different one than we are. Another reason for this is that we may not be a part of the same community. In Thailand, for instance, they say it is an insult to show the soles of your feet. Such an act is innocuous to someone without that communal background. They see the act as just a literal showing of one's feet not as an insulting gesture. This also demonstrates that there is a conventional aspect to insults. If the Thai man were to show me his feet I would be insulted despite not feeling insulted because I had no idea that I was. Insults do not depend solely on what one person feels.

Feeling insulted, of course, seems to be deeply rooted in human nature. We get this out of the natural tendency to feel pain. We can use this natural tendency and Wittgenstein's beetle example to show how insulting someone and causing intentional harm is unacceptable. The first thing to note is that the beetle in the box suggests that we really can know each other's pains. Knowing others' pains should prevent us from harming one another though, through our natural propensity for empathy. Because not only is it obvious that we are causing pain when we inflict physical harm on one another,

but when we insult, bully or oppress. In all these cases it is clear we are causing distress and something is allowing us to do harm.

There should be such a way to fix this problem, by articulating why such a behavior is not okay and changing our language-games. Changes in our language should be able to change our behavior. Wittgenstein can account for how we can insult one another, but we should not be satisfied with this. Indeed, much of the debate around bullying revolves around how we can change this behavior. Wittgenstein allows for language-games to change, but we need to consider the best way to change this one.

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[1] Robert Fogelin, *Wittgenstein.* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), 97.
[2] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §243.
[3] *Ibid.,* §3.
[4] *Ibid.,* §2.
[5] *Ibid.,* §7.
[6] *Ibid.,* §23.
[7] *Ibid.,* §25.
[8] *Ibid.,* §66.
[9] *Ibid.,* §67.
[10] *Ibid.,* §43.
[11] *Ibid.,* §11.
[12] *Ibid.,* §12.,
[13] *Ibid.,* §18.
[14] *Ibid.,* §241.
[15] *Ibid.,* §23.
[16] *Ibid.*, §140.
[17] *Ibid.,* §141, §142.
[18] *Ibid.,* §151.
[19] *Ibid.,* §154.
[20] Colin McGinn, *Wittgenstein on Meaning.* (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1987), 95.
[21] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* §183-6.
[22] *Ibid.,* §188.
[23] *Ibid.,* §189-190.
[24] *Ibid.,* §193-194.
[25] *Ibid.,* §197.
[26] *Ibid.,* §199, §202.
[27] Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 74.
[28] *Ibid.,* 16-17.
[29] *Ibid.,* 66, 89.
[30] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* §201.
[31] Kripke*, Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language,* 7.
[32] John McDowell, "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule," *Synthese* 58, no. 3 (1984): 331. Norman Malcolm, *Nothing is Hidden: Wittgenstein's Criticisms of his Earlier Thought* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 154.

[33] McDowell, "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule," 342
[34] *Ibid.,* 339.
[35] McGinn, *Wittgenstein on Meaning,* 42.
[36] *Ibid.,* 86.
[37] *Ibid.,* 91.
[38] Malcolm, *Nothing is Hidden: Wittgenstein's Criticisms of his Earlier Thought*, 173.
[39] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* §217.
[40] *Ibid.,* §244.
[41] *Ibid.,* §257.
[42] *Ibid.,* §261.
[43] McGinn, *Wittgenstein on Meaning,* 85.
[44] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* §293.
[45] Neu, *Sticks and Stones: The Philosophy of Insults,* 7.

Chapter 4: Wittgenstein and Abusive Language-games

Wittgenstein's criticisms of his earlier thought not only provide a theory of meaning that helps us understand the role of language in bullying and oppression, but also provides an important lesson. It teaches us that facts are in themselves valueless, they just are. They are things like 'your skin is white,' 'you wear glasses,' or 'you are smarter than I am.' In order for these facts to become insults like 'four eyes' or 'nerd' we have to place some judgement on them. As facts, these things, in terms of our identity, are relatively stable. I cannot change my ethnicity, who I am attracted to, or what my body looks like (at least without effort). In terms of the features that we would use to construct my identity, the facts do not change much. In Wittgenstein's later work, our language starts to take on a normative aspect through rule-following. The community can start to use the facts that constitute our identity to control how we see ourselves and perhaps how we act.

This partially comes out in the performative element that lies in the background of Wittgenstein's theory. For the later Wittgenstein, speaking a language is an activity that has to be justified in the eyes of the community. In order for the community to say we are speaking correctly, the community has to have a set of rules and criteria to judge our sentences. As a result, the community is imposing the way that language should be upon us. By imposing a specific set of linguistic behaviors for us to follow, the community is also regulating our activity. Language becomes a way to regulate behavior by virtue of language being an activity, so it seems language-games impose rules that require speakers to act a certain way.

In spite of this, no language-game is set in stone. The fluidity of language permeates Wittgenstein's later thoughts. In the previous chapter I mentioned how Wittgenstein commits to this idea in the *Investigations*. The language-game is not a fixed entity that determines a meaning for all time. He presents this idea in *On Certainty* as well:

> The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the bed itself; though there is no sharp division of one to the other. […]
>
> And the bank of the river simply consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which now in one place now in another gets washed away, or deposited.[1]

Though he does not offer a specific mechanism for how change occurs, he suggests that both language and human life coevolve together. This idea seems, to me, contained in the idea of there being no distinction between water and river bed. The two flow together forming a path. Similarly human life and language are inseparable. They flow together and influence each other; there is no clear distinction between the two. As human life changes some aspects of it are washed away, so to speak, and as a result so are the language-games that accompany it. The changing nature of language-games changes human life and vice versa, which creates a way for the community's normative requirements to change.

That language-games change creates a way for those of us who perhaps are not satisfied with a language-game or hurt by it to push against the normative requirements of the community. There is always the possibility that we may create new language-games. Wittgenstein himself provides no explicit mechanism for this, perhaps because he saw it as an organic process. He may have thought changes in a language-game just come from

the way our lives naturally change. Over the years we learn more, develop new theories, or advance in technology and old practices start to become less relevant. Though, I think we may be more intentional about how we change language. In this section I will explore this mechanism. First I will consider the problem of language-games being the only way to define our identity and to force us to act a certain way based on that. Next, I consider whether Wittgenstein's theory is able to produce a solution to the worry. This partially stems from the charge that Wittgenstein's theory of language may be too conservative. Ultimately, I believe charges that it is are unconvincing. Finally, I attempt to formulate the solution to the worry based on some of Wittgenstein's later ideas.

Trapped in Language

Insults, bullying, and oppression all have their roots in abusive uses of language, which are themselves rooted in the language-games we play. What constitutes our language-games in their abusive usages is the normative nature of the language-game. The language-game imposes a certain behavior upon us, but that may be worrying. These impositions create the sense of being trapped in a language-game. When a community dictates the rules of the language-games, which in turn dictate the way we are compelled to act, then speakers get the sense that we are limited by a certain vocabulary in how we talk about ourselves and others. They impose a set of values on the things we talk about, especially in the case of identity. This worry is formulated in the writings of Richard Rorty, bell hooks, and Judith Butler. The task of this section will be to synthesize their views into a single cohesive worry.

The broadest of these worries comes from Rorty, who examines how these vocabularies play a role in the construction of one's own identity. Rorty's first point is

that these vocabularies are contingent on the community. As a result the "truth is not out there," which means "where there are no sentences there is no truth."[2] Rorty's idea bears a similar idea to that of Wittgenstein's. This is the idea that which sentences we designate as true depends on the community's construction of language. Truth for him depends on the human mind. That is not to say that the world is not out there without us. Rather descriptions of it depend on us. In a nonlinguistic sense facts are out there, but any linguistic idea we impose on the facts has to come from us. The truth of any of these sentences depends on the rules of the community.

Rorty thinks that paying attention to the vocabularies as a whole, rather than particular sentences, reveals the contingency of truth. For instance in the Newtonian vocabulary it is true that 'the rock falls because it is pulled by gravity,' and in the Aristotelian vocabulary it is true that 'the rock falls because it has the essence of heaviness.'[3] What he pulls out of this is that nature or the world is independent of our description of it whereas truth is not. Given our language-games, the world can cause us to hold certain beliefs as true. Whether it is true that the object falls from heaviness or gravity depends on the language-game. This idea parallels Wittgenstein's in the *Investigations.* We cannot appeal to reality or the state of affairs to determine the truth of the description. Rather we have to appeal to the community and the role they play in structuring our language, and by extension our experience.

Early on, Rorty points out that this community-structured experience also structures our experience of ourselves. Since there is no truth independent of language "the human self is created by the use of a vocabulary rather than being adequately or inadequately expressed in a vocabulary."[4] The personal identity we seem to have depends

on how we participate in language-games, and in doing so we become selves. Imagine, for instance, that I am a psychopath, but there is no word to define my personality type. In my head I struggle to empathize with people, I find myself inclined to do awful things to them, and I feel no remorse after I have done these things. If my community does not have a language-game or the adequate medical institution that can define me as a psychopath, then it seems like they are unable to define one of the crucial characteristics of my identity. For, if I go out and start to do horrible things without remorse and there is no concept of psychopath in the community, then they cannot define me as a psychopath and I cannot define myself as such. Instead they would probably say I was just a really ruthless criminal and punish me. If they see mental illness more as a possession as people once did, then they might burn me at the stake or exorcise me. Not only does this example get at the idea that we are defined in a public way, but it also creates the worry that the language-games we play cannot adequately define us.

This is one of bell hooks' main worries, that we are trapped in a language-game that does not represent us. hooks focuses on race and how "the oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew."[5] This struggle stems from the fact that in order for oppressed people to give a voice to their experience they have to do so in the language of the person who dominates them. The power of the oppressor's language is so strong that the oppressed actually lose their sense of self. This creates the need to recover the self in language. Language itself becomes a struggle to define oneself. When there is no language-game in which we can define ourselves we are stuck in the situation where others are defining us. Such a situation is a problem because

it deprives us of our autonomy. We are restricted in our choices to define ourselves and this restriction leads to our being oppressed.

hooks showcases this oppression in the words of the oppressor. The oppressor believes there is

> No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can talk about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to hear your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Rewriting you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority.[6]

Cases where we cannot define ourselves allow the oppressor to maintain this authority over our experience. There is a sense of absurdity about what the oppressor has to say. That someone could know our experience better than we know it is arrogant to say the least. The problem stems from the oppressor being the one to create the language-game. They are able to structure discourse in such a way that makes them the authority. In doing so they deprive those of us who actually suffer this or that experience or pain of the ability to define it. By not defining our experience we cannot define ourselves. Here, there is a dilemma. Either we allow ourselves to be defined by others or we assume the language of the oppressor, and in doing so lose our identity. As a result, we are trapped in a language-game that does not define us, but rather imposes a certain behavior upon us.

Judith Butler is able to put her finger on this normative imposition through gender roles. In her examination of gender, she argues for the need to depart from the idea that there is an essence to gender or to a person and recognize gender as a constructed contingency. As a consequence, "there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender […] identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."[7] Similar to Rorty, our identities are constituted by how we act. It is

constructed based on our interaction with a set of vocabularies. The self is a linguistic construction, but some of these are constructed in a way that disadvantages some of us. Again, these are oppressed identities. It is a construction that this race or that gender is perceived as inferior. This inferiority is reinforced by people having to act out their identity.

The notion of performativity is problematic for Butler because we do not choose our identities and the performance is highly regulated. Performativity, here, represents the darker side of community compulsion since

> The tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend to not agreeing to believe in them; the construction 'compels' our belief in its necessity and naturalness.[8]

The community rigidly dictates this identity with the threat of punishment for not complying. We are bound to this language-game and its rules, by a sort of bewitchment that comes from a metaphysical or essentialist notion of gender. The community sanctions the belief that there are only two genders and that one gender holds a specific set of traits. This sanction seems to trap us in a particular language-game for our identity because performing a different construction of gender is either not justified or met with resistance. The community polices our performance of identity. Their policing becomes the same external definition that bell hooks worries about. Their enforcement of these rigid categories makes us think that because we are women or men we must naturally have all the traits of whichever gender we are. Policing the performance defines us externally, it requires us to see ourselves the way that the communities want us to. In other words, language's normative function has the disastrous consequence of oppressing

us. The community uses facts about us such as race or gender in order to dictate how we must act.

Are These Consequences of Wittgenstein?

These worries about the community raise questions about whether Wittgenstein's view of language causes them. Though the community may be the cause, Wittgenstein provides several solutions that provide a way to get out of these language-games. The first of these is his anti-metaphysical views, which we first saw in his critique of the *Tractatus.* The anti-essentialism he presents entrusts us in removing some of the harmful language-games from our discourse. The second involves twisting the private language argument a bit to allow us to take our private self-created identity into the public discourse. Instead of thinking of privacy in a Cartesian sense and trying to give voice to our private sensations, we take advantage of the fact that we *can* speak about our experiences with oppression and take those private (as in personal) experiences into public discourse.

It is tempting to say that Wittgenstein traps us in a set of language-games. For instance, consider his project in the *Investigations.* He wants to show that ordinary language that we use every day is fine as it is. Christopher Robinson, among others, notes that political theorists like Herbert Marcuse charge Wittgenstein's claim here as an "uncritical support for the mutilated language of the status quo."[9] If this claim is true then Wittgenstein is helping to perpetuate abusive language. Marcuse's claim becomes a powerful one because it is our ordinary language that oppresses us. It is what compels us to act in a certain way. Uncritical support of the community standards suggests conservatism and gives a pass to oppressive uses of language.

Robinson, much like myself, wants to resist this claim however. Robinson's argument relies on introducing a critical view towards ordinary language. He does this by looking to one of the features in Wittgenstein's rejection of the *Tractatus,* criticisms of positivism. In chapter 2, I explored some of these, but here what is important is that "philosophy may serve to set the logical limits of the world of facts and offer a coherent picture of reality, [but it] could never adopt the methods of science. Nor should it."[10] Given what I have said in previous chapters it should come as no surprise that I accept Robinson's claim here. Based on his treatment of value in the *Tractatus,* he wants to resist the positivist reduction of ethics to facts. Allowing the positivist to say ethics are just facts leaves us stuck in the oppressive situation. It becomes a fact that this race or gender is inferior for the positivist. The reduction of values to facts leaves us in a situation where there is only human nature and no human custom. By showing that insults rely on both, as I did in previous chapters, we are able to introduce an element of change.

However, I believe Robinson could strengthen his argument by taking note of Wittgenstein's anti-essentialist, and by extension anti-metaphysical, account of language to show how we are critically engaged with language. As noted in the last chapter, Wittgenstein rejects the notion that the essence of language is to picture facts. He abandons the earlier project of constructing the ideal, logically-founded language in favor of ordinary language. By rejecting the logical essence he embraces an anti-metaphysical language, one that is explained by the things we do. In a fairly explicit rejection of his early project he commands that "philosophy must not interfere with the actual use of language, so it can in the end only describe it."[11]At a first glance, this might seem

worrying because it seems as though Wittgenstein is unable to adequately account for change now. Peg O'Connor, for instance, considers this a point of departure between her and Wittgenstein because it does not allow her to pursue her goal of creating a less oppressive language.[12] Her reason for the departure is because Wittgenstein's view limits her as a philosopher. Wittgenstein, in her eyes seems to be asserting that language is okay as it is.

However, O'Connor makes an unnecessary departure here, as Wittgenstein's message is directed at the ideal language philosophers. Wittgenstein's point that language is okay as it is points more towards the idea that there is no reason to provide a logical foundation for language. In our ordinary language there is nothing that needs to be fixed, thus the philosopher only needs to describe it. By describing ordinary language, we clarify philosophical discourse and find the solutions to our problems. Through this clarification, we may see problematic aspects of our language-games or forms of life we might want to criticize. Wittgenstein restricts us in trying to find a logical foundation for language, but there does not seem to be a restriction on making language better in a moral sense. We can offer criticisms of our language-games.

To some extent, this is what Wittgenstein's attempt to eliminate metaphysical speech from ordinary language entails. Wittgenstein offers his own criticism of how these concepts confuse us and muddle our understanding. Oppressive statements play a similar role in our language as metaphysical ones do. They confuse our understandings of people who are, in fact, quite similar to us. They make us think that there are natural categories that people can be separated out into, and that some categories are superior to others.

Breaking the Cycle of Abuse

However, as we learned from the private language argument, our interaction with others helps us understand that this is not the case. Look back on the genius child. The child is inducted into a community with a meaningful concept of pain, and this meaningful concept gives us an idea of the pains of others. Though we have a natural way of feeling the sensation, we really learn what pain is as a concept and replace our natural reaction through the community, not through our own first person experience. Our public language not only teaches us about others' pains, but it shows us that they have minds. For someone to say that others do not have minds or pains requires them to express that sentence in a public language. However, for it to be a public language presupposes that there are other minds capable of using language or forming concepts of pain. Asserting that no other minds exist, already presupposes that there are other minds when we use language because linguistic concepts are formed outside of ourselves. Since the worry about other minds breaks down in Wittgenstein's system, we start to get the picture that other people really are just like us. I cannot use the reason that someone else does not have a mind to treat them terribly. It was permissible to harm someone if they did not have a mind, and since Wittgenstein denies the premise that other minds do not exist, it follows that there is no justification to treat others differently.

The private language argument plays another role in overcoming the worry about abusive speech by providing a way to redefine our language-games through the articulation of our personal experiences in public discourse. This idea is prevalent in Rorty, Butler and hooks, but I will focus on hooks' account because it seems clearest in my mind. hooks sees the language of the oppressed as an act of resistance. With this in mind, she sees the task of reforming oppressive language-games as one of including

"private speech in public discourse," which creates "a space that enables me to recover all I am in language."[13] By private speech, hooks seems to be referring to the lived experience of those who are repressed. This is the inclusion of the sorts of things we might only speak to our friends and family about. The inclusion of the private discourse expands our language-games. By taking our stories to a new space and moving the private to the public we are sharing those stories in a new setting. By making an experience public, we push at the boundaries of language. As a result, we change the general discourse.

Peg O'Connor sees this potential as well, arguing that new uses of language are able to undermine oppressive and hurtful ones. The two processes she focuses on for creating new meanings are 'breaking the silence' surrounding one's experience with sexual abuse and 'coming out.' At their core, these are processes of self-identity and they offer a "shift in how people are oriented toward the world."[14] By defining ourselves, we create a new concept of who we are and thereby challenge those old concepts. The old concept might be something like the stereotype homosexuals are perverted or promiscuous and that one should be ashamed of homosexual feelings. Coming out challenges this view. It suggests that no one should be ashamed of his or her sexuality. It creates a rival language-game that challenges the dominant one.

I think there is a bit of truth to this idea, that we challenge these dominant uses with new language-games, and particularly to create less oppressive meanings. Wittgenstein himself suggests this challenging is possible in *On Certainty,* because we use language-games to "combat" one another when we criticize someone who consults an oracle rather than a physicist.[15] Slightly later in §612, Wittgenstein suggests that he

himself is willing to combat different language-games. In these remarks Wittgenstein seems to be giving credence to a more competitive aspect of his ideas of games. By being situated in our language-games and unable to get outside of them we are up to the task to determine which ones are better. The ones we see as better seem to be those that are, in fact, less oppressive when we look at our political landscape. Many groups seem to be trying to reclaim words from their oppressive usages, one of the most notable and successful examples being the word 'queer.' Though it originally meant something to the effect of weird or strange it took on a hurtful meaning. It became a slur against people who identified with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. In recent history, it has taken on a less hurtful meaning. Today some people use 'queer' as the label they have chosen for their sexuality, we have 'queer pride month,' 'queer studies,' or television show with 'queer' in the title. It no longer seems to have the damaging impact it once did. This indicates that we are trending towards choosing language-games that are less hurtful or oppressive, confirming some of O'Connor's and hooks' ideas.

In their writings, hooks and O'Connor highlight one of the seminal points I have tried to make: that we cannot change the facts, but we can change the culture. It will always be the case that someone's skin is a certain color for instance, but the way we treat her can change. The *Tractatus* is important for its highlighting of this dichotomy, but it is only with the *Investigations* that we get a clear sense that we can change the culture. We can rearrange our language to make it quite different than it is. With regards to insults, bullying, and oppression, this is an important mechanism. It allows us to try and fix the moral character of our language. Abusive uses of language demand this of us, they cause us pain in devastating ways. Mere description of them does not satisfy us, we

know what our words mean. Wittgenstein's 'meaning as use,' not only shows us how these words can be hurtful, but shows the path for changing it.

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[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. Von Wright (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), §97, §99.
[2] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 5.
[3] *Ibid.,* 5-6.
[4] *Ibid.,* 7.
[5] bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness" in *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990), 146.
[6] *Ibid.,* 152
[7] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble.* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 25.
[8] *Ibid.,* 140.
[9] Christopher Robinson, "Why Wittgenstein is Not Conservative: Conventions and Critique," *Theory and Event* 9, no.3 (2006), https://www.press.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/robinson_sample.html
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical investigations,* §124.
[12] Peg O'Connor, *Oppression and Responsibility: a Wittgensteinian Approach to Social Practices and Moral Theory.* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 19.
[13] hooks., "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openess," 147.
[14] O'Connor, *Oppression and Responsibility,* 95.
[15] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty,* §609.

Concluding Remarks: The Minefield of Meaning

Through Wittgenstein's analysis of language we can begin to see language as a social construction, but not everything is. Language is built up on the natural features of what it means to be a human being. We cry when we are in pain, for instance, and our language replaces this natural behavior. Another example might be that we get tired and have to sleep, and so a language-game is built around this. If language were not rooted in these non-constructed features of human beings, then we are open to questions of what our language is rooted in. The constructivist would likely quip that it is rooted in human agreement as Kripke seems to. However, we are left to wonder how we come to agreement. I can imagine a man pointing to an animal and saying 'rabbit,' and us agreeing that this is now the name for that animal. Such an account, however, relies on my natural propensity to interpret his finger pointing at the animal. It seems the constructivist has trouble accounting for how we establish meaning here. Wittgenstein rejects the idea that meaning can be interpretation all the way down. At some point there must be an end to analysis, which he thinks are these unlearned given responses we have. This idea separates him from a constructivist like Judith Butler who believes all meaning is constructed.

A final clarification of Wittgenstein's understanding of language is that the analysis of language into the smaller unit of the language-game gives us an understanding of language that is complex and nuanced. This is exemplified in the act of insulting someone. Insults rely on context. When I am with a group of friends for instance and they call me 'dumb,' I would likely know that they were not trying to hurt me, but that they are joking. If a teacher said the same thing to me, I would take it seriously and be quite

hurt. In the second case, the context is different by virtue of the relationship. A student-teacher relationship is less personal than a friendship and it has a different power dynamic. The difference of power complicates speech, not only at the individual level, but also at the community level. Just as an individual might have a different relationship to different people, a community can have a different relationship to another community. Marginalized communities, for instance, face insults from dominating communities. The dominant community systematically uses their insults to cause harm to those who are marginalized. However, the marginalized people are able to use these insults as well. They are able to reclaim the words that are used to oppress them. Additionally, we might see them use satire. With satire we can use insulting speech to undermine the structure of the dominant community. We show how ridiculous the system they have built is by parodying it. These, then, are some language-games that can counter the harmful impacts of insults, since insults can sometimes be use as a tool by marginalized groups to resist oppression, showing us that language-games are more complicated that Wittgenstein suggested.

This dynamic also indicates the conflict that can arise between communities. For instance, ESPN editor Anthony Federico caused controversy when referring to Asian-American basketball player Jeremy Lin's poor performance as a 'chink in his [Lin's] armor.'[1] Although it is possible to use the word 'chink' as a slur, Federico contended that it was not his intention to do so. Indeed, Gregory McNeal at Forbes Magazine suggested it was "poor choice of words and there was nothing racist intended in the headline."[2] The phrase could be used of any player to point out they had an Achilles heel. Huan Hsu at Slate Magazine, on the other hand, suggested that while the phrase itself was not racist,

the phrase ought to be "retire[d] from the lexicon for good" by virtue of having a racial slur in it."[3] Though the phrase itself is not hurtful, one of the words is in some contexts. The phrase could be used to describe any player, but it impacts those of a particular race. Indeed, we would not use other racial slurs like the 'n-word' in idioms these days. With this example we see two communities in conflict over the meanings of this word. Though I find it plausible that Federico had no intention of making a double entendre at Lin's expense, what we really have to consider is the impact of the phrase. If Lin himself was hurt by the phrase, we should consider this to have been an intentional insult. If he was not hurt, then it seems as though we are policing language.

The general public, then, has to consider what usages are acceptable in our language. It is in that broad context that we have to consider whether one person intended to use words to hurt another one. It is against this background that everyone understand that we understand the meaning of our words. The phrase 'a chink in the armor' itself may not be offense, but when applied to someone who is ethnically East Asian we start to see it as a double entendre. Thus, as members of the public discourse we really do see him as inflicting some harm. Through the context of the phrase's usage we judge the speaker's intentions.

That is not to say that we have to police our language for all those harmful words. Just as it is on a playground, if we say not use one word, a new hurtful word will take its place. What we ought to consider instead is how we can limit those systematically hurtful language-games. Firing one ESPN editor who uses 'chink in one's armor' does not solve the problem. Nor does eliminating the slur from our speech, really. What, perhaps, offers the best way forward is coming to an understanding about how others feel when we use

hurtful language. What matters is bridging the gulf between us, to reference the German aeroplane example. By doing so, we are able to come to an understanding.

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[1] Cindy Boren, "ESPN editor fired for offensive Jeremy Lin headline calls it 'honest mistake,'" *Washington Post*, published February 22, 2012 accessed April 15, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/early-lead/post/espn-editor-fired-for-offensive-jeremy-lin-headline-calls-it-honest-mistake/2012/02/22/gIQApRJmTR_blog.html.

[2] Gregory McNeal, "ESPN Uses "Chink in the Armor" Line Twice UPDATE- ESPN Fires One Employee Suspends Another," *Forbes,* published February 18, 2012, accessed April 15, 2015, http://www.forbes.com/sites/gregorymcneal/2012/02/18/espn-uses-chink-in-the-armor-line-twice-did-linsanity-just-go-racist/

[3]Huan Hsu, "No More Chinks in the Armor," *Slate,* published February 21, 2012 accessed April 15, 2015, http://www.slate.com/articles/sports/the_good_word/2012/02/chink_in_the_armor_jeremy_lin_why_it_s_time_to_retire_the_phrase_for_good_.html

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