

THE MORAL DIMENSION OF WITTGENSTEIN'S PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD¹

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ABSTRACT. Wittgenstein wrote: 'Working in philosophy ... is really more a working on oneself. On one's own interpretation. On one's own way of seeing things.'¹ In what sense, for Wittgenstein, is work in philosophy 'work on oneself'? This paper will be devoted to answering this question, and to delineating the moral aspects of his work.

1. Conceptual Tensions

Wittgenstein wrote: 'Working in philosophy ... is really more a working on oneself. On one's own interpretation. On one's own way of seeing things.' [CV p. 16] One gets a feel for the truth of this by reading his philosophical writings. Not only are we drawn into a world of bizarre philosophical deliberations, but also, as Wittgenstein often describes it, a world of 'personal struggle'. Many commentators would agree. For example, Stanley Cavell [1989, p. 37] writes:

The *Investigations* exhibits, as purely as any work in philosophy I know, a philosophizing as a spiritual struggle, specifically a struggle within the contrary depths of oneself, which in the modern world will present themselves as touches of madness.

and Rudolf Carnap [1967]:

When [Wittgenstein] started to formulate his view on some specific philosophical problem, we often felt the internal struggle that occurred in him at that very moment, a struggle by which he tried to penetrate from darkness to light ...

In what sense, for Wittgenstein, is work in philosophy 'work on oneself', and in what sense do his philosophical works exhibit an 'internal' or 'spiritual' struggle?

¹ *Analysis & Metaphysics* 6, December 2007, pp. 452-467.

In attempting to answer these questions, I have found it helpful to make use of a well known expression coined by Sartre. In ordinary discourse, we sometimes say of a person that he shows signs of 'bad faith'. According to Sartre [1956, p. 87], 'bad faith' is 'a lie to oneself', which we must distinguish from 'lying in general'. The latter implies that the liar is 'actually in complete possession of the truth which he is hiding', 'affirms' the truth within himself. Lying to oneself ('bad faith'), on the other hand, though it shares with lying in general the idea that the liar is presenting as truth an untruth, differs from lying in general in that it is *from himself* that the liar is hiding the truth. The deceiver, in this case, *is* the deceived. Bad faith thus results in a paradoxical duality of consciousness, an inner turmoil: the liar knows the truth, yet refuses to accept it, to act on it as a truth.

Though Sartre supposes that 'lying to oneself' involves *knowing the truth*, I think there is another way one can 'lie to oneself', in certain circumstances, that does not involve knowing the truth, and that is: to be ignorant of the truth yet *fail to seek it*. To interpret or see things as they are bequeathed to us by tradition when we are puzzled by those interpretations, troubled by them, perhaps even tormented by them, without an effort to understand *why* they trouble or torment us, is, in some sense, I would add, also to be in a state of 'bad faith'. Both this and the state of 'bad faith' Sartre speaks of involve an inner turmoil or unrest, and a *failure to act* in a way that aims at alleviating or dissolving that unrest.

Of course, it is not a failure to deal with *any* kind of problem generating internal tensions that, I would maintain, generates a state of 'bad faith'. Some problems might not have a *rational* explanation (e.g., Why did he behave that way?), so that efforts to resolve them must necessarily fail. Explanations do come to an end somewhere, and not always where we want them to. Fortunately, though, not everything that perplexes us is this way. For the most part, where there's a *will*, there's a *way* -- a means of rescuing ourselves from deception, prejudice and superstition; of enlightening ourselves.

At least, this is how Wittgenstein felt about many of the problems of philosophy. He too, though he did not employ these terms, had what I think can aptly be described as a good faith/bad faith distinction with regard to how we deal with what he took to be pseudo-philosophical problems. Wittgenstein felt that many of the problems of philosophy arise from a natural impulse or tendency to misconstrue the way language works, and thus are only pseudo-problems, conceptual muddles, that would fall like a 'house of cards' [PI §118] once their real nature is disclosed. *Good faith*, we can say, involves looking carefully into the 'workings of language' [PI §109], to get to the *source* of the pseudo-problems; *bad faith* a failure to do so. For only by

‘clarifying the use of our language’ [PG p. 115], Wittgenstein felt, can the philosopher remove particular misunderstandings that generate the pseudo-problems that ‘hold him captive’ [PI §115], like the fly in the bottle [PI §309]. The fly, having landed in a trap, is in grave danger. So too, Wittgenstein felt, is the philosopher when he fails to rescue himself from the snares of language (his prison).

I do not think it would be an exaggeration to say that for Wittgenstein, pseudo-philosophical problems can arise wherever *ordinary language* (common parlance) exists: they hover about (though they may go unrecognized) in virtually all disciplines that *borrow* expressions from ordinary language. And in this sense, his method of doing philosophy, which he likened to a form of therapy, has a *wide* range of patients. The practitioner of any discipline whose discourse overlaps with ordinary language can fall prey to the snares of language. Philosophy (that is, the practice of philosophy as Wittgenstein envisioned it) only appeared, for Wittgenstein, to be of no use to the ‘non-philosopher’, because of the traditional default of practitioners of various disciplines to deal with (by means of eradicating) certain *kinds* of problems – specifically, for Wittgenstein, problems springing from *overstretched analogies* in our language (more on the nature of these problems later). As he says of the mathematician:

If a philosopher draws the attention of a mathematician to a distinction, or to a misleading mode of expression, the mathematician always says ‘Sure, we know all that, it isn’t really very interesting.’ He doesn’t realize that when he is **troubled by philosophical questions** it is because of those very unclaritys that he passed over earlier with a shrug of the shoulders. [MS 219, 10]

A mathematician is bound to be horrified by my mathematical comments, since he has always been trained to avoid indulging in thoughts and doubts of the kind I develop. He has learned to regard them as something contemptible and, to use an analogy from psychoanalysis, he has acquired a revulsion from them as infantile. That is to say, I trot out all the problems that a child learning arithmetic, etc., finds difficult, the problems that education represses without solving. I say to those **repressed doubts**: you are quite correct, go on asking, demand clarification! [PG pp. 381-382]²

It is this dismissive way of pushing off a problem about a misleading mode of expression, suppressing a conceptual tension, or failing to resolve it, that gives rise to the ‘deep disquietudes’ Wittgenstein speaks of:

The problems arising through a misinterpretation of our forms of language have the character of depth. They are **deep disquietudes**; ...[PI §112]

A simile that has been absorbed into the forms of our language produces a false appearance, and this disquiets us. ‘**But *this* isn’t how it is!**’ – we say. ‘**Yet *this* is how it has to be!**’ [PI §112]

And it is these ‘deep disquietudes’ [§112]³, repressed doubts or puzzlements, that I am assimilating to a state of ‘bad faith’, for they too trigger a duality of consciousness (‘*This* isn’t how it is!... Yet *this* is how it has to be!’ [§112]), a kind of *schizophrenic* disorder that is in need of therapy, only here the source of the conflict is language, as opposed to, as in the existential tradition, a denial of responsibility for our actions, or, as in the psychoanalytic tradition, a repression of painful childhood emotions.

Sartre maintains that though we are free beings, we are also quite ‘unaware’ of our freedom. This obliviousness results not from ignorance or oversight, but from the fact that we try to *conceal* our freedom from ourselves. But these efforts at self-deception, Sartre contends, are bound to fail, because human beings can try to conceal their freedom only to the extent that they recognize it. The attempt thus succeeds only in producing a paradoxical duality of consciousness / state of ‘bad faith’, since consciousness thinks of itself as a ‘thing’ (an entity which is not responsible for its behavior), yet at the same time gives recognition to its freedom (and hence responsibility).

Philosophers have also, Wittgenstein would say, generated clever tactics for concealing the real nature of pseudo-philosophical problems from themselves, treating them instead as genuine problems of profound difficulty: ‘Numerous traditions have treated this as a “serious” problem’, ‘Many philosophical theories have grown around it’, ‘It has occupied the minds of some of our greatest thinkers’, etc.

But efforts to solve pseudo-problems also give rise to the ‘deep disquietudes’ Wittgenstein speaks of. Once we recognize this, we are in a position to identify the *symptoms* -- the nature of the *kinds* of conflict -- that Wittgenstein saw as in need of philosophical therapy. Just as an individual might go to a psychoanalyst or psychologist to bring rest to conflicting emotions he might have toward an individual, so too, Wittgenstein felt – and, I would hasten to add, recognized this better than any other philosopher of his time -- that we (and the philosopher in particular) can have conflicting attitudes / feelings over our understanding and use of expressions of our language (‘*This* isn’t how it is! Yet *this* is how it has to be!’), and this too is *in need of therapy*, generating, as it does, *internal (conceptual) tensions* – the ‘deep disquietudes’ Wittgenstein speaks of. This is why work in philosophy involves ‘work on the self’: it involves repairing a *fractured* self.



Though these tensions might not be *as intense* as conflicting emotions toward human beings can be, they do exist, and in some cases they are *very* intense. (Consider, for example, problems concerning the 'existence' and 'goodness' of God, which can be a perpetual source of internal unrest for some theists.) By likening his philosophical method to the treatment of a disease, Wittgenstein was noticing the need for a 'science' to treat the *kind* of ailment ('illness') that afflicts the philosopher (and non-philosopher as well⁴): *conceptual neurosis*. When we are suffering from conceptual tensions we have a bit of hidden or repressed nonsense in our minds, and the only way to cure it is to bring it out into the open -- to make it explicit nonsense. Wittgenstein saw his philosophical method as a therapeutic instrument for bringing conceptual tensions to the surface and dissolving them, just as Freud saw his psychoanalytic method as a therapeutic instrument for bringing conflicting emotions toward an individual to the surface and dissolving or at least alleviating them. In this respect, Wittgenstein's method is like psychotherapy. Like Freud, Wittgenstein's goal was *psychological health*: uniting a divided self.⁵

How conceptual tensions arise, and correlatively how, for Wittgenstein, pseudo-philosophical problems are generated, is a question I will turn to in the next section.

2. How Conceptual Tensions Arise

Throughout his life, Wittgenstein was preoccupied with investigating the 'limits of language'. For Wittgenstein,

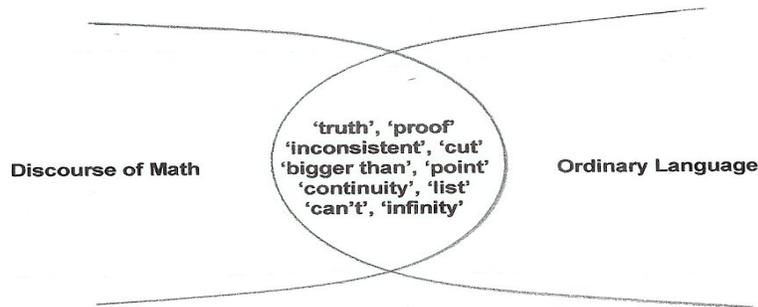
The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language. [PI §119]

A. Janik and S. Toulmin [1973 p. 224] remark that the ancient dictum ‘Know yourself; Know your limits’ translated for Wittgenstein into ‘Know the limits of *language*’. [1973 p. 224] For Wittgenstein, one could obey the Socratic injunction ‘Know yourself’ only if ‘he came to understand the scope and limits of his own understanding; and this meant, first and foremost, recognizing the precise scope and limits of language, which is the prime instrument of human understanding.’ [1973 p. 224]

But what is meant by the ‘limits of language’, a knowledge of which is integral to self-understanding, and, for Wittgenstein, to the practice of philosophy? By the ‘limits of language’, Wittgenstein meant, first and foremost, the limits of *our* language; that is, the language we actually use to communicate. Though our language is ‘in order’ as it is (i.e., connected to our ways of acting in the real contexts of our lives), it is, for Wittgenstein, the *source* of pseudo-philosophical problems. These problems arise in a number of ways, but I take the following to be central:

- (1) conflating *senses of words* in different ‘regions of language’, and
- (2) conflating *grammatical functions of sentences* in different ‘regions of language’.

(1) involves conflating the senses of words as they are used in different ‘practices’ or ‘language-games’. For example, conflating the sense of a word as it is used *within* the discourse/conceptual framework of science, math, religion, art, psychology, politics, etc. with how it is used *outside* the discourse; primarily, with how it is used in ordinary language. It’s quite natural to do this, since much of the terminology in these various fields is borrowed from ordinary language. For example, both within the discourse of mathematics and that of ordinary language we find the words:



Each of these words has a technical definition (specific to the discourse of

mathematics), which (though resembling in some ways) differs in important respects from its ordinary language meaning. For example, in ordinary language, the word 'infinite' is rarely used to denote a quantity greater than every finite quantity (as it is *in* mathematics). Rather, the word 'infinite' is treated as if it were the designation of a *huge* number. We say, e.g., 'I have an *infinite* amount of work to do!' meaning a *huge* amount.

The fact that many expressions in a given discourse ('language-game') have a use both *within* and *outside* the discourse, in ordinary language, makes it tempting for someone who has not mastered the discourse, and, in some cases, even for someone who has, to **conflate** the meaning of words within that discourse with their meaning in ordinary language. This can lead them to **falsely interpret** statements in the discourse embedding those words. False interpretations give rise to *conceptual tensions* ('*This* isn't how it is! ... Yet *this* is how it has to be!'): these are the *symptoms/signs* that something has been falsely interpreted. The unwary philosopher, seduced by the false interpretation ('*This* is how it has to be!'), is then led 'willy nilly' to erect what Wittgenstein took to be **pseudo-philosophical problems** (since they are based on false interpretations).

When we do philosophy we are like savages, primitive people, who hear the expressions of civilized men, put a **false interpretation** on them, and then **draw the queerest conclusions** from it. [PI §194]

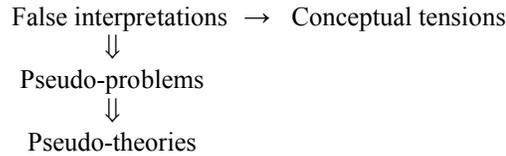
He then seeks to resolve these pseudo-problems in the wrong sorts of ways: constructing what Wittgenstein took to be **pseudo-theories** (thereby erecting a *new* home for the false interpretation).

(2) (which can give rise to (1) and vice versa) involves conflating *grammatical functions* of sentences in different 'regions of language' -- functions as diverse as describing facts, commending, commanding, expressing feelings and emotions, influencing attitudes, etc. *Superficial similarities* in the syntactic form of sentences (e.g. the subject/predicate form) *conceal differences* in the role and function of those sentences. This can seduce the philosopher, once again, into raising pseudo-problems, which he seeks to resolve in the wrong sorts of ways (constructing pseudo-theories).

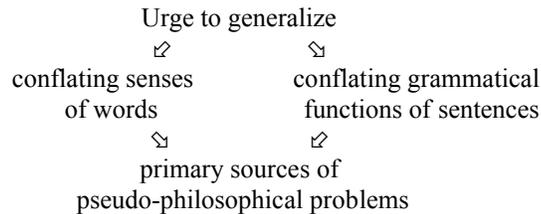
We can summarize the errors involved in (1) and (2) as follows:⁶

Conflating senses of words or grammatical functions of sentences





These tendencies to misconstrue how language works, which Wittgenstein saw as root causes of philosophical ‘sin’, can be traced in turn to the same fundamental urge: *the urge to generalize*. It is this urge that we can identify as the root source of the symptoms that Wittgenstein saw as in need of philosophical therapy. Pictorially, we have:



Wittgenstein emphasized that the puzzling questions that lead the philosopher to construct pseudo-theories are not in need of solution, but of **dissolution**: the philosopher needs to *draw his attention to the false interpretations* that lead him to posit the pseudo-questions in the first place, and recognize that the words embedded in the sentence(s) he falsely interpreted do not mean what he took them to mean, and/or that the sentences do not function the way he took them to function. To see this, the philosopher needs to examine how the (falsely interpreted) sentences function *within* the discourse/‘language-game’ that embeds them -- their natural surrounding / original home⁷ -- *where they do their work*, not *outside* the discourse that embeds them, *where they remain idle* (‘*on holiday*’). By doing so, the philosopher unties the knots in his understanding that give rise to the pseudo-problems, and the problems disappear.

Here are some examples to illustrate.

EXAMPLE 1. Consider the meaning we attach to the notion of ‘existence’ in ordinary language. We think of an object of which we predicate existence (e.g. a chair or table) as *spacio-temporally bounded*. The ordinary use of this term can tempt one to *falsely interpret* statements *within* the discourse of mathematics involving the term, such as ‘The set of natural numbers *exists*’,

'The set of real numbers *exists*', as claims about *a completed totality, a finished product*. This interpretation of the infinite can then lead to *paradoxical results*, such as those found in set theory, which the philosophers or logicians have attempted to resolve by constructing what Wittgenstein took to be *pseudo-theories* -- for example, *revising* the language of mathematics so as to remove all references to the infinite, and attempting to prove the consistency of the resulting theory. Wittgenstein noticed that there wasn't a need for such theories, for once it is recognized that the notion of a 'completed infinite totality' makes no sense, the paradoxes that prompted their construction would disappear. This is why he writes:

It is the business of philosophy, not to resolve a contradiction by means of a mathematical or logico-mathematical discovery, but to make it possible for us to get a clear view of the state of mathematics that troubles us: the state of affairs *before* the contradiction is resolved. (And this does not mean that one is sidestepping a difficulty). [PI §125]

EXAMPLE 2. We say, *within* the discourse of mathematics, that 'Numbers exist'. This sentence bears a resemblance to sentences in ordinary language, like 'Tables exist'. *Conflating* the functions of these sentences can lead the philosopher to *falsely interpret* the term 'number' to refer to an *object*, and the sentence 'Numbers exist' to function as a *descriptive statement*. This in turn can lead him to raise 'problems' that have an air of puzzlement -- what Wittgenstein took to be *pseudo-problems* (indeed, 'problems' that he thought lack sense⁸) -- like: What is the nature of these objects? Where are they located? How can we know anything about them? etc. He then attempts to resolve these 'problems' by constructing what Wittgenstein took to be *pseudo-theories*, since they address pseudo-problems.

One such mythological theory, for Wittgenstein, is *Platonism*. According to this theory, numerals are names of numbers, which are *abstract objects*. These objects are immaterial, not located, causally impotent. A 'third world', eternal, neither spatial nor temporal, is said to house them. Platonism accounts for our *knowledge* of abstract objects by positing a faculty of *intuition*, which puts us in contact with them. This faculty is supposed to be like sense perception, but also in some mysterious way different from it.

Wittgenstein emphasized that the puzzling questions that led the philosopher to create this pseudo-theory are not in need of solution, but of *dissolution*: the philosopher needs to *draw his attention to the false interpretation* that led him to posit the pseudo-questions in the first place, and recognize that numerals do not pick out objects in the world in the way that names of physical objects do. To recognize this, the philosopher needs to

examine the *role and function* of the sentence ‘Numbers exist’ *within* the discourse of mathematics, *where it does its work*, not *outside* the discourse, *where it remains idle*. By doing so, the philosopher unties the knots in his understanding that gave rise to the pseudo-problems, and the problems *disappear*.

3. The Moral Dimension of Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Method

To wrap up, the source of the symptoms that Wittgenstein felt were in need of philosophical therapy can be traced, at root, to an unbridled urge to generalize. Allowing this urge free rein leads to the sort of intellectual dishonesty involved in generating pseudo-philosophical problems and pseudo-theories. For it is mainly this that generates pseudo-philosophical problems: a failure to keep the various senses and functions of words/sentences apart in our minds. Mental sloth/laziness drives the philosopher to *assimilate* what should be kept apart (‘as if the sense were an atmosphere accompanying the word, which it carried with it into every kind of application’ [PI #117]). In our earlier examples, we saw how this causes the philosopher to generate pseudo-problems.

Of course, it is not only the philosopher who succumbs to such sloppiness: no one is completely immune from making such mistakes. Language, Wittgenstein felt, operates in ‘dangerous’ ways not only in the life of the philosopher, but in our daily lives, as the following remark made to Norman Malcolm suggests (recorded by Malcolm in his biography of Wittgenstein [1962 p. 30]):

Whenever I thought of you I couldn’t help thinking of a particular incident which seemed to me very important ... you made a remark about the ‘national character’ that shocked me by its primitiveness. I then thought: what is the use of studying philosophy if all that it does for you is to enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc., & if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life, if it does not make you more conscientious than any ... journalist in the use of the DANGEROUS phrases such people use for their own ends.

Every one of us, whether we choose it or not, given certain features of our language, is liable to fall prey to the *kinds* of ‘problems’ that hold the unwary philosopher captive.

Language sets everyone the same traps; it is an immense network of easily

accessible wrong turnings. And so we watch one man after another walking down the same paths and we know in advance where he will branch off, where walk straight on without noticing the side turnings, etc. etc. What I have to do then is erect signposts at all the junctions where there are wrong turnings so as to help people past the danger spots. [CV p. 18]

This is the *moral demand* that Wittgenstein makes, not merely, as the passage indicates, on himself, but, through his writing, on us: that we ‘erect signposts’ to help ourselves past the ‘danger spots’, that we remain in constant vigilance of the seductive and overwhelming powers of language, that we be *honest* with our selves when we are in the grip of a conceptual tension (‘*This* isn’t how it is ... But *this* is how it has to be!’), and look carefully into the ‘workings of language’ [PI §109], to get to the *source* of it. We must ‘distrust language’ [NB] in the sense of guarding from an instinctive or habitual urge to generalize, and reflect more carefully on the workings of language when we are confused.

Of course, this is not easy work:

‘Philosophy is a **battle** against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language’. [PI §103]

The philosopher is ‘engaged in a **struggle** with language’. [CV p. 12]

The struggle involves not so much a battle of the *intellect*, as of the *will*: the will to resist an unguarded urge to generalize (more specifically, ‘urge to misunderstand’ [§109]), one of the most deep-seated human urges.

What makes a subject hard to understand – if it’s something significant and important – is not that before you can understand it you need to be specially trained in abstruse matters, but the contrast between understanding the subject and what most people *want* to see. Because of this the very things which are most obvious may become the hardest of all to understand. What has to be overcome is a difficulty having to do with the **will**, rather than with the intellect. [CV p. 17]

As I have often said, philosophy does not call on me for any sacrifice, because I am not denying myself the saying of anything but simply giving up certain combination of words as senseless. But in another sense philosophy demands a renunciation, but a **renunciation of feeling**, not of understanding. Perhaps that is what makes it so hard for so many people. It can be as hard to refrain from using an expression as it is to hold back tears or hold in anger. [MS 213, 406]

What we need to do, then, is strengthen the will to resist the urge to misunderstand. It is precisely here that we can extract moral content from the method Wittgenstein urges us to employ in our philosophical practice, or the practice of interpreting language more generally. For it is a failure to restrain an unguarded urge to generalize that is a root source, not only of philosophical error ('sin', to use Wittgenstein's expression), but of moral sin more generally. (Haven't, for example, hasty generalizations concerning what others are like been a root source of religious wars, racial prejudice, and other forms of oppression?) For Wittgenstein, God is in the details, and if we wish to save our selves from falling into certain kinds of error ('sin'), we must attend to the details.

Anthony Kenny [1982] compares Wittgenstein's conception of 'philosophical sin' to the Christian doctrine of original sin. 'Philosophical sin' is not something we are born with, Kenny says, it is something we take in along with language. 'Along with language, along with all the benefits which language brings, along with all the possibilities for our way of life which it brings, we take in whether we want to or not, certain temptations; we must resist these if we are not to be misled.' [1982 p. 15] This is why we are better off having gone through philosophy: we have gone through a discipline that helps us develop *good habits*⁹ to counteract the bad habits that we have acquired through our immersion in language.

Developing good habits, of course, is not easy work, for the grip of a false interpretation is very difficult to shake off once that interpretation has become *sedimented in our 'forms of life'*: to the extent that it has become sedimented, it becomes more difficult for us to challenge it.

Getting hold of the difficulty *deep down* is what is hard. Because if it is grasped near the surface it simply remains the difficulty it was. It has to be pulled out by the roots; and that involves our beginning to think about these things in a new way. The change is as decisive as, for example, that from the alchemical to the chemical way of thinking. The new way of thinking is what is hard to establish. [CV p. 48]

Wittgenstein would have agreed full heartedly with George Orwell [1981 p. 156-7] when he wrote: 'An effect can become a cause, reinforcing the original cause and producing the same effect in an intensified form, and so on indefinitely. Language becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.' In this way, a mythology becomes 'embedded in our language' [MS 213, 434]. Moreover, we drill ourselves so often and so make a *habit* of interpreting words or sentence-forms in terms of standardly assigned

meanings/functions that we *naturally* stretch these interpretations into all contexts where these expressions or sentential-forms are found, and until something compels us to reconsider our interpretation, we cease to think twice about it. In this state of contentment, we fail to notice, and so take steps to free ourselves from, the forces of language that hold us captive; our complacency conceals our shortness of vision.

A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably. [PI §115]

But notice that Wittgenstein says we ‘*could not* get outside it’, not ‘*cannot* get outside it’. And indeed, the point (as the past tense ‘could not’ suggests) we must not forget is: the processes that have led to our bewitchment are *reversible*. Though philosophical writing has its share of bad habits that spread by imitation and tradition, these habits can be reversed, by *unraveling* the linguistic confusions that led to them.

... philosophy unties the knots in our thinking, which we have tangled up in an absurd way; but in order to do that it must make movements which are just as complicated as the knots. [PR Part 1 #2]

By tracing the usage of the concepts that we have ‘tangled up in an absurd way’, it becomes possible to see how they became entangled and thus to disentangle them.

The fact that bad habits can be *reversed* highlights the *moral dilemma* that confronts us: Do we follow long-standing conventions and traditions in our interpretations (‘*This* is how it has to be!’), when we are troubled or puzzled by those interpretations, or shall we courageously question the bulwark of popular opinion (‘*This* can’t be how it is!’), when we are troubled by it, and probe into the ‘workings of language’ for possible sources of confusion. For Wittgenstein the answer is clear:

What I do think essential is carrying out the work of clarification with COURAGE: otherwise it becomes just a clever game. [CV p. 19]

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¹ G. H. von Wright (ed), P. Winch (trans), *Culture and Value*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.16.

² No doubt, Wittgenstein had certain mathematicians or mathematically inclined philosophers in mind in writing this – Cantor, Russell, Ramsey, and Godel among them, all of whom he regarded as failing to recognize, or ignoring, the linguistic confusions that formed the bedrock of their ‘theories’.

³ Also described by Wittgenstein as a ‘mental uneasiness’ or ‘intellectual discomfort’ in Moore [1955, p. 27].

⁴ It is possible not only for the philosopher, but for the mathematician, the journalist, the scientist, the psychologist, the practitioner of virtually any discipline, to generate conceptual tensions, like those generated by the philosopher, and land himself in a muddle.

⁵ On this note, we can also forge a connection between Wittgenstein and Socrates. Both sought to restore psychological health (for Socrates, health of the ‘soul’) in their interlocutors. Both saw the sickness of their time as consisting in a lack of self-knowledge. According to Richard Gilmore [1999], for the Socrates of Plato’s so-called ‘early dialogues’, the lack of self-knowledge of his interlocutors manifested itself as ‘a failure to acknowledge a disparity between their ways of acting and their ways of speaking and thinking’. [p. 141] This discrepancy resulted primarily from ‘the mythology of the Homeric conception of the virtues to which was appended a newly developing conception of cooperation-based virtues’. [p. 142] This gave rise to a confused moral climate. On the one hand, we have Thrasymachus in Book I of the *Republic* professing that ‘might makes right’, and on the other, the moral principles of the *Euthyphro*, which are more closely aligned with cooperation-based virtues. [p. 142] What Socrates was fighting, on Gilmore’s reading, was ‘the temptation of people to

follow popular conception', the 'spell cast by the opinion of the majority'; more specifically, 'a [Homeric] conception of the virtues that was outmoded', that had become 'a mythology'. [p. 139] The use of examples in Socrates philosophical method was to remind people of the *actual* contexts in which they use their words. [p. 142]

⁶ I follow Paul Horwich [2005] and Baker and Hacker [1993] in referring to the problems generated by conflating senses of words as 'pseudo-problems', and efforts to solve them as 'pseudo-theories'. Horwich in particular offers a helpful discussion of how various fallacies – including overstretched analogies in our language – leads for Wittgenstein to the generation of pseudo-problems, which has influenced my own presentation above.

⁷ The idea of bringing words home suggests mental economy, but also 'being at home with oneself', as Richard Gilmore [1999 p. 146] puts it; of restoring a self that has been fractured by language.

⁸ This is why he says a philosophical problem has the form: 'I don't know my way about'. [PI §123] See also Moore 1955 p. 27: '[According to Wittgenstein, we are led] by instinct to ask certain questions, though we don't even understand what these questions mean.'

⁹ Wittgenstein recognized that not everyone is in a position to develop/nurture such habits. As Anthony Kenny remarks '[For Wittgenstein] only those who were not at home in the world [language], those who found that they had to push against it, really had a hope of salvation.' [1982 p. 16] Passages like the following lend support to this claim:

Human beings are profoundly enmeshed in philosophical – i.e., grammatical – confusions. They cannot be freed without being extricated from the extraordinary variety of associations which hold them prisoner. You have as it were to reconstitute their entire language. – But this language grew up as it did because human beings had – and have – the tendency to think in this way. So you can only succeed in extricating people who live in an **instinctive rebellion** against language; you cannot help those whose entire instinct is to live in the herd which has created this language as its own proper mode of expression. [MS 213, 423]