Therapy

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In a number of remarks, dating back to the early 1930s, Wittgenstein drew an explicit analogy between his methods of philosophical enquiry and psychotherapy. So, alongside the famous remark from *Philosophical Investigations* directly on this (see below), we have other remarks from the *Big Typescript* and from his dictations to Friedrich Waismann for Moritz Schlick. These are those places where Wittgenstein explicitly coins the term by way of elucidating his method. Here are some samples of his explicit references to therapy:

> Our method resembles psychoanalysis in a certain sense. To use its way of putting things, we could say that a simile at work in the unconscious is made harmless by being articulated. And this comparison with analysis can be developed even further. (And this analogy is certainly no coincidence.)
>
> (Diktat für Schlick 28, in Baker 2003: 69e–71e)

> One of the most important tasks is to express all false thought processes so characteristically that the reader says, "Yes, that's exactly the way I meant it". To make a tracing of the physiognomy of every error.
>
> Indeed we can only convict someone else of a mistake if he acknowledges that this really is the expression of his feeling. // … . if he (<u>really</u>) acknowledges this expression as the correct expression of his feeling.
>
> For only if he acknowledges it as such, is it the correct expression. (Psychoanalysis.)

What the other person acknowledges is the analogy I am pro-
posing to him as the source of his thought.

(BT §410, in *PO* 165)[1]

It is not our aim to refine or complete the system of rules for the
use of our words in unheard-of ways.

For the clarity that we are aiming at is not *complete* clarity.
But this simply means that the philosophical problems should
completely disappear.

The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stop-
ping doing philosophy when I want to. – – The one that gives
philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions
which bring *itself* in question. – – Instead, we now demonstrate
a method, by examples; and the series of examples can be broken
off. – – Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single*
problem.

There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed
methods, like different therapies. *(PI* §133)

The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment
of an illness. *(PI* §255)

In addition to these explicit references to therapy, there are, of course,
many remarks where Wittgenstein talks the language of therapy, as it
were (and many more still where that language can be profitably applied
as a hermeneutic device by one puzzled by his texts). For example,
he talks of the centrality of gaining consent from one's interlocutor
as to what they take themselves to mean by their locution (see below
for a full discussion of this key point); he talks of relieving or being
subject to mental torment and disquiets *(PI* §111), cravings *(BB* 17)
revulsions *(BB* 15), angst *(BB* 27), irresistible temptations *(BB* 18) and
so on. Wittgensteinian philosophy is a quest to find a genuinely effec-
tive way of undoing the suffering of minds in torment.[2] The analogy
with therapy is with "our method" of philosophy; it is not claimed to
be with philosophy, *per se.* "Our method", the therapeutic method,
is concerned with bringing to consciousness similes or pictures that
have hitherto lain in the unconscious, constraining one's thought (and,
maybe, leading one to believe one needed to produce that theory, to
do that bit of metaphysics). Similar to Freudian psychoanalysis (for
more on which see below), the very act of the bringing of the simile
or picture to consciousness, of articulating it and acknowledging it
as a simile or as a non-obligatory picture (aspect of things), breaks

its thought-constraining grip. (And then the real challenge begins: of not backsliding into being reconstrained at future "opportunities" for doing so … The price of philosophical liberty is eternal vigilance. This is why Wittgenstein sometimes remarked that we would never come to the end of our job, in philosophy [see especially *Z* §447]. If one takes the analogy with therapy seriously, one will not mis-cast Wittgenstein crudely as an end-of-philosophy philosopher [cf. *Z* §382; *PO* 185–6].)

The analogy is with psychotherapy as a practice, not psychoanalysis as a theory of mind. Wittgenstein was scornful of Freud's scientific pretensions, thinking his theory of mind to be myth (albeit a deep, powerful and creative myth): a myth dangerously unaware of its nature *as* myth. The purpose of practising philosophy as therapy is to achieve freedom of thought, clarity about what we mean by our employment of words on actual and possible occasions, and justice in our takings of the world.

Wittgenstein is, therefore, attempting to break us (and himself) free of the impulse to metaphysics. To talk of "breaking us free" of impulse is already to talk therapeutically. How is that therapy pursued? Well, one finds it pursued in a number of ways, for there are methods not *a* method. However, there is a shift between Wittgenstein's writing in the early 1930s and his later work in *Philosophical Investigations*. The shift is in the way he practises his therapy. In *Investigations* Wittgenstein pursues the therapeutic task by engaging us in "dialogues" with a diverse and dialectically structured range of philosophical impulses. These impulses are presented as the voice of Wittgenstein's imaginary interlocutor(s) in *Investigations*. Through these voices, Wittgenstein presents us with different aspects of our language use, customs and practices with the intention of facilitating our freeing *ourselves* from the grip of a particular, entrenched, simile, picture or its lure. This then frees us of the thought-restricting tendencies (mental cramps) fostered by our being held in thrall to a particular picture to the exclusion of other equally viable ones.

In contrast to the dialogical and dialectical nature of *Philosophical Investigations*, in what is sometimes termed as his middle period Wittgenstein often deployed slogans, particular turns of phrase (attempts at finding liberating words[3]), to therapeutic ends. The move from the "middle period" to *Investigations* can be very roughly summed up as being from combating prejudice through carefully chosen slogans to facilitating the dawning realization that one is in the grip of a picture or simile – which led one to prejudicial views – through engagement in imaginary scenarios. Both of these approaches can be covered by the label "therapy". The latter is more effective, working with the will

rather than against it. This can be seen in the move from his coining of the slogan "thinking is operating with signs" in the early 1930s, to his presenting the reader with the "trip to the [world's weirdest] 'grocer'" and other scenarios in *Investigations*. (See Chapter 7, "Thinking".)

This is an important point to bear in mind, one often overlooked even by those most sensitive to Wittgenstein's therapeutic endeavours. To present Wittgenstein as fundamentally in the business of *combating* prejudice, as does Katherine Morris (2007), might, we suggest, be a little misleading. For while Wittgenstein is, throughout his philosophical life, in the business of *absenting* prejudice from the mind of the philosopher, to talk of "*combating*" is to risk seeming as if one has failed to be sensitive enough to the way Wittgenstein pursues his therapeutic objectives, at least from about the *Philosophical Investigations* on. This point might seem to be of minor significance; we submit that it is pretty important. To talk of "combating" suggests a conflict situation, one initiated by the philosopher practising therapy. This does, in a way, capture what Wittgenstein is up to in his "middle" period, when he employs slogans designed to jolt his readers or interlocutors out of their settled, prejudicial way of thinking about some thing (such as, for example, that the meaning of a word is projected onto the word by a mental act[4]). It does not capture very well what Wittgenstein is up to in *Philosophical Investigations*, when he constructs imaginary scenarios in which his readers and interlocutors become immersed, and of which their attempts to make sense lead to a reorientation of their thoughts.[5] This latter way of practising therapy is expressly designed to avoid conflict (confrontation), rather trying to work with the will of the reader or interlocutor and not to meet that will with equal force of will.

We are inclined to be charitable here. One might say that this does not present a problem; that the concept of combat can encompass the non-confrontational methods we are submitting are in evidence in *Philosophical Investigations* and elsewhere in Wittgenstein's work from (roughly) the late 1930s and the 1940s. Why? Because it is *prejudices* that are being combated in Wittgensteinian philosophy, not people.[6] And prejudices can be "combated", at the very least in a metaphorical sense, by a variety of means, including by Wittgenstein's subtle methods of deluding his readers into the truth. So: here "combat" covers *both* the more confrontational attempts at therapy, in the use of slogans designed to jolt readers or interlocutors out of their entrenched way of thinking, from (roughly) the early 1930s; *and* the more facilitatory attempts at therapy, in the invitation to immerse oneself in scenarios that serve to reorientate one's thoughts. To coin a combat-sport analogy: boxing

and aikido are both combat sports, but while the former is by and large primarily and straightforwardly about fighting, about confronting one's opponent's force with force (and skill), the latter is by and large about using (working with) one's opponent's force and momentum so as to render them no longer a threat. In Wittgenstein's most mature practice of therapy, one practises a subtle form aikido or jujitsu upon oneself / one's interlocutor, and largely gives up any effort to *fight*.

The point we wish to make, here, is not one of terminology: whether one "can" or "cannot" employ the term "combat" to describe what Wittgenstein does in practising therapy. We strive for clarity. Therapy is about freeing someone from what might be termed pathologies of mind.[7] It can be achieved in many ways. Wittgenstein explored these ways, and settled eventually on the one(s) he thought best.

Now, what is it about philosophical problems that makes them suited to treatment by therapy rather than by argument as traditionally conceived? Well, as we have noted elsewhere (see e.g. Hutchinson 2007), philosophical problems, on Wittgenstein's understanding, do not cause mental disturbances, but rather we see philosophical problems *as* mental disturbances – we feel them deeply. This is related to Wittgenstein's claim that the problems of philosophy are problems of the will, not of the intellect;[8] our inability to acknowledge other pictures of how things might be stems from certain pathologies. Put another way, Wittgenstein saw philosophical problems as (took them to be) existential problems; thus their treatment was to take the form of therapeutic treatment of the person and that person's mode of engagement with the world: his or her mode of being in the world. That is, it is not to take the form of dealing with the problem in abstraction from the person whose behaviour manifests it.

And (and this point is critical), it is the person in question who is the ultimate authority for the successful resolution of the problem. As already hinted above, this is the very core of Wittgenstein's promotion of the therapeutic analogy for philosophy:

> We can only convict another person of a mistake … if he (really) acknowledges this expression as the correct expression of his feeling. // For only if he acknowledges it as such, *is* it the correct expression. (Psychoanalysis.) (*BT* §410)[9]

> [O]ne can only determine the grammar of a language with the consent of a speaker, but not the orbit of the stars with the consent of the stars. The rule for a sign, then, is the rule which the speaker *commits himself* to. (Baker 2003: 105)[10]

One commits oneself to something by standing by it, on reflection: your words do not speak for you. It is *you* who speak, and it is fatally bad faith to hope or pretend otherwise. One can concede the point most famously made by poststructuralists, that the meaning of an utterance is not *determined* by the utterer (issues of structure, context and occasion-sensitivity – to coin Travis's term – can all play a role).[11] However, when one is asked to take responsibility for one's utterances, then one, following reflection and clarification, is asked to consent to the meaning of those words as being expressive of the thought one was seeking to express in the utterance in question. In this sense, one is ineluctably responsible for and committed to the words one speaks.

Here is the central reason for the disanalogy between philosophy and science. That disanalogy can only be taken seriously by Wittgensteinians who genuinely embrace some version of the therapeutic conception of philosophy: an emphasis on use, or "ordinary language", without a central place for the consent/acknowledgement of the speaker, fails to generate a genuinely non-scientistic conception of philosophic method.[12]

The analogy with therapy, then, demands to be taken seriously, as a key to Wittgenstein's later philosophical methods. But what of early Wittgenstein? Presumably, early Wittgenstein can be contrasted on this score with later. Was early Wittgenstein not a builder of theories, even if he declared those theories to be unsayable or ultimately self-refuting?

We do not believe so. The current generation of Wittgenstein scholarship has witnessed the rise to prominence of a loose "school" of thinkers[13] who take Wittgenstein's self-appointed task *from the* Tractatus *onward, inclusive*, to be one of overcoming our tendencies to metaphysics through delicate attention to our inchoate desire to speak "outside 'the limits' of language".

We submit that the difference between the *Tractatus* and the later work is not a difference between a non-therapeutic and a therapeutic conception of philosophy: rather, it is the difference between less and more effective methods, less and more effective therapies. Just as Wittgenstein moved beyond the subtle, carefully chosen sloganeering of the early 1930s to the subtle engagement with imaginary scenarios[14] of his fully mature work, so he had earlier moved beyond the attempt to do therapy as one gigantic exercise in overcoming (the *Tractatus*) to a much more engaged and variegated approach (in the early 1930s). (Though there is at least one important respect in which the *Tractatus* is *more* therapeutically engaged and honed than most of what Wittgenstein wrote for the next fifteen years or so: its masterfully deliberate enticement of its reader deep into nonsense, an enticement echoed and explored retail in the *Philosophical Investigations*.) Wittgenstein,

we suggest, came to see that the *Tractatus* had not got its hands dirty enough in the immense variegation of ordinary language, and had not been user-friendly enough to engage the reader in the therapeutic dance that now (from the early 1930s onward) he made explicit, and practised with increasing sophistication in the last decade or so of his life.

What is the justification for attributing such a conception of philosophy to early Wittgenstein too? Here is how it was put in the "Introduction" to *The New Wittgenstein*:

> [The authors in this collection] agree in suggesting that Wittgenstein's aim in philosophy is … a *therapeutic* one. These papers have in common an understanding of Wittgenstein as aspiring, not to advance metaphysical theories, but rather to help us work ourselves out of confusion we become entangled in when philosophising. More specifically, they agree in representing him as tracing the sources of our philosophical confusions to our tendency, in the midst of philosophising, to think that we need to survey language from an external point of view. They invite us to understand him as wishing to get us to see that our need to grasp the essence of thought and language will be met – not, as we are inclined to think in philosophy, by metaphysical theories expounded from such a point of view, but – by attention to our everyday forms of expression and to the world those forms of expression serve to reveal.   (Crary & Read 2000: 1)[15]

The *locus classicus* here is Cora Diamond's paper "Throwing away the ladder", which among other things presses the case for the *Tractatus* to be read as asking its reader to overcome the temptation to hang on to any of its *Sätze*. If one wants to understand fully the "therapeutic" reading of early Wittgenstein, one can do no better than to begin by reading that paper, and by reflecting upon the wording of the *Tractatus* 6.54.

But there is also a less well-known passage, from Wittgenstein's explicitly therapeutic writings of the early 1930s, that provides a particularly fascinating bridge back to the *Tractatus*, on the therapeutic reading of that work, and offers a key clue to a continuity present in Wittgenstein's thinking throughout, so far for instance as his use of "nonsense" as a term of criticism is concerned:

> [T]he uneasiness which one feels with the expression: "The rose is identical with red" could make somebody conclude that something is wrong with this expression, which, in turn, means that it somehow does not agree with reality, hence that it is an

incorrectly formed expression and that sometimes reality guides grammar. Then one would say: the rose is really not identical with red at all. However, in fact this only means the following: I do not employ the words "rose" and "red" in such a way that they can be substituted for each other, and therefore I do not use the expression "identical" here. The difficulty I run into here, that is the uneasiness, does not result from a non-agreement of the grammatical rules with reality, but from the non-agreement of two grammatical rules which I would like to use alternately. The philosopher does not look at reality and ask himself: is the rose identical with red? What is warring inside the philosopher are two grammatical rules. The conflict that arises in him is of the same kind as one's looking at an object in two different ways and then trying to see it in both ways simultaneously. The phenomenon is that of *irresolution*.   (Baker 2003: 235)

This passage is so remarkable (although it is by no means the only such passage in Wittgenstein's *Nachlass*) because it culminates in explicitly indexing the very word that has come to be most closely associated with the therapeutic reading of the *Tractatus*: the word *resolute*. The most common appellation now for the "therapeutic" reading of the *Tractatus* is *the resolute reading*. And this passage from Wittgenstein's "middle" period explicitly places centrally in his method the phenomenon of irresolution, and (by implication) the opposing phenomenon, of resoluteness/resolution.

Wittgenstein's aim, in his therapy, is to enable one no longer to equivocate, in philosophy, and no longer to suffer from the conflicting desires that one is inclined to equivocate between. No longer to have words or phrases or concepts "flicker" before one's mind's eye, such that one cannot decide what one wants to mean by one's words.[16] No longer to be hovering between different possible resolutions, different possible commitments that one could make – that one *needs* to make only one of, at a time – between desires to mean.

Once one commits, then the philosophical problem ebbs away. One is no longer pulled in two directions at once, pulled ("compelled") to endorse a picture that clashes with something else that one feels (perhaps rightly, perhaps not) unable to give up.

We might then describe Wittgenstein's entire career thus: as a sequence of (on balance) deepening experiments in how to conduct philosophy such that it is actually therapeutically effective. In a manner that standard allegedly Wittgensteinian methods ("ordinary-language philosophy", philosophy as linguistic topography, philosophy as

"grammatical analysis" – laying down what is grammatical and what is not, etc.) are not effective.

One *can* of course choose not to accept Wittgenstein's invitation to philosophical therapy. One can stay "safe" by being a metaphysician or a word-policeman. But this is a very poor – a strikingly unsafe – "safety" – an *illusion* of safety.[17] It is a "safety" that deprives one of all that Wittgenstein can offer. And here it is important to realize that Wittgenstein knew full well that people would resist what he had to offer: that is a key reason why the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations* have the form that they do. Both are designed, in different ways, to dump the reader *in media res* into philosophy, and deceive them into the truth by offering an apparent way out that dissolves upon one. In the *Tractatus*, one is thrown into the deep end of what appears to be a metaphysics, and inhabits its attractions, and then one gradually emerges from and throws off that metaphysics and its associated theoretical attractions. In *Philosophical Investigations*, one is dropped into an attractive way of thinking about language by means of a quote from someone else; one believes one is overcoming those attractions by developing something like a theory of "language-games" or of "use"; and then one overcomes the attraction of that, too, as one starts to see that the apparent solution was only an illusion of a solution.

"At the end" of either book, one has to stand and speak for oneself. Wittgenstein never does one the "favour" of thinking *for* you. If you want to be healed, in philosophy, then you must be your own physician. It is thyself that can help – for there is no analogue, in this therapy, to drugs or surgery. *You have to want to get well.* And you have to be prepared to struggle, to achieve such wellness ongoingly. That is why philosophy is hard work, and why it requires, as Wittgenstein remarked on more than one occasion, courage … [18]

Notes

1. Editions referred to in this chapter are *Philosophical Investigations* (2001a), *The Blue and Brown Books* (1965), *Philosophical Occasions* (1958) and *Zettel* (1967).
2. Though cf. *On Certainty* §37; sometimes, of course, the problem is that one's interlocutor *does not* feel tormented, because they have not *yet* noticed how different areas of their practice or different desires that they have are incompatible.
3. "In this matter it is always as follows. Everything we do consists in trying to find the liberating word. In grammar you cannot discover anything. There are no surprises. When formulating a rule we always have the feeling: That is something you have known all along" (Waismann 1979: 77).

4. So in the early 1930s Wittgenstein is happy to coin the slogan "meaning is use"; in later work he is more circumspect. Modal qualifiers abound in *Philosophical Investigations* (see Hutchinson & Read 2008). Wittgenstein in his full maturity wanted to guard against the slogans ossifying and themselves becoming thought-constraining pictures.

5. This is not to suggest that he does not talk directly about things such as meaning and thinking and so on in *Philosophical Investigations*. It is just that he does not employ slogans to therapeutic effect. He moves from "Meaning is Use" to the very delicately worded §43: "In a large class of cases – though not for all – in which we employ the word meaning, it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language." One might see this latter locution on the subject of meaning as suggestive (and: of a practice that we can engage in) rather than sloganeering.

6. In our forthcoming monograph on Wittgenstein, we investigate this issue more deeply, because of course it is not quite that simple: people's prejudices can appear to them to be constitutive of their very identity.

7. Though this "pathologizing" move of ours is of course not an othering move: "Language contains the same traps *for everyone*; the immense network of well-kept//passable//false paths" (Typescript 213, 90; emphasis added). Moreover, much of one's task in philosophy involves "putting up signs which help one get by the dangerous places [in language]" (*ibid*.) – in that respect, our task is more like a "*prevention*" of (relapse into?) otherwise potentially chronic illnesses of the intellect.

8. See the opening of the chapter on philosophy in *The Big Typescript*.

9. There are a number of ways in which one can fruitfully follow up the analogy that Wittgenstein drew quite explicitly between his practice and the proper practice of psychoanalysis. See for instance Waismann (1979: 186), and the closing sections of G. E. Moore's "Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930–33" (1954), for the crucial point that "a psycho-analysis is successful only if the patient agrees to the explanation offered by the analyst" (*ibid*.: 108). Wittgenstein held that the same was true of philosophy. That is why he described himself as "a disciple of Freud" (see the Introduction to *LC*).

10. For amplification, compare also: "Should we record the actual use of a word, variable and irregular though it be? This would at best produce a history of the use of words. Or should we set up a particular use as a paradigm? Should we say: Only this use is legitimate, and everything else is deviant? This would be a tyrannical ruling" (Baker 2003: 227–8).

11. In this respect see Lars Hertzberg's paper, "The Sense is Where You Find It" (2001).

12. For amplification of this point, see the closing sections of our "Towards a Perspicuous Presentation of 'Perspicuous Presentation'" (Hutchinson & Read 2008), wherein we accuse "Oxford Wittgensteinians" such as Peter Hacker of being covertly committed to a scientistic vision of philosophy, in spite of this being in their own eyes the very antithesis of their project. (See also Chapter 5, "Ordinary/Everyday Language".)

13. In terms of *Tractatus* scholarship, this reading emerged officially in Cora Diamond's writings on that book, particularly her work on nonsense and the context principle (although antecedents of this "resolute" reading of the *Tractatus* can also be found in work on Tractarian objects, undertaken by Rhees, McGuiness and Goldfarb. Conant has since become the leading advocate (along with Diamond). See Crary & Read (2000).

14. Why do we keep emphasizing the *imaginariness* of the scenarios? To distance Wittgenstein from any supposed connection with the stereotype of "ordinary-language philosophy" (see Chapter 5, "Ordinary/Everyday Language"), or with a theoreticistic or sociologistic emphasis on "use".

15. Note that paying *attention* to our everyday forms of expression is not to be equated with thinking, absurdly, that a mere record of linguistic usage can *settle* philosophical questions – see above.

16. Thus the closing sentence of Witherspoon's essay in *The New Wittgenstein*: "When Wittgenstein criticizes an utterance as nonsensical, he aims to expose, not a defect in the words themselves, but a confusion in the speaker's relation to her words – a confusion that is manifested in the speaker's failure to specify a meaning for them" (2000). In passing, we should note that some practitioners of the resolute reading do not wish to employ the term "therapeutic" to describe their practice, and moreover that some of the "New Wittgensteinians" do not like the label "therapeutic" – or the label "New", either. It would perhaps be a distraction to go into this question in detail here. Suffice to say, at present, that we believe the reasons intimated in the quotation above from Crary already sketch a decent case for the use of the term "therapeutic" to describe the resolute reading – and that our quotations from the "middle" Wittgenstein only buttress that case.

17. For detail, see Read's forthcoming monograph on *The Lord of the Rings*, and the excerpt therefrom in his *Philosophy for Life* (2007b).

18. Thanks for helpful comments to colleagues at UEA, especially to Oskari Kuusela and Tamara Dobler.

Further reading

Tractatus, Preface, 4.003–4.0031, 4.111–4.121, 6.53–6.54.