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## Wittgenstein on Understanding and Emotion: Grammar and Methods

Francis Y. Lin

Emotion is an important issue in Wittgenstein's philosophy of psychology, yet the literature on this topic is quite small. Wittgenstein's philosophical investigation is a grammatical one, and he tries to dissolve philosophical problems by using many philosophical methods. In this paper I examine the grammatical rules for some emotion words and the methods he employs in dealing with the philosophical problem of emotion. To facilitate this examination, I first analyze Wittgenstein's treatment of the problem of sudden understanding, where the grammar and methods are easier to comprehend. I will then show that the grammar and methods used by Wittgenstein in the cases of sudden understanding and emotion are rather similar.

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# Wittgenstein on Understanding and Emotion: Grammar and Methods

Francis Y. Lin

## 1. Introduction

Emotion is an important topic in the later Wittgenstein's philosophical investigations. His interest in emotion is largely due to his reading of William James's *The Principles of Psychology* (see [Goodman 2004](#), 109–18). According to James,

Every emotion has its "expression," of quick breathing, palpitating heart, flushed face, or the like. The expression gives rise to bodily feelings; and the emotion is thus necessarily and invariably accompanied by these bodily feelings. ([James 1983](#), 475)

He further remarks,

If we fancy some strong emotion, and then try to abstract from our consciousness of it all the feelings of its bodily symptoms, we find we have nothing left behind, no "mind-stuff" out of which the emotion can be constituted. ([James 1983](#), 1067)

For example, no fear would be left if such bodily feelings as quickened heart-beats, shallow breathing, trembling lips, weakened limbs, goose-flesh, and visceral stirrings were absent ([1983](#), 1067). Thus, James's theory is that emotion is nothing but a set of "bodily feelings". He expresses this as:

My theory, on the contrary, is that the bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur is the emotion. ([James 1983](#), 1065)

In his Cambridge lectures Wittgenstein characterizes James's theory as saying that an emotion (e.g., fear, hope) is "a sum of feelings" ([Wittgenstein \[1946-47\]/1988](#), 40).

Emotion does not figure prominently in Wittgenstein's writings before 1945,<sup>1</sup> but after 1945 he makes a large number of remarks on emotion in general and on specific emotions such as joy, fear, and depression. These remarks are contained in what was formerly called *Philosophical Investigations* part II<sup>2</sup>, *Zettel* ([Wittgenstein \[1929-48\]/2007](#), hereinafter cited as *Z*), *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* I and II ([Wittgenstein \[1947\]/1980a](#), [1948]/1980b, hereinafter cited as *RPP* I & *RPP* II), and *Last Writings* I and II ([Wittgenstein \[1949-51\]/1982](#); hereinafter cited as *LW* I & II). Wittgenstein's word for emotion is "*Gemütsbewegung*". The German term has a wider meaning than the English term "emotion", for it also covers enjoyment, pleasure, admiration, hope, etc., (see [Schulte 2009](#), 41 n 3). Among all these specific emotions, his discussion on fear is the most extensive ([Black 1990](#), 108).

There is no doubt that Wittgenstein's treatment of emotion is an important part of his later philosophy. Yet the literature on this topic is quite small compared to what has been written on other topics such as understanding, meaning, rule-following and private language. Moreover, Wittgenstein's philosophical investigation is a "grammatical one" ([Wittgenstein \[1953\]/2009](#), §90, hereinafter cited as *PI*), and he tries to dissolve philosophical problems using many philosophical "methods" (*PI* §133). Now, what grammar concerning emotion does Wittgenstein investigate, and what methods does he use to dissolve the philosophical problem of emotion? In this paper I will try to answer these two questions in order to arrive at a clear understanding of Wittgenstein's treatment of emotion.

Note that Wittgenstein's grammatical investigation applies to all philosophical problems, not just to that of emotion, and fur-

<sup>1</sup>For a general description of Wittgenstein's work on the philosophy of psychology, especially what he wrote after 1945, see [Hacker \(2010\)](#).

<sup>2</sup>The formerly so-called part II of the *Investigations* is nowadays published as *Philosophie der Psychologie—Ein Fragment / Philosophy of Psychology—A Fragment* in [Wittgenstein \(\[1953\]/2009\)](#). Hereinafter cited as *PPF*.

ther, that his philosophical methods for dealing with emotion may be found in his treatment of other concepts as well. Since scholars generally agree that Wittgenstein's treatment of sudden understanding is better expressed by him and better understood by readers, I will first analyze the grammar and methods he uses to dissolve the problem of sudden understanding. I will show that is very helpful for us to understand Wittgenstein's work on emotion.

The structure of this paper is as follows. In Section 2 I will review previous work on Wittgenstein's treatment of emotion and point out the deficiencies. In Section 3 I will provide an overview of Wittgenstein's thoughts on grammar and methods, and illustrate the main ideas through an analysis of his treatment of sudden understanding. In Section 4 I will concentrate on the grammar and methods in Wittgenstein's dealing with the problem of emotion. I will show that Wittgenstein's treatment of sudden understanding and his treatment of emotion are rather similar in terms of grammar and methods.

## 2. Previous Research on Wittgenstein on Emotion

Black (1990) provides a general overview of Wittgenstein's work on emotion contained in PPF, RPP I and II, and LW I and II. In addition, he devotes a section to the description of Wittgenstein's treatment of fear, where he mentions many themes that Wittgenstein discusses. On the whole, Black's paper serves as a good introduction to the topic, but his discussions are too cursory.

Schulte (1993) examines Wittgenstein's treatment of emotion in some detail. He carries out a study on the relationship between the expressions of, or feelings relating to, an emotion on the one hand, and the emotion itself on the other, quoting many remarks by Wittgenstein along the way. Schulte's study includes a number of aspects of emotion. For instance, that some emotions typically go with certain feelings (Schulte 1993, 122), that one can imitate some expressions of an emotion to cause oneself to have

that emotion (e.g., making a joyful face to help oneself feel joyful) (1993, 124), that imitating joy does not guarantee that one will feel it (1993, 129–30), and that bodily feelings are not part of the emotion (1993, 131). Schulte's main conclusion is this:

But the real point I want to make is this. Natural expressions like groaning, crying, trembling, and so on are still only very rough indications of what another person may feel. Taken by itself, weeping does not tell you whether the person concerned is crying from joy or grief, jealousy or relief. And the same goes for the other natural expressions, like groaning, trembling, blushing, etc. In order to understand what they express we need to know more, either about the history of the person in question or about his present state. (Schulte 1993, 132)

The above point seems quite reasonable. Schulte goes on to say that one way of knowing more about a person's present state is by looking at, among other things, the peculiar tone in which he utters his expressions. What is of special interest is that Schulte makes this point by appealing to some remarks by Wittgenstein on fear:

I say "I am afraid"; someone else asks me: "What was that? A cry of fear; or did you want to tell me how you feel; or was it an observation on your present state?"—Could I always give him a clear answer? Could I never give him one? (PPF §73)

One can imagine all sorts of things here, for example: "No, no! I am afraid!"

"I'm afraid. I am sorry to have to admit it."

"I'm still a bit afraid, but no longer as much as before."

"In fact I'm still afraid, though I'm reluctant to admit it to myself."

"I torment myself with all sorts of fearful thoughts."

"Now, just when I should be fearless, I'm afraid!"

To each of these sentences a special tone of voice is appropriate, to each a different context. (PPF §74)

Schulte interprets these remarks by Wittgenstein as saying that "The specific tone of our expressions allows other people to un-

derstand how we really feel" (Schulte 1993, 133). I will come back to this interpretation later.<sup>3</sup>

These two passages, just quoted, are the foci of Canfield (2007, 2009). Canfield pays special attention to the following sentence, which is the last one in PPF §74, and which Schulte (1993) does not quote or discuss:

It would be possible to imagine people who, as it were, thought much more precisely than we, and used different words where we use only one. (PPF §74)

Canfield goes on to analyze Wittgenstein's examples of fear, listed in PPF §§73–74, and suggests that these show that there are at least 12 different uses of "fear", including memory-based and thought-based uses (Canfield 2007, 23).

Now, what is the purpose of doing such a detailed examination of the different uses of "fear"? Canfield suggests (1) that the purpose is to fight against the "referential understanding" of fear, which states that "fear" refers to a thing, which is common to all cases of fear, and (2) that the examination shows that this notion of a common referent is mistaken (Canfield 2007, 25).

Black and Schulte try to provide a general picture of Wittgenstein's thought on emotion by discussing a number of related themes and by interpreting many of Wittgenstein's remarks. Canfield focuses on a specific set of remarks by Wittgenstein on fear, and endeavors to interpret them to make them understandable. These studies are undoubtedly useful for understanding Wittgenstein's philosophy of emotion, but they lack a clear explanation of the following issues: what grammar, or grammatical facts, does Wittgenstein present, and what methods does he employ to dissolve the problems? Understanding these issues is vital for understanding Wittgenstein's thought on emotion and his later philosophy in general.

<sup>3</sup>See Note 16 below. Schulte (2009) argues that there is a tension between Wittgenstein's thought on emotion in the period 1946–1948 and his later thought on the topic in the period 1948–1949, and that this suggests a change in Wittgenstein's thinking. An adequate analysis of this argument is beyond the scope of the present paper.

In order to understand these issues, I propose to first (in Section 3) look at Wittgenstein's treatment of sudden understanding, because scholars generally agree that it is better expressed and better understood. Then I will (in Section 4) show that the grammar Wittgenstein examines in dealing with sudden understanding and emotion are similar, and that the methods he employs in the two cases are more or less the same.

### 3. Wittgenstein on Grammar and Methods: the case of Sudden Understanding

"Grammar" is a key concept in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, for his whole philosophical investigation is "a grammatical one" (PI §90). "Method" is another key concept. A number of scholars have made strenuous efforts to explain both of these concepts.<sup>4</sup> Their discussions are mainly conducted on a general level, and they seldom make clear how Wittgenstein uses grammar and methods to tackle concrete philosophical problems. In this section I would like to offer a brief overview of Wittgenstein's thought on grammar and methods.

On the notion of grammar, Wittgenstein writes: "Grammar describes the use of words in the language. So it has somewhat the same relation to the language as the description of a game, the rules of a game, have to the game" (Wittgenstein [1933]/1974, 60; hereinafter cited as PG). Further, he states that, "Grammatical rules, as they currently exist, are rules for the use of words" (Wittgenstein [1933–37]/2005, 193; hereinafter cited as BT). Grammar thus consists of grammatical rules, i.e., "rules for use", which provide explanation of the meanings of signs (PG 60).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, Hilmy (1987), Savickey (1999), Schulte (2002), Baker (2004), Forster (2004), McGinn (2011), Conant (2012), Hacker (2012), Engelmann (2013), Wyss (2015), and Schroeder (2017).

<sup>5</sup>In this section I quote Wittgenstein's remarks from several of his books. This might incur the objection that his ideas might have changed during the

There are several types of grammatical rules. The first type is ostensive definition. For example, “This color is called ‘red’ ” is a grammatical rule (BT 188; PG 60, 88), which says that “red” is used to designate *this* color. The second type of grammatical rule has explicit formulation, e.g., “An unmarried man is called a ‘bachelor’ ”. The third type of grammatical rule specifies the circumstances under which a word is used. An analogous rule in chess is “[I]n such a case *this is how one moves*” (PG 86); such rules I will call “circumstantial rules”.<sup>6</sup> There are other types of grammatical rules, but these three suffice for my present purpose. Grammatical rules have two very important features. The first feature is that they are indisputable:

The only things that are exact and unambiguous and indisputable are the grammatical rules, which in the end must show what is meant. (BT 374)

The second feature of grammatical rules is that they are known. Grammatical rules are the “grammatical facts” to which the philosopher needs to give a “clearly surveyable representation” (BT 415; see also PI §122); they are “what we have long been familiar with” (PI §109) and what we need to remind ourselves of (BT 415; PI §127). A central part of Wittgenstein’s philosophy is describing the grammatical rules (grammatical facts), which are indisputable and are known (PI §109).

Let us proceed to look at Wittgenstein’s philosophical methods. In the early 1930s Wittgenstein declared that a new method of doing philosophy had been discovered (Moore 2013, 322). What is this method? The title of a chapter in BT provides an

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years. I have two arguments for defending my treatment. One is that Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy and grammar did not change fundamentally from BT to PI (see Hacker 2012, 4–12), and the other being that my treatment can explain Wittgenstein’s notions of grammar and methods and his conception of philosophy quite well.

<sup>6</sup>Below I will explain how Wittgenstein uses circumstantial rules to dissolve the problem of sudden understanding. For how Wittgenstein uses such rules to tackle the problem of thinking, see Lin (2019a).

answer: “The Method of Philosophy: The Clearly Surveyable Representation of Grammatical Facts” (BT 414). In other words, the method is to present grammatical rules in a surveyable way to dissolve philosophical problems. To put it still differently, “In philosophy we give rules of grammar wherever we encounter a difficulty” (Wittgenstein [1932–35]/1979, 21). Wittgenstein demonstrates the method “by examples; and the series of examples can be broken off” (PI §133). Indeed, we will understand Wittgenstein’s method by looking at how he dissolves concrete philosophical problems, such as understanding, meaning, thinking, willing, etc. (we will see the example of understanding in a moment).

In addition to *the method*, Wittgenstein also speaks of *methods*: “There is not a single philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, different therapies, as it were” (PI §133). So there are methods. What are they methods of? Recall that *the method* is to present grammatical rules (in a surveyable way). I think that the most consistent interpretation is this: *the methods* are ways of presenting grammatical rules. In other words, the overarching method is to present grammatical rules, and there are various methods for achieving this goal.<sup>7</sup>

Let us now examine the grammar and methods Wittgenstein uses to deal with the problem of sudden understanding (PI §§151–55; §§179–81). The phenomenon of sudden understanding can be philosophically perplexing. When one says “I now understand”, what is happening? In PI §151 Wittgenstein discusses a case of sudden understanding. Person A has written down the numbers 1, 5, 11, 19, 29; at this point person B says, “I now understand” (or “Now I can go on”). Person B suddenly

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<sup>7</sup>Wyss (2015, 170) distinguishes between the overarching method and problem-oriented methods. My distinction is similar to his, but there is an important difference. On my interpretation, the method and methods concern the presentation of grammatical rules exclusively, whereas in Wyss’s interpretation they also contain other elements, e.g., identifying the sources of philosophical problems (2015, 169, 181). On this point, see also Section 5 below.

understands the series. It then seems that this understanding is a particular process, such that a person understands when and only when it occurs. Thus we are tempted to think that understanding is a process, and that if we can find such a process, we will explain what understanding really is.

Wittgenstein deals with the problem of sudden understanding using a variety of methods. One method, which I will call the “method of rule-listing”, is to enumerate some concrete uses of the expression “I now understand”. In PI §151, Wittgenstein presents the following four cases:

while A was slowly writing down one number after another, B was busy trying out various algebraic formulae on the numbers which had been written down. After A had written the number 19, B tried the formula  $a_n = n^2 + n - 1$ ; and the next number confirmed his supposition.

Or again, B does not think of formulae. He watches, with a certain feeling of tension, how A writes his numbers down, while all sorts of vague thoughts float through his head. Finally he asks himself, “What is the series of differences?” He finds: 4, 6, 8, 10, and says: “Now I can go on.”

Or he watches and says, “Yes, I know *that* series”—and continues it, just as he would have done if A had written down the series 1, 3, 5, 7, 9.

—Or he says nothing at all and simply continues the series. Perhaps he had what may be called the feeling “That’s easy!” (Such a feeling is, for example, that of a light quick intake of breath, as when one is slightly startled.) (PI §151)

Each of these cases shows a use of the expression “I now understand”. Each corresponds to a circumstantial rule (discussed earlier), which states that the expression can be correctly used under such-and-such circumstances. These grammatical rules are (part of) the grammar of the expression. With the method of rule-listing, Wittgenstein presents some grammatical rules concerning sudden understanding.

After this, in PI §152, Wittgenstein invites us to look at the processes involved in these cases to see which process can be

identified with understanding. He points out that none of the processes are sufficient for understanding. For instance, the mental occurrence of the formula does not guarantee that the person understands the series:

But are the processes which I’ve described here *understanding*? “B understands the system behind the series” surely doesn’t mean simply: the formula “ $a_n = . . .$ ” occurs to B. For it is perfectly conceivable that the formula should occur to him and that he should nevertheless not understand. “He understands” must have more to it than: the formula occurs to him. And equally, more than any of those more or less characteristic *concomitant processes* or manifestations of understanding. (PI §152)

Here, Wittgenstein employs a method which I will call the “method of sufficiency”. With this method, he shows that no process which is manifested in understanding can be identified with it. So, the investigation thus far has yielded the following result:

Now we try to get hold of the mental process of understanding which seems to be hidden behind those coarser, and therefore more readily visible, concomitant phenomena. But it doesn’t work; or, more correctly, it does not get as far as a real attempt. (PI §153)<sup>8</sup>

There is no process which can be identified with understanding. Understanding is not a mental process at all. Wittgenstein expresses this result in a paradox-like remark, which is quite typical of his style:

In the sense in which there are processes (including mental processes) which are characteristic of understanding, understanding is not a mental process. (PI §154)<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>One might argue that in obtaining this result Wittgenstein also employs the “method of family-resemblance” and the “method of necessity”, to show that there is no process which can be found in all cases of understanding, and that no process is necessary for understanding. I omit these two methods here. But see Lin (2019a) for how Wittgenstein uses them to deal with the problem of thinking.

<sup>9</sup>We will see more such paradox-like remarks by Wittgenstein in Section 4 (see Note 11 below).

What this remark means is roughly this: there are (mental) processes which typically go with understanding, but understanding is not a mental process.

In order for us to see clearly the grammar concerning understanding, Wittgenstein also advises us to consider how we learn the expressions of understanding, writing:

Think how we learn to use the expressions “Now I know how to go on”, “Now I can go on”, and others; in what family of language games we learn their use. (PI §179)

I will call this method the “method of learning-consideration”. When we consider learning, we are likely to come up with situations (such as the four listed in PI §151) in which the expression “I now understand” is used and learned. Hence, the method of learning-consideration is closely related to that of rule-listing.

The conclusion of the investigation, conducted with all the methods I identified above, is that understanding is not a (mental) process. This conclusion is clear, and anyone who went through the above grammatical investigation seriously and carefully would agree to it. It is then a *thesis* which Wittgenstein speaks about in PI §128:

If someone were to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them. (PI §128)

The following puzzlement might still remain at this point: “All right, understanding is not a (mental) process. But what is understanding then? When one understands, does nothing go on in his mind?” Wittgenstein makes it clear that whatever goes on in one’s mind is not understanding. When one understands, he may have things occurring in his mind, but he may have nothing going on in his mind (see PI §151). It is the context which determines whether one understands or not. For instance, in the context in which someone has learned algebra and has done

derivation using formulae before, the mental occurrence of a formula means that the person understands the series (see PI §§179, 183). If the person has not learned algebra before, then he does not understand the series even if he has the formula occurring in his mind. So the difference between understanding and non-understanding lies not in what goes on in the mind but in what happened before.

I think that, by now, I have shown that the problem of sudden understanding as a mental process can be successfully dissolved by Wittgenstein’s grammatical investigation. I have done so by making clear the grammar and the methods Wittgenstein uses in conducting the investigation. In the next section I will show that these methods are also employed in Wittgenstein’s investigation of emotion, and that the grammar concerning emotion is similar to that concerning sudden understanding.

#### 4. Wittgenstein on Emotion

Why is Wittgenstein interested in emotion? The answer must be that emotion generates some philosophical problems. To understand Wittgenstein’s thought on emotion, we must first understand the relevant philosophical problems.

The question “What is emotion?” is one that philosophers often ask themselves, as well as more specific questions such as “What is fear?” and “What is joy?” Misled by the form of the question, which is “What is X?”, philosophers think that an emotion must be a particular thing. Wittgenstein characterizes philosophers’ thinking well:

“But I do have a real feeling of joy!” Yes, when you are glad you really are glad. . . “But ‘joy’ surely designates an inward thing.” (Z §487)

One wonders, “What does ‘I’m afraid’ really mean; what do I aim at when I say it?” (PPF §75; RPP I, §14; LW I, §22)

“But depression, anger, is surely a particular feeling!” (RPP I, §136)

[When enjoying reading a poem] “I experience something different” ... “But didn’t you enjoy it during the reading?” (Z §170)

Is “I hope...” a description of a state of mind? (Z §78)

Are the words “I am afraid” a description of a state of mind? (PPF §72)

And don’t the words [i.e., “I am afraid”], no matter how they are uttered, give me information about the same state of affairs, namely, his state of mind? (LW I, §43)

We can see that, in Wittgenstein’s eyes, philosophers cannot help but think that an emotion is a particular feeling, or a particular state of mind.<sup>10</sup> These are the philosophical problems which he aims to dissolve. In this paper I will only focus on Wittgenstein’s treatment of emotion as a particular feeling. The problem of emotion as a particular state of mind is big enough to deserve a full-paper treatment (but see [Lin 2019b](#) for a related discussion).

How does Wittgenstein deal with the idea that emotion is a particular feeling? I will first present Wittgenstein’s conclusions, and then show how he reaches them. The following are Wittgenstein’s conclusions:

Depression is not a bodily feeling. . . (RPP I, §135)

No. “Joy” designates nothing at all. Neither any inward nor any outward thing. (Z §487)

We ask, “What does ‘I am frightened’ really mean, what am I referring to when I say it?” And, of course, we find no answer, or one that is inadequate. (LW I, §22; PPF §75)

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<sup>10</sup>I do not mean to say that philosophers think these are the two only possibilities. They might also think that an emotion, e.g., pleasure, is a particular sensation (compare RPP I, §799).

That there is a fear-syndrome of sensations, thoughts etc., (for example) does not mean that fear is a syndrome. (Z §502; see also RPP II, §174)<sup>11</sup>

These conclusions are similar to those about understanding we saw in Section 3. The first conclusion (RPP I, §135) matches the earlier one that understanding is not a mental process (PI §154). In parallel with the second conclusion, Wittgenstein could say “‘Understanding’ designates nothing at all. Neither any inward nor any outward thing”. The third conclusion (LW I, §22) is essentially the same as the remarks:

Now we try to get hold of the mental process of understanding which seems to be hidden behind those coarser, and therefore more readily visible, concomitant phenomena. But it doesn’t work; or, more correctly, it does not get as far as a real attempt. (PI §153; quoted in Section 3 above)

The fourth conclusion (Z §502) is very much the same as PI §154d (also quoted in Section 3), and it means that although fear maybe associated with some symptoms, such as certain sensations and thoughts, fear is not to be identified with any of these.

We have just seen that Wittgenstein’s investigations of understanding and of emotion have reached the same conclusion, i.e., that a mental phenomenon (such as understanding or an emotion) is not an entity (a process, or a feeling). It is natural to ask whether Wittgenstein’s methods of dealing with these two problems are also the same. We saw that in the case of understanding Wittgenstein uses the methods of rule-listing and of sufficiency. So does he also employ them in the current case of emotion? The

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<sup>11</sup>This paradox-like remark is similar to the one on understanding (compare Note 9 above). Wittgenstein also writes this kinds of remarks on thinking, e.g., “True, we sometimes call accompanying a sentence by a mental process ‘thinking’; nonetheless, that accompaniment is not what we call a ‘thought’ ” (PI §332), and “Thinking cannot be called a phenomenon, but one can speak of ‘phenomena of thinking’, and everyone will know what kinds of phenomena are meant” (RPP II, §31). Understanding these remarks on thinking (see [Lin 2019a](#)) is helpful for understanding the present remark on fear.

answer is “Yes”. This is quite clear in PPF §§74–76. In PPF §74, Wittgenstein lists a number of different uses of “I am afraid”. Then, in PPF §75, he says “no answer is forthcoming, or only an inadequate one” if we want to know what that utterance refers to. This combination of moves is the same as that in the case of understanding: after listing some circumstantial rules for “I now understand” in PI §151, Wittgenstein remarks in PI §153, “But it doesn’t work; or, more correctly, it does not get as far as a real attempt”. In the case of fear Wittgenstein wants us to pay attention to the manifestations of fear, such as bodily feelings, thoughts, etc, which occur when we say “I am afraid”, and see that none of these symptoms are sufficient for one’s being in fear (one can have all these symptoms and still not be in fear). Indeed, he explicitly suggests we do this, as he writes in PPF §76: try to find the thing—the fear—“by repeating the expression of fear and at the same time attending to myself, as it were observing my mind out of the corner of my eye”. So Wittgenstein here does employ the method of sufficiency to show that fear is not a thing, either inward or outward. However, there is a difference between Wittgenstein’s treatment of understanding and that of fear. In the former case, Wittgenstein himself presents some processes (e.g., the mental occurrence of a formula) which may occur when someone understands. But in the latter case, he does not list the symptoms of emotion (at least not here in PPF Section ix). Rather, he asks the reader to perform this task. Seen in this light, Canfield’s work (2007; 2009) is particularly useful.

Of course, Wittgenstein could apply the methods of rule-listing and of sufficiency in dealing with all emotions. However, more often he does not do so; rather, he employs other methods. One of these can be called the “method of meaning-consideration”, which is illustrated in the following remarks:

If I direct my attention to my bodily feelings, I notice a very slight headache, a slight discomfort in the region of the stomach, perhaps a certain tiredness. But do I mean that, when I say I am severely

depressed? — And yet I say again: “I feel a burden weighing on my soul.” (RPP I, §133)

Depression is not a bodily feeling . . . (RPP I, §135)

If I go for a walk and take pleasure in everything. . . if I now express my joy, saying, e.g., “How marvellous all of this is!”—did I mean to say that all of these things were producing pleasant physical feelings in me?

In the very case where I’d express my joy like this: “The trees and the sky and the birds make me feel good all over”—still what’s in question here is not causation, nor empirical concomitance, etc. etc.. (RPP II, §322)

No answer is forthcoming if I try to settle the question “What do I aim at?”, “What am I thinking when I say it?” by repeating the fear utterance and at the same time attending to myself, as it were observing my mind out of the corner of my eye. In a concrete case, I can indeed ask, “Why did I say that, what was I up to?”—and I could answer the question too; but not on the ground of observing what accompanied the speaking. And my answer would supplement, paraphrase, the earlier utterance. (PPF §76)

These remarks are difficult to understand, a reason being that they contain many questions, so I will spend some time explicating these remarks. In each of the above three examples, Wittgenstein asks: when one utters an emotion-expression, what does one mean (in the sense of what one is referring to; call it the what-question) or whether one means that he has certain bodily feelings (call it the whether-question). Wittgenstein does not give a straightforward answer. Rather he distinguishes between two cases: a general case and a concrete case. In the general case, the answer to the what-question is that no answer can be found; and the answer to the whether-question is “No”. The reason is that there is no bodily-feeling that can be the meaning of the emotion-expression, or can be identified with the emotion (compare the method of sufficiency).

However, Wittgenstein also discusses the concrete case. In a concrete case, there can be answers to the what-question, and the answer to the whether-question can be “Yes”. Consider the whether-question first: suppose that I am depressed and feel a slight headache, a slight discomfort in the stomach and a certain tiredness. To the question “Do I *in this case* mean those bodily feelings when I say I am depressed?” I can answer “Yes, I do mean that I feel a slight headache. . .”. Now consider the what-question. If asked “What do I *in this case* mean when I say I am depressed?” I can provide an answer to it. I can say “I feel a slight headache, a slight discomfort in the stomach and a certain tiredness”. This utterance of mine is then a supplement to my earlier utterance “I am depressed”, providing some specific information. To the what-question I can also answer “I feel a burden weighing on my soul”, this sentence in German being a paraphrase of my earlier utterance “I am (severely) depressed”. In the example of joy, I express my joy by uttering “How marvellous all of this is!” Did I mean that I have a set of bodily feelings (caused by the scenery)? In this specific case, I can indeed answer affirmatively to that question by saying “Yes, I have a set of bodily feelings (caused by the trees and the sky and the birds)”, or alternatively “The trees and the sky and the birds make me feel joyful”. This is a supplement to my earlier joy-expression “How marvellous all of this is!”—It provides some details of my joy.

This parallels Wittgenstein’s discussion of understanding. We can ask: “What does understanding refer to?” and “Does understanding refer to a mental process?” In the general case, there is no answer to the first question, and the answer to the second is negative. But in a concrete case where, for instance, I have learned algebra, have done derivation before, and now I see a person writing 1, 5, 11, 19, 29, . . . , and the formula  $a_n = n^2 + n - 1$  comes up in my mind, the utterance “I now understand” can indeed mean “The formula has occurred to me” (PI §§179, 183). In the case of sudden understanding Wittgenstein does not use the method of meaning-consideration explicitly. He does not

ask “Do I mean to tell you that I have an accompanying process when I say I understand?” or “What do I mean when I say that I understand?” However, his discussion shows that he uses this method implicitly.

Now, what is the use of the method of meaning-consideration? Why does Wittgenstein distinguish between the general case and the concrete case? I think that Wittgenstein has two related aims. One aim concerns asking questions. Wittgenstein is extremely careful about questions. On the one hand, philosophers go astray because they ask the wrong questions.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, asking the right questions can help dissolve philosophical problems.<sup>13</sup> Questions that are general and out of context are wrong questions, and they lead us to no answers and to mysteries.<sup>14</sup> But concrete questions direct our attention to how words are used in concrete circumstances, and consequently they can help us see things aright. So, the method of meaning-consideration has the same effect as that of rule-listing: both make us focus on concrete contexts and uses.

Wittgenstein also employs the “method of learning-consideration” in dealing with emotion. This method is shown in the following remarks:

Depression is not a bodily feeling; for we do not learn the expression “I feel depressed” in the circumstances that are characteristic of a particular bodily feeling. (Z §135)

How do I know that someone is enchanted? How does one learn the linguistic expression of enchantment? (Z §168)

<sup>12</sup>“When we approach philosophical problems the first mistake is the question we ask” (Wittgenstein [1944]/MS 179, 18r). Von Wright (1982) provides a catalogue of Wittgenstein’s writings. “MS” stands for manuscript, and “r” indicates recto.

<sup>13</sup>Wittgenstein once said that “a philosophical treatise might contain nothing but questions (without answers)” (Malcolm 2001, 28).

<sup>14</sup>For example, the question “What is depression?” is likely to send us in pursuit of a particular entity, which can nowhere be found. We may then be inclined to think that depression is indefinable and ineffable, thus creating a mystery.

You must ask how we learnt the expression “Isn’t that glorious!” [which is an expression of enjoyment] at all. — No one explained it to us by referring to sensations, images or thoughts that accompany hearing! Nor should we doubt whether he had enjoyed it if he had no account to give of such experiences; though we should, if he shewed that he did not understand certain tie-ups. (Z §170)

Why does Wittgenstein want to talk about how one learns the expressions of emotions when dealing with the problem whether it refers to a bodily feeling? The answer is this: if one utters an emotion-expression, e.g., “I am afraid” (assuming that he is sincere and knows English), he must have learned this expression and knows its meaning. So, by considering how he learns the emotion-expression we can get clear about what the meaning is. Now, the idea of the philosophers, whom Wittgenstein is targeting, e.g., James, is that an emotion-expression refers to a bodily feeling (or a set of them). Wittgenstein here, in Z §§135, 168 and 170, points out that we do not learn such an expression this way: no one teaches me to say, e.g., “I am afraid”, when and only when a particular bodily-feeling occurs. So when I do say “I am afraid”, I cannot be referring to a particular bodily-feeling either.

How then do we learn an expression of emotion? Well, how do we learn other expressions? Wittgenstein makes many remarks on the learning of expressions, for instance:

In other words: when does one say that someone is angry? In such cases he learns to use the expression “I am angry”. (RPP I, §127)

But I surely did not learn to use the word [“unreality”] to mean: a feeling. No; but I learned to use it with a particular meaning and now I use it spontaneously like this. (RPP I, §125)

One learns the word “think”, i.e., its use, under certain circumstances, which, however, one does not learn to describe. (RPP II, §200; Z §114; LW I, §41)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Note that this occurs in LW I in the middle of Wittgenstein’s discussion of fear.

I just teach him the word [“comparing”] under particular circumstances. (RPP II, §207; Z §116)

He just learns the use of the word under particular circumstances. (A variant of Wittgenstein RPP II, §207)

All these remarks say that we learn an expression (of emotion, of comparing, of thinking, etc.) under particular circumstances.

Wittgenstein also uses the “method of use-consideration” in dealing with emotion, which is shown in the following remarks:

“What is fear?”—“Well, the manifestations and occasions of fear are as follows: - - -”—“What does ‘to be afraid’ mean?”—“The expression ‘to be afraid’ is used in this way: - - -”. (LW I, §20)

One wonders, “What does ‘I’m afraid’ really mean; what do I aim at when I say it?” And, of course, no answer is forthcoming, or only an inadequate one.

The question is: “In what sort of context does it occur?” (PPF §75)

So the method of learning-consideration and that of use-consideration have the same function: they direct our attention to the particular circumstances under which an expression is learned and used, and they can help us see that an emotion-expression does not refer to a bodily feeling.

The last method which Wittgenstein uses in dealing with emotion, and which I want to discuss, is the one I will call the “method of multi-words”. This method is seen in PPF §74. After listing some uses of the expression “I am afraid” Wittgenstein goes on to say “It would be possible to imagine people who, as it were, thought much more precisely than we, and used different words where we use only one” (quoted in Section 2 above). Canfield (2007) identifies 12 different uses of this fear-expression. On his interpretation according to Wittgenstein, people who speak precisely might invent 12 different words, e.g., “fraida”, “afriad”, “rafaid”, etc., where we only use one word “afraid”. If we agree that this scenario is possible, then we will see that our word

“afraid” can have 12 distinct uses, and we will therefore lose interest in finding *the* thing which we think our word designates. Hence, Canfield’s interpretation, which is that Wittgenstein’s use of the method of multi-words is to reject the “referential understanding” of fear, is quite correct.<sup>16</sup>

With all the methods described above, Wittgenstein succeeds in showing that an emotion-expression does not designate anything, neither a bodily-feeling nor any behavior. Anyone who followed this investigation carefully would, in the end, agree to this conclusion. But as in the case of understanding, one might still be puzzled: what is an emotion then, what is really going on when one is afraid, etc.? Well, as in the case of understanding, an emotion is not a particular bodily feeling (or a particular set of them). Whether someone is in fear, for example, is determined by the context. A person who is really in fear (e.g., when seeing a fierce dog charging towards him) and a person who is pretending to be in fear may have exactly the same symptoms. The difference between real fear and pretended fear may lie in the context.

The following long passage illustrates some of the methods and the conclusion well:

A poem makes an impression on us as we read it. “Do you feel the same while you read it as when you read something indifferent?”—How have I learnt to answer this question? Perhaps I shall say “Of course not!”—which is as much as to say: this takes hold of me, and the other not. “I experience something different”—And what kind of thing?—I can give no satisfactory answer. For the answer I give is not in itself of any importance.—“But didn’t you enjoy it during the reading?” Of course—for the opposite answer would mean: I enjoyed it earlier or later, and I don’t want to say that. But now, surely you remember sensations and images as you read, and they are such as to connect up with the enjoyment, with the impression.—But they got their significance only from the surroundings: through

<sup>16</sup>By contrast, Schulte’s interpretation that the different uses of “I am afraid” listed in PPF §74 are meant to allow other people to understand how we really feel, although not wrong, misunderstands Wittgenstein’s real purpose.

the reading of this poem, from my familiarity with its language, with its metre and with innumerable associations. (RPP II, §170)

We often have the experience of enjoying a poem. But “What is enjoyment?” we wonder. We are inclined to think that enjoyment is a specific experience, but if we look at the sensations, images, bodily feelings, etc. which occur when we enjoy a poem, we cannot find any satisfactory candidate; any candidate is in itself of no importance, because it cannot be identified with enjoyment (a person may have this sensation or image or bodily feeling without being in enjoyment). Having any, or any set, of these symptoms does not guarantee that the person is in enjoyment. A person with certain sensations and images can be said to be in enjoyment only in a concrete context, e.g., when he knows the language and its meter, is reading the poem, and so forth.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper I examined the grammar and methods Wittgenstein uses in the investigation of sudden understanding and emotion. In both cases, Wittgenstein focuses on one type of grammatical rules—circumstantial rules, which specify the circumstances under which a word or an expression is used. In both cases he employs a set of methods for obtaining a surveyable representation of these grammatical rules. He uses the methods of rule-listing and of sufficiency to deal with sudden understanding, and he also employs them in treating emotion. In dealing with emotion, Wittgenstein tries three additional methods: those of meaning-consideration, of learning-consideration and of multi-words. The first two methods are not explicitly used in the case of sudden understanding, but they are implicitly used. The third method Wittgenstein could also use in dealing with sudden understanding. He could say that some people who speak more precisely might employ at least 4 different words for “understanding” (see PI §151), to remove the temptation to think that understanding is a particular mental process.

These methods are not completely different from one another. Rather, they reflect Wittgenstein's looking at grammar from different viewpoints, such as the speaker's meaning, language learning, and language use. They have the same function, i.e., to arrive at a surveyable representation of grammar and to dissolve philosophical problems.

All these methods also share a feature: they are all used to present grammatical facts, which every competent speaker knows about. For example, "I now understand" can be used in the four situations described in [PI §151](#). For another example, it is imaginable that some people who speak more precisely can have different words to express the thoughts mentioned in [PPF §74](#), which we express using only one word "afraid". These methods give content and life to the idea of a "grammatical investigation".

When we understand the methods Wittgenstein uses in the case of understanding and emotion, we find Wittgenstein's relevant remarks much easier to understand, which at first sight might seem to be incomprehensible. I believe that concentrating on Wittgenstein's methods will also be useful, and essential too, for us to understand Wittgenstein's dissolution of other philosophical problems. It can be expected that some, or all, of the methods examined in this paper are to be found in Wittgenstein's remarks on other topics. Indeed, a number of these methods are used by Wittgenstein to deal with thinking.<sup>17</sup> It is also to be expected that some additional methods are employed by Wittgenstein to tackle other philosophical problems, e.g., the problem of private language, and the problem of fear (or understanding) as a mental state.

Before ending this paper I would like to discuss the notion of a surveyable representation. In [BT](#), Wittgenstein emphasizes the importance of a surveyable representation of grammar, and this he repeats in [PI §122](#). What is a surveyable representation of grammar? No satisfactory explication has been offered in the

literature. The present paper suggests an explanation. There is an indefinite number of grammatical rules (for the words in a given language). There is little point in presenting them all, or in a random way. We need to select only those grammatical rules which bear directly on the philosophical problem at hand, and represent them in such a way to make the problem disappear.

For example, consider viewing the problem of sudden understanding as a mental process. Initially, we do not know how to deal with this problem. The grammar of the expression "I now understand" seems unable to help us. It seems to be too hazy: we understand the expression and know how it is used, yet we seem unable to bring the relevant grammatical rules into view. But we can list the circumstantial rules for the expression, as Wittgenstein does in [PI §151](#). When we have done this, we can then command an overview of them, and consequently see that sudden understanding is not a mental process. The listing of the circumstantial rules in [PI §151](#) then becomes a surveyable representation. Notice the contribution of the method of sufficiency. This method actually does the surveying job: we survey the processes (mental or physical) which occur when one suddenly understands, and we see that no process is sufficient for understanding. Hence, both the method of rule-listing and that of sufficiency contribute to obtaining a surveyable representation of grammar. Other methods I discussed in this paper also make their contributions. I can therefore describe the situation as this: *the method* is to obtain a surveyable representation, and *the methods* are means to achieve this goal.

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<sup>17</sup>See [Lin \(2019a\)](#) for a detailed exposition.

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