

Understanding Wittgenstein's positive philosophy through language-games: Giving philosophy peace

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Abstract

A significant discrepancy in Wittgenstein's studies is whether *Philosophical Investigations* contains any trace of positive philosophy, notwithstanding the author's apparent anti-theoretic position. This study argues that the so-called 'Chapter on philosophy' in the *Investigations* §§89–133 contains negative and positive vocabulary and the use of various voices through which Wittgenstein employs his primary method of language-games, thus providing a surveyable understanding of several philosophical concepts, such as knowledge and time. His positive philosophy aims to reorient our attention from understanding the theories on these concepts to understanding the concepts themselves, regardless of any theorisation.

I | INTRODUCTION

Wittgenstein¹ begins *Philosophical Investigations* (henceforth PI) with the Augustinian conception of language: an across-the-board theory encompassing a broad perspective on language, especially found in Frege, Russell and *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (henceforth TLP). This general theory of language inter alia postulates that words are names that form sentences and have meaning when veridically referring to something (Frege).² Words form propositions and sentences. They are symbols, endowed with meaning and standing for something other than themselves, describing how things are; we are acquainted with symbols (Russell).³ Words are names for objects that stand in a pictorial, isomorphic way, forming elementary propositions and sentences

¹Wittgenstein (2009: §§1–30).

²Frege (1964: I §32).

³Russell (1937: 42); Russell (1998: 32).

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as combinations of names. Meaning is the object signified by a name and emerges when names and objects share a common logical form (TLP).⁴

Philosophy employing this conception of language is the target of most of PI, especially §§89–133 (the Chapter on philosophy). Here, Wittgenstein writes against a generalised approach to language that rests on the assumption shared by many authors, one where sentences are combinations of words and every word is a name that stands as a meaning for objects in the world. I will argue later that PI targets more than the Augustinian conception of language, which he had abandoned by the end of 1929. It includes what is known in the secondary literature as ‘the middle Wittgenstein’, a period between 1929 and 1936, when Wittgenstein, especially in his philosophy of mathematics, toyed with the idea of language as a calculus and used it according to its strict grammatical rules. The emergence of a new method of language-games in 1932 allowed him to consider our most basic actions through the lens of games being rigidly defined and played in accordance with strict rules. Thus, on the one hand, his criticisms of philosophy targets Frege’s and Russell’s logicist projects of reducing mathematics to pure logic and the *Tractarian* project of solving philosophical problems that often emerged in these projects; on the other hand, he is rejecting his own attempts to salvage some of the *Tractarian* doctrines in his ‘middle period’. I will also argue that his method of language-games, which emerged in 1932 and matured by 1936⁵ [when he wrote the first (1936) and second (1937) drafts of PI], evolved significantly. It is not as much about the definitive and regulatory rules of the game (as in 1929–32) or the games themselves (1932–36), but about *how* the game is being played and its purposes. Since PI does much more than discredit the Augustinian conception of language and various authors who might share some of its main postulates, I prefer the label ‘a philosophy of referential semantics’ or ‘dogmatism’ (see PI §131) because it encompasses not only criticism and dismissal of the earlier periods (1913–29) but also the middle Wittgenstein.

This multifarious goal becomes particularly clear in the ‘Chapter on philosophy’, which contains two purposes: to dismiss the philosophy of referential semantics (a negative method in §§89–108) and to provide a positive outlook on how philosophy should be conducted (a positive method in §§109–133). To this end, Wittgenstein uses several techniques in the text, which mark his general techniques of philosophy in PI and his other works. One is his use of various (two or three) conflicting voices, which makes PI a collection of dialogues. Another is his use of terms that can form either negative or positive descriptions of philosophy that could be inclusive or exclusive. Within this second method, he also contrasts ‘what’ questions used by dogmatism and ‘how’ questions, which he substitutes and clearly prefers in his new philosophy.

⁴Wittgenstein (1961: 2.18, 3.315, 4.121).

⁵Specifically in *The Blue and the Brown Books* (henceforth BB) from Wittgenstein (1969a), *Philosophical Remarks* (henceforth PR) from Wittgenstein (1975), *Philosophical Grammar* (henceforth PG) from Wittgenstein (1984) and *The Big Typescript* (henceforth BT) from Wittgenstein (2013).

In the sections that follow, the author argues that while a philosophy of referential semantics results in various misunderstandings, and the philosophy of language-as-calculus generates all types of philosophical puzzlements, overemphasis on the role of language-games returns his philosophy to dogmatism. By contrast, the last draft of PI suggests a philosophy without theses, theories and dogmatic pronouncements. Through careful analysis of selected parts of PI, the author shows that this is a positive method of philosophy so often obscured by his overall critical approaches to his earlier writings.

II | NEGATIVE PHILOSOPHY (§§89–108)

Part 1 (§§89–108) begins with Wittgenstein contrasting the understanding of dogmatism with surveyable understandings. He begins §89 by referring to the interlocutor's failed attempts in §87–88 to provide a satisfactory account of 'explanations' and then elucidates the exactness of our rule-giving as follows: '...As though an explanation, as it were, hung in the air unless supported by another one'⁶; 'No single ideal of exactness has been envisaged'.⁷ The whole of §88 is dedicated to exposing the craving for exactness in philosophy as something that should belong to the natural sciences alone. The sublimation of logic is an attempt to quench this craving by sacrificing ordinary language for formal language consisting of exact expressions.

In the first two paragraphs of §89, Wittgenstein depicts such attempts at exactness and then dismisses them as an attempt by philosophy to be of pristine logical and exact scientific mind and methods. Here, through the voice of the interlocutor, Wittgenstein presents what logic 'seemed' to be: having 'a universal significance' and being 'at the foundation of all the sciences' as 'logical investigation explores the essence of all things' and 'the foundations of things', arising 'from an urge to understand the foundations, or essence, of everything empirical'. By the end of the second paragraph, the narrator's voice gives another view of logic and what logic without sublimation should be like: 'It is, rather, essential to our investigation that we do not seek to learn anything *new* by it. We want to *understand* something that is already in plain view. For *this* is what we seem in some sense not to understand'. This would mean that logic alone cannot account for our investigations; for example, time is 'already in plain view'. In §89c, he turns to the nature of time, right after denying the exclusive rights of logic to our understanding of the world. In 45 sections of §§89–133, the words 'understanding' and 'to understand' (*Verständigung*, *Verstand*, *verstehen*) occur 14 times. The words 'misunderstanding' and 'misunderstand' (*Mißverständnis*, *mißverstehen*) occur nine times, making it one of the most important terms in the text.

⁶Wittgenstein (2009: §87).

⁷Wittgenstein (2009: §88).

Wittgenstein's brief discussion of time in the last paragraph of §89 is connected to the discussion of exactness in §88. The exactitude of what time is, if such discourse is even possible, belongs to physics and not metaphysics. Nonetheless, the famous quotation from Augustine's *Confessions* speaks of knowing what time is—'when nobody asks me [what is time] I know it'—but that knowledge is not of natural sciences. Do we not know what time is? We live in time; we act in time; we feel and perceive time; hence, we know and understand what time is. But we cannot explain this in non-scientific terms. It 'is something that has to be called to mind'. Whence do we know what time is? A person without any knowledge of physics (e.g., no knowledge of Einstein's general theory of relativity) would nevertheless act, live and perform in time as well as Einstein himself did. Our philosophical knowledge and understanding of time should come from us living in time, not from a metaphysics of time that imitates the natural sciences in suggesting hypotheses and theories about time and space (such as J. McTaggart's argument for the unreality of time). Is Augustine's difficulty merely a grammatical problem of not knowing how to explain what time is? Alternatively, did he confuse philosophical questions with scientific ones?

The reason why Wittgenstein is engaging with a non-doctrinal, common-sense Augustine in §1 and §89 is probably because the latter is closer to the understanding upon which Wittgenstein founded his Tractarian approach to meaning and time. The Augustinian notion of language in *Confessions* precedes Augustine's philosophy of language in his doctrinal works in the same way it also precedes TLP's 'object and designation' approach. Augustine's common-sense realisation of not being able to explain what time is, while knowing what it is, reveals Wittgenstein's notion of understanding in general. This notion of understanding is closely related to the notion of rules. Just as no definition of time could account for our experience of it, so there is no one definition or explanation of rules and normativity that would satisfy all instances of rule-following.

Wittgenstein's point—namely, that through careful examination of examples in his language-games, we will come to an understanding of the critical notions under investigation—is not only linguistic but also epistemic. This means achieving an understanding of these notions without expressing it, because as soon as an expression is given (as was evident in §§87–88), we are destined to start our investigation anew (which does indeed happen in §89). Explanations employ analogies, which by their very nature cannot fully account for what is being explained. Thus, the goal of PI is not solely linguistic understanding but also, and most importantly, epistemic understanding; in Wittgenstein's own words, this is an understanding from 'surveyable representation' (§122a).

The interplay of two voices in §89 proceeds to a third commentator's voice, in both paragraphs of §90. Here, in the first sentence, we see Wittgenstein contrasting two approaches. One is a scientific approach 'to *see right into* phenomena', and the second is that 'our investigation is directed ... toward the "*possibilities*" of phenomena'. The terms in italics render the three approaches distinct and in conflict with

each other: ‘*see right into*’, ‘*phenomena*’ and ‘*possibilities*’. While the sciences investigate something specific, and philosophy focuses on phenomena, Wittgenstein suggests examining possibilities of different meanings and their different practical applications of similarly defined rules or words. The viewpoint that there are different possibilities cannot support ‘exact grammar’ applied ‘in one strict way’ in either scientific discourse or generalised philosophical theory. Wittgenstein’s new philosophical approach allows us to investigate how we use our knowledge, understanding, and perception of phenomena without looking into their essence. Insight into the essence of things not only imitates the methods of science badly but also creates an ideal world (like that of TLP), in which philosophical theses and theories thrive, but which takes us away from the real world in which genuine understanding alone is possible.

Perhaps the most telling example is TLP’s language of logical grammatical analysis, whose job was to describe and picture the world of facts. Once believed to be an alternative to Frege’s and Russell’s logicism, by the end of 1929 Wittgenstein realised that such language is possible only in theory as an idea (or an ideal). Its impossibility is logical, in that it cannot itself convey the meaning of its own propositions: ‘The phenomenological language or “primary language” as I called it, does not seem to me now as a goal, now I hold it to be no longer possible. All that is possible and necessary is to separate what is essential from what is inessential in *our* language’.⁸

In §90b, Wittgenstein expounds further on the idea that an enquiry into the ‘*possibilities*’ of phenomena makes it ‘a grammatical one’. Here, ‘grammatical’ means clearing away the misunderstandings created by false analogies, such as those drawn between the scientific and philosophical use of words (i.e., time). In §§91–92, he expands on what he means by a grammatical enquiry (§90b). He dismisses the view that he is performing ‘a final analysis of our linguistic expressions’ (§91a) or that he is ‘aiming at a particular state, a state of complete exactness’ (§91b), a theme that runs through the entire ‘Chapter on philosophy’. In §92, he portrays an investigation in which a final analysis and state of complete exactness would be the real goal. It would be a discovery of ‘something that lies *beneath* the surface’ (§92a). In §92b, he gives two examples of the questions that aim at such discoveries: ‘*What is language?*’ and ‘*What is a proposition?*’ The words in italics refer to the essence of things and their being as the two main metaphysical questions. Their answers, or attempts at answers, require discovery. Their statement presupposes that something is hidden that ‘an analysis is supposed to unearth’ (§92a).

In §§93–94, Wittgenstein explores how dogmatic philosophy treats the second question, ‘*What is a proposition?*’, and describes what is wrong with this treatment. In §94–6, he again attacks his Tractarian picture theory of language (as in §§1–88). First,

⁸The above translation is the author’s. The original reads as follows: ‘Die phänomenologische Sprache oder “primäre Sprache” wie ich sie nannte schwebt mir jetzt nicht als Ziel vor; ich halte sie jetzt nicht mehr für möglich. Alles was möglich und nötig ist, ist das Wesentliche *unserer* Sprache von ihrem Unwesentlichen zu sondern.’ Wittgenstein (2000: MS105, 205); slightly amended version in Wittgenstein (1975: 51).

he notes traditional philosophy's attempt to find 'a pure intermediary between the propositional *sign* and the facts' (§94) in thought and language as 'the unique correlate, picture, of the world' (§96). Then, he diagnoses the reason for why this picture is no more than an illusion: The use of words is missing because 'the language-game in which they are to be applied is missing' (§96).

Dogmatism through the methods of sublime logic searches for the clear, perfect, super order of an '*a priori* order of the world' (§97). We find this image in his TLP, namely the Tractarian view that a sentence must have a determinate sense for it to be a sentence.⁹ In the same section, Wittgenstein shows how this becomes an obvious contradiction and unattainable goal: 'It is *prior* to all experience, must run through all experience'. The ideal of this kind of philosophy is 'a perfect language' (§98), which is prior to but must be relevant to all use. In §99, Wittgenstein further demonstrates this contradiction with the analogy of a man being confined to a locked room, but in which there is one door left open. The analogy explains the paradox as the sense of a sentence being open, while at the same time 'the sentence must nevertheless have a determinate sense'.

This and the following section¹⁰ return to the question of rule-following and particularly to vagueness in the rules. Vagueness and rules appear to be mutually exclusive terms; after all, rules are meant to determine the sense of a sentence and not leave everything open. Therefore, §99 ends with the interlocutor's desperate statement: "So you haven't accomplished anything at all". An enclosure with a hole in it is as good as *none*'. However, the last sentence of the interlocutor's remark is undermined by the commentator's question: 'But is that really true?' Philosophy of referential semantics cannot accept vagueness in rules; it will treat it as an obvious contradiction. A dialogue in §100 between the interlocutor and narrator discusses whether this anti-dogmatic understanding of rules constitutes a game at all:

[Interlocutor:] "Still, it isn't a game at all, if there is some vagueness *in the rules*".

[Narrator:] But is it really not a game, then?

[Interlocutor:] – "Well, perhaps you'll call it a game, but at any rate it isn't a perfect game".

⁹Wittgenstein (1979a: 61); Wittgenstein (1961: 5.156).

¹⁰Wittgenstein (2009: §100).

[Narrator:] This means: then it has been contaminated, and what I am interested in now is what it was than was contaminated.

[Commentator:] – But I want to say: we misunderstand the role played by the ideal in our language. That is to say: we too would call it a game, only we are dazzled by the ideal, and therefore fail to see the actual application of the world “game” clearly.

The ideal that Wittgenstein speaks of in §101 and §103 relates to ‘the strict and clear rules’ in §102. We assume that the ideal ‘*must* occur in reality’ (§101) to such an extent that it becomes ‘unshakeable’ (§103). The ideal becomes the norm of our perception and understanding of the world; we cannot step outside of it; we cannot exist without it (§103). This dependence on the ideal order of sublime logic brings about dissatisfaction with ordinary language, reminiscent of Frege’s critique of ordinary language for its vagueness. However, searching for the ideal order (Fregean or *Tractarian*) outside ordinary language is as futile as an attempt ‘to repair a torn spider’s web with our fingers’ (§106).

In the last two sections of the first part of the chapter (§§107–108), Wittgenstein describes the conflict between actual language and the requirement of sublime logic for exactness of sense by comparing his current approach with that of his TLP: ‘We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction, and so, in a certain sense, the conditions are ideal; but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!’

The ideal conditions of pristine order make it possible to examine the essence of things; however, they also make it impossible to achieve what is meant to be achieved (i.e., correspondence of the ideal with the real). Investigating the working of our language is the necessary friction we get by returning to the rough ground. In §108, Wittgenstein asks what happens to the rigour of logic if we deny its sublime nature. With this new method, we do not deny logic’s rigour; instead, we reverse the order of placing logic before investigations of ordinary language. Thus, the whole enquiry is turned around ‘on the pivot of our real need’. This real need is that of surveyable understanding. Logic, with all its rigour, is not removed from our investigations by means of language-games, it does not disappear; rather, it comes *after* our understanding of experience and practices, with its limited as well as precise methods of explanation.

III | POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY (§§109–133)

From §109 to §133, Wittgenstein turns to consider the nature of philosophy more closely and, unlike in the first part of this chapter (§§89–108), provides a positive outlook on philosophy that opens some of the impasses created by his first consider-

ation of normativity of meaning in §§82–88. In §109, Wittgenstein links this impasse to the ‘scientific considerations’ by which we advance theories, construct hypothetical considerations, and explain. These are all negative terms that we saw in §§2–88 and will see again in §§185–242. He substitutes them for positive ones: ‘description’ instead of ‘explanation’ and ‘philosophical problems’ instead of empirical ones that are solved [*werden gelöst*]. In BT§89, he uses a much stronger form of the verb: ‘The problems are solved in the literal sense of the word—dissolved [*aufgelöst*] like a lump of sugar in water.’ Indeed, they are (dis-)solved ‘through an insight into the workings of our language’ (§109).

It seems that, in the first part of the chapter, he proposes a negative method of dismissing philosophical theories to show that a philosophy whose methods aim at a complete logical and grammatical analysis cannot deliver on its promises. However, what emerges in Part 2 of the chapter is a positive method and the promise of a dissolution of these problems.

In §109, Wittgenstein groups five positive (P1–5) terms versus six negative (N1–6) ones: (N1) scientific, (N2) theoretical and (N3) hypothetical considerations must give way not to (N4) explanation but to (P1) description, which ‘gets its light’ from (P2) philosophical problems; philosophical problems stand in contrast to (N5) empirical problems; the latter ‘are solved through an (P3) insight into the workings of our language’; philosophical problems are solved not through (N6) new discoveries (P4) ‘but by assembling what we have long been familiar with’, which is the same ‘as something that already lies open to view’ in §92; finally, the result is (P5) ‘our understanding by the resources of our language’ of that which is open and what we are familiar with.

These terms are assembled so that they strike us as standing in contrast with each other. Discovery and familiarity, or something that is open to view, are opposites. Explanation and description stand in contrast as two opposite methods: one of science, the other of philosophy. Theories and hypotheses belong to scientific problems. Insight and understanding belong to philosophical problems. These positive terms prevail in the remaining sections (from §110 to §133), opening to the positive nature of philosophy.

In §§110–113, Wittgenstein points to ‘a misinterpretation of our forms of language’ as the main source of attributing a special character of depth to language and philosophy. This in turn causes ‘deep disquietudes’ within us, making us feel a certain fatalism and resignation, as though this depth were the essence of language and philosophy. In §114, he shows the same disquietude that he did when he defined the general form of proposition in the TLP4.5; in §115, he diagnoses this disquietude as ‘a *picture* held us captive’, with our inability to break free of the picture as the result of the same grammatical illusions of our language.

Through language-games, we ‘bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use’ (§116). Thus, we do not try to grasp ‘the *essence* of the thing’ but instead ask how various philosophical terms are used in language. In these

sections, we can clearly see how Wittgenstein turns away from philosophy's tendency to discover something new, which he calls 'the discovery of some piece of plain nonsense', towards an understanding of the value of philosophy 'running up against the limits of language' (§119). As with §120, where there is no special, phenomenological language in which we express our thoughts apart from ordinary language, in §121, there is no 'second-order philosophy'. Language-games give us an understanding that consists of 'seeing connections' through 'an overview of the use of our words' and solving the problem of deficiency in surveyability (§122); this is because they survey the workings of our language without interfering 'in any way with the actual use of language' but 'only describe it'. Without a theoretical or argumentative justification, 'it leaves everything as it is' (§124).

§122 is one of the most contentiously discussed texts in PI. The disputes centre around two questions. One is the question regarding the meaning of '*übersichtliche Darstellung*'; the other is about 'that kind of understanding that consists in "seeing connections"'. Since Wittgenstein recognises that 'a surveyable representation is of fundamental significance to us' (by 'us' here, he implies himself and his readers involved in investigations), clarifications are in order.

In §124–5, Wittgenstein gives practical suggestions as to how surveyability applies to philosophy. Where philosophy of referential semantics selects a particular aspect, it interferes with the actual use of language by cutting from it what the theory must see. To this, he counters that surveyability leaves 'everything as it is'. It is descriptive in nature; it does not discover anything (§125a). In §125c, he explains what must be surveyed: 'This entanglement in our rules is what we want to understand: that is, to survey'. The 'entanglement in our rules' occurs when the accepted rules do not explain our own following of them (§125b). Whenever 'we lay down rules', we define what or how something must be played, but the games themselves are always larger, potentially infinite ('*countless* kinds' §23a) with respect to their own, ever-limited rules. We expect linguistically expressed rules to account sufficiently for what the game is and how it will be played; this expectation can very well be expressed (i.e., in abstract philosophical theories). However, as soon as we actually play the game by following the rule, we find that quite often it does fit perfectly with the rule.

Hence, we begin to feel 'deep disquietudes' because 'the problems arising through a misinterpretation of our forms of language have the character of depth' (§111). Deep philosophical problems take the form of a split between two worlds: one of our attempts to establish rules, the normativity of meaning (§125d); the other of actually applying the meaning by following the rules. Thus, a 'philosophical problem has the form: "I don't know my way about"' (§123), precisely because the rules show me a way that is somewhat different from following them. We must understand how language actually operates without setting scientific or dogmatic limitations on it: we require surveyability.

In §126, Wittgenstein introduces another contrast between three negative terms, ‘explanation’, ‘deduction’ and ‘discovery’, and one positive one, ‘putting everything before us’ so that ‘there is nothing to explain’. Explanations and deductions are necessary to discover something hidden, but what is hidden ‘is of no interest to us’. Thus, philosophy is a possibility ‘before all new discoveries and inventions’.

In §128, Wittgenstein does not forbid philosophy ‘to advance theses’, meaning the setting up of rules of use ‘because everyone would agree to them’; the real problem is that these theses, just like rules, will not fit entirely into our practices. This ‘ultimate clarity’ allows one to formulate any theses in philosophy, but because the rules are obvious and clear, theses formulated like this would never generate any disputes: ‘If there were theses in philosophy, they would have to be such that they do not give rise to disputes’.¹¹

Wittgenstein transferred this remark verbatim from BT into §128.¹² If, in his conversations with the members of the Vienna Circle, he gave an explanation based on the primacy of grammar and its unequivocal rules, the same remark stands alone without any explanations in PI§128.¹³ Glock,¹⁴ Baker and Hacker¹⁵ and Horwich¹⁶ all suggest viewing this short passage as a divide between good and bad theses in philosophy and not, as suggested by Cavell,¹⁷ as rendering all philosophical theses in the best-case-scenario useless truisms and tautologies.

I believe that the remark has two meanings historically. The first is explained rather clearly in BT §89; the key to understanding it is to take grammar and rules as part of the central methods in philosophy. However, while Wittgenstein preserves the same wording in all three sources discussed here, his meaning in PI is different from that in the other two. Rules themselves do not suggest meaning, and grammar itself is no more than an instrument (*organon* of logic) to be used according to the practices and customs of its users (‘in the *practice of the language*’¹⁸). Rules (as theses) can explain themselves in full, but they cannot explain either their following or the reality in which the following occurs. Cavell is correct to say that theses can be tautological, but this does not mean that they are useless. They are too limited to be an explanation of more than themselves, but they still establish the limits of our language and actions.

Instead, §128 in PI suggests an ideal in philosophy that is hinted at by the first word in the subjunctive mood: ‘*Wolte man...*’ (‘If someone were to...’). It is not impossible but somewhat desirable to formulate theses in philosophy in such a manner that everyone would agree with them. It is what philosophy always attempts to do, but

¹¹Wittgenstein (1979b: 183)

¹²Wittgenstein (2013: §89).

¹³Wittgenstein (1979b: 183).

¹⁴Glock (2017).

¹⁵Baker and Hacker (2005b: 271–3).

¹⁶Horwich (2012: 66).

¹⁷Cavell (1979: 33–4).

¹⁸Wittgenstein (2009: §51a).

without success. If Wittgenstein (like Waismann) wanted to propose theses in philosophy, everyone would *also* agree; but since there is very little agreement on what Wittgenstein proposes in PI, what he *does* propose are not theses. Even when they are stated in full (i.e., by the interlocutor and the narrator), they continue to provoke disputes. Theses are only partially responsible for the understanding of our practices and indeed do not constitute the main source of clarity; they cannot be given the role of sublime explanations of the real world. Rather, they rely on language-games as the primary method of investigation of our practices, which are essentially thesis free.

After §128, Wittgenstein's discussion on the nature of philosophy becomes exclusively positive. In §130 and §133, he makes it clear that the method of language-games ('our clear and simple language-games') or rather the 'methods, different therapies' (§133d) are methods of positive philosophy that 'are meant to throw light on features of our language' (§130). They are instrumental in establishing 'an order in our knowledge of the use of language'—'not the order' (singular), but 'one out of many possible orders' (§132a). This pluralism of methods, games and orders makes Wittgenstein unable 'to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of words in unheard-of ways' (§133a). That is what dogmatism does (§131) when a theory always precedes practice: it sets up rules that cannot always conform to the use itself.

A positive outcome of this philosophy is laid down in §133b–c; these paragraphs serve as a natural conclusion to this chapter on philosophy. The first outcome is 'complete clarity' due to the complete disappearance of philosophical problems. Here, Wittgenstein performs wordplay with two uses of 'complete', both times in italics in §133b. It is reminiscent of his wordplay on the (dis-)solution of problems in §109 and BT§89. Ironically, the second outcome ascribed a negative term, 'discovery', which turns into a positive term here with the addition of the word 'real': 'The real discovery' is the ability for 'me to break off philosophising when I want to', in §133c. This, in turn, is reminiscent of the 'deep disquietudes' referred to in §111, which arise from a mismatch between philosophical problems and practices, rules and their following.

This possibility 'to break off philosophizing when I want to' 'gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions [that] bring itself in[to] question'. In §133d, Wittgenstein again specifies that this possibility can give his methods of language-games the role of being something that stops the series of examples: 'a method is now demonstrated by examples, and the series of examples can be broken off'. However, one should ask why and how 'the series of examples' can 'be broken off?' The goal of a *Tractarian* logical analysis of language (but also Russell's idea of a complete analysis of sentences through their constituent parts) providing a complete analysis fails; philosophical problems cannot be solved, and neither can philosophising stop. The fly cannot find its way out of the bottle while remaining *in* the bottle; it must be shown the way out (§309). Instead of searching for solutions to philosophical problems in philosophy of referential semantics, Wittgenstein proposes moving from one game to another, from one use to another, completely free from any theoretical or dogmatic commitments; explaining nothing (because it is not science), but describing

everything with the help of ‘the series of examples’ that ‘can be broken off’ whenever we reach an understanding; this is done by giving peace to philosophy, to ‘our craving for generality’.¹⁹ The outcome is understanding as a result of surveyable representation, of seeing the connections we determine in the course of our investigations.

§133 is one of the most quoted sections of PI that is often commented on. Together with §109 and §122, it is of central importance to understanding Wittgenstein's philosophical method. According to secondary sources, the disagreement centres on the questions of whether Wittgenstein indeed aimed to be ‘capable of stopping doing philosophy’ at will and the philosophical peace that this would appear as. Answers to these questions will depend in part on how one interprets §109 (whether Wittgenstein actually advanced ‘any kind of theory’ and came up with ‘new discoveries’), §122 (what the process of surveyability and seeking connections is) and §128 (whether PI contains any philosophical theses at all).

Baker and Hacker insist that in §133, Wittgenstein presents two kinds of philosophies—one dogmatic and the other his own—and that breaking off philosophising refers to the first kind, while peace is secured by the dissolution of its problems by his own methods.²⁰ Glock claims that Wittgenstein substitutes ‘wrong’ questions with the ‘right’ ones. Wrong questions are based on similarly wrong assumptions that lead to endless philosophising. The correct questions are still *a priori* philosophical questions that allow philosophy to continue.²¹ In a similar fashion, Jolley claims that in §133, Wittgenstein acknowledges that he does not succeed in ceasing to philosophise, that the real discovery has not been achieved, and that this failure is confirmed by Wittgenstein's own admission in the Preface.

Jolley's comment linking §133 to the Preface is important because it explains something that previous authors appear to omit, viz., that there *appears* to be a contradiction between Wittgenstein's promise to break off philosophising and not suggesting any new theories and theses, on the one hand, and proposing multiple methods of philosophical investigation, on the other.²² The major difficulty with this interpretation, however, is that it diminishes Wittgenstein's achievements in PI and makes it look as if he wanted to dissolve philosophical problems and stop philosophising and yet failed to do so. However, the interpretations of Glock, and Baker and Hacker do not do justice to Wittgenstein's efforts, by marking him as someone who merely separated the philosophical wheat from the chaff.²³

¹⁹Wittgenstein (1969a: 17).

²⁰Baker and Hacker (2005b: 283).

²¹Glock (1996: 292–8); Glock (2017).

²²Jolley (1993).

²³Rhees' recollections from 1970 confirm that Wittgenstein was not satisfied with this remark: ‘He had found some feature of what he had been saying unsatisfactory. This was typical: he would come back to the same questions again and again, often trying to see if they could not be done in another way’. But Rhees immediately adds Wittgenstein's own words, in reference to §133c: ‘In my book I say that I am able to leave off with a problem in philosophy when I want to. But that's a lie; I can't. (In one of his lectures, when speaking in this way about the work of doing philosophy, he stated: “I can stop philosophizing about a question when I want to” – suggesting that this was the goal that he wished to impart on his pupils)’. Wittgenstein and Rhees (2015, 54).

An alternative interpretation stresses a much more radical side to Wittgenstein's methods in §133. In direct response to Jolley, and building on the interpretations of Cora Diamond and James Conant, Read claims that there are no real discoveries in PI, and that Wittgenstein's only in the book is to show that all philosophical discoveries are 'chimerical'.²⁴ This interpretation takes literally and resolutely the idea in §133: giving philosophy peace because of the complete clarity achieved because of the disappearance of *all* philosophical problems. Hence, the aim of PI is somewhat similar to that of TLP, especially in its concluding remarks 6.53–7 and the Preface. If in TLP, Wittgenstein aimed for 'the final solution to the problems' (Preface), in PI, he found their total dissolution. To some degree, this approach makes Wittgenstein profess anti-philosophy, to giving up philosophising altogether. The kind of peace he aimed at in §133 is an eternal peace.

What brings philosophy peace, and what makes one break off philosophising when one wants to? I have argued that the most obvious candidate for this is understanding surveyability by means of Wittgenstein's language-games' methods. However, these language-games are infinite, just as our linguistic practices are infinite, like a city with many ever-growing suburbs (§18). The dissolution of all philosophical problems is only one (negative) side of Wittgenstein's methods in PI. There are no philosophical problems, theses or theories in his positive methods. If these methods are incarnated into how we play language-games, there is no place for philosophy of referential semantics. What Wittgenstein aimed at in PI is much more interesting than anti-philosophy or dogmatic philosophy specifically. What stops me from philosophising is my understanding that comes from seeing how philosophical theories have failed. New attempts at solving problems can always be made, but Wittgenstein's aim is to make sure that problems are solved by the kind of understanding that his methods provide. In a way, there is philosophy after philosophy, a positive approach to whatever science and language discover. A real discovery in philosophy is not chimerical; it is *real* because it exists in and through our understanding of our linguistic practices.

IV | THE STATUS OF LANGUAGE-GAMES IN POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY

Different voices in the text and positive versus negative vocabulary underline the positive method of philosophy in PI. However, one might object that these methods do not give us enough incentive to practise philosophy without dogmatism. The methodological turn in PI indicates more specific ways we can practise a truly positive philosophy after the philosophy of referential semantics is placed aside.

PI comprises three ways of looking at language-games. One way is to see that every language-game is defined, restricted and fully determined by its constitutive

²⁴Read (1995: 368).

rules. In the early sections of PI (i.e. the first 30 sections, mostly taken from BB),²⁵ these are language-games of calculus whose goal is to imitate the philosophy of referential semantics and show its inevitable demise. Already starting from §8, the approach changes significantly due to the increasing complexity of the games. There are some language-games that are not so much determined by their rules, but rather by how they are played, and the focus drifts from their rules to the games themselves.²⁶

Throughout the first sections of PI, we see how various language-games become increasingly complex, with new elements and various strategies attached to ever more complex sets of emerging rules. If Wittgenstein's goal was simply to dismiss the philosophy of referential semantics, the first language-games (§§1–4) would suffice. However, this was already done in BB. The positive method of Wittgenstein's new philosophy required more than simply showing how the referential approach to language could create conceptual blind spots. Instead of language-games' superiority over their rules, Wittgenstein opted for the act of playing the games over, not just for their rules but even when clearly defining their features. This becomes clear in the later sections of PI (§§561–9 and §§654–6), but it starts becoming evident in the early sections, including the 'Chapter on philosophy'.

Stephen Hilmy²⁷ and William Barnett²⁸ speak of language-games as 'purely heuristic devices' that were meant to do no more than teach, educate, or elucidate us on our various linguistic uses. We can state that starting with PI §31 and progressing with at least the rest of Part I, the nature of language-games devolves or 'degenerates'²⁹ into being 'purely heuristic devices', with attention first being *removed from their rules* to the games themselves, but then from the games to their application and use. As we have seen, the 'Chapter on philosophy' gives few hints of this degenerate character of language-games (§§89c, 92b, 108d, 116 and especially §130, in which language-games are said to be '*objects of comparison*') together with §§31, 68–9 and §83. In addition, the method of moving away from 'What?' to 'How?' questions only confirms the methodological weakness of language-games, while preferring the activity for games to be played with not just rules but also the games themselves being constantly amended.

²⁵Rhees, in his *Preface* to BB in Wittgenstein (1969a: viii–x), speaks of the evolution of the notion of language-games from 1933–1935 (*The Blue Book*) to 1936 (*The Brown Book*) and compares them further with PI; also see Wittgenstein and Rhees (2015).

²⁶Hintikka (1989) supports Rhees' analysis of the evolution from BB to PI regarding the notion of language-games and further persists in his study of rule-following in the middle (1928–1936) and later periods. Hintikka's contention is that after August 1936, Wittgenstein began to slowly acknowledge the primacy of language-games over their constitutive rules.

²⁷Hilmy (1987: chap. 3).

²⁸Barnett (1990).

²⁹Baker and Hacker (2005a); Schulte (2004: 33–34) speaks of 'degenerate games' and 'degenerate languages' interchangeably, but in relation to the 'builders' language-game and similar games that Wittgenstein calls 'primitive languages' (PI §2, §5, §7, §25, §146). The author uses the terms in reference to those language-games whose rules are arbitrary and indiscriminate and serve, as the author will demonstrate further, to make a specific point or serve a specific purpose.

The last two passages that I would like to draw attention to are PI §§561–9 and §§654–6. In them, one can see more clearly than in any other texts of PI the weakened role of language-games and their heuristic nature.

In PI §§561–69, Wittgenstein discusses how to distinguish what is essential and what is inessential in linguistic use, and he soon *continues to discuss what is essential and what is inessential in language-games*. In §564, he states: ‘The game, one would like to say, has not only rules but also a *point* [*einen Witz*]’ (author’s emphasis). In §566, he adds: ‘And now it looks as if the use of the same word or the same piece, had a *purpose* [*einen Zweck*] – if the sameness is not accidental, inessential’ (author’s emphasis). Both these terms—a *point* and a *purpose*—come into play several times in the next paragraph.³⁰ It begins with the interlocutor’s objection, ‘But, after all, the game is supposed to be determined by the rules!’ The narrator responds:

What objection might one make to this? That one does not see the point [*den Witz*] of this prescription. Perhaps as one likewise wouldn’t see the point [*den Witz*] of a rule by which each piece had to be turned round three times before one moved it. If we found this rule in a board-game, we’d be surprised and would speculate about the purpose of the rule [*den Zweck der Regel*].

Where should one look if one wants to distinguish between what is essential and what is inessential in the use of the word or the use of a piece in a game? In §563, Wittgenstein considers that ‘the meaning of a piece is its role in the game’. However, in sections §§564–567ff, he dismisses what seemed so obvious in BB or PG. Instead, neither the rule nor the game itself ‘decides’ on the importance or the meaning here, but on the point, the purpose for which the entire game is being played. Attention is not simply moved from rules to the game, but even from the game itself to the purpose of the game being played.

In §654, Wittgenstein stresses this idea further: ‘Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to regard the facts as “proto-phenomena.” That is, where we ought to say: *this is the language-game that is being played*’ (author’s emphasis). Notice that he does not emphasise the language-game here, but that it is being played. In the following paragraph, he explains himself further: ‘The point is not to explain a language-game by means of our experiences, but to take account of a language-game’. In §656a, he insists that we ‘Regard the language-game as the *primary thing*. And regard the feelings, and so forth, as a way of looking at, interpreting, the language-game!’ This way of looking at the language-game is an interpretation of feelings, wishes, and so forth. Here, the way the game is being played becomes the primary aspect: the proto phenomenon. The point and the purpose of the game (i.e., the activity) is the most basic fact; it is at this level that understanding occurs.

³⁰Wittgenstein (2009: §567).

David Stern once showed the entire evolution of his thought on logic, language and practice in just three sets of quotations from Wittgenstein, from ‘Logic must take care of itself’,³¹ through ‘Language must speak for itself’,³² to ‘rules leave loop-holes open, and the practice has to speak for itself’.³³

We can state the nature of positive philosophy in PI and beyond: it consists of reaching an understanding through various methods of investigation, specifically by paying attention to how that which is being investigated (i.e., the nature of time and knowledge) plays into our most basic and common practices. Thus, metaphysical and epistemological questions about the nature of concepts (the ‘what’ questions) give way to questions about how we act with these notions (the ‘how’ questions). Questions such as ‘What is time?’ and ‘What is knowledge?’ give way to questions like ‘How do we live in time?’ and ‘How do we acquire knowledge?’

This positive philosophy should not be confused with anti-philosophy, philosophical quietism, or Pyrrhonian scepticism. Metaphysical, epistemological and ethical questions can be centred at the beginning of investigations with whichever theories are suggested from ancient to contemporary philosophy. ‘Dogmatism in philosophy’ is not discarded but implemented at the beginning of the enquiry, just as it was in the first 30 paragraphs of PI. The investigation will proceed by stating that none of the theories are conclusive and that none are truly capable of answering the ‘what’ questions. The outcome at this stage is philosophical puzzlement, but also appreciation that these puzzles have no solutions but only lead to new puzzles. If the goal of a student of philosophy is to appreciate the puzzle or the game of philosophy being played and that game’s various rules being implemented, then the investigation can be completed here. However, one cannot claim that they have reached an understanding of the object of the investigation, only an understanding (to some degree) of philosophical theories. Anti-philosophy, quietism or Pyrrhonian scepticism are three alternative methods the student can adopt, but I believe that these will likewise offer no understanding of the object, only of the philosophical methods. Finally, Wittgenstein’s positive method truly begins in his investigation of the various practices conducted by means of language-games—but without excessively crediting language-games and their rules.

The result of positive philosophy will never operate with any definitions; this much is clear from the ‘Chapter on philosophy’. There would be no single definition of time, knowledge or being; instead, there are various approaches, such as perceived aspects of different notions or objects of investigations, ‘dawning’ on us when we engage in philosophy. The result is a philosophy without metaphysics in the strict sense of that word, namely, investigations into the nature of the world without any level of description of it, any phenomenological language or theorisation. Philosophy

³¹Wittgenstein (1979a: 2); Wittgenstein (1961: 5.473).

³²Wittgenstein (1984: §2, §27).

³³Wittgenstein (1969b: §139, §402); Stern (2004: 27).

is no longer an understanding of metaphysical theories, but an immediate understanding of that which theories refer to. Therefore, stating a positive philosophy proves difficult in PI. Through various methods of language-games (and not just various language-games by themselves), Wittgenstein leaves us with homework to complete on our own: understanding the very same topics that have stood at the centre of philosophy since Thales, but this time without any theory, meta-description or 'second-order' (PI §121). This time, we also have no ladder leading anywhere because we are not allowed to leave the grounds of our investigations (CV, 10). In this truly novel method of philosophy, not even language-games can claim centrality. Their place is peripheral and purely instrumental to a surveyable understanding that substitutes any and all craving for generality, be it of a logico-philosophic or scientific origin.

Wittgenstein's positive philosophy in PI is based on inspiring the reader with this conviction: a perception of the world based on an understanding achieved through the use of various language-games as linguistic practices in which the meanings of the key philosophical terms begin to reveal themselves, without any need for philosophical theories that follow strict grammatical rules. In the end, we are left with a surveyable understanding that attains the twofold peace of appreciating theories' limitations and finally understanding the world without them.

An appreciation of the theories' limitations as a necessary condition for gaining a surveyable understanding is the goal of his negative philosophy. Attaining the understanding and realisation that theories are no longer necessary is the kernel of Wittgenstein's positive philosophy. However, in the end, it is the same understanding achieved by two methods that effectively makes Wittgenstein's philosophy in PI (and many other in his later writings) a positive one.

In the history of philosophy, we can recall at least one example where resemblance of some initial pieces of this positive method can be found. It is in the closing remarks of Plato's *Theaetetus*,³⁴ where, after considering various theories and their definitions of what knowledge is, and after Socrates, by means of his method of *elenchus*, brings the young mathematician Theaetetus to recognise that 'neither can perception ... nor true belief, not the addition of an account along with true belief' count as knowledge, Socrates considers these theories to be 'all a bag of wind, and not worthy of being fed and watered'. The result of their enquiry into knowledge amounts to Theaetetus' realisation not to think that he knows what he does not know. Socrates' midwifery's art stops here, by his own recognition that 'I know none of the things others know'. Wittgenstein's positive method in philosophy starts where Socratic philosophical midwifery stops.

³⁴Plato (2015: 210b–c5).

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