Wittgenstein & Stage-Setting: being brought into the space of reasons

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1. Introduction

There are three primary reasons for introducing Wittgenstein to a discussion of pedagogy and practice. First, in the context of Wittgenstein scholarship, it is worth reiterating the commonly unremarked[1] fact that throughout his later work Wittgenstein constantly invokes the notions of teaching, learning, and training, and not merely as a stylistic and rhetorical device. Second, Wittgenstein's later work is a valuable addition to a discussion of pedagogy because of his central assault there on the cognitivist, rationalist, and intellectualist assumptions that come so naturally when we consider the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, Wittgenstein seems to offer a way of avoiding the behaviourist alternative to cognitivism.

In what follows, I hope to clarify and explicate an account of how a creature comes to be brought into the space of reasons – that is, comes to take its place as a rational agent in social practices. My ultimate interest, however, is with a tension apparently generated by the emphasis on training coupled with this attack on cognitivism. If one's coming to maturity depends on one being embedded in a practice, so that one comes to adopt, with 'comfortable certainty', the common ground of that practice's language games, then there seems to be no position from which to frame a critique of a practice. Here, no sense can be made of, say, a constructivist's invocation of active learners constructing their own knowledge, or of restructuring knowledge *à la* Marzano. Such models turn out merely to be descriptions of the necessary process of training and shaping a mind, and the agency supposed to be nurtured by such frameworks seems impossible.

In contrast to this conservative aspect (or interpretation) of Wittgenstein's work, with its nihilistic and authoritarian overtones, one finds in his own practice and in his impact a radical critique of the practice of philosophy. We find also in the 'reminders' that repeat through the *Investigations* and elsewhere the notion that in engaging in a practice (like *philosophy*, at least) we ought (and can) adopt a critical stance, noting the muddled theoretical habits laid down in that practice's memory, and changing our 'style of thinking' so as to avoid them (LC, p. 28).[2]

This is interesting in the context of a discussion of pedagogy and expertise because it reflects a natural tension in pedagogical theory and practice; and of course, the question of whether or how Wittgenstein is conservative and quietist about practices is an interpretive challenge and an ongoing debate in Wittgenstein scholarship. I will suggest a way of resolving these parallel tensions – or, I will suggest that the tensions do not need resolution in the way we might assume. My suggestion, bringing the focus back onto the practice of pedagogy, is that the tension (between habit and innovation, between conservatism and critique) is unavoidable and healthy. The Wittgensteinian lesson is that there is no resolution, and that anxiety at this point follows from a confused view of the self.

2. Grasping a Concept

We begin with questions of understanding. What is it to understand a concept, a procedure, and a game? What criteria of understanding might there be? What, if anything, is the mark of understanding? How and where does understanding begin?

Two types of answer have seemed attractive in philosophy, psychology, and education theory: that understanding is a psychological state, or that it is (or is defined as) the acquisition of new behaviour. Wittgenstein rejects both cognitivist and behaviourist options.

It might seem that the question of whether or not understanding is an inner state or process that we try to bring about when we teach is important because of the consequences it has for the *practice* of teaching. Clearly there is much interesting discussion to be had here;[3] however, that is not something that directly interests Wittgenstein. His argument against cognitivism regards teaching as satisfactory as

it stands - as the basis for explication, not the target of critique. His focus is not on teaching, but on to what he thinks of as confused ways we think when we think about the mind and the self.

The idea that understanding is a psychological or mental state or process has intuitive appeal. If we think of ourselves as teachers trying, perhaps, to produce understanding of how to solve simultaneous equations, or of the role of the slab language at the beginning of the *Investigations*, it seems natural to think that our task is to bring about a state, or change of state, or process, or something, *in* the student. If we change focus, it cannot be denied that there is for a student, at least sometimes, an *experience* of understanding, the experience of 'getting it'; and, we might want to say, that is an experience of the (psychological) state or process of understanding. Furthermore, the approach tunes into the longstanding appeal of intellectualist or rationalist explications of the self, and it connects with contemporary hopes for neurophysiological, causal accounts of the self.

> If one says that knowing the ABC is a state of the mind, one is thinking of a state of an apparatus of the mind (perhaps a state of the brain) by means of which we explain the *manifestations* of that knowledge. (PI §149)

Wittgenstein, however, rejects intellectualism. According to intellectualism, all there is to a human form of life is seeing – it is interpretation all the way down – whereas for him the human form of life is grounded in doing. He also rejects causal reduction, because it confuses explanations and manifestations of understanding with understanding itself (PI §152).

Wittgenstein's response to the cognitivist challenge is developed in three interwoven lines of attack: that we have no clear conception of what an inner state of understanding might be; that an inner conception achieves nothing without a mode of projection or application; and that what counts as understanding is multifarious and contextualized.

The first point comes out in a series of challenges, the effect of which is that although we might find ourselves attracted to an inner-process account of understanding, once we focus on what we mean, what understanding, on this view,

amounts to, it becomes very hazy. We might think that the feeling or sense of understanding gives us a clear idea, but the feeling of understanding can't be the same as understanding. Wittgenstein asks, in a note attached to PI §138:

> Must I *know* whether I understand a word? Don't I also sometimes *think* I understand a word (as I may think I understand a method of calculation) and then realize that I did not understand it? ("I thought I knew what 'relative' and 'absolute' motion meant, but I see that I don't know.") (PI §138 nb)

The second line of attack, prefiguring aspects of the so-called rule-following considerations, is of more interest given some of my later discussion. Wittgenstein offers 'cube' (PI §139) as a concept we easily enough grasp, and notes that we might also reasonably easily imagine that the inner state is an image of a cube. However, accepting that we do here have a fairly clear account of an appropriate inner state, we have to explain how the image determines its application. This challenge generates the following interaction with the interlocutor:

> When someone says the word "cube" to me, for example, I know what it means. But can the whole *use* of the word come before my mind when I *understand* it in this way?
> "It's quite simple: if that picture occurs to me and I point to a triangular prism for instance, and say it is a cube, then this use of the word doesn't fit the picture." — But doesn't it fit? I have purposely so chosen the example that it is quite easy to imagine *a method of projection* according to which the picture does fit after all.
> The picture of the cube did indeed *suggest* a certain use to us, but it was also possible for me to use it differently. (PI §139)

He acknowledges that he has chosen his example carefully, but his point is that the discovery of a psychological compulsion is insufficient; we needed a logical compulsion that rules out alternative methods of application. One solution (PI §141) might be to say that not only the picture of the cube, but also the method of projection, comes before our mind, perhaps as a schema. Wittgenstein is doubtful whether we have a way of imagining the situation; but in any case, a type of third man argument threatens, for we then face the possibility of alternative methods of applying the schema.

It is important to note that this is not a sceptical argument from Wittgenstein (just as the later 'rule-following' considerations are not, as Kripke (1982) suggests, set up by

a sceptical argument). The point is not that the puzzle raises the possibility that we aren't in fact capable of understanding concepts, or that we ought normally be hesitant about the application of words; the point is that the model of an inner process or state fails to account for the comfortable understanding that we actually do have. A sceptical reading accepts that understanding always and only rests on interpretation. So, the reasoning goes, as it is never possible to rule out an alternative interpretation of *any* rule, rule following is groundless, and rests on nothing more than the contingent norms of a community. The problem with this reading is that these norms are presented from our theoretical stance as though we theorists *can* stand aside from and outside them, like fantastical anthropologists

This ties to the third line of criticism. When wedded to an inner-process story we think that there is *something* that understanding is, but when we turn away from our theoretical commitment and focus on actual cases in which we ascribe understanding, we find no essence. We might say that a pupil understands what we've taught (Wittgenstein's example in PI §143 is writing the series of natural numbers) if they do so without mistakes. But mostly we do not count random mistakes as marking lack of understanding, and even if the pupil carries on without mistakes it cannot be decided in general (without considering particular circumstances) how far they need to go before we say they understand. Furthermore, the answers to these questions – what the difference is between random and systematic mistakes, how much success is required to mark understanding – will vary among contexts, subject matter, and purpose. We tend to think of understanding as a set measure, but understanding is really a matter of 'well-enough' – well-enough in *this* context, given *this* subject matter, in the light of *this* purpose.

Wittgenstein's interlocutor makes a natural response to this line of argument:

> … to have got the [number] system (or again, to understand it) can't consist in continuing the series up to *this* or *that* number: *that* is only applying one's understanding. Understanding itself is a state which is the *source* of the correct use. (PI §146)

But Wittgenstein replies that this just takes us back to the model of an algebraic formula, open to multiple interpretations, and thus multiple modes of application. In normal cases (or better, except in particularly unusual circumstances) we apply concepts and rules unhesitatingly, without interpretation. But were the inner process model to apply, we would, given the logical possibility of alternative interpretations, have to proceed with hesitation in all cases. Thus, he says "The application is still a criterion of understanding" (PI §146).

The account I've presented here so far is fairly standard. It is, I think, in accord with at least a major strand of Wittgenstein interpretation. I believe, for example, that it more or less captures the explication offered by Warren Goldfarb. But I do not think that it is fully adequate, for two reasons.

First, Wittgenstein's is often presented as if he's rejecting a first-person account of understanding in favour of an external third-person account. Goldfarb (1989), for example, focuses his attention on the difficulty of identifying an inner state that could count as understanding, and on the "variegation and lack of uniformity" (1989: 640) of features that play a role in our ascriptions of understanding to another's behaviour. But this, I think, draws a distinction between inner and outer processes that Wittgenstein rejects.

The second concern (or puzzlement) goes back to the first of the motivations behind this paper. That is, in many of the discussions of the relevant parts of the *Investigations* (I mean the material on understanding, that on private languages, and those on rule-following) there is little or no reference to the regular invocation, in those sections, of teaching and training. I think that if we do consider this aspect we can arrive at a more nuanced account.

3. Training in a Practice

Williams (1994) observes that when Wittgenstein's mention of learning is noted at all, the reference tends to be construed as either an expository or heuristic device. She objects that such interpretations,

> … distort and diminish the significance of the appeal to learning in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, and both are rooted in drawing a strong distinction between the empirical and the conceptual (or grammatical). By contrast, the interpretation I want to explore sees the process of training as pivotal in creating the logical space for the very distinction between the grammatical and the empirical. (Williams 1994, p. 174)

Williams rightly claims that it is only by taking the references to training and teaching as central to the project that we can get a clear grasp of Wittgenstein's account of normativity. This is because on this account normativity arises as the background of practices that is itself generated by the operation of those practices, which itself rests on the natural reactions of inculcated participants.

If we think about how a child comes to grasp concepts, or know the meanings of words, we might think that the child makes, or is taught, associative connections between word and object (what we might, crudely, call a cognitivist hypothesis-formation model). But Wittgenstein rejects such an account on the basis that it presupposes that which is being explained.

Pointing towards a cat and saying 'cat' (ostensively defining 'cat') couldn't teach someone the meaning of 'cat', he claims, because in order to be taught, the child must already grasp an indefinite range of things: whether what is being pointed at is a physical object rather than a number, say, and if it is an object, what category of object (physical thing, moving thing, animal, species …)[4]. And in order for those issues even to arise, the child must grasp the concept of pointing, and the way pointing and speaking is an act of defining.

So how can we ever come to grasp a concept? How can it ever get off the ground? Perhaps we choose behaviourism, but by taking that path we give up on normativity, on the idea that there can be correct and incorrect applications of concepts and following of rules. We do, it is true, retain a distinction between more and less successful training of responses, and more and less, say, biologically productive responses, but no *normative* behaviour – behaviour that involves adopting a path *as* the correct path – and no judgement.

Wittgenstein provides another option. The critique of ostensive definition shows us that in order for that sort of performance to get off the ground, we require 'stage-

setting'. By the stage he means a background of taken-for-granted assumptions that make an act of pointing and naming sensible. These come to operate as rules, but rules we are *trained* to follow. The stage is partly constructed by the practice of one's peers and elders, and it is partly our natural reactions.

We break the child into the circle, not by ostensive definition, but by ostensive teaching (PI §6). We take an initiate (a human animal with a certain set of natural reactions), and working, initially, from its natural reactions, we embed it in a practice. We model for it, nudge it, encourage it, and redirect it, often with the aid of a carefully constrained and enriched environment, until its 'natural' reactions become the reactions we find natural.

> I do it, he does it after me; and I influence him by expression of agreement, rejection, expectation, encouragement. I let him go his way, or hold him back; and so on.
>   Imagine witnessing such teaching. None of the words would be explained by means of itself; there would be no logical circle. (PI §208)[5]

Because justification and explanation cannot rest on ultimate rational foundations, they must be grounded in our acts. He says in *On Certainty* that "it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *in deed* not doubted" (OC 342), and later he adds that he wants to conceive of certainty, the comfortable agreement that makes practice possible, as "something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were, as something animal" (OC 359). In order to make someone able to participate in a practice, those who already participate must embed in them acceptance in deeds, and on this basis they are perhaps able to carry on alone.

> The differences between normality and abnormality are philosophically not as instructive as their fundamental unity—that both depend upon the same fact of civilization, that it expects complete acceptance and understanding from its natives. And yet it can *say* so little about itself in achieving its acquisition. In both cases you have to go on alone; in the one case toward acceptance, in the other toward isolation. (Cavell 1978 [1999], p. 112)

This means that we can never hope to provide (and in practice, of course, we do not attempt to provide) an ultimate justification for our practices (our practices of judgement etc.). What we must do (and what we actually do) is show someone how

it is done – get them to do as we do. That is, an initiate must be *brought into* a practice; so, an introduction to a practice depends on the welcome of participants. Williams' exposition is helpful here.

> The status of the naïve learner's utterances (that, for example, they are taken as judgments or requests) is a function of the status extended to those utterances by masters of that practice. In other words, the initiate learner speaks, makes judgments, requests, and the like only by virtue of a courtesy extended to the learner by those who have already mastered the practice. (Williams 1994, p. 180)

At this point we need to return to the notion of 'practice'. Often in explications of Wittgenstein we find reference to a private/public dichotomy. So, for example, the problem with a private language is that there is no public check, and *therefore* it lacks normativity because without a public check there is no difference between right and wrong. And for Kripke, the problem with private rules is that there is no community to check their application. I think that this is mistaken. It is wrong in part because if *this* was the problem Wittgenstein would barely have made any inroads into the cognitivist framework he is opposing.

The opposition is not between a private act and a public act, but between a private act and a social practice, because it is only as part of (by virtue of playing a role in) a social practice that words have meaning, that there are concepts to be had.

At one point Wittgenstein notes that disputes do not break out, for example, among mathematicians, as to whether or not a rule has been followed. He says that this is because the rules belong "to the scaffolding from which our language operates (for example, yields descriptions) " (PI §240). Now this can seem relativist – that human agreement decides what is true or false. But he responds:

> What is true or false is what human beings *say*; and it is in their *language* that human beings agree. This is agreement not in opinions, but in a form of life. (PI §241)

> It is not only agreements in definitions, but also (odd as it may sound) agreement in judgements that is required for communication by means of language. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so. — It is one thing to describe methods of measurement, and another to obtain and state results of measurement. But what we call "measuring" is in part determined by a certain constancy in results. (PI §242)

We might think of agreement as something we 'come to', but Wittgenstein's claim is that agreement – in a form of life, in the background acceptance of how the world is – is a prerequisite for judgement or measurement, and for agreement and disagreement in a different sense.[6]

The role of teaching is to take someone and train them to absorb this background, so that they can, on that basis, participate in a practice. As Williams says:

> Standards (of whatever kind) must be embedded within practice, that is, within actual ways of behaving, both verbally and nonverbally, that are regular and sustained over a period of time and are independent of *any* individual's say-so. (Williams 1994, p. 188)

The form of life, or background, thus constitutes a normative ground of a practice. In broad agreement with Williams, Stern notes that the regress of interpretations ends because we are able to grasp a rule without interpretation (PI §201).

> Our explicit beliefs and interpretations are only meaningful against a background of shared practices, which include the skills and customs we have learned—ways of acting that were not acquired as beliefs, even though we may express them in beliefs. (Stern 1995, p. 127)

Traditionally, normativity is thought of as made possible by a split between propositions that are true or false independently of experience and those that are true or false by virtue of their relation to the world. The motivation for this is that if we are going to talk normatively we need to have a principled way of distinguishing talk about the world from talk about the way we talk about the world. The analytic/synthetic distinction is an attempt to satisfy this, tied to the notion of a priori knowledge and necessary truth.

Wittgenstein rejects the traditional approach, but in a way that is significantly different from, for example, Quine. Like Quine, he denies that necessary propositions are truths of a special kind – analytic, true by virtue of meaning. But whereas Quine denies that there are such truths distinct from empirical truths, Wittgenstein denies that necessary propositions are truths at all.

> Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end;—but the end is not certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is

> not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom
> of the language-game. (OC §204)
> If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not *true,* nor yet false.
> (OC §205)

That is, Wittgenstein identifies the mistake of the positivists as being on the one hand to think that necessary propositions are descriptions, and on the other hand to think that they form the basis for normative claims. Instead, Wittgenstein says that what have been called necessary propositions, but which he calls 'grammatical' propositions, are in themselves normative. They express rules for the use of language, and thereby provide the normative basis without which language could not operate. Unlike traditional necessary propositions, grammatical propositions determine the meaning of words; they do not follow from the meaning of words. They are a necessary feature of our use of language because without this normative element meaningful discourse would be impossible. As Glock expresses this point, in effect expanding the previous quote from Williams,

> some uses of sentences must be *normative* rather than descriptive. There
> must be standards of correctness which exclude certain combinations of
> words as nonsensical. A predicate like "bachelor" is meaningful only
> insofar as its application is *incompatible* with that of certain other
> predicates, for example, "married". (Glock 1996, p. 222)

So two points come together: words have meaning by virtue of their role in a practice, and their meaning in the practice enables our practices to be rule-governed. This means that we ought see the rule-following discussion as aimed at rejecting the idea that rules are inexorable and independent of human activities, not at rejecting the idea that human practice is rule-governed.

In this context, it is a mistake to think of grammatical propositions as *types* of propositions on the model of analytic versus synthetic propositions. Instead, they are ways of using propositions. So a given locution can vary between being an empirical description and being a grammatical proposition, depending on its context of use, and can vary between description and rule over time depending on scientific, conceptual, or cultural change.

Take an example of Wittgenstein's. He says, regarding GE Moore's famous proof that idealism is false, that part of what strikes us as wrong about what Moore does

is that asserting, for example, "I know I have two hands", does not play a role in our language games. That is, "I have a hand" is grammatical; it is a *certainty* that is the basis for moves in the game. It is not an empirical proposition that Moore has proven with certainty. *However,* change the context away from the normal, think of someone in hospital following an accident, covered in bandages, *then* the statement does sensibly play a role as an empirical proposition. (OC §23)

Or, take a different sort of example: an acid is a substance that, in solution, turns litmus paper red. This presumably began as a description, reflecting a scientific discovery about acid. It then became a rule, defining 'acid' within scientific discourse. But it then lost this normative role (being replaced by "An acid is a proton donor"), and operates as an empirical proposition true of most but not all acids. Outside science, however, in certain contexts of use, it can still operate as a grammatical proposition. Part of the point is that when a grammatical proposition ceases to play that role, it is because it is abandoned, not because it is falsified.

Yet the question surely arises, what *is* the difference between the pupil and the teacher? This is not just a third-person question (has he got it?), but a question for participants in a practice (have I got it?). I want to offer three levels of answer to this question. The first answer, as can be anticipated, is that it is misguided – asking for a general answer to a question that has only contextualized, situated and fallible answers. Yet more can be said. We can say that the difference is between someone who is drilled (or being drilled) in a practice and someone who can, so to speak, play the game. What counts as being able to play the game? Again we are forced back onto the particular. It depends on the practice, on the range of experience of the participants, on the purpose of the practice on a particular occasion. Once we give up on the idea of an essence of understanding, we seem to give up on the satisfaction of a general answer to such questions. I suggest, however, that we ought say something more, and something more general, about language games.

Robert Brandom claims that what distinguishes us as sapient beings is that we can come to play the game of giving and asking for reasons (a phrase he adopts from Sellars).

> Being rational is … being able to play the game of giving and asking for reasons, which is to engage in a specifically *linguistic* social practice. For one cannot give reasons unless one can make claims. Doing so requires mastery of the normative dimension of inference: a practical grasp of the notion of *right* reasoning, of the distinction between correct and incorrect inference. (Brandom 1994, p. 230)

I think that when Brandom invokes Wittgenstein, at least in *Making it Explicit,* he fails to grasp the role of embodied acting in the structure of our normative practices.[7] Furthermore I think that there are significant problems with the individuation of games here. I do not think it makes sense to see giving and asking for reasons as a language game in and of itself (I do not think it could work as a game); rather, we should say that being able to play a language game is being able to give and ask for reasons in that game.

Nevertheless, Brandom is on to something important, which we might put like this: what makes our practices *practices* is that they are normative, and what distinguishes a trainee or novice from a practitioner is that they make moves in the practice *as* moves in the practice in the light of the norms of the practice. What this in turn brings out is that the rational agent, capable of giving and asking for reasons, is both embodied and social. It is trained on the basis of natural reactions, and in its training it is incorporated into a space of reasons.

There can be no sharp line between novice and practitioner in this regard, and the line we draw will vary across contexts. But being able to give and ask for reasons in ways, and this must be emphasised, that are appropriate to the practice is, I think, a useful way of conceiving of the relation between novice and practitioner. The practitioner is embedded in the practice, and can, so to speak and for example, make measurements in the practice and defend those measurements according to the practice, and can observe measurements and question those measurements, in the practice.

It is worth considering a challenge to this sort of approach. Michael Luntley (2008) has argued that 'training' gives no account of reasoning capacities.

> Talk of training into practices, mastery of techniques, acculturation into forms of life, etc., fudges the hard issues that show that rationalism is the only game in town. (Luntley 2008, p. 696)

Luntley's basic challenge is to ask what the capacities are that provide a pupil with the platform to respond to reasons, and then – in response to the social-practice account found in Williams, Stickney and Brandom (and in the present paper) – what are the capacities that provide a pupil with the platform to become a member of (I, and Williams and Stickney, would say, participant in) a social practice. The idea is that there must be some native rationality always already present in order for a pupil to be brought into the space of reasons.

There is, however, a problem. The model Luntley begins with is Fodor's, but he explicitly rejects the 'full-blooded rationalism of the kind that Fodor has promoted' (Luntley 2008, p. 699). He instead champions a developmental model, but one that

> … endorses the central rationalist thought that what constitutes the platform that enables learning to begin is a prior set of capacities appropriately called 'reasoning capacities'. (Luntley 2008, p. 699)

Luntley says that the rationalist thesis here does not specify what reasoning skills are required in order that brute training inputs can have the effect of providing a capacity to understand explanations, just that it need not involve a language of thought (Luntley 2008, p. 701). However, if he refuses to draw on and defend a language of thought – that is, an innate system of representations and a combinatorial syntax that is realized in the thinker's brain – it's not clear how he has a position that deserves to be called rationalism; it ends up as hand-waving.

Here is the situation. Wittgenstein thinks that rationalism (or call it cognitivism, or intellectualism) is incoherent – and we have seen his arguments to this effect in Section 2. His challenge then is to explicate the bootstrapping of learning and reason without invoking behaviourism. His response is to say that the social context of training provides a stage-setting that incorporates natural reactions in a grammar of practice. As Luntley quite aptly says,

> If we take account of the rich range of activities that can be appealed to in explaining the meaning of a word, we get a much richer notion of grammar. 'Grammar' is now more than merely a linguistic structure, it is a structure of activities. (Luntley 2008, p. 702)

However this, as Luntley fails to grasp, shows that we don't have to be rationalists. Innatism isn't required once we move beyond individualism; but as long as we cling to individualism, we will be grasping in vain for coherent versions of rationalism. It achieves nothing to eschew Fodor and the language of thought, but demand "subjects with the appropriate intellectual wherewithal" (Luntley 2008, p. 704) and think that this is rationalism.

4. Conservatism and Critique

As noted in the Introduction, Wittgenstein's later philosophy can easily appear to espouse quietism. That is, he appears to be advocating both a rejection of critical philosophy, and an uncritical acceptance of tradition.

Here is the problem. First, as I hope the account I've given makes clear, we come to be fully-fledged by being embedded in a practice; being first trained to accept various categories and pathways as natural or necessary. Any challenge to those necessities is meaningless, because they are constitutive necessities of the game or practice. A challenge of this sort involves treating grammatical propositions as empirical propositions, in a game in which they operate as grammatical.

In *On Certainty* Wittgenstein introduces the thought of a pupil who continually interrupts explanations with doubts about the existence of things, the existence of history, and the meaning of words that are the terms in which the explanations are given. Teaching, Wittgenstein says, becomes impossible, because the child has not learnt to ask questions *in the practice* within which the teacher is giving explanations.

> It would be as if someone were looking for some object in a room; he opens a drawer and doesn't see it there; then he closes it again, waits, and opens it once more to see if perhaps it isn't there now, and keeps on like that. He has not learned to look for things. And in the same way this pupil has not learned how to ask questions. He has not learned the game that we are trying to teach him. (OC §315)

Note that the problem is not the asking of questions; it is the asking questions that are not *appropriate in this game.* This, of course, makes sense: at its most general, someone who fails to embed in the basic rules of logic is simply unable to converse.

Yet it highlights the tension to which I'm referring. The approach that steers us away from cognitivism and behaviourism seems to generate a very conservative approach to teaching, learning and membership of a community. As Edwards puts it "at the bottom of our rule-governed behavior is *obedience,* not choice; *blindness,* not whole sight" (1990: 180). Challenges from the developing initiate must be ruled out in order for them to be able to play the game, and (philosophical) doubts by practitioners about the rules of the game are ruled out, just because they are *about* the game. I want to emphasize that this is not just a worry about Wittgenstein. It is a legitimate concern we can have about a range of similar anti-intellectualist and anti-cognitivist approaches – for example Bourdieu, whose notion of 'habitas' borrows much from Wittgenstein's 'grammar' and 'form of life', and Heidegger.

This leads to the second concern. It is not implausible to see much of Wittgenstein's work as an attack, not just on philosophical mistakes, but on philosophy itself. We find regular references to the way philosophers take expressions out of their normal language games and then find them puzzling, generalize from convenient examples, or become wedded to a picture and then try to apply it across the board.

We might ask at this point, why doesn't he leave philosophy alone? He leaves other practices alone (for example, religious practice) so why not philosophy? The answer seems to be that these faults are not just examples of bad philosophy, but examples of what we do (what we cannot avoid doing) when we philosophize: *necessarily* moving from the concrete to the abstract and general, *necessarily* treating grammatical propositions as empirical ones and questioning their legitimacy, *necessarily* pretending to speak from a perspective outside all perspectives. Notice also that while Wittgenstein's concern or irritation targets philosophy – it is, *if* it is actually an attack on philosophy, also in effect an attack on any critical reflection regarding a practice.

I suggest, however, that both these concerns are misplaced. The concern that choice, like justification and explanation, comes to an end, not in a proposition, but in obedience and action, reflects a libertarian notion of the self that is utterly untenable. Such a self, disembodied and purely intellectual, is indeed hostage to the hyperbolic scepticism that arises in the history of philosophy along with the

conceptualization of such a self. However, after Descartes, philosophers such as Kant and Nietzsche showed that the notion of freedom bestowed on such a self is entirely illusory. For them, autonomy *depends* on the constraint provided by reason (Kant), or one's embodied type (Nietzsche). For them, autonomy involves acting and judging *with* and *within* constraint, and judgement can only be made from within a phenomenal perspective – never from a place beyond all perspective. Such a framework is only nihilistic from within a discredited and itself ultimately nihilistic libertarianism. My suggestion is that Wittgenstein complements, and goes some way towards completing, this Kantian/Nietzschean framework.

I drew attention earlier to the way Brandom's use of "the space of reasons" helps articulate the relationship between the novice and the practitioner. When we come to occupy the space of reasons we become able to participate in a normatively governed process, in which moves by participants stand open to demands for justification by other participants, and in which moves set up relations of commitment and obligation. In a particular language game, someone who makes an assertion, say, takes on a range of commitments (particular to the game) that flow from that assertion, and is obliged to defend the assertion and its ramifications. Conversely, the assertor's fellow participants also have responsibilities regarding the assertion. The act imposes on them an obligation to hold the assertor to account.

While there may be a class of fully-fledged participants who bare these commitments and obligations, this is really an idealisation. In fact, the vast majority will be somewhere on the path from novice to expert. Somewhere here is Wittgenstein's schoolboy, asking inappropriate questions; somewhere also is the novice who asks a question which, when heard in the right context provide the impetus for challenging certain grammatical rules of the language game, but which are normally dismissed as misguided. Somewhere also is a recognized participant who asks a challenging question and is, for manifold reasons (of timing, status, and accident) heard as legitimate. None of this is preordained, and the discursive status of a claim is not set in stone. Empiricist claims run up against a Sellars, cognitivism has to negotiate Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty, and so on.

I am thus suggesting that Wittgenstein's attack is not directed at critical discourse, the questioning of claims within a discourse. Rather, Wittgenstein's attack is itself an instance of critical discourse, participating in the agora of the language game, whereby participants make claims and challenge claims. Wittgenstein happens to attack certain styles or habits of thinking that he saw as characteristic in philosophy and as a source of confusion; but he did so by developing his own style of philosophising, not by abandoning philosophy. We do, according to this critique, have to abandon the idea of a conclusive perspective and understanding of our form of life, and instead accept our position as situated within our form of life. But giving up on metaphysics is not the same as giving up on critique.

5. Conclusion

Perhaps, however, my suggestion is mistaken; perhaps Wittgenstein's goal *was* to stop people doing philosophy. But supposing that to be the case, it was a colossal failure, and it is worth thinking why that is so. To start with, in explaining Wittgenstein's critique of bad philosophical approaches an alternative view becomes visible. In fact, what I have been doing is expound an alternative, a 'Wittgensteinian' account of concept formation and normativity. I do not think that this is my failure, for how could I articulate a critique (especially a non-sceptical critique) without more or less explicitly presenting an alternative to the views being criticized?

 So it is hardly surprising that, say, neo-pragmatists take on board the implicit account of the *Investigations,* and aim to develop that. And more generally, it seems strange to dismiss as recalcitrants who missed the point those philosophers who, at least partly under Wittgenstein's influence, exhibit a wariness of metaphysics and 'external' perspectives outside of practice, who search for a non-scientistic naturalized account of normativity, or insist on an emphasis on the phenomenology of practice.

These philosophers are philosophers who have learnt, or think they have learnt, Wittgenstein's lessons. They might be wrong in some cases, and we can't just take it for granted that the lessons were worth learning, but in any case, if Wittgenstein

wanted to call off the game, a lot of people weren't listening, and that's no bad thing8.[1]

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Notes

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1. There are important exceptions. In what follows, I will draw on Williams' landmark paper of 1994. Work by Stern (1995), and Stickney (2005; 2008), is also important. A significant precursor is Cavell (1979) – see esp. Ch. VI.

2. References to Wittgenstein's work will be abbreviated as follows: PI (*Philosophical Investigations*), OC (*On Certainty*), LC (*Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief).*

3. These considerations are taken up in work by MacMillan (1995), Standish (1995), McCarty & McCarty (1995), Peters (1999; 2001), Burbules (2008), and Peters, Burbules, & Smeyers (2010).

4. See, for example, Mandler's work (2008a; 2008b), for recent discussion of concept formation that help fill out an account of the background and process of concept formation in ways that could be wedded to a Wittgensteinian approach.

5. See Goddard (1961) for a nicely worked explication of the process of teaching counting that fits well with the sort of account proposed here.

6. In this context, and with a useful emphasis on the relation between training and agreement, see Stickney (2008).

7.   See Williams (2002) for a critique of *Making it Explicit* along these lines. See also Dromm (2003) for more general discussion.

8.   My thanks to participants in the Expertise, Pedagogy and Practice Workshop, and to two referees for the Journal, for valuable comments on earlier versions of this paper