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The Aesthetic Dimension of Wittgenstein's Later Writings

William Day

When a collection of remarks from Wittgenstein's journals was published in 1977 as *Vermischte Bemerkungen (Culture and Value)*,¹ Georg Henrik von Wright, the editor, explained the nature of the collection this way:

In the manuscript material left by Wittgenstein there are numerous notes which do not belong directly with his philosophical works although they are scattered among the philosophical texts. Some of these notes are autobiographical, some are about the nature of philosophical activity, and some concern subjects of a general sort, such as questions about art or about religion. (CVix)

Readers of von Wright's description of *Culture and Value* who went on to read *Culture and Value* itself came to wonder eventually, of course,

¹Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, rev. ed., ed. G. H. von Wright, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) (Wittgenstein 1998)

W. Day (✉)

Department of Philosophy, Le Moyne College, 1419 Salt Springs Road,
Syracuse, NY 13214, USA
e-mail: daywb@lemoyne.edu

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whether any set of remarks described as “scattered among [Wittgenstein’s] philosophical texts” but “which do not belong directly with his philosophical works” was in fact a null set. (Why would Wittgenstein “scatter” these remarks among his “philosophical texts” unless they were, in fact, part of “his philosophical works”—or, at a minimum, part of his philosophical work?) But I want to take note of a different, if less trenchant, implication of von Wright’s description: these collected remarks can be further delineated, he offers, as “autobiographical” or else “about the nature of philosophical activity” or concerning “subjects of a general sort, such as questions about art or about religion.”

The difficulty of putting this claim into practice appears when one runs up against remarks from *Culture and Value* such as the following:

Scientific questions may interest me, but they never really grip me. Only *conceptual & aesthetic* questions have that effect on me. (CV 91e)

The queer resemblance between a philosophical investigation . . . and one in aesthetics. (E.g. what is bad about this garment, how it should be, etc..) (CV 29g)

Is the first of these notes autobiographical, or is it about the nature of philosophical activity? Is the second note about the nature of philosophical activity, or is it concerned with the way we talk about art? Von Wright may have shared our sense that the answer in each case must be “Both—and more.” He says he rejected the idea of arranging the remarks in *Culture and Value* according to topics treated because it “would probably give an impression of artificiality” (CV ix). But if we can now grant that topical segregation of Wittgenstein’s already segregated remarks from *Culture and Value* would yield something worse than a mere impression of the artificial, what deliberate criss-crossing of autobiography and method and aesthetics, as I attempt here, can promise something better?

The following remarks promise no more than a reorientation, but they are an attempt to elucidate the aesthetic dimension in Wittgenstein’s later thought. That one can find material *relevant* to aesthetics in his later writings (not only in *Culture and Value*) has been recognized for over a half-century. My interest here, however, is not in applying Wittgenstein’s thought to some traditional aesthetic problems, but in reading some of Wittgenstein’s remarks

through the lens of his aesthetic concerns, hoping thereby to gain a better understanding of his philosophical purpose. I hope to show the extent to which meaning and judgment in aesthetics figure in Wittgenstein's later conception of language, particularly in his conception of how philosophy might go about explaining, if not justifying, the ordinary functioning of language.

My remarks fall into three parts. In the first, I draw attention to some biographical and textual considerations that will help us measure the extent to which Wittgenstein's life with music is embedded in his later writings. In the second part, I advance these considerations by outlining the connection among Wittgenstein's discussions of (1) the ideal of philosophical clarity or perspicuity sought in his later writings, (2) our attempts to give clarity to our aesthetic experiences by wording them, and (3) the clarifying experience of the dawning of an aspect, which Wittgenstein pictures as the perception of an internal relation. By then examining, in part three, Wittgenstein's use of "internal relation" from the *Tractatus* to his later writings,² I come to challenge the understanding of Wittgenstein's appeals to grammar as an appeal to something given (e.g., to a set of grammatical rules). While something like this challenge has received increasing notice over the past 20 years,³ I develop that challenge by making clear the lesson that aesthetic considerations bring to one's reading of Wittgenstein's later conception of language. That lesson is, in a sentence,

² I will argue that in the period between the *Tractatus* and the "Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*," Wittgenstein changes his view on internal relations from a logical one to, call it, an aesthetic one.

³ See, for example, Steven Affeldt, "The Ground of Mutuality: Criteria, Judgment, and Intelligibility in Stephen Mulhall and Stanley Cavell," *European Journal of Philosophy* 6:1 (April 1998): 1–31 (Affeldt 1998); Stephen Mulhall, "The Givenness of Grammar: A Reply to Steven Affeldt," in the same issue, 32–44 (Mulhall 1998); Mulhall, "Stanley Cavell's Vision of the Normativity of Language: Grammar, Criteria, and Rules," *Stanley Cavell*, ed. Richard Eldridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 79–106 (Mulhall 2003); Edward Minar, "The Philosophical Significance of Meaning-Blindness," *Seeing Wittgenstein Anew*, ed. William Day and Victor J. Krebs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) (Minar 2010). The debate I see myself joining is thus in part a debate over how to read Stanley Cavell reading Wittgenstein; but that debate was from the first a debate over how Wittgenstein read the unutterable systematicity of human language. In marrying that debate with considerations gleaned from aesthetics and from what one might call the unutterable meaning of music, it will be clear to some that my remarks continue to repay a debt to Cavell, particularly to his early essays on aesthetics collected in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, 1976; updated edition, 2002) (Cavell 1969, 1976).

that Wittgensteinian appeals to grammatical criteria should be understood as modeled by the form of justification found in our conversations about art.

1.1 Music and Understanding Wittgenstein's "Book"

One place to begin to sound the depth of Wittgenstein's concern in his later writings with what he calls at one point "aesthetic matters"⁴ is with a remark of his that links his deep involvement with music to his well-documented fear or conviction that his teaching would fall on deaf ears and before blind eyes. At the time he was at work on the remarks on aspect-seeing, Wittgenstein told his friend Maurice Drury, "It is impossible for me to say in my book one word about all that music has meant in my life. How then can I hope to be understood?"⁵ Of course it is possible to make too much of this remark, but one should not be so impressed by that fact that one overlooks the danger of making too little of it. For its tone of despair, to mention its most obvious feature, asks us to take it seriously, however in the end that is to be done.⁶ I assume that a serious reading will not direct us to fasten on those remarks in Wittgenstein's later writings that

⁴Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), 202h (Wittgenstein 1958b), hereafter cited as *PI* followed by the remark number or, for citations from Part II of the *Investigations*, by page number and a letter indicating the position of the remark on that page—for example, "193a" for the first remark on page 193, etc.

⁵M. O'C. Drury, "Conversations with Wittgenstein," in Rhees, ed., *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 160 (Drury 1984).

⁶Joachim Schulte quotes Wittgenstein's remark to Drury in the "Introduction" to his *Wittgenstein: An Introduction*, trans. William H. Brenner and John F. Holley (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 14 (Schulte 1992), placing it at the beginning of a section titled "Personality." Not surprisingly, given that placement, the immediate lesson Schulte draws from it is purely biographical: music was an "important part in his life" and "a determining factor in the way Wittgenstein interacted with many of his friends and acquaintances" (*ibid.*). It is true that Wittgenstein's remark, as remembered by Drury, could be read as saying that his life with music is important (only) to understanding *him*. But if that is what one takes it to say, then one must account for the fact (an implication of this particular voicing of despair) that Wittgenstein would care to place the singular hope of his being understood on what is, by most accounts, a work of philosophy.

allude to an experience of music. For insofar as he does speak to his life with music in these writings, it is not clear how we could understand there being a *difficulty* in his speaking to it. Wittgenstein's remark to Drury would seem to announce: Nothing of what I write is untouched by the fact that my life has been, among all else, a life with music. Should we understand this to mean that *every* remark in the *Investigations* speaks—or rather fails completely in each instance to speak—somehow to a life with music? It seems we could come to believe that nothing of the book breaks faith with that experience.

How should we characterize that experience? Consider the following, representative part of the public record of Wittgenstein's life with music. He learned to play clarinet when he was in his 30s, and thereafter played on occasion informally with others. We are told that he took great care over the exact manner of performance, but whether his concern was unusual or straightforwardly musicianly is not clear. He was fond of the music of Brahms and Josef Labor, both of whom had been personal friends of his family when he was growing up. He had little interest in or patience for the music of modern composers—which should be understood to include Mahler no less than Schoenberg; but on at least one occasion he showed an interest, or more a curiosity, in jazz. He was by all accounts an excellent whistler: he would whistle Schubert songs while his friend David Pinsent, to whose memory Wittgenstein dedicated the *Tractatus*, accompanied him on the piano. He grew up in a family that had a wealth of musical talent. His mother was an outstanding sight reader; his brother Paul was a concert pianist; and his brother Hans was composing music when he was 4 years old, the age at which Wittgenstein, we are told, began to talk.⁷

While these particulars and anecdotes are intriguing, and despite a continuing fascination with their cultural background—with *fin de siècle* Vienna and the breaking apart of empires—what we have here is not an *exceptional* life with music, a life with music unlike any other. (What would the public record of such a life look like? Perhaps it

⁷ For facts cited in this paragraph, see Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 8, 11–14, 78, 213, 240 (Monk 1990); Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 175–76 (Janik and Toulmin 1973).

would look like Mozart's; perhaps like Helen Keller's: "I am blind—yet I see; I am deaf—yet I hear.") Despite its melodramatic expression, or say its transcendental claim, its gesture in the direction of all that music has meant in his life, Wittgenstein's remark is not best taken to be singling out his experience with music as opposed to, say, mine, my deeply felt but unexceptional life with music. Yet neither is his an ordinary life with music. We cannot imagine Wittgenstein's particular despair as belonging to just anyone.

I said above that taking Wittgenstein's remark seriously will not direct us to turn single-mindedly to his remarks on music. But it would be equally unwise to overlook the several remarks in the *Investigations* that do draw connections to music. I count over 30 such remarks in its 232 pages. And there are dozens of others in the Nachlass from this period when Wittgenstein was at work on what he described to Drury only as "my book." Indeed, as one follows the suggestion that a life with music informs the later writings, one can be struck by the often pivotal locations of those remarks in the *Investigations* that speak to music. They belong to paths of thought that include further remarks about the sense in which we can and cannot describe sounds (*PI* §78) and smells (*PI* §610), what pictures tell us (*PI* §523), what it means to understand a picture or a drawing (*PI* §526), how we lead others to comprehend a poem (*PI* §533), what goes on in reading a poem with and without feeling (*PI* 214h), and, of course, what it means that we can see and hear things in a particular way (*PI* II. xi *passim*) or in a particular sense (*PI* §534) or with a particular phrasing (*PI* 202k). By now, I hope, the wonder is not whether we can take Wittgenstein's remark to Drury seriously, but whether we can account for what I believe is a not uncommon experience in reading the *Investigations*: the sense that one is *discovering* its aesthetic import, as if the remarks about music and pictures and poetry came upon one by surprise, as if the presence of these remarks had always been missed.⁸ This experience is no

⁸ I find this experience, and the argument of this paper generally, not incompatible with Norton Batkin's observations about the "seeing-as" remarks in *PI* II.xi, that they "are not in the first place about matters of aesthetics" and that "if we find significance for aesthetics in Wittgenstein's remarks in *PI* II.xi, we find it by analogy." See Norton Batkin, "Aesthetic Analogies," *Seeing Wittgenstein Anew*, 23, 25 (Batkin 2010).

doubt tied to another which one can have in reading Wittgenstein's "Lectures on Aesthetics,"⁹ namely the sense that much of what is said there is only tangentially related to what we tend to call aesthetics, so that one forgets that one is reading lectures on aesthetics.¹⁰ These complementary possibilities of forgetting suggest to me the difficulty in mastering the extent to which Wittgenstein's work treats the aesthetical, as it treats the ethical,¹¹ not as a separate discipline within philosophy but as somehow integral to the task of thinking philosophically—or as Wittgenstein prefers to say, perspicuously (*PI* §122). To take Wittgenstein's remark to Drury seriously now asks that one bethinks oneself how a life with music—a deeply felt if unexceptional life with music—figures in the pursuit of philosophical perspicuity.

1.2 Perspicuous Representation, Aesthetic Descriptions, and Aspect-Seeing

To bring out this connection between the aesthetical and the philosophically perspicuous, (1) I will first say a word about Wittgenstein's characterization of his method as one of perspicuous representation. (2) I will then describe how the philosophical task of perspicuous representation relates to the kinds of critical descriptions called for by experiences of music. Lastly, (3) I will compare these to Wittgenstein's description of the dawning of an aspect as the perception of an internal relation.

⁹ Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), hereafter cited as *LC* (Wittgenstein 1972).

¹⁰ One of Wittgenstein's first remarks, for example, is that one learns which words in a foreign tribe correspond to "good" or "fine" by looking for food or toys (*LC* 2).

¹¹ See Stanley Cavell, "Declining Decline: Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture," in *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque, N.M.: Living Batch Press, 1989), 40 (Cavell 1989).

Philosophical Clarity and Perspicuous Representation

In the remark where Wittgenstein emphasizes the importance to his method of a perspicuous representation (*PI* §122), he explains that such an account “produces just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connections’”. Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate cases*.” What kind of understanding is Wittgenstein describing here? We come to know through the course of reading the *Investigations* what he means by “finding and inventing *intermediate cases*” (*Zwischengliedern*, “connecting links”): they are instances of language use (of language-games) summoned as “*objects of comparison* which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language” (*PI* §130) at moments of philosophical darkness, or when one is most in danger of succumbing to one or another form of philosophical error. Where Wittgenstein *finds* an intermediate link, it may counter a tendency to view the occasions of use of a particular word unvaryingly—the tendency, for example, to imagine that “I know . . .” always implies being able to say or describe what one knows (cf. *PI* §78). Elsewhere Wittgenstein will *invent* an intermediate link, not so much between existing occasions of use as between existing human or even biological forms of life, say between human and animal, to counter the tendency to view certain words or concepts as fundamental (cf. *PI* 230b). Thus Wittgenstein asks his readers on occasion to imagine a language use as natural at some time in our primitive past, or for creatures differing from us in some important respect, or natural to us were certain facts about us somehow different. The builders in *PI* §2 are introduced in this way;¹² and Wittgenstein’s conceptual investigation of the aspect-blind is another instance of such an invented intermediate case.¹³ Wittgenstein calls the

¹² *PI* §2: “That philosophical concept of meaning [i.e., the one Wittgenstein sees pictured in the quotation from Augustine that opens the *Investigations*] . . . is the idea of a language more primitive than ours. Let us imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right.”

¹³ *PI* 213f: “The question now arises: Could there be human beings lacking in the capacity to see something *as something*—and what would that be like? What sort of consequences would it have?—Would this defect be comparable to color-blindness or to not having absolute pitch?—We will call it ‘aspect-blindness’—and will next consider what might be meant by this.”

making of *these* intermediate cases “the construction of fictional concepts” (*CV* 85a) and “inventing fictitious natural history” (*PI* 230a).

It is not so obvious how laying before us these findings and inventions will produce “just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connections’.” For saying that an understanding consists in seeing connections does not straightforwardly exclude very much of anything we understand by “understanding.” Yet Wittgenstein asserts that a perspicuous representation, the concept of which “is of fundamental significance for us,” has the effect of producing “just that understanding.” It will help, in unpacking this claim, to turn to the original context of the remark that became *PI* §122, since there Wittgenstein specifies at least one sort of understanding he means to exclude.

The remark on perspicuous representation dates from the early 1930s and concludes 10 pages of consecutive commentary on Frazer's *The Golden Bough*.¹⁴ Wittgenstein's aim in that commentary is to distinguish his new method of responding to philosophical puzzles from what he finds objectionable in Frazer's enterprise of explaining magical and religious practices by seeking to establish their historical origins. Wittgenstein writes,

The historical explanation, the explanation as an hypothesis of development, is only *one* way of assembling the data—of their synopsis. It is just as possible to see the data in their relation to one another and to embrace them in a general picture without putting it in the form of an hypothesis about temporal development....

“And so the chorus points to a secret law” one feels like saying to Frazer's collection of facts. I *can* represent this law, this idea, by means of an evolutionary hypothesis, ... but also by means of the arrangement of its factual content alone, in a ‘perspicuous’ representation.

There follows in reverse order two short paragraphs that constitute the last two-thirds of *PI* §122:¹⁵

The concept of a perspicuous representation is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things. . . .

¹⁴ Wittgenstein, “Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*,” in *Philosophical Occasions: 1912–1951*, ed. James Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1993), 115–55, hereafter cited as *PO* (Wittgenstein 1993).

¹⁵ Here I substitute Anscombe's more familiar translation in *PI* for Beversluis's translation in *PO* wherever the German in the two versions is identical, so as to bring out that identity.

This perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connections.’ Hence the importance of finding *intermediate cases*.

And the remarks on Frazer conclude,

But an hypothetical connecting link should in this case do nothing but direct the attention to the similarity, the relatedness, of the *facts*. As one might illustrate an internal relation of a circle to an ellipse by gradually converting an ellipse into a circle; *but not in order to assert that a certain ellipse actually, historically, had originated from a circle* (evolutionary hypothesis), but only in order to sharpen our eye for a formal connection. (PO 132–33; Wittgenstein’s emphasis throughout)

The goal of a perspicuous representation is thus distinguished from an understanding of “the facts” (e.g., concerning ritual practices) which proposes a hypothesis to *explain* their interconnectedness (e.g., that these ritual practices are, as they are for Frazer, a superstitious attempt to do what greater experience has taught us to do by means of full-fledged scientific inquiry).¹⁶ For Wittgenstein, *seeing* the connections among the facts is the goal: philosophical perspicuity requires not that you find the causal connections of the facts collected and set down, but that you see how the facts connect to you, or sit with you, how your response to them is telling of you. Philosophical perspicuity takes the form not of a demonstration, something on which one can build, but of a way of looking, something which must itself be built up (that is, practiced, gone over, repeatedly reconstructed).

But there is something curiously unguarded in the younger Wittgenstein’s claim—repeated in *PI* §122—that a perspicuous representation “produces”¹⁷ that keen seeing of connections that characterizes

¹⁶ The thought that a philosophical inquiry is not a scientific (empirical) one, that the urge to provide an explanation must give way to the task of description, and that “description” here means a laying out or arrangement of what we already know, finds its most concentrated expression in the *Investigations* at §109.

¹⁷ Wittgenstein’s “*vermittelt*” is perhaps not as strong as Anscombe’s “produces” (“mediates” seems closer); but neither is it hedged (“*vermittelt etwa das Verständnis*” or something similar).

philosophical understanding. For *must* it produce this in everyone? Couldn't someone fail to see? The unguardedness is further apparent in this earlier version where Wittgenstein calls what one sees an "internal relation" (as between ellipse and circle). An internal relation—whether this describes a relation between pictures¹⁸ or among the structures of propositions (*TLP* 5.131, 5.2)—is something that the early Wittgenstein insists can be shown but not said (*TLP* 4.122). So one question of interpretation, in assessing Wittgenstein's remarks on Frazer, is whether he thinks that my seeing an ellipse changing into a circle means that I *must* be on the way to seeing their "internal relation" ("sharpen our eye for a formal connection"). And a related question, in considering the method of the *Investigations*, is whether Wittgenstein thinks that my seeing, for example, a list illustrating the multiplicity of things we do with words (*PI* §23) or seeing two quite different schema for reading a table (*PI* §86) entails that I be on the way to "seeing the connections" among our words. This second question is particularly pressing, for what I see there in the list or schema (*if* I see it) is that these connections among our words are all that connects—that is, that what holds language together is not to be gained by some philosophical analogue to Frazer's hypothesizing.

Critical Descriptions and the Experience of Music

The same distinction just outlined—between a knowing whose goal is seeing the connections and a knowing that proposes an historical or causal explanation of the connections—is central to Wittgenstein's descriptions of how we convey our experiences of music. Here the relevant remarks appear in Wittgenstein's various discussions of what it is to understand music and what it is to *explain* to someone what one understands in understanding a musical passage. Let me summarize the four

¹⁸ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1961), 4.014 (Wittgenstein 1961), hereafter cited as *TLP* followed by the proposition number.

lessons that I draw from these passages:¹⁹ (1) We explain what we understand in understanding a musical passage by coming up with certain comparisons or associations (connections). We might make a gesture to express what we hear, or we might say “These two [symphonic] ideas stand to each other not as blood relations, but as man & wife” (*CV* 39c). (2) Insofar as these comparisons can be justified (*PI* §527), it is not a justification which the other person *must* accept; we cannot give conclusive reasons (propose a causal connection) for our making them, for example by noting something the composer said about what the passage is supposed to represent (*CV* 79c). (3) The comparisons that I come up with in describing a musical passage can be of interest to *me* no less than to someone else (*LC* 32). I may even begin with the feeling that I “don’t know my way about” with the music (cf. *PI* §123) but then, when the association occurs to me, say: Now I understand (*LC* 37).²⁰ (4) Nevertheless, when I offer comparisons as a way of explaining what I understand in understanding a musical passage, I am not claiming that *they* are what I understand, as if forming them were the criterion of that understanding.²¹ And thus my intention in offering the associations is not to put these associations in the other person’s head. For in that case it would do just as well for her to acquire the associations independent of hearing this stretch of music (*LC* 34, 36).²²

¹⁹ It is not part of my concern whether the following remarks fail to discriminate between descriptions of music and descriptions of painting or dance or architecture. It may matter in a way that goes beyond what I have written here—indeed, I suspect it does matter—that it was a life with music and not, for example, a life with architecture or poetry that Wittgenstein despaired his being unable to say anything about. But whether, if it matters further, we should attribute this to music’s abstractness or purity or directness, is not my immediate concern to say. Nor am I interested in criticizing Wittgenstein for his fairly scanty enumeration of what can be said to convey an understanding of a musical passage. It is enough for my purpose that the examples he does give are felt as accurate, recognizable as expressive of a life with music.

²⁰ See also Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 167, hereafter cited as *BB* (Wittgenstein 1958a).

²¹ Cf. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. Rush Rhees, trans. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974; reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), III:37 (p. 79) (Wittgenstein 1974).

²² Wittgenstein adds that producing associations *could* be our interest in art (his example is poetry) were we or our culture different (*LC* 34). What this suggests about the nature of art, I take it, is that a question perpetually worth asking is whether we or our culture are on the way to becoming,

My intention is rather to get her to hear what I hear. And since I know too well that the comparisons I offer only hint at this (cf. *PI* 183b), I might describe my intention as one of getting her to hear what I hear *before* the connection is made (cf. *PI* §§125–6). Understanding a musical passage is not a matter of “having” (suffering) associations (connections); understanding music is following it. (Admittedly, however, I will look to what she says and does as the music is playing, or afterwards—and in general, to what I know of her—if asked to say whether I think she understands a musical passage.)

You may already see how understanding music bears on Wittgenstein's proposal that the philosophical project is one of seeing connections. Grant that the musical association I give voice to in response to a musical passage is not one I simply choose on a whim, but that it is forced on me, or from me (cf. *PI* 178h, 215a). Do we feel inclined here, as with the ellipse and the circle, to say that there is an “internal relation” between this musical passage and my description of it? I think that we are less inclined to speak of an internal relation here, and that our disinclination is not unrelated to the fact that some other person may well fail to acknowledge this relation, may well fail to understand me. The positivist inheritors of the *Tractatus* would say simply that this is because my description of the musical passage—e.g., “Don't you see, this is as if a conclusion were being drawn” (*PI* §527; cf. *PI* 182e)—is nonsense. Yet of music Wittgenstein expresses the conviction, as he does of the self-affirmed nonsense of the *Tractatus*, that it can teach us something as well as give us pleasure (*CV* 42d; *TLP* Preface). And he is willing to speak of something in discussions of aesthetic associations as “decisive” (*PI* 219b). What should we make of the fact (if it is one) that we are less inclined here to speak of an internal relation?

The Case of the Dawning of an Aspect

Wittgenstein emphasizes a structure of “seeing an internal relation” at a crucial juncture in the discussion of aspect-seeing in Part II of the *Investigations*. His central task over the first half of this discussion is to

or have already become, different in just this sense. And I take it that this change would be felt by some (including Wittgenstein) to be an irredeemable loss.

characterize the odd mix of features in our expressions of the dawning of an aspect, the sense that seeing an aspect is “a case of both seeing and thinking” or “an amalgam of the two” (*PI* 197h). After Wittgenstein rejects the suggestion that it just *is* an amalgam (*PI* 211e), he offers the following:

The colour of the visual impression corresponds to the colour of the object (this blotting paper looks pink to me, and is pink)—the shape of the visual impression to the shape of the object (it looks rectangular to me, and is rectangular)—but what I perceive in the dawning of an aspect is not a property of the object, but an internal relation between it and other objects. (*PI* 212a)

The internal relation among the relevant objects in this context is not something prepared for us, as by a perspicuous representation or setting out. The internal relation simply dawns in the seeing. Wittgenstein says the internal relation *is* “what I perceive.”

Before considering the implications of this for our understanding both of aspect-seeing and of philosophical perspicuity, I note that the pertinence of Wittgenstein’s discussion of aspect-seeing to a consideration of his philosophical method makes itself felt in two distinct ways. First, Wittgenstein approaches the topic of aspect-seeing with the same goal of clarification that he claimed as central to our understanding of (Frazer’s facts about) ritual practices. Immediately after Wittgenstein introduces the concept of “noticing an aspect” in this section of the *Investigations*, he draws the distinction between an interest in its causes (an interest which he ascribes to psychologists) and “our” interest in “the concept and its place among the concepts of experience” (*PI* 193d–e). Here again, his interest is in discovering conceptual connections the seeing of which achieves a clearing of the philosophical fog. But further—coming to the second point of pertinence—in this instance the concept of aspect-seeing identifies an experience which is *itself* a seeing of connections. To study its connections to other concepts is thus to study the conceptual connections of the concept of seeing connections, the concept of understanding that Wittgenstein sets out to convey in his later writing. This affinity between subject and method suggests strongly that aspect-seeing is more than a mere figure for the experience of sudden philosophical understanding.

Wittgenstein's discussion of aspect-seeing should itself be seen as a meditation on the possibility and conditions of his philosophical procedure.²³

1.3 Aspect-Seeing and Seeing an Internal Relation

Let us return to Wittgenstein's saying that when I see an aspect dawn what I perceive is an internal relation. An internal relation between what? In an aspect-dawning experience it will be the relation between that which is before me—say, Jastrow's duck-rabbit—and something *not* (necessarily) before me—say, rabbits, with their rabbit ears, rabbit noses, rabbit eyes, etc. If I have been seeing the duck-rabbit simply as the picture of a duck, my experience in the dawning of an aspect is that of suddenly seeing the one (rabbits) in the other (the duck-rabbit).²⁴ When we compare this experience to that of seeing the internal relation or formal connection that Wittgenstein is describing in his remarks on Frazer, or in the gradual conversion of an ellipse into a circle, it seems that here in the dawning of an aspect more is dependent on me, as it were. One could say that with aspect-dawning experiences the relation is more obviously something that I bring to the table (since at least one of the "objects" is). Still, that I perceive a relation need not be telling of me; my interest in it need not entail the sense that it is *mine*, as we found it did with the musical associations I form. That I perceive a relation does not

²³ For an elaboration and defense of the idea that "the aspect-seeing remarks in the *Investigations* offer . . . both an extended allegory of how to appropriate or receive the text of the *Investigations*, and a detailed working-out of the vicissitudes that, invariably or constitutionally, one finds along the way," see Victor J. Krebs and my "Introduction: Seeing Aspects in Wittgenstein," in *Seeing Wittgenstein Anew*, 4–11 (Day and Krebs 2010) (from which the passage just quoted is taken), and (in the same volume) my "Wanting to Say Something: Aspect-Blindness and Language," 220–24 (Day 2010).

²⁴ Richard Wollheim famously draws a distinction between seeing-as (seeing one object as a different object) and seeing-in (seeing what is pictured in a picture, seeing what it represents); see Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects: An Introduction to Aesthetics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) (Wollheim 1968). In speaking of seeing rabbits (a rabbit) "in" the duck-rabbit I am not trying to muddy Wollheim's distinction but, rather, to bring out that Wittgenstein's description of aspect-dawning as the perception of an internal relation is agnostic about this distinction.

seem particularly telling, for example, with the switch of aspects of the duck-rabbit, at least not once I become familiar with such drawings. It may be more telling were I *unable* to make it switch where you and most others could. And it may be more telling where the object of perception is more ambiguous (a cloud, a Rorschach test), as it would be telling, and troubling, were I to discover that I could no longer see *any* figures in clouds, the adroitness of childhood possibly abandoning me, here as elsewhere.

But now, are we inclined, as Wittgenstein would seem to be, to call what we perceive in aspect-dawning experiences an “internal relation?”

I think that we are most inclined to say this when we are thinking of gestalt-figures like Jastrow’s duck-rabbit. And our inclination here seems to be strengthened by the peculiar unambiguity of these ambiguous figures, the feature of there being, one wants to say, exactly two ways of seeing them. Even when we find that there are multiple ways of seeing a figure, as Wittgenstein seems to discover between his remark about the schematic cube pictured at *TLP* 5.5423 (where he imagines only two ways of seeing it) and his remark about the similar rectangular prism pictured at *PI* 193f (where the list of “several” ways of seeing it could go on indefinitely), we are still inclined to say with the earlier Wittgenstein, “we really see two [three, four, . . .] different *facts*” (my emphasis). The picture anticipates, or provides for, the very possibilities we see. It is this feature of self-presentation or transparency that such figures, despite their ambiguity, share with unambiguous pictures (whether “picture objects”—such as the “picture-face” at *PI* 194c—or full-fledged pictures). More importantly, it is this aspect of our life with pictures which makes that life appear to offer the perfect solution to the problem of meaning, in the guise of the Tractarian picture theory. What seems given in such figures is the very method by which we are to read them—and so, too, the significance that they carry.

But when Wittgenstein turns to the example of a child seeing a chest as a house (*PI* 206e–g),²⁵ or of a musical theme played at successively slower tempos until the listener exclaims “Now at last it’s a [march, dance, . . .]”

²⁵ “And if you knew how to play this game, and, given a particular situation, you exclaimed with special expression ‘Now it’s a house!’—you would be giving expression to the dawning of an aspect.”

(*PI* 206i),²⁶ I think we are less inclined to say that these possible relations are internal to those objects. And when he introduces related experiences, such as my hearing the plaint in a plaintive melody (*PI* 209f) or the seriousness of a tune (*PI* 210b), and then moves on to consider “experiencing the meaning of a word” (*PI* 210c, 214d and following) or our “attachment” to our words which we could imagine other human beings lacking (*PI* 218g), we are not very far from descriptions of our understanding of a musical passage. And yet Wittgenstein nowhere says that musical descriptions express the perception of an internal relation. So what about these just-mentioned aspect-dawning experiences?

It is striking that here we become ambivalent, that we are unlikely to see how to read “internal relation” into every one of these quite diverse aspect-dawning experiences. But it is also striking that our ambivalence is produced by the very examples Wittgenstein lays before us. And that, for me, argues against a *strong* reading of his use of “internal relation” in describing aspect-dawning experiences at *PI* 212a. Call it rather a figure, or a trope, for those experiences. By identifying Wittgenstein's use of “internal relation” here as a figure of speech, I am denying that it is meant to denote a connection that is established or grounded by anything beyond the experience of connection itself—established or grounded, for example, by what Stephen Mulhall calls “conceptual or grammatical structures.”²⁷ Said otherwise: Although Wittgenstein's use of “internal relation,” from the *Tractatus* on, may have the appearance of describing the structuredness of language (whether

²⁶ “In the end I say ‘*Now* it's right’, or ‘*Now* at last it's a march’, ‘*Now* at last it's a dance’. –The same tone of voice expresses the dawning of an aspect.”

²⁷ Stephen Mulhall, *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects* (London: Routledge, 1990), 131 (Mulhall 1990). The entire sentence runs: “In thus perceiving the applicability of a certain system of concepts, one perceives a relation between the object and those objects to which that set of concepts is also applicable; and since this relation has been established via conceptual or grammatical structures, it can validly be called an internal relation— one pertaining to the essence or identity of the relata.”

In his later exchange with Steven Affeldt, Mulhall continues to describe himself as “committed to the idea that rules and their applications are internally related”; see Mulhall 1998, 39. Mulhall's later discussions of aspect-seeing can be read as moderating this position somewhat; see, for example, Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), especially 179–82 (Mulhall 2001).

inflected as logic or as grammar), it is, in fact, no more than standing in for or occupying the place of its mystery.

To underwrite this claim, I begin by noting that “internal relation” appears nowhere else in the *Investigations*, and that Wittgenstein nowhere tries to justify this singular invocation of the term despite its frequent, significant, and ultimately mysterious appearances in the *Tractatus*.²⁸ The sense that Wittgenstein gives to “internal relation” in the *Tractatus* is expressed at *TLP* 4.123:²⁹

A property is internal if it is unthinkable that its object should not possess it. (This shade of blue and that one stand, eo ipso, in the internal relation of lighter to darker. It is unthinkable that *these* two objects should not stand in this relation.)

As is thematic throughout Wittgenstein’s early text, the nature of the unthinkable is that it is unsayable: “It would be just as nonsensical to assert that a proposition had a formal property [that a pair of propositions had an internal relation] as to deny it” (*TLP* 4.124). Instead, an internal relation between possible states of affairs “expresses itself” through an internal relation between the representing propositions (*TLP* 4.125), and *their* internal relation likewise “expresses itself,” is not something *we* can express, not something our words can say (*TLP* 4.121); it needs to be seen.

For the early Wittgenstein, then, the Tractarian remarks including the phrase “internal relation” are to be understood according to that interpretive stance that readers of the *Tractatus* are asked to take toward the book as a whole: they are to be surmounted, transcended, finally done without

²⁸ See *TLP* 4.014, 4.122–4.125, 5.131, 5.2–5.232.

²⁹ This apparent sense of “internal relation” is in line with that which generates the turn-of-the-last-century debate between idealists and their opponents over the existence and extent of internal relations. For an overview of the positions and arguments in this debate, see Richard Rorty, “Relations, Internal and External,” *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 7:125–33 (Rorty 1967). For a summary of how a more recent debate over internal relations plays out in conflicting interpretations of the *Tractatus*, see Marie McGinn, “Wittgenstein and Internal Relations,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 18, no. 4 (2010): 495–509 (McGinn 2010).

(*TLP* 6.54; Emiliani 2003; Koeth 2003; Krebs 2001; Mounce 2003; Proops 2001; Read and Deans 2003; Vilhauer 2003).³⁰ It is thus inexplicable why readers of Wittgenstein not only persist in reading the conventional philosopher's sense of "internal relation" into Wittgenstein's use of the term in the *Tractatus* but adopt that expression and that sense in explicating the meaning of "grammar" in the *Investigations*—despite, as I say, the all but complete nonappearance of the term "internal relation" in that work.³¹ Thus we seem to have two interpretive options in reading this phrase in the *Investigations*: either "internal relation" now says something, or it still says nothing. We also have two, parallel interpretive options in understanding Wittgenstein's elucidative purpose in adopting this phrase in describing the dawning of an aspect: either he is saying whatever one now imagines "internal relation" says—something that Stephen Mulhall, P. M. S. Hacker, and others imagine Wittgenstein's notion of "grammar" says—or he is still saying something that "internal relation" cannot say—which is why, since this is the option I opt for, I speak of its being used as a figure or trope. Which option one adopts will depend ultimately on what one takes the perception of an internal relation in the dawning of an aspect to turn on: something underlying the fact of human commonality (as Mulhall and Hacker would say), or (as I say) something suggestive of the provisionalness of human commonality.

Let me follow Mulhall's and Hacker's reading of Wittgenstein as far as I can. Imagine that Wittgenstein in *PI* 212a is using "internal relation"

³⁰ The distinction between the something that Wittgenstein says with the words of the *Tractatus* and the nothing that is said by those words was proposed in the late 80s by Cora Diamond and James Conant and has been developed by others since. For a sampling of this so-called "resolute" reading of Wittgenstein's early work, see Conant's "Throwing Away the Top of the Ladder," *The Yale Review* 79 (Spring 1990): 338–64 (Conant 1990); *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) (Crary and Read 2000); articles by Victor J. Krebs and Ian Proops in *European Journal of Philosophy* 9:3 (December 2001); articles by John Koethe, Alberto Emiliani, and Ben Vilhauer (with replies by Rupert Read & Rob Deans and by H. O. Mounce) in *Philosophical Investigations* 26:3 (July 2003); and McGinn 2010.

³¹ P. M. S. Hacker is the most influential representative of this practice. See his *Insight and Illusion: Themes in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 118–19, 203, 249–50, 269, 334 (Hacker 1986). Mulhall, for whom Hacker served as both supervisor and example (Mulhall 1990, 5), follows this practice.

(as what one “sees” in the dawning of an aspect) somehow literally, or as shorthand for something like “logical connection” or “grammatical connection.” And consider a relatively unambiguous case in which one might be inclined to speak of an internal relation, or at any rate of a close similarity or likeness,³² between two objects—for instance, the relation between ellipse and circle. What leads one to speak of an internal relation between the ellipse and the circle? One might say any number of things: that ellipses and circles are both round (or anyway, curved); that they are both conic sections, where the circle is “the limiting case” of a series of ellipses that we imagine cut from a single cone; that they have similar equations, where the equation for a circle is again a sort of limiting or simplified version of the equation for an ellipse; that both circles and ellipses work particularly well for the shape of the lip of a coffee cup, though ellipsoidal cups become problematic the more the lip of the cup is, as we say, flattened; and that they look a lot alike. If I now proceed to remind us of the various occasions on which we say that something is “internal” (a clock, a combustion engine, evidence, an exile, friction, a rhyme, revenue, . . .) and conclude that all of these and similar things we say and do are what we go on in calling the relation between circles and ellipses (somehow “literally”) an internal relation, I would be appealing to what we call grammatical remarks. And I might explain my appeal by noting that Wittgenstein says, “*Essence* is expressed by grammar” and “Grammar tells what kind of object anything is” (*PI* §§371, 373). Is such an appeal successful in determining this relation between ellipse and circle once and for all? *In what sense* do we go on what we say and do in seeing a relation or connection between things?

To raise this last question is not to refuse to acknowledge that one among the things we say and do is call some of the things we see by the

³² Garth Hallett suggests that “Likeness between two things (as opposed, say, to their spatial proximity) is a paradigm example [of an internal relation]”; see *A Companion to Wittgenstein’s ‘Philosophical Investigations’* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), 698 (Hallett 1977). And he reminds us that “the example W. used to illustrate ‘noting an aspect’ was: ‘I see the likeness between these two faces’” (*ibid.*; cf. *PI* 193a). But I question whether the later Wittgenstein intends the concept of “likeness” to give “internal relation” the sort of definitional precision that Hallett’s talk of a paradigm example suggests. (It is telling of Hallett’s view that he renders “*Ich sehe eine Ähnlichkeit*” as “I see the likeness,” not “I see a likeness.”)

same name (chairs, for example, or rabbits). I am not denying that, to put it formulaically, perceptual connections are linguistic connections. My seeing two chairs before me and my calling them both chairs (though they are not one and the same, nor need they be two alike), my hearing singing on two different occasions and my saying of each that it is singing I hear (though the songs, the singers, . . . are different) are, I want to say, facts or achievements on the same level. The thought that in speaking I give form to a world that I might have imagined myself merely to be describing is one whose impact has been registered by philosophers as diverse as Kant (in the premise of his transcendental standpoint) and Nietzsche (in the surmise that truths are illusions whose illusoriness we have forgotten, proffered in the early essay “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense”).³³ What I am denying is that the appeal to grammar is meant to, or can, remove the natural anxiety or unease one may feel when philosophizing about the role of judgment in our everyday use of language—for example, in our attribution of a relation or connection between things. If the appeal to grammar could remove that unease, then Wittgenstein’s perspicuous representation of our grammar really would—indeed *must*—produce understanding, show that the connecting links (e.g., between the question “Can I know another’s pain?” and the ways we ordinarily respond, or fail to respond, to another’s pain) are indubitable requirements of meaningful speech and thought. But if *establishing* connecting links is not a feature of our grammar—as the later Wittgenstein comes to believe it is not—then a perspicuous representation of that grammar cannot establish them either, and thus may well fail to produce understanding, despite its success at conveying language’s evident systematicity and normativity. For what Wittgenstein thinks we need to understand is not, simply and finally, the systematicity and normativity of language. What requires understanding is what one might call the musicality of grammar: the recognition that grammatical connections, *despite* their systematicity and normativity, are formed and held together by nothing more than our continuing individual judgments, the individual occasions of our

³³ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” in Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, ed., *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 139–53 (Nietzsche 1999).

engagement with language—just as, despite the disarming delights of music’s systematic structures, nothing forms and holds together, nothing makes understandable, this musical passage if we do not or cannot make the connections in the particular occasions of our hearing it.³⁴

Wittgenstein’s despair over the impossibility of saying one word about all that music has meant in his life reflects, among other things we cannot hope to fathom, his sense that his book cannot do justice to this lesson, essentially *the* lesson of aesthetic judgments—at least for someone who, like Wittgenstein, finds that an aesthetic impression can be indescribable (*LC* 37) and yet produce conviction, and so model that everything and nothing which stands behind whatever sense one’s words can convey. Wittgenstein wrote, in the same year in which he articulated his method as one of perspicuous representation: “The inexpressible (what I find enigmatic & cannot express) perhaps provides the background, against which whatever I was able to express acquires meaning” (*CV* 23g). These words can seem to, and in a sense do, answer Wittgenstein’s question to Drury (“How then can I hope to be understood?”). But despair over a failure to do justice to an understanding is not despair over a failure to express anything at all. In his remark to Drury, Wittgenstein’s despair follows from an awareness that the words needed to convey philosophical understanding do not function within a calculus.³⁵ And it expresses the awareness that philosophical clarity arrives not like the solution to a jigsaw puzzle—which, no matter how much its construction demands of me, everyone immediately recognizes *is* the solution—but like the wording of an aesthetic perception, with its peculiar balance of obviousness and opacity, of tenacity and fragility.

³⁴ For an insightful study of the experience of connectedness in music, see Jerrold Levinson, *Music in the Moment* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997) (Levinson 1997).

³⁵ I find various illuminating permutations of this thought in Rush Rhees, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, ed. D. Z. Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) (Rhees 1998). I note two differences in Rhees’s presentation of this thought: (1) Rhees’s insistence that “speaking is not functioning within a calculus” is articulated in the domain of “saying something” in general rather than in the domain of philosophical writing and speech (though I am not opposed to Rhees’s broader, and so somewhat different, use of that disanalogy); (2) Rhees tends to argue that this awareness is one that the later Wittgenstein continued to miss. Here my disagreement with Rhees is predicted, and possibly shared, by D. Z. Phillips (*ibid.*, 19).

1.4 Addendum: Aspect-Seeing and Giving Voice to Connections

I ought to address an objection to my claim that aesthetic judgment is Wittgenstein's model for understanding the way in which appeals to grammar clarify philosophical confusions. For surely, someone might say, the relation or connection that I see between Jastrow's duck-rabbit and actual (pictures of) rabbits does not cause me the slightest unease; after all, there is a difference between *seeing* an aspect and having an hallucination of one! When I say, standing before the duck-rabbit, "Now it's a rabbit!", my expression has *some* implications for the world beyond me, something beyond conveying how things are with me (as when I cry "Ouch!"). Even if no one should happen to see what I see, for my expression to *be* the expression of the dawning of an aspect it must be possible for me to justify my expression, to make clear to others that what I see is not an hallucination, a dream, a phantasm, . . . And on Mulhall's reading of Wittgenstein, that means giving voice to a perception that is established via conceptual or grammatical structures: "it must be possible for us to justify how we go on, and as Wittgenstein tells us [at *PI* §265] 'justification consists in appealing to something independent' of that which is being justified" (Mulhall 1998, 39).

Noting, but putting aside for the moment, the sound of desperation in "it must be possible for us to justify how we go on"—a remark easier to imagine voiced by one of Wittgenstein's interlocutors than in defense of his developed view—I have not meant to deny that "justification consists in appealing to something independent." We would not call it "justification" were someone to say, for example, "I know that 'Now it's a rabbit' is true because the aspect I see matches my (private) image for 'rabbit'." But the confusion that has taken hold in this objection lies in the thought that "justification" implies an appeal to something beyond one's present voicing of the connections one sees. What sustains the error is the thought that any attempt at justification that is not an appeal beyond one's present voicing of connections is an appeal to something private, and so participates in the delusion of a private language. Or else (and this is more the force of Mulhall's remark in its context) it is an appeal to

something made up on the spot, and so misconstrues the grammar of “justification.”

To imagine a different alternative, and one we have been prepared for, consider Wittgenstein’s description of how one justifies the way one plays a musical passage, as discussed late in *The Brown Book*:

—“But surely when you play [a tune that has made its full impression on you] you don’t play it *anyhow*, you play it in this particular way, making a crescendo here, a diminuendo there, a caesura in this place, etc.”—Precisely, and that’s all I can say about it, or may be all that I can say about it. For in certain cases I can justify, explain the particular expression with which I play it by a comparison, as when I say “At this point of the theme, there is, as it were, a colon,” or “This is, as it were, the answer to what came before,” etc. (This, by the way, shows what a ‘justification’ and an ‘explanation’ in aesthetics is like.) (*BB* 1969: 166)

For these words to *be* a justification (or a “justification,” if that is different) it is still necessary that the other person *hear* it, hear the point of my making these and other comparisons. There is no further course of appeal to show that what is called for at this juncture of the tune is as it were a colon, or an answer to what came before, or an exhalation, or less a repetition than a remembrance. Naturally, I may find, as in other contexts where I employ a figurative or secondary use of words, that I need to explain, and so in a sense can “go on” to appeal to, the ordinary or primary use of “colon,” “answer,” “exhale,” “remember.”³⁶ But when I do go on in that way—however I justify my thinking that I need to go on in that way, with this person—the things I then say are not justified by something strictly beyond me, as modeled in the notion of grammar as a framework, but “justified” by my continuing to make the connections I do, in the hope—a hope typically but not everywhere borne out—that the other will make them, too.

³⁶ Cf. *CV* 59d: “If I say e.g.: it’s as if here a conclusion were being drawn, or, as if here something were being confirmed, or, as if *this* were a reply to what came earlier,—then the way I understand it clearly presupposes familiarity with conclusions, confirmations, replies, etc.”

That is the model of justification found throughout Wittgenstein's later work in his remarks on justification in aesthetics. By weighing this aesthetic dimension of Wittgenstein's later writings, one can come to see (or hear) that the form of justification found in our conversations about art reveals in bald form our condition, whenever we give voice to (verbal, visual, aural) connections.

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William Day is an associate professor of philosophy at Le Moyne College in Syracuse, New York. He writes on aesthetics and moral perfectionist thought, with particular focus on the work of Wittgenstein, Cavell, Emerson, and Confucian thinkers. Day is contributing coeditor (with Victor J. Krebs) of *Seeing Wittgenstein Anew* (Cambridge University Press, 2010). His writings on Wittgenstein include “Wanting to Say Something: Aspect-Blindness and Language” (in *Seeing Wittgenstein Anew*) and “To Not Understand, but Not Misunderstand: Wittgenstein on Shakespeare” (in *Wittgenstein Reading*, De Gruyter, 2013).