

# **Wittgenstein on Grammar and Grammatical Method**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is an investigation of Ludwig Wittgenstein's later conception of grammar and philosophy as a grammatical investigation. I seek to clarify how one should understand the later Wittgenstein's statement that "grammar describes the use of words in the language" (PG 60), as well as what motivates Wittgenstein's philosophical interest in grammar. I explore and critically assess three different interpretative approaches to Wittgenstein's conception of grammar, each of which presents a different characterisation of his view that philosophy is a grammatical investigation. I argue that Wittgenstein's conception of grammar and philosophy should be understood against the background of his early views, and also in light of his later critique of those views in the *Philosophical Investigations*. I develop a sustained critique of the standard interpretation of grammar and grammatical investigation, which, I argue, tends to obliterate important contrasts between Wittgenstein's early and later views. I propose that in interpreting Wittgenstein's use of the term grammar, one should be sensitive to a distinction between two different notions of use, which in turn give rise to two different notions of grammar: namely, grammar as that which describes the use of words in sentential contexts, and grammar as that which describes the use of words in the context of particular activities on different occasions. I argue that, on the later Wittgenstein's view, neglecting the latter aspect of use is responsible for many philosophical confusions, and that Wittgenstein's grammatical methods aim to eliminate confusions by bringing this dimension of use and grammar back into focus.

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**Word Count: 78,997**

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- BT (2005). *The Big Typescript: TS 213*. (tr. and eds.) C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue. Oxford: Blackwell
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- RPPii (1980). *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, vol. II.* (eds.) G. H. von Wright and H. Nyman, tr. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue. Oxford: Blackwell.
- TLP (1922/1961). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.* (tr.) D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
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- (2000). *Wittgenstein's Nachlass, The Bergen Electronic Edition.* (Ed.) The Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

### **Derivative primary sources**

- AWL (1979). *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1932–35, from the Notes of Alice Ambrose and Margaret MacDonald.* (ed.) Alice Ambrose. Oxford: Blackwell
- LFM (1976). *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics, Cambridge 1939.* (ed.) C. Diamond. Sussex: Harvester Press
- LWL (1980). *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1930–32, from the Notes of John King and Desmond Lee,* (ed.) Desmond Lee. Oxford: Blackwell.
- M (1993). G.E. Moore's notes entitled 'Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930–33', repr. in: Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*, ed. J. Klagge and A. Nordmann Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett. 1993 pp. 46–114.
- VoW (2003). *The Voices of Wittgenstein,* Transcribed and edited by Gordon Baker, tr. Gordon Baker, Michael Mackert, John Connolly and Vasilis Politis. London: Routledge.
- WVC (1979). *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle.* Transcribed and edited by Gordon Baker Oxford: Blackwell

Reference style: all references to *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I, are to sections (e.g. PI 1). References to other printed works are either to numbered remarks (TLP) or to sections (Z, RPP); in all other cases references are to pages (e.g. LFM 21 = LFM, page 21). All references to other material cited in the von Wright catalogue are by MS or TS number followed by page number ('r' indicating recto, 'v' indicating verso) or section number '§', as it appears in the Bergen electronic edition of *Wittgenstein's Nachlass*.

## INTRODUCTION

.....

“How is the word used?” and “What is the grammar of the word?” I shall take as being the same question. (Wittgenstein, AWL 3)

The thesis is an investigation of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s later conception of grammar and of philosophy as a grammatical investigation. In particular, I shall seek to clarify how one should understand the later Wittgenstein’s statement that “grammar describes the use of words in the language” (PG 60), as well as what motivates such an interest in grammar (or in describing language use). I shall explore and critically assess three different interpretative approaches to Wittgenstein’s conception of grammar, each of which presents a different characterisation of his view that philosophy is a grammatical investigation. In doing this, I shall adopt the following principle: any cogent interpretation of the later Wittgenstein’s conception of grammar and philosophy will need to be consistent with Wittgenstein’s own criticism of the *Tractatus*. Therefore, my general strategy in the thesis will be to develop an understanding of Wittgenstein’s conception of grammar and philosophy against the background of his early views, and in keeping with his later critique of those views in *Philosophical Investigations*.

For the remainder of the introduction I shall: (i) lay out a provisional characterisation of Wittgenstein’s somewhat idiosyncratic notion of grammar, focusing on its connection with notions of meaning, use and rules; (ii) propose a tentative distinction between two different



notions of “use” and a concomitant distinction between two kinds of “grammar”, which I shall develop on and refer to throughout the discussion in the thesis; (iii) indicate what, for later Wittgenstein, represents a main motivation for investigating grammar; and (iv) I shall give a brief outline the structure of the thesis.

### **Wittgenstein’s idiosyncratic usage of “grammar”**

The concept of grammar is one of the key notions in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy. The question of how best to understand Wittgenstein’s use of the term “grammar” continues to be a topic of much scholarly dispute, not least because of its crucial bearing on matters concerning the continuity of his early and later thought, his views regarding language, its use, and meaning, and his attitude toward the role and purpose of philosophy. It is my view that within the ongoing debates surrounding these issues, a clear and consistent understanding of Wittgenstein’s usage of “grammar” is yet to emerge.

It has long been common practice to distinguish three main domains of linguistic study: syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (following Morris 1938).<sup>1</sup> In standard usage, the term “grammar” is associated with the first of these domains, and is taken to refer to the study of the structure or form of languages; their morphology, syntax, and phonology. The later Wittgenstein, however, uses the term “grammar” more or less interchangeably with the terms “meaning” and “use”. For instance, he takes questions such as “How is the word used?” and “What is the grammar of the word?” as being the same question” (Wittgenstein, AWL 3). What is more, he suggests that we can substitute the phrase “meaning of a word” for “use of a word” (AWL 48) and proposes that the investigation of meaning should go hand in hand with the investigation of use (PI 43). This suggests that the later Wittgenstein’s concept of grammar breaks with standard use of the term, and that for him, talk of grammar pervades the different domains of linguistic inquiry rather than being limited to any particular one of them.

Many of Wittgenstein’s interpreters agree that Wittgenstein’s usage of the term “grammar” is highly idiosyncratic. Specht (1969), for instance, writes that “grammar” in Wittgenstein is a technical term which does not coincide with normal linguistic usage. Whilst traditional

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<sup>1</sup> Morris defines the tripartite distinction in a following way: syntax “the study of the formal relation of signs to one another”, semantics “the study of the relations of signs to objects to which the signs are applicable” and pragmatics “the study of the relation of signs to interpreters” (Morris 1938, 6).

grammar is largely “phonetically oriented”, comprised of phonetics, syntax, and accidence, Wittgenstein’s “grammar” refers to an investigation of content rather than form, and it is “primarily oriented toward semantic aspect, towards the content of what is said and the regularities resulting therefrom” (Specht 1969, 145). The term “grammar” in Wittgenstein’s usage signifies “content oriented” grammar or “grammar of meaning” that describes “all those rules of sign usage that are related to meaning of the sign and its semantic modes of use” (Specht 1969, 145). Baker & Hacker hold that Wittgenstein is stretching the use of “grammar” to include the description of the explanations of meaning, which are “ordinarily conceived of as belonging not to grammar but to lexicography” (B&H 1985, 52 fn. 13), and they argue that for Wittgenstein “there was no essential dividing line in the patterns of use of words between so called ‘syntax’ and ‘semantics’” (B&H 1985, 56). In his later writings, Baker proposes that Wittgenstein’s conceptions of language and grammar are best understood in connection with the pragmatic notions of speaking a language, speech acts, and, more generally, with the dynamics of what is said on particular occasions (see Baker 2004, 60). Similarly, Charles Travis sees Wittgenstein (and Austin) as pioneers of “an essentially new view of the relation of language to what is said in using it (to thought)” (Travis 2008, 70), the view he calls “the speaking-sensitive view of language”. What is perhaps most important to bear in mind is that Wittgenstein himself is well aware that his is a distinctly philosophical conception of grammar that contravenes conventional use of the term. Indeed, the notion of grammar that he takes to be relevant for philosophical undertakings is one that has the effect of “pulling ordinary grammar to bits” (AWL 31).

### **Grammar: meaning, rules, and use**

The concepts of grammar, meaning, and use in Wittgenstein’s texts are, as I just suggested, intimately connected. Indeed, Wittgenstein has characterised grammar as that which “describes the use of words in the language” where “the use of a word in the language is its meaning” (PG 60). Grammar, he adds, “has somewhat the same relation to the language as the description of a game, the rules of a game, have to the game” (PG 60). With such remarks in mind, it is clear that in order to arrive at an accurate understanding of “grammar” we must ask what Wittgenstein means when he speaks of “the use of words in the language”; what he takes to be involved in “describing” that use; and how such acts of description could be characterised in terms of “rules”.

As regards the first question, there are at least two ways one can think about “the use of words in the language”, both of which were adopted by Wittgenstein at different stages of his career. In the *Tractatus*, for instance, he talks about “use” as “the logico-syntactical employment” of words (TLP 3.327), whereas in his later work the term “use” designates rather the activity of speaking or operating with words in the context of other extra-linguistic activities. This is an important difference, and as I shall argue, if it is not observed it may have serious ramifications for one’s interpretation of Wittgenstein’s texts.<sup>2</sup>

The other two notions in Wittgenstein’s characterisation of grammar are similarly equivocal. As Wittgenstein himself notes, “[w]hat seems to mislead here is a double-meaning of the word ‘description’ when one sometimes talks about the description of a real house or a tree etc., and sometimes about the description of a shape, construction etc., of a notation, a game” (MS 113, 28v). As some interpreters are keen to point out, for Wittgenstein grammar “describes” the use of words in the language in the second, rather than the first sense, hence there are no metaphysical or empirical commitments about our actual practices of using language.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, there is the notion of the “rules of grammar” or “grammatical rules” that is intimately connected with settling the boundary between sense and nonsense. The rules of grammar are said to “determine the sense of a proposition; and whether a combination of words makes sense” (BT 63). Some interpreters, as we shall see, take this to mean that the rules of grammar are the “standards of correct use” of words, where “correct” simply means “meaningful” or “significant”, and “incorrect” means “meaningless” or “nonsensical”.<sup>4</sup> Again, what is evaluated for correctness or incorrectness, however we unfold these notions, will depend on one’s conception of use.<sup>5</sup> At any rate, Wittgenstein’s usage of the term “rule” is contentious too, and, as I will try to illustrate in the opening chapter, because it plays the central role in Wittgenstein’s conception of grammar it is critical that we clearly separate different interpretations of this notion.

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<sup>2</sup> I return to the distinction between two notions of “the use of words in the language” and its connection with the notion of “grammar” in the next section.

<sup>3</sup> See chapter 2 on Kuusela’s critique of the standard reading.

<sup>4</sup> See especially Baker & Hacker 1985, 2005a, 2005b, 2009; Hacker 1996, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Thus, for instance, the remark like the following suggest that the judgement whether a sentence makes sense or not depends on its “use” on particular occasions: “If, for example, someone says that the sentence “This is here” (saying which he points to an object in front of him) makes sense to him, then he should ask himself in what special circumstances this sentence is actually used. There it does make sense” (PI 117)

### **The distinction between two notions of use and grammar**

In the previous section I mentioned that there are at least two ways one can interpret Wittgenstein's notion of use. I said that one's interpretation of Wittgenstein's later work on grammar may depend on which interpretation of use one adopts, or whether one makes a sufficiently clear distinction between the two notions. In addition, I noted that Wittgenstein has championed each of those notions at some point of his career. My brief here is to make some preliminary remarks about the two notions of use because I shall be making use of the distinction in discussing each of the three approaches to Wittgenstein's conception of grammar.

When Wittgenstein talks about "the use of words in the language", what does he have in mind? The answer will depend on whether we discuss Wittgenstein's early or later work; for he employs the term "use" in both periods, arguably in different ways. Some authors are concerned to highlight the importance of either the continuity or the contrast between the notion of use in Wittgenstein's early and later writings. For instance, Cora Diamond says that "[the] way philosophy liberates is – in the *Tractatus* and in Wittgenstein's later philosophy – connected with the significance of 'use' and of willingness or unwillingness to look for the use for what it enables us to see" (Diamond 1991, 32). However, Diamond also stresses that there are crucial contrasts between the early and later notion of use inasmuch as "[the] notion in the later philosophy of philosophy as liberating is thus tied to an ability to look at the use without imposing on it what one thinks must already be there in it" (ibid., 33). Marie McGinn similarly argues that "[the] idea of use that is present in the early work is an idealized and etiolated one that reflects the early Wittgenstein's preoccupation with the concept of representation. In the later work, the conception of use is clearly much richer and more concrete; the emphasis is on our life with language, rather than on the concept of representation" (McGinn 2006, 2). On Hide Ishiguro's interpretation, there is an important continuity in Wittgenstein's conception of use; however, whilst in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein considers use "only in relation to truth-stating purpose of language", later he is concerned with "other things people may say in using...expressions — such as beseeching, promising, and so on" (Ishiguro 1969, 21). Martin Stokhof, in contrast, argues that the *Tractatus*'s notion of use "seems a far cry from

the actual, practical, day-to-day use that the *Philosophical Investigations* makes much of” (Stokhof 2002, 162). Thus, whereas some authors are explicit about the existence of either the continuity or contrast in Wittgenstein’s early and later conceptions of use, others take no notice of his early conception. However, the lack of a palpable similarity or difference between the two notions can have major repercussions for those interpretations.

Without going into details about the problem of continuity and discontinuity in Wittgenstein’s early and later conceptions of use at this point, I want to introduce the distinction between two notions of use, which will then facilitate the discussion and arguments that will be developed in the course of this thesis. The phrase “the use of words in the language” could be interpreted in either narrow or broad sense. Use in a narrow sense, or a *narrow* use of words in the language, signifies the word’s “logico-syntactical employment” (or application), that is, its (significant or meaningful) use in the context of a sentence (*sentential* context).<sup>6</sup> The word’s logico-syntactical employment represents the way a word could (or could not) combine with other words in different sentential contexts. “The use of a word” means its combinatorial possibilities or a potential to combine with other words to form meaningful sentences. Because the relevant context of use here is the context of a (meaningful) sentence, the narrow use of a word in the language is typically invariant across different occasions; it is occasion-invariant or insensitive to the extra-sentential contextual factors where the only thing it can affect the (meaningful) use of words narrowly understood are (the features of) other words (and syntax of course).

By contrast, “the use of words in the language” *broadly* understood concerns, as Whiting puts it, “how a word is put to use on a particular occasion in a specific context” (Whiting 2010, 5), and it brings to the fore the occasion-sensitivity and variability of what is said by deploying words with the same meaning (combinatorial possibilities) on different occasions. In contrast to a narrow use, this domain of use concerns the activity of speaking (or operating with) the language, or simply “using” language in the context of various other human activities (cf. *PI* 23), rather than the combining of words in sentences.

Corresponding to these two dimensions of use, we might distinguish two distinct models of grammar: (i) grammar that describes the logico-syntactic employment (or meaningful

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<sup>6</sup> The terms “logico-syntactic employment” and “the significant use” come from the *Tractatus* (see TLP 3.326, 3.327).

combinations) of words in sentences, and (ii) grammar that describes different ways of operating with words on particular occasions. Both can be thought of as being comprised of certain “rules”<sup>7</sup> that are said to distinguish between the items (i.e. sentences or speech-acts (moves)) that make sense (are, say, truth-evaluable) and items that do not make sense. Call them the “combinatorial” and “occasion-sensitive” conceptions of grammar.<sup>8</sup> Whilst a combinatorial grammar describes the use of a word in the context of meaningful sentences (understood as types), an occasion-sensitive grammar models different uses (utterances) of sentences on particular occasions (with occasion-specific standards of correctness or occasion-specific rules). Note that in neither of these cases we need to commit ourselves to the claim that such grammars or rules really exist (underpin actual uses): they can simply be our models of observed regularities.<sup>9</sup>

This proposed distinction could be illustrated with the following example. Take for instance, the sentence (1) “The leaves are green”. This sentence can be uttered on various different occasions. We can consider (1) with respect to its narrow or its broad aspect of use. That is, we can ask whether it is well-formed in terms of combinatorial possibilities of the expression “leaves” with the expression “green” (for instance, whether we would say of leaves *tout court* that they are green *tout court*), but we can also ask whether the sentence says something/expresses a thought (and if so what) or not with respect to the occasion of utterance. We can think of combinatorial possibilities or words in terms of combinatorial, occasion-invariant (general) rules, or what I called the combinatorial grammar.

Furthermore, we might think that considerations pertaining to combinatorial possibilities of words (concepts) *suffice* for determining whether the utterance of (1) makes sense or not. Hence, by checking whether the combination of words is well-formed, the distinction between sense and nonsense is *ipso facto* drawn. On the other hand, we might think that the combinatorial grammar (or considerations pertaining to licit combinations) will not suffice to determine whether an utterance of (1) makes sense. The distinction between sense and

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<sup>7</sup> It is contentious what those rules are like.

<sup>8</sup> In chapter 2, I shall argue that these correspond to the relevant interpretation of Wittgenstein’s notion of “surface” and “depth” grammar.

<sup>9</sup> As we shall see in chapter 1, some interpreters (Kuusela) will emphasise that acknowledging this point is of crucial importance for understanding Wittgenstein’s reference to rules as being consistent with his anti-dogmatic methodology.

nonsense, on this view, would apply to particular utterances, rather than to sentence-types, and could be established only relative to an occasion of utterance.

What I called the “occasion-sensitive grammar” would specify occasion-specific (particular) rules or the rules that describe, for the purpose of a particular occasion of utterance, a correct (e.g. true) use of an expression. The sentence (1) can have a multiplicity of occasion-sensitive grammars, depending on (purposes of) an occasion in which it is uttered. This multiplicity can be presented by different language-games with different (game-specific) rules. So for instance, even though the combinatorial grammar of (1) stays the same, its occasion-sensitive grammar (the relevant occasion-specific rules) may vary: on one occasion, a rule may specify “green” to mean natural green, on another painted green, on yet another painted green in a pointillist style etc., in accordance with specific purposes of specific occasions. Even so, English word “green” allows for any of these specific understandings, and bears none of them in particular.<sup>10</sup>

As I shall try to show in the thesis, there is a strong tendency among some of Wittgenstein’s interpreters to assume that the combinatorial model of grammar specifies the correctness-conditions, not merely for possible combinations of words, but also for the activity of speaking or operating with words on particular occasions. In other words, it associates the distinction between sense and nonsense primarily with the rules of combinatorial grammar. This is mainly because no clear distinction has been made between narrow and broad aspects of use. The combinatorial grammar represents a set of (occasion-invariant) grammatical rules (especially the rules concerning sentence-formation and inference-relations) that determine the combinatorial possibilities of words in sentences.<sup>11</sup> One of my general aims will be to show that Wittgenstein’s conception of grammar does not reduce to the combinatorial grammar, and that Wittgenstein is very much interested in the occasion-sensitive grammar, i.e. showing how features of the broad use affect the sense of our utterances.

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<sup>10</sup> See Travis 2008, 111ff. for the elaboration of this example.

<sup>11</sup> It will be one of my main arguments that the standard interpretation of grammar in fact conflates two dimensions of use and sees the occasion-invariant rules of grammar as determining not only combinatorial possibilities of words in sentences, but also the sense of what is said by the use of sentences on particular occasions.

## Grammar and philosophical problems

This brings us to another important question: what motivates Wittgenstein to investigate grammar in the first place? Why does he think of philosophy as grammatical investigation, and what is the aim of such philosophical investigation of grammar? Why is he “fiddling around with the grammar of our language at all” (BT 202)? The short answer, which I will elaborate on in chapters 2, 3, and 4, is: because *philosophical problems* arise in our failure to command a clear view of how we use language, and investigating grammar (or describing the use of words) is a means of resolving these problems. Wittgenstein says,

The point of examining the way a word is used is not at all to provide another method of giving its meaning. When we ask on what occasions people use a word, what they say about it, what they are right to substitute for it, and in reply try to describe its use, we do so only insofar as it seems helpful in getting rid of certain philosophical troubles [...] We are interested in language only insofar as it gives us trouble. [...] When we give a description of the use of a word we do so only so far as it seems helpful in removing certain troubles. (AWL 97)

For Wittgenstein, both early and late, investigating grammar has descriptive and elucidatory rather than explanatory purpose, because it is essentially connected with the aim of removing particular philosophical problems. Wittgenstein’s interest in grammar is, to this extent, distinctive, and it stands in contrast to classical semantic or syntactic theories, whose interest in language is largely explanatory.<sup>12</sup> Such clarification-driven approach to investigations of language use should be taken as a significant constraint on our understanding of the later Wittgenstein’s conception of grammar. The treatment of grammar as concerned with “use” is connected with the fact that Wittgenstein’s interest is primarily in the question of clarification of language use, insofar as philosophical problems are understood as resulting from misunderstanding of the use of words. And, as I shall argue, understanding the way in which Wittgenstein’s investigations of grammar are motivated by certain philosophical problems that arise from the lack of clarity in grammar

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<sup>12</sup> “Theory” is a term Wittgenstein connects exclusively with the methods of natural science. It is worth noting that throughout his early and later work Wittgenstein takes philosophical problems to be distinct from scientific. Hence their methods and aims are also different. This is one of his core commitments. In his early work he treated philosophical problems as pseudo-problems. In his later work philosophical problems are grammatical, i.e. confusions about grammar or concepts.



is essential to understanding the relationship between Wittgenstein's early and later philosophy.

Grammatical (or conceptual)<sup>13</sup> investigations are prompted by the existence of particular philosophical problems that arise because, in reflecting on her subject-matter, the philosopher loses from focus essential aspects of concepts (or essential aspects of words) she reflects upon, namely their application or use on particular occasions. I intend to show that such a process, whereby philosophical problems arise because an essential dimension of use has been abstracted away from, can be illuminated by clarifying the metaphor of *subliming* Wittgenstein deploys to characterise what went wrong with his early account of language and psychology in the *Tractatus*.<sup>14</sup> Thus, as we shall see, Wittgenstein's later conception of grammar and his idea of philosophy as aiming at the clarification of philosophical problems arising from grammar are very closely related. Wittgenstein's main aim, as I shall show, is to "de-sublimate" sublimed concepts by bringing out how we apply those concepts on particular occasions, thus also making perspicuous different facets of our concepts that become relevant in connection with different purposes of activities we are engaged in.

### Chapter-by-chapter outline

In Chapter 1, I introduce three different interpretations of Wittgenstein's conception of rules. For the most part, this chapter explores the exegetical landscape with reference to the distinctions and models outlined earlier. I show that, on what I call the *standard interpretation*, grammatical rules are understood as "inherently general" (or occasion-invariant) combinatorial rules, which speakers follow when they speak meaningfully. These rules are given as norms that govern our actual linguistic practices and determine which combinations make sense and which do not. The other two interpretations of rules challenge in their own way the standard interpretation. They bring to view that grammatical

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<sup>13</sup> For Wittgenstein, philosophical investigations are conceptual or grammatical investigations. Grammatical investigations of the use of words are *eo ipso* conceptual investigations of the application of concepts. This is particularly obvious in sections §§65-89 of *Philosophical Investigations* where Wittgenstein switches from "concept" to "word". Cf. Z 458.

<sup>14</sup> I examine the idea of subliming as a way to illuminate the contrast between Wittgenstein's early and later philosophy, particularly regarding his understanding of grammar and the method of clarifying grammar, in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

rules should be understood as occasion-specific rules of particular language games that model particular occasions.

Chapter 2 connects the distinction between combinatorial grammar and occasion-sensitive grammar with the distinction Wittgenstein draws between surface grammar and depth grammar. It is shown that the standard interpretation treats depth grammar as a more fine-grained version of surface grammar (i.e. as consisting of more fine grained categories). Contrary to this, there are other interpretations (particularly that one which I call the *anthropological interpretation*) which insist that the distinction targets a more radical contrast such that the term “depth grammar” refers to the aspect of use that goes beyond combinatorial possibilities and use in the construction of a sentence and aims to capture how we operate with expressions on particular occasions. It is argued that grasping this new dimension of use is a key to resolving philosophical confusion. This chapter also discusses how such differences are reflected in how one can unfold the distinction between sense and nonsense.

Chapter 3 turns to Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy as grammatical investigation. In particular, it seeks to clarify what Wittgenstein means by the notion of perspicuous representation, which the process of clarifying philosophical problems by clarifying grammar aims at. Again, I scrutinise and contrast three different approaches to “perspicuous representation”. I show that some of them see the goal of philosophy as mapping out our whole conceptual space by “tabulating rules”, thus preventing any possibility of misunderstanding, whilst others opt for a more piecemeal undertaking and the use of techniques such as “simple language games”, which target particular occasions and cases. Whereas the method of tabulating rules facilitates the explication of combinatorial grammar, the use of language games facilitate bringing out occasion-sensitive grammars of expression.

Chapter 4 suggests that one can understand how abstracting away from particular occasions of use creates philosophical problems by considering the later Wittgenstein’s criticism of the *Tractatus*. More specifically, I try to illuminate pertinent contrasts between Wittgenstein’s early and later work by discussing the “tendency to sublime the logic of our language”. I show how the *Tractatus* is affected by subliming and how Wittgenstein

responds to the subliming of “logic”, “proposition”, “name”, and “thought” in *Philosophical Investigations*.

In chapter 5 I criticise the standard interpretation of subliming which overlooks some of the key elements of Wittgenstein’s turn away from his early conception of grammar (logic) and philosophy. In particular, I show that because it focuses on the alleged metaphysical realism and the answerability of grammar in the *Tractatus*, the standard interpretation misses the role of family resemblances and downplays Wittgenstein’s critique of the sense-determining role of grammar.

Finally, Chapter 6 examines how Wittgenstein’s grammatical techniques work on clarifying or “de-sublimating” a particular concept, namely “thought” or “thinking”. Once again, I criticise the standard interpretation of Wittgenstein’s analysis of thinking, arguing that it misconstrues what goes on in Wittgenstein’s text. There is no evidence of a procedure of tabulating grammatical rules or of locating the real grammatical category of thinking in the sections on thought and thinking in *Philosophical Investigations*. On the contrary, Wittgenstein employs the techniques of perspicuous representation highlighted by the anthropological interpretation that brings to view aspects of depth or occasion-sensitive grammar of “thinking” and “thought”, which were obscured by the sublime view. Bringing together conclusions in previous five chapters, I conclude the thesis by submitting that the anthropological interpretation gives the most compelling interpretation of Wittgenstein’s conceptions of grammar and philosophy as grammatical investigation.

## CHAPTER 1

### *Three Interpretations of Rules of Grammar*

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“We investigate (our) language *in terms of its rules*. If we find no rules anywhere, then *that* is the result (outcome)” (MS 112, 232; first drafted in 1931)<sup>15</sup>

#### 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I shall present and assess three different interpretive approaches to the notion of a grammatical rule and its role in Wittgenstein’s later conception of grammar. I shall refer to these as the *standard*, the *methodological*, and the *anthropological* interpretations. We shall see that, on the standard interpretation, the rules of grammar are understood as “inherently general”<sup>16</sup> principles (in that they apply across a multiplicity of occasions) that represent the “standards of correct use” of expressions, where “use” involves combining words in meaningful ways on particular occasions of speech. Correct or meaningful use is

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<sup>15</sup> See also TS 213, 254: “We could say: we investigate language in terms of its rules. If here and there it has no rules, then that is the result of our investigation”

<sup>16</sup> The phrase is Baker & Hacker’s. See B&H (1985, 44)

determined by what I referred to in the introduction as the “combinatorial grammar”. Rules thus understood are the “norms” that govern our *actual* linguistic practices and are taken to be the only thing that distinguishes sense and nonsense.

A number of these claims regarding the status of the rules of grammar are challenged by the other two interpretations. As I shall show, both of these readings of Wittgenstein adopt an alternative stance toward the notion of rules and, as a consequence, provide a different characterisation of Wittgenstein’s concept of grammar than that offered on the standard interpretation. Many of the differences in these approaches to the notion of grammar are motivated, I shall argue, by divergences in opinion regarding the significance of the contrast between Wittgenstein’s early and later views. Indeed, in this and later chapters, one of my central aims will be to show how crucial an impact this particular issue has had on current thought concerning the notion of grammar.

## **1.2 The standard conception of Wittgenstein’s grammar**

The standard interpretation of Wittgenstein’s conception of rules and their role in grammar is defended, most notably, by Peter Hacker.<sup>17</sup> In this section, I show how Hacker characterises Wittgenstein’s notion of grammar in terms of grammatical rules. I first look at the function and role of grammatical rules on the standard interpretation, and then proceed to look at more general features of the notion of rule in relation to Hacker’s construal of the relation between Wittgenstein’s early and later views on grammar.

### **1.2.1 The role of rules as norms and determinants of sense**

Hacker distinguishes two senses of Wittgenstein’s use of the term “grammar”, one referring to the object of study and the other referring to the study itself:

[G]rammar is used by Wittgenstein to mean the study and description of the rules of language (primarily semantic) and also to mean the network of rules themselves...It is the accounting book of language in the sense that the eliciting

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<sup>17</sup> Besides Hacker this interpretation is defended by Hans-Johann Glock (1996), Specht (1969) and Michael Foster (2004). I refer to Hacker rather than Baker and Hacker, because Gordon Baker changed his views on Wittgenstein. However, some of Hacker’s texts I use here as evidence are written jointly with Baker.

of the rules of language will determine which combinations of words are legitimate. (Hacker 1972, 151)<sup>18</sup>

Hacker depicts grammar *qua* object of investigation as an existing network of rules that govern actual uses of expressions. Since rules are here understood as underpinning our actual linguistic practices, we might say that the standard interpretation adheres to *realism* with regard to rules. By virtue of governing, or determining, the application of expressions, the rules of grammar essentially “fix the concepts in question” (Hacker 1993b, 239) and so constitute our conceptual scheme (see Hacker 2007, 100). Grammar is taken as something that exists *independently* of philosophical (or linguistic) investigation; it is that which the speakers of a language follow in using language correctly. In this sense, use of language is essentially “thickly” normative, in that it is regulated by an existing set of rules which function as “standards of correctness” (see B&H 1985, 46).<sup>19</sup> Hacker explains the role of rules as follows:

The use of a word is determined by the rules for the use of that word. For using words in speech is a rule-governed activity. The rules for the use of a word are constitutive of what Wittgenstein called ‘its grammar’. He used the expression ‘grammar’ in an idiosyncratic way to refer to *all* the rules that determine the use of a word. To grammar belongs everything that determines sense, everything that has to be settled *antecedently to questions about truth*. The grammar of an expression... specifies licit combinatorial possibilities of the expression, i.e. *which combinations make sense and which don’t*, which are allowed and which are not allowed. (B&H 2005a, 145-6)

Note that the rules of grammar are taken to determine legitimate uses of words in speech by specifying *which combinations of words make sense and which don’t*. On this view, to use a word just is to combine it with other words (in acts of speaking) in ways that either do or

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<sup>18</sup> Similarly Specht (1969) notes that “[by] ‘grammar’ it is also to be understood the rules of the usage of linguistic signs, the totality of the rules constituting the meaning of a sign. Thus for Wittgenstein grammar means both the science of the rules of linguistic usage and also the rules themselves (roughly in the way the word ‘logic’ also means the science of logical structure as well as the structures themselves)” (Specht 1969, 146).

<sup>19</sup> Hacker argues that “[grammar] is a normative description — like a description of a legal system. To be precise, grammar states, rather than describes the rules of language” (B&H 2005a, 147). Furthermore, “taking what words mean to be specified by rules for their use, the concept of meaning is construed normatively, and normativity is taken ‘thickly’” (B&H 2005a, 151). I use abbreviation “B&H” for Baker and Hacker.

do not comply with the rules of grammar. These rules are “inherently general laying down standards of correctness for a multiplicity of occasions” (B&H 1985, 44). Whether one’s use of words makes sense is determined by the general combinatorial possibilities specified by the rules.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the rules are *all* that matter when it comes to “distinguishing sense from nonsense” (B&H 1985, 40), or correct from incorrect use. As Hacker says elsewhere, “[t]he rule and nothing but the rule determines what is correct” (B&H 1985, 172).

This latter point is crucial for understanding the standard interpretation. It is important to appreciate that there is no such thing as (an instance of) a meaningful use of an expression that is not determined by some or other rule: “[there] is no such thing as meaning independently of *rules* which determine how an expression is to be used” (B&H 1985, 37). Hence, the rules of grammar are that which delimits the “bounds of sense”. What is more, as Hacker often repeats, it is “the rule itself, not some third entity, [that] determines what accords and what conflicts with it” (Baker & Hacker 1985, 155). For Hacker, whilst the rules of grammar are observable in, or made manifest by, our uses of words, this is not to say that speakers make explicit judgements, or enter into any kind of explicit agreement with each other on actual occasions of use, regarding whether a given utterance does or does not accord with a rule. Hacker argues that whilst notions of human agreement and judgement do play a crucial role in Wittgenstein’s work, it is a mistake to think that agreement in judgement intercedes between the rule and its extension (i.e. an act of speaking that exhibits a correct application of the rule). As he puts it, “[t]he relation between a given rule and an act that accords with it (‘agrees’ with it) is internal or grammatical. Nothing mediates between a rule and its “extension”, for internal relations are not cemented by any “third thing”” (Hacker 1985, 243). This idea signals the importance of the notion of the autonomy, or arbitrariness, of grammar on the standard interpretation, a matter I shall consider further in the next section.

For now, let us pursue the idea of grammar as that which specifies combinatorial possibilities by means of “rules for the construction of significant utterances whose violation yields nonsense” (B&H 1985, 22). What do such rules look like? For Hacker, rules take the form of non-contingent grammatical propositions that are quite distinct from the contingent empirical propositions that the rules themselves govern. Leaving aside

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<sup>20</sup> I shall return to this point when contrasting the standard interpretation with the other interpretations of the notion of grammar later in the chapter.

certain details for the next section, these grammatical propositions establish which combinations of words are semantically, not merely syntactically, well-formed. On the standard interpretation, then, “it is no less a rule of grammar that the phrase ‘A saw...’ may not be completed by an expression signifying a sound than it is a grammatical rule that ‘identical’ does not admit of a comparative or a superlative” (Hacker 2000a, 70). Similarly, some rule exists which dictates that any construction of the form “A is green all over and yellow all over” would be an incorrect use of language. Sentences of this form would be nonsensical in virtue of their “[failing] to conform with rules of sentence-formation for colour predicates” (B&H 2009, fn.15, 61). That is, this construction is excluded by a rule which specifies a restriction on the use of colour-predicates to the effect that, if something is green all over then it cannot also be yellow all over, red all over, etc.

Hacker notes that, for Wittgenstein, the category of grammatical rules can also include such items as arithmetical or geometrical propositions, ostensive definitions, colour-charts, axioms, equations, samples, blueprints, tables, and metaphysical statements. Whilst acknowledging that talk of such things as rules appears to deviate from those examples of rules mentioned above, Hacker suggests that the initial surprise here diminishes on reflection (B&H 1985, 59). For instance, in terms of ostensive definitions, their status as rules can be made somewhat more apparent by considering how an utterance of the sentence “This is red” (said pointing at a red chair) is not to be paraphrased as “This *chair* is red”, but rather as “This *colour* is red”. The sentence, paraphrased thus, provides a non-contingent norm for correct use; i.e. a rule that dictates that anything that is *this* colour can correctly be said to be red. Such a rule is, for Hacker, a *substitution rule*: “instead of saying ‘A is red’ one may say ‘A is this colour’ (pointing at the sample)” (*ibid.*). Whilst ostensive definitions might be helpfully stated for the purposes of teaching or explaining, they are not empirical propositions that can be true or false. Rather, they are grammatical propositions that set standards for correct use by showing how the demonstration of some sample can be substituted for the use of a particular word in different combinations.

The role of the rules of grammar is also reflected in certain inference relations, such as “If X is green, then X is not red, yellow etc.”, “If X is coloured, then X is extended” (cf. B&H



1985, 53), “If X is red and Y is pink, then X is darker than Y” (cf. Hacker 1996, 215).<sup>21</sup> It is the job of grammatical rules thus understood to licence such inferences as: “If A is red and B is pink... then A must be darker than B; if you have 25 bags of 25 florins each, then you must have 625 florins; if it is true that p, and it is true that if p then q, then it must be true that q” (B&H 2009, 252). In this way, rules serve “to licence or prohibit transformation of propositions” (Hacker 2000a, 78).

Before moving on, it is important to emphasise that the radically normative conception of linguistic practice that is favoured on the standard interpretation gives rise to a certain interpretation of philosophy and its aims. Since I discuss this topic in great detail in chapters 2 and 3, I shall here simply introduce the general idea of philosophy as grammatical investigation, as this notion is understood by Hacker. On Hacker’s view, philosophy as a grammatical investigation is the investigation *of* grammatical rules that are actually given. Grammatical investigations are prompted by the occurrence of nonsense in philosophical discourse, which, as we saw earlier, results from a violation of “familiar rules” (Hacker 1996, 107). The goal of grammatical investigation is to re-order and tabulate the established rules that characterise our grammar (or the “form of representation” as he sometimes calls it)<sup>22</sup> so as to make clear “the bounds of sense” to those who transgress them.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, insofar as it is an investigation of grammatical rules, philosophy is characterised as “the guardian of the bounds of sense” (Hacker 2000a, 96). The job of a philosopher is to re-arrange these “grammatical data” in a surveyable manner, and the aim is to produce a comprehensive map of our conceptual terrain.<sup>24</sup> Since the rules that govern ordinary uses of language, and are also held to be constitutive of our concepts, eliciting or tabulating those rules provides evidence regarding which combinations of words uttered by philosophers make sense, as well as whether or not they expressed some thought.

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<sup>21</sup> Rules are, Hacker writes, “norms of representation or, more prosaically, inference tickets. We say such things as ‘If this □ chair is red then it must be darker than the pink curtains’ or ‘If he is a bachelor, then he cannot be married to Daisy’... They indicate inferences licensed by a rule – a norm of representation. For example: red is darker than pink – so, if the chair is red then it follows that it is darker than the pink curtains – it must be. Similarly, bachelors are unmarried men – so, if Jack is a bachelor, then it follows that he is unmarried – he must be unmarried... We would not call something ‘red’ if it were lighter in colour than any pink thing; we would not call someone a ‘bachelor’ if he were married; and so on” (B&H 2009 263-4).

<sup>22</sup> “Grammar understood not as a description of the structure of our language, but as the structure thereby described is... identical with the notion of a form of representation” (Hacker, 1972, 151)

<sup>23</sup> Hacker frequently uses this phrase. See e.g., (B&H 1985, 34)

<sup>24</sup> See chapter 3 for the comprehensive discussion concerning the aim of philosophy as grammatical investigation.

### 1.2.2 Contrasting Wittgenstein's early and later view: the arbitrariness of grammar

As we have seen, according to the standard interpretation, the essential feature of grammatical rules is to fix the boundary between sense and nonsense antecedently to any particular use of language in assertions, questions, orders, descriptions etc. Grammar determines what counts as a proposition with sense and excludes all non-propositions prior to their employment in making true or false claims; it settles all questions regarding the sense of utterances, and so settles everything that needs to be settled in order for there to be a proposition that can be compared with reality for truth or falsity.<sup>25</sup> The standard view finds this particular feature of rules a crucial point of continuity with Wittgenstein's early philosophy. "An important point of continuity" Hacker writes, "was the insight that philosophy is not concerned with what is true or false, but rather with what makes sense and what traverses the bounds of sense" (B&H 1985, 39). He argues that the later Wittgenstein's notion of grammar is an heir to the *Tractatus*'s notion of logical syntax, and that the notion of the rules of grammar succeeds the notion of the rules of logical syntax. In both incarnations, grammatical rules are said to have one essential role, i.e. to set the boundary between meaningful and meaningless uses of linguistic expressions. Hacker writes,

[Rules of grammar] are the direct descendants of the 'rules of logical syntax' of the *Tractatus*. Like the rules of logical syntax, rules of grammar determine the bounds of sense. They distinguish sense from nonsense, but not truth from falsity... Wittgenstein's rules of grammar serve only to distinguish sense from nonsense. Grammar is a free-floating array of rules for the use of language. It determines what is a correct use of language, but is not itself correct or incorrect. (B&H 1985, 40)

Apart from having this central constitutive role for questions of meaningful uses of language, the rules of grammar have another important feature which, however, distinguishes them from the rules of logical syntax in the *Tractatus*: they are considered *arbitrary*, that is, unanswerable or unaccountable to any extra-linguistic reality. Here is where the distinction between grammatical and empirical propositions (mentioned in the

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<sup>25</sup> Hacker writes that Wittgenstein characterises grammar as "all the conditions, the method, necessary for comparing the proposition with reality" (B&H 1985, 57).

previous section) emerges. When we state a rule of grammar, we do not express a contingent *empirical proposition* whose truth or falsity is discerned via speakers' judgements about the state of the world, but rather we state a *grammatical proposition* that represents a standard of correctness for use, but is not answerable to reality in any way.

Grammar consists of rules for the use of expressions in empirical propositions. There is no such thing as an utterance which simultaneously expresses a rule of grammar and makes an empirical statement, just as one cannot hold a metre-stick against a platinum bar simultaneously to measure the length of the bar and to calibrate the metre-stick. (B&H 1985, 267)

The idea of arbitrariness (autonomy) of grammar is, on the standard interpretation, one of the later Wittgenstein's major philosophical insights. Hacker writes that "[the] doctrine of autonomy is as central to Wittgenstein's later philosophy as was the doctrine of showing and saying to his earlier" (Hacker 1972, 160) and that "Wittgenstein's thesis of the autonomy of grammar is bold and radical" (ibid., 166). The realisation that grammatical rules cannot be justified by reference to reality, but are instead arbitrary and independent of reality, is seen as one of the key features of Wittgenstein's turn and the crucial point of departure from the supposed metaphysical realism of the *Tractatus*.<sup>26</sup> Hacker sums up the point about arbitrariness as follows,

[Grammatical rules] are not rendered correct or right in virtue of reflecting the nature of reality. They are not accountable to any reality... there can be no question of whether the meaning of a word, as determined by the rules for its use, accords with the essential nature of the objects... the empirical investigation into the nature of the thing or stuff in question *presupposes* the meaning as given by the grammatical criteria for the application of the expression... there can be no such thing as justifying such grammatical propositions...by reference to reality. (Hacker 2000b, 176)

There are at least two arguments against the possibility of justification of grammar by reality, according to Hacker. First of all, justifying grammar by reference to reality would lead to an infinite regress because the propositions we might attempt to use to do so would

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<sup>26</sup> I discuss Hacker's interpretation of Wittgenstein's 'turn' from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations* along the lines of arbitrariness of grammar in greater detail in chapter 5.

themselves have to possess a grammar that itself requires justification, which would then imply an infinite regress of justifications. On the other hand, if these justificatory propositions were said to have a different grammar, then that grammar would determine a different set of concepts and would thus be “irrelevant” (as Hacker puts it) when attempting to justify the rules that determine *our* concepts.<sup>27</sup> Secondly, any attempt to justify grammar by reality would have to be couched in propositions with sense that are by definition (according to the principle of bipolarity) either true or false. However, in order to justify a rule of grammar, which is itself defined as excluding nonsensical forms of words, one would have to employ a proposition whose negation “would have to be a nonsense, not a falsehood” (Hacker 2000a, 77). Hacker emphasises that this latter argument has two corollaries: (i) the rules of grammar would turn out *superfluous* if it were possible to justify them by reference to reality, and (ii) if grammar could be justified by reference to reality, any proposition we used to justify it would presuppose the possibility of describing reality that can be otherwise, and it would thus need to employ a form of words that is excluded as nonsensical by the grammar in question (see Hacker 2000a, 77).<sup>28</sup> Hacker takes these arguments to show that the *Tractatus* wrongly assumed that grammar can be “ineluctably but ineffably justified by reference to the metaphysical nature of the world” (Hacker 2000a, 74).

The idea that the rules of grammar are arbitrary is closely connected with the issue of conventionalism. If grammar is arbitrary, are the rules a product of social agreement, and are they alterable by a social decision? Hacker argues that arbitrariness does not imply that the rules of grammar (which are also expressions of necessity) are “easily dispensable or alterable” (B&H 1985, 330). They are, to an extent, constrained by “natural limits” insofar as they must be usable by creatures of our psycho-physical constitution. The non-arbitrary element of grammar is to be found in the “naturalness” that presents a foundation for all concept-formation. It concerns “our powers of surveying, our mnemonic capacities and our perceptual discriminatory powers” (B&H 1985, 334). However, Hacker emphasises that the importance of naturalness ought not to be overestimated: “[there] is some justice in saying that [Wittgenstein’s account of rules] is a conventionalist account” (ibid. 347), provided we realise how deeply different it is from classical versions of conventionalism.

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<sup>27</sup> Again, see Hacker 1993b for comments regarding the relation between rules of grammar and concepts.

<sup>28</sup> See Travis (2010, 205ff.) for a critique of ascribing this view to Wittgenstein’s mature conception of sense.

Combined with a particular “constructivist reading”<sup>29</sup> of the remark “essence is expressed by grammar” (PI 371), the idea of arbitrariness contributes to a view that grammar constitutes the way we encounter the world and categorise entities and events through language. In particular, Hacker suggests that the key change from the *Tractatus* to Wittgenstein’s later philosophy is that “the theory of the structure of language as the mirror of the structure of reality is turned on its head” (Hacker 1972, 147). The structure of reality, Hacker suggests, is “a projection of our grammar” (Hacker 1972, 160). Grammar “[...] is the form of representation we employ which determines reality and what forms it has” (Hacker 1972, 164), rather than the other way around. Hacker finds this to be as a major point of discontinuity between Wittgenstein’s early and the later philosophy. Whilst in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein took logical syntax to be answerable to the form of reality, in the *Investigations* it is our form of reality that is determined by grammar. Whereas in the *Tractatus*’s logical syntax is answerable to the independent essences of things, in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein holds that “natures or essences are merely the shadows cast by grammar” (Hacker 1993b, 236). On this view, therefore, “[the] nature or essence of anything is given by rules of grammar which determine the application of expression, for they fix the concept in question” (Hacker 1993b, 239).

To sum up. On the standard interpretation, grammar consists of a network of concept fixing rules that determine combinatorial possibilities for the use of words in sentences. These rules can be made perspicuous by examining certain patterns of inference that hold between such sentences (i.e. by examining what Hacker calls transformations of propositions). A grammar serves as “a standard of correctness against which to measure actions” (B&H 1985, 161). As Hacker explains, “in speaking...we are following rules of grammar. Following rules is *fundamental* precisely because the rules of grammar are measure of all things” (B&H 1985, 181). Therefore, grammar - understood as a “free-floating” structure made of “inherently general”, occasion-invariant, grammatical rules - provides everything necessary and sufficient for determining when what is said on some occasion will be something that we can make sense of. As we shall see in 1.4.2 below, some of the advocates of the “anthropological” approach to the interpretation of grammar (notably Hertzberg, Goldfarb, Travis) are keen to emphasise that we should regard the notion of

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<sup>29</sup> See Hacker 1972 (102 ff.), Specht (1969, 39 ff.). For a critique of constructivist readings of this remark see Kuusela (2008, 184 ff.).

sense as something that is dependent on certain facts about human beings as judges, about the occasions on which the relevant acts of judgement take place, and on wider facts about the world which we inhabit. On these views the very idea that sense is determined autonomously by the grammar faces certain problems that emerge as a consequence of projecting certain dogmas from the *Tractatus* onto Wittgenstein's later philosophy (see Goldfarb 1997, 85ff; Hertzberg *forthcoming*, 354).<sup>30</sup>

### **1.3 The methodological conception of grammar and rules**

Oskari Kuusela (2008) raises a number of critical objections to the conception of a grammatical rule that is central to the standard interpretation of grammar. He aims to show that this understanding of rules entails certain metaphysical commitments, which are at odds both with the later Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as something that is essentially free from doctrines, and with his methodological principle that philosophers should not advance metaphysical theses. Since Kuusela sees both the essence of Wittgenstein's turn and his later understanding of rules as methodological in nature, I call this conception the "methodological" interpretation of rules and grammar. Kuusela argues for an interpretation of Wittgenstein's concept of rules that does not commit Wittgenstein to the essentialist thesis to the effect that there is no such thing as a meaningful use without following a rule. The present section will outline how his methodological treatment of rules and grammar contrasts with the view outlined in the previous section.

#### **1.3.1 The role of rules as instruments of clarification and objects of comparison**

I noted in the introduction that the term "to describe (the use of language)" is, just like the notions of grammar, rule and use, ambiguous, and that this ambiguity can be misleading as to how we might interpret Wittgenstein's views. As Wittgenstein notes in the remark I quoted there, we can "describe" something in two different ways: namely, we can describe some independently existing object (a house, tree, etc.), or we can describe (in the sense of *construct* or *design*) something as we describe a possible notation or game, which need already exist. Kuusela argues that Hacker's misunderstanding of the intended meaning of "description" motivates misconstruing Wittgenstein's notion of rules. On Kuusela's methodological interpretation, a "statement of a rule" describes the use of a word.

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<sup>30</sup> In chapter 5 I develop a critique of Hacker's thesis that the arbitrariness of grammar represents the essence of Wittgenstein's turn away from the *Tractatus* to his later view of grammar.

However, there is an important contrast between the standard and methodological interpretation concerning what we are committed to when we talk of rules of grammar as *describing* the use of an expression of a language. The contrast is summarised in the following observation made by Kuusela:

[Although], I may describe the use of a word by stating a rule and thus determine how the word is to be used, this rule as such does not yet tell us anything about whether and how this word is used in any actual language or by any actual speaker. It is a further matter to determine whether or not language is actually used according to this rule. (Kuusela 2008, 115)

On the methodological interpretation of rules, in contrast to Hacker's reading, a grammatical rule describes only a *possible* use of language; it does not state that the word is ever *actually* used according to this rule. It is crucial to understand, Kuusela argues, "that even if the rules one states for the use of a word coincide perfectly with its actual use, they are not descriptive of its actual use" (Kuusela 2008, 116). Grammatical rules are "descriptions" in a special sense, as when one describes a possible game or a notation, where this does not yet tell us anything about whether the game is actually played or not.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, on Hacker's reading, "[the] philosopher is not only stating a rule, but also asserting that this rule is one we actually follow or one *actually constitutive* of language" (Kuusela 2008, 117). In other words, the standard interpretation, as we saw above, is committed to realism with respect to rules that the methodological interpretation finds highly questionable.

Moreover, by claiming that anyone *must* be necessarily following a certain rule when using a word correctly, Hacker is projecting what belongs to a model of interpretation (i.e. seeing language use as being rule-governed) onto the object of investigation, i.e., actual language use. In this way, the standard view depicts the later Wittgenstein as committed to a metaphysical thesis about language use – i.e. that it must be governed by rules – and to the essentialist view of language that characterised the *Tractatus*.<sup>32</sup> On the methodological interpretation, when understood properly, Wittgenstein's statements of rules are not intended to articulate what underlies our actual use of expressions. The question to be

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<sup>31</sup> See the introduction

<sup>32</sup> See Kuusela 2008, 92ff.

asked, of course, is: what bearing, if any, on the methodological conception, the rules of *possible* language use have on the way we *actually* use language? Are grammatical investigations not meant to be clarifications of *actual* philosophical confusions connected with *actual* language use?

To show what the connection between the philosopher's statements of rules and actual use consists in, Kuusela argues that the rules of grammar, taken as descriptions of possible uses of words, function not as norms or specifications regarding how we do and ought to use language, but rather as *objects of comparison* with our actual uses of words.<sup>33</sup> A grammatical rule used as an object of comparison sheds light on the actual use of a word for philosophical purposes of clarification.<sup>34</sup> Since they are employed as objects of comparison they "cannot change the reality that is the object of description" (Kuusela 2008, 218). The principal difference with the standard interpretation thus lies in denying both the realist and normative aspects of rules: here rules are not to be taken as a property of our actual language use that exists independently of an activity of clarification, nor are they generally binding in the sense that their violation necessarily yields nonsense on every occasion of use. Instead, grammatical rules are part and parcel of the philosopher's model of description that sheds light on actual use of language by means of similarities and dissimilarities.

### 1.3.2 Rules and philosophical problems

Philosophical descriptions of language use and the work of clarifying philosophical problems are, according to the methodological interpretation, intimately related: "grammatical reminders are instruments employed to dissolve actual philosophical problems that particular people have" (Kuusela 2008, 250). Wittgenstein's rules of grammar are purpose-relative statements. They serve as (constructed) organising schemas of our erratic language use, whilst their "correctness is decided on the basis of how the *instances of language use* fit [statements of rules]" (Kuusela 2008, 254). The claim,

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<sup>33</sup>A similar argument is put forward by Hilmy: "The shift to a heuristic use of exact language games as 'objects of comparison' involved an abandonment of his attempts earlier in his career to offer a refined and complete system of rules for the use of words (an 'ideal' order to which our language must approximate), but this should not be taken to imply that he was no longer concerned with 'rules of use' in his later philosophy. Rather there was a change in his concern with such rules" (Hilmy 1987, 77). Note that some authors discussed below under the "anthropological" view emphasise the status of rules as objects of comparison too.

<sup>34</sup>"Rules are to be comprehended as articulating models with the help of which language use is described by means of comparison" (Kuusela 2008, 140)



however, is not that there are no rules whatsoever that govern our actual use of language and function as norms (establishing that would be a matter for linguists or anthropologists), but rather that the later Wittgenstein's notion of rules of grammar does not correspond to the notion of rules as norms which govern our linguistic practices, functioning as independent standards of correctness that could be called upon in a critique of other philosophical theories. For, that assumption involves a relapse into metaphysical claims about language use. In short, the crucial point is to understand the status of rules as objects of comparison, whereas the philosopher is not at liberty to assert whether the rule she states in fact governs actual use, without committing herself to an empirical or metaphysical thesis. There is a crucial difference between the rules that are constitutive of meaning (those one actually follows on particular occasions) and the rules as objects of comparison formulated by the philosopher (see Kuusela 2008, 217ff.).

The rules stated by the philosopher in the course of clarification of philosophical problems have, as Kuusela stresses, their *own grammar*.<sup>35</sup> The methodological interpretation thus distinguishes between the "grammar of our language" (i.e. regularities pertaining to actual language use on particular occasions) and the grammar of philosopher's statements (or the rule-governed grammar). The philosopher's grammar is only a (constructed, artificial) means of description (or model) of the actual grammar of our language. Whilst the actual grammar of our language is typically unbounded, fluctuating, flexible and occasion-variant, the philosopher's grammar is fixed, precise and sharply determined (Cf. AWL 48). For instance, our actual use of the word "meaning", or our actual concept of meaning, has various facets, so that sometimes we use the word "meaning" to designate the object some word stands for, sometimes to designate our use of the word, sometimes what we "mean" by the word (i.e. a mental picture) and sometimes the feeling it invokes. Our use of the word "meaning" thus fluctuates from occasion to occasion, and is not regulated by some fixed, uniform rule; its grammar is not clearly regulated. This fluctuation in use, as Kuusela suggests, is the main cause of philosophical confusion. To remove confusion connected with focusing on, say, the aspect which represents meaning as the mental picture, we might bring to view a different use of the problematic word, or different facet of the concept, by stating a rule such as "The meaning of a word is its rule-governed use". As the statement of a rule, such a statement will amount to a statement of essence or "exceptionless necessity"

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<sup>35</sup> "[... ] Clarificatory statements themselves possess a grammar of their own" (Kuusela, 2008, 146).

(Kuusela 2008, 148), although (as an object of comparison) it will not attribute this necessary feature (i.e. rule-governedness) to our concept of meaning.

The grammar of our language is embedded in “the form of life language is part of” and only in that sense is “the logical... fundamentally intertwined with the factual” (Kuusela 2008, 147). To this extent, the grammar of our language, Kuusela argues, can be considered *non-arbitrary*. Hence, to say that grammar is arbitrary is merely “to clarify the status of statements about essences and necessities by characterising them as grammatical statements” (2008, 190). If one fails to keep these two notions of grammar separate, one is in danger of projecting the properties of the “ideal” onto our actual language use, thus claiming that it is, or it must be, governed by rules.<sup>36</sup> And this is precisely what Hacker’s interpretation does. Accordingly, it falls short of understanding the proper role of rules and the appeal to them in Wittgenstein’s later work.

Kuusela’s critique of Hacker’s realist interpretation of rules thus brings out two important features pertaining to Wittgenstein’s conception of rules and grammar: (i) rules are not understood as something “real” and given prior to grammatical investigations, but rather as something constructed for particular philosophical purposes; (ii) the use of rule-based models of grammar (such as language games and calculi) does not entail that what those models model must be also governed by the rules. The methodological interpretation thus makes an important contribution to our understanding of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy as a whole, inasmuch as his conception of rules is consistent with his general anti-dogmatic methodology.

However, although this interpretation acknowledges that the actual standards for application of our concepts (or the use of our words) might fluctuate across different occasions, and builds this insight into the notion of the status of rules (as objects of comparison), still the relevant method of clarification is *stating definitions* (such as “Language is a rule-governed activity” or “The meaning of a word is its use in a language”) whereby “a definition in terms of necessary conditions... articulates a particular way of drawing limits to the concept” (Kuusela 2008, 182). Because it still conceives of the rules as general schemas that are simply stated in the process of clarification of actual use, rather than seeing rules as the instructions that govern the correctness of particular moves in

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<sup>36</sup> Hilmy (1987) emphasises this in a number of places. See e.g. p. 136, p.281 n 341, p.289 n. 376.

particular language games, the methodological interpretation does not see the philosopher's grammar as the "occasion-sensitive" grammar of language games, but rather takes the insight about the occasion-sensitivity of our actual standards of correctness as a general constraint on understanding Wittgenstein's conception of rules. The anthropological interpretation, as we shall see below, understands "rules" as the (occasion-specific) rules of constructed language-games, which set the standard of correctness for use of an expression within a particular game (or a constructed "use of language").<sup>37</sup> *Pace* Kuusela, what is to be compared with our actual fluctuating, occasion-sensitive uses of language are not simply rules (definitions), but rather the constructed *uses* of language (i.e. language-games) governed by such rules.

### 1.3.3 Contrasting Wittgenstein's early and later work: a dogmatic projection

According to the methodological interpretation, Wittgenstein made an important step towards understanding the special nature of grammatical rules very early on. The *Tractatus* represents an early attempt to distinguish factual statements, on the one hand, and necessary statements or those concerning essences, on the other. The distinctive feature of the statements concerning essences is that they do not make true or false claims about objects. The distinction between two kinds of statements is preserved in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. The contrast is correctly characterised in terms of the distinction between factual statements and grammatical rules, which function as "expressions of exceptionless necessity".

Kuusela argues that the so called "Wittgenstein's turn" is properly characterised by a *methodological* shift from the metaphysical philosophy of the *Tractatus* to philosophy as a conceptual or grammatical investigation which is liberated from the earlier, methodologically motivated dogmatism. The turn, according to Kuusela, is misleadingly characterised by the change in the object of investigation from hidden rules of logical syntax to familiar rules of grammar, as the interpretation advocated by Baker and Hacker assumes. The dogmatism of the *Tractatus*, on this view, is not a result of any particular doctrine or theory of meaning, but it stems from a dogmatic understanding of the method of

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<sup>37</sup> Wittgenstein calls simple language games in *PI* §1 and 2 "uses of language" or "systems of communication". They are, however, not the actual uses of language, but are put forward as object of comparison.

logical analysis.<sup>38</sup> There are a few notions, stemming from the *Tractatus*'s idea of analysis, that Wittgenstein later criticised as confused and dogmatic. For example, one such notion is that analysis aims at explicating a complete list of rules that govern uses of expressions (simple names), thereby resolving all possible misunderstandings related to the expression once and for all. Another pair of notions considered misleading is that analysis must achieve complete exactness and that there is such a thing as the fundamental, simplest form for all our expressions, i.e. elementary propositions made of simple names. The underlying premise to all these notions is the idea that beneath the accidental grammatical features of particular languages lie hidden essential logical properties or, otherwise, *the* logic of our language.

On the methodological conception, one general problem with the *Tractatus*, and metaphysics more generally, is that it mistakes a particular way of representing some concept, or a rule for the use of a sign, for a thesis about the essence of the concept. It is a particular kind of projection that is involved in this inability to distinguish what belongs to our means of representing a concept, and what belongs to the concept that is represented, which typically results in dogmatic theses about the concepts that are the objects of our investigation. "The projection of the philosopher's mode of presentation onto the object of investigation gives rise to dogmatism" (Kuusela 2008, 109) and it amounts to turning a model into a dogma. Realisation that the *Tractatus* rests upon such projections and errors of primarily methodological nature is at the heart of Wittgenstein's turn. "Turning one's investigation around" thus presupposes that some of the central *Tractatus*'s claims such as that propositions are pictures, albeit put forward as philosophical theses, are in fact disguised rules of grammar and statements of essences, and not some super-factual statements about actual propositions. Being sensitive to the difference in the status of factual and grammatical statements is one of the central tenets of the turn. To avoid dogmatism with regards to their statements philosophers should be aware of the pertinent contrasts between the "logical roles" of rules and empirical statements. It is a significant feature of a grammatical rule or definition that its "logical role" is not that of a true or false statement<sup>39</sup> or description about an object of investigation; it is rather a sort of description

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<sup>38</sup> "As Wittgenstein comes to realise later the method of the *Tractatus* involves a commitment to philosophical or metaphysical theses about the nature of language and philosophy" (Kuusela 2008, 3).

<sup>39</sup> "[The] definition does not state a truth about anything" (Kuusela 2008, 114)

that determines the meaning of a sign. As we have seen earlier, although both empirical statements and rules are in some sense “descriptions”, the former describe actual objects that exist independently of an activity of description, whilst a rule describes (i.e. “constructs”) abstract entities or activities like games, calculi, signs, geometrical constructions, notations or designs that do not exist independently of the activity of description. A grammatical rule as a description of possible language use belongs to the second category.

To sum up. The methodological interpretation disagrees with the standard interpretation about the realist interpretation of Wittgenstein’s concept of rules, and their supposed normative role. On this view, the rules Wittgenstein employs in his later work are only the instruments of clarification of fluctuating actual language use, and not something that implicitly governs it and needs to be brought to light in the course of the investigation. Rules are constructed for purposes of clarification of particular problems, and represent objects of comparison with the way we use language. Still, Kuusela’s account of rules as objects of comparison does not specify how rules understood as definitions are supposed to be compared with our actual uses of expression. As we shall see in the next section, the anthropological interpretation is far more specific about the way the rules figure in the method of comparing constructed uses with actual uses. Namely, the rules are typically embedded within particular language games that then serve as relevant objects of comparison.

Most importantly, “inherently general” rules envisaged as combinatorial principles or the rules for sentence-formation are not sufficient to determine what counts as correct or incorrect use of words on different occasions, or to distinguish sense from nonsense. Wittgenstein’s talk of rules as describing the use of words is part and parcel of the “occasional”, rather than “combinatorial” (occasion-invariant) grammar. This means that the rules understood as standards of correct use are always the rules belonging to particular simple language-games<sup>40</sup>, and simple-language games by means of their rules describe (as objects of comparison) a possible standard of correctness for a particular (type of) occasion, however not for every possible occasion of use.

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<sup>40</sup> See below for the idea of simple language-games

## 1.4 The anthropological conception of grammar

Both of previous interpretations have, in their different ways, given central place to the notion of a rule in Wittgenstein's later conception of grammar. We saw that the standard interpretation sees "our grammar" as a set of grammatical rules, which are the object of philosophical inquiry and whose main function is normative – i.e. to determine the standard of correctness for what can be said – whilst the methodological account of grammatical rules treats them as instruments for clarification of philosophical problems that have the role of objects of comparison. In this section I want to look at a cluster of interpretations, which are either sceptical or overtly critical about the function of the notion of a rule whose formulation would be necessary and sufficient for determining correctness of a use. I call this interpretation "anthropological" because it takes as essential to Wittgenstein's later thought the idea that grammatical investigations of language are concerned with uncovering the place of language in the network of human activities, which are part and parcel of human life and natural history. As the reader will see, I group together some very divergent accounts concerning Wittgenstein's later philosophy. However, what I think unites them is: (1) general scepticism concerning the formulation of rules as that which determines the general standards of correctness of meaningful speech (of the domain of use broadly understood); (2) a focus on the role of human practices, forms of life, and particular occasions in determining the sense of what is said; and (3) the concern with the way we operate with words on particular occasions, and thus with the emphasis on looking at the particular case, rather than on a concern with the formulation of occasion-invariant rules.

### 1.4.1 The role of rules

In his essay, "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy" (1962/2002), Cavell argues against David Pole's critical comments on *Philosophical Investigations*. Cavell finds Pole's interpretation to be a serious distortion of Wittgenstein's later thought. In particular, he thinks that Pole has misunderstood the role of the concept of rules. According to Cavell, Pole's interpretation is committed to the following theses: (1) "The correctness or incorrectness of a use of language is determined by the rules of the language"; and (2) "Where no existing rules apply, you can always adopt a new rule to cover the case, but then that undoubtedly changes the game" (Cavell 2002, 48). Cavell criticises Pole's view as described by these claims as follows:

Pole's description seems, roughly, to suggest the way correctness is determined in a *constructed* language or in the simplest games of chance. That everyday language does not, in fact or in essence, depend upon such a structure and conception of rules, and yet that the absence of such a structure in no way impairs its functioning, is what the picture of language drawn in the later philosophy is about. It represents one of the major criticisms Wittgenstein enters against the *Tractatus*; it sets for him many of the great problems of the later philosophy... and forces him into new ways of investigating meaning, understanding, reference... his new, and central, concept of "grammar" is developed in opposition to it; it is repeated dozens of times. Whether the later Wittgenstein describes language as being roughly like a calculus with fixed rules working in this way is not a question that can be seriously discussed. (Cavell 2002, 48)

Cavell's main objection is that Pole misses the point of Wittgenstein's later approach to language use by seeing it as something akin to a calculus with fixed rules. Far from defending such a view, this is precisely the model that Wittgenstein in the *Investigations* criticises. We saw that on the standard interpretation, the "inherently general" combinatorial rules play a central role in the understanding of Wittgenstein's conception of meaningful language use. That role is to determine "the bounds of sense" and to establish the standards of correctness for future applications of words. The thrust of Cavell's argument against Pole's interpretation is that the notion of rules thus understood itself belongs to the picture of language that is challenged in the *Investigations*. Hence, it affects the standard interpretation insofar as it shares Pole's core commitments. On Cavell's view, Wittgenstein's main reason for investigating the concept of a rule would be "to formulate one source of a distorted conception of language – one to which, in philosophising, we are particularly susceptible" and to show "how inessential 'the appeal to rules' is as an explanation of language" (Cavell 2002, 51-52).

By shifting the focus away from the idea that our language is akin to a logical calculus governed by strict rules, the idea concerning what constitutes the conditions of meaningful language use also changes. The notion of rules becomes relevant only in the context of simple language-games that model particular uses of words, and not as a general standard

of well-formedness. In fact, the very idea of well-formedness is considered to be of secondary importance for the domain of use understood as operating with words in particular contexts.<sup>41</sup> As Baker points out, “Wittgenstein shows little or no interest in sentence-construction...He directs attention to how we *operate* with words, how they are integrated into human activities, and how differently sentences function as instruments...We might say that his investigations of language take place largely in a different dimension” (Baker 2004, 277).

Others who share Cavell’s scepticism regarding the standard interpretation of rules have also raised concerns against the idea that there are occasion-invariant rules that serve as standards of correctness for language use. These arguments, like Cavell’s, stress that understanding the sense of an utterance relies significantly on understanding the broader human context in which linguistic communication takes place. A recent argument to this effect can be found in Glüer and Wikfross (2010). These authors argue that interpreters like Hacker and Glock are wrong to claim that Wittgenstein retained the idea that language is rule-governed when he rejected the calculus in favour of game analogy. They argue that the thesis that “speaking a language is a rule-governed activity” is “very much at odds with central tenets of the later Wittgenstein” and that Wittgenstein’s views on meaning and rules “underwent [radical change] towards the late period, a change culminating in the rejection of [this thesis]” (2010, 149). According to Glüer and Wikfross, Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations represented the final blow for “his own earlier idea that meaning is determined by rules that guide our use—instead, [Wittgenstein] suggests, meaning is determined by this use itself, by the *practice* of applying the sign” (ibid., 155). What is essential to the distinction between using a word correctly and incorrectly lies, not in rules, but in “human agreement (in primitive reactions and judgements)” (ibid., 156).<sup>42</sup>

The dependence of understanding the sense of what is said on the context in which an utterance takes place is particularly emphasised by authors such as Lars Hertzberg, James Conant, and Charles Travis.<sup>43</sup> These authors argue that the contribution that a particular

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<sup>41</sup> I discuss this in more detail in chapter two.

<sup>42</sup> The authors do admit that “[there] is, of course, substantial dispute as to precise role agreement is supposed to play for meaning determination in later Wittgenstein” (Glüer & Wikfross 2010, 156).

<sup>43</sup> Some interpreters (Gustafsson, Baz) argue that Travis and Hertzberg (or Cavell) are actually on opposite sides of the fence and that Travis still tries to preserve the idea of generality in linguistic meaning, something that transcends any particular occasion, whilst Hertzberg rejects any notion of generality in language use (see



context makes to our understanding of what is said by someone's use of language is not derivable from any previously established rules. James Conant highlights the centrality of Wittgenstein's notion of *criteria* for understanding applications of our concepts, which, unlike the notion of rules, is part and parcel of particular occasions and circumstances in which an utterance takes place. Criteria for the concept's application cannot be specified purely in virtue of one knowing the concept, and are thus not derivable from antecedently specified rules.<sup>44</sup> For Conant, "a grammatical investigation is a convening of our criteria for the employment of a particular concept" (Conant 1998, 249). According to Hertzberg and Travis, to consider an utterance in a given context involves a special kind of capacity or "sensitivity to surroundings" that is not simply entailed by knowing language or the meanings of words.<sup>45</sup> This particular sensitivity to what is pertinent for sense in given surroundings is not "translatable" into rules. As Hertzberg puts it, determining what is said by the use of words on some occasion,

does not simply mean that we enlarge the number of factors taken into consideration in establishing the sense of an utterance, as though the sense were a function of a determinate range of contextual variables in addition to the verbal ones [...] there is no way of determining in advance what contextual considerations will be relevant to what a person is saying. What we respond to in the course of a conversation, it might be said, is the particular utterance in its particular context, our understanding of the utterance and our understanding of the context being mutually dependent. (Hertzberg, *unpublished manuscript*)<sup>46</sup>

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e.g. Hertzberg 2007). There is some truth in this view insofar as Travis agrees that there is a gap between "what words mean" and "what is said by using them on an occasion" (see e.g. Travis 2008, 70ff). However, Travis's arguments are systematically trying to undermine the idea that the sense of utterances is occasion-insensitive and thus work towards the same notion as Hertzberg's, or at least as far as I can see. For a similar line of thought see: Putnam (2002, 105-6).

<sup>44</sup> Marmor also emphasises the context-dependence of criteria: "[On] a Wittgensteinian account one should typically expect a multiplicity of criteria for the correct application of a given concept... all criteria are defeasible, not only those which determine the use of indexical predicates... all criteria for the correct applicability of concept-word are circumstance-dependent... there is no hope in enumerating all the variant circumstances which alter the criteria" (Marmor 1992/2005, 109). See also Cavell 1979.

<sup>45</sup> See Travis (2008, 279)

<sup>46</sup> This passage is part of the full version of the essay that appeared in T. McCarthy & S. Stidd (eds.), *Wittgenstein in America* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), pp. 90-103. The passage was omitted in a published version by mistake. See:

[http://web.abo.fi/fak/hf/filosofi/Staff/lhertzbe/Text/The\\_Sense\\_Is\\_Where\\_You\\_Find\\_It.pdf](http://web.abo.fi/fak/hf/filosofi/Staff/lhertzbe/Text/The_Sense_Is_Where_You_Find_It.pdf)

In a similar manner, Travis criticises the idea that general, occasion-invariant rules such as “bachelor is an unmarried male” can settle the correct use (application) of an expression on a particular occasion (see Travis 2000, 213). According to Travis, “words have, or contribute to, a decisive condition of correctness only in the right surroundings... But the context here is not the context of a sentence (or *Satz*). It is the context of particular human doings to which a certain speaking of words contributes” (Travis 2006, 62). Travis criticises those views that try to eliminate the need to make reference to particular contexts in which human linguistic interaction occurs when trying to account for what our sentences say. On the standard interpretation, which is committed to the notion that one could formulate the rules of grammar, one must effectively eliminate the idea that there could be divergent judgements regarding how to interpret a particular rule in different contexts; the rules alone, once specified and tabulated, are supposed to be sufficient for determining application conditions for our concepts across a multiplicity of occasions. Hence, consulting those rules should be sufficient for knowing how words are correctly used.<sup>47</sup>

However, as Travis highlights, Wittgenstein’s talk of rules in the *Investigations* is specifically connected with the use of the method of simple language-games,<sup>48</sup> and these model and apply (as objects of comparison) only to particular occasions and specified circumstances:

A language-game... is an object of comparison. It is a specified way of connecting (spoken) words with actions which need not be speaking words, and... with situations one may encounter, or projects one may have. Once specified, a game can be compared with one or another bit of actual talk, and the way *it* connects to further doings, or situations. The game’s way of connecting talk with further things may illuminate... that actual talk’s way of connecting with further things. One specifies such an object of comparison by saying how the game is to be played. One *may* do that by specifying what are to be its rules. (Travis 2006, 18)

Here Travis, in line with the methodological interpretation, aims to understand the role of the notion of rules in Wittgenstein’s later work in such a way that it does not create a

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<sup>47</sup> As I shall argue in chapter 3, the standard view’s interpretation of “perspicuous representation” emphasises precisely the feature of comprehensiveness of rules when creating a map of our conceptual space.

<sup>48</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the method of language-games as objects of comparison see 3.4

conflict with the rest of his philosophical insights. First, the notion of rules is connected explicitly with Wittgenstein's use of constructed simple language-games (or constructed uses of language, systems of communication) as objects of comparison, and not with the rules that supposedly govern our actual activities of using language.<sup>49</sup> Second, the rules of particular language-games are meant to make perspicuous, rather than replace, our practical sensitivity to surroundings. Simple language-games with rules can be used to model different occasions (with different relevant purposes) on which an expression is used (where rules govern particular moves). Thus, in agreement with the methodological reading, and in contrast to the standard reading, the claim is not that our actual linguistic practices are rule-governed, but rather that simple language-games with explicit rules can be used to make perspicuous relevant features of the different occasions on which expressions are used, which features affect their correctness-conditions.<sup>50</sup>

We can illustrate this with the following example. Consider the utterance of an order "Bring me a slab!". How do we know when this utterance is correctly responded? What is the standard of correctness for this utterance? On the standard interpretation, the use of a word "slab" will be correct only if it complies with a familiar definition or rule which specifies what "slab" means and how it combines with other expressions in a sentence (i.e. that it stands for something that can be brought, unlike, say, the note C sharp). We may define "slab" as a broad, flat, somewhat thick piece of stone, wood, or other solid material, used to refer to objects that bear those features. On the anthropological conception of grammar, as established earlier, no such previously established rule or definition will specify *the* standard of correctness for every possible occasion of use and every possible circumstance. The contextual variation of relevant standards of correctness could be represented by using simple language-games with different rules. Take for instance the

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<sup>49</sup> The following remark supports the view that rules are primarily the rules of language games: "I would like to call the rule an instrument. 'To clarify grammar' means to produce it in the form of a game with rules" (MS 113, 24r/Ts211, 571)

<sup>50</sup> A similar interpretation of the notion of rules as the rules of language-games is given by Stephen Hilmy (1987). Hilmy associates two aspects of "grammar", i.e. exact and unbounded, with hypothetical and actual language-games. Only hypothetical (constructed) language games are said to be governed by strict rules and their role is heuristic, whilst grammar in the latter sense signifies fluctuating, unregulated uses of our everyday expressions and our extant language games (of asserting, making a hypothesis, describing sensations, pretending, reporting, praying etc.). It is crucial to understand the nature of the relationship of these two aspects of grammar, which means that exact grammars are only compared with our everyday grammar; they are not meant to be substituted for it: "[...] Wittgenstein uses language games (of the hypothetical exact variety) as objects of comparison to shed light on facts... of our language (our extant language games)" (Hilmy 1987, 262 n.230).

language game §2, involving a builder and his assistant. When the builder says “Slab!”, the assistant has to bring a slab (and not, say, a pillar). The assistant understood what is said correctly only if he brings a slab. However, what if the assistant brings the slab broken in two pieces? Did he do something correctly or not? The rules of this game allow for any of the two interpretations (see *PI* §41); according to the rules of this game, it is irrelevant whether slabs are broken or not: bringing either will count as a correct move.

However, there are occasions where it will matter whether slabs are broken or not (i.e. whose *purposes* will exclude certain possibilities). Thus, we could specify two further variants of this game, one whose rules count broken slabs as slabs and the other whose rules exclude broken slabs. These two variants model two different occasions, one whose purpose excludes broken slabs (e.g. building a house) and other whose purpose includes broken slabs (e.g. counting how many slabs are delivered at the building site). Crucially, the conditions of correctness for any of the two variants were not given with the rules of the initial game (since for purposes of that game it was irrelevant whether slabs were broken or not). Which specific understanding of what the rule says is called for (in a new circumstance) is not derivable from that initial rule (that mentions no feature of brokenness), but it depends on particular purposes connected with particular occasions of use. So, the contribution “slab” makes to the correctness-conditions of the order “Bring me a slab!” in each of these games (occasions) varies, and it is not accounted for by any combinatorial rules that settle (semantic) well-formedness of the sentence. Arguably, these occasion-specific purposes cannot be simply included in the *general* rules (definitions) and thus made explicit, because any new occasion and circumstance can require different understanding of what the initial rule might say.<sup>51</sup>

One of the things this example brings to light is the relevance of the different *purposes* that emerge on particular occasions and that have a bearing on the rules of language games that model those occasions.<sup>52</sup> To the extent that the purposes of our activities are an essential

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<sup>51</sup> See Travis 2006, 19 for elaboration of this example and p.113ff. for the argument against the view that the required conditions of correctness can be made explicit and formulated in advance.

<sup>52</sup> Wittgenstein raises the concern about the alleged insignificance of purposes and points in *PI* §561ff. (especially in §§564, 567). He suggests that purposes and points are the essential part of the game, and that rules which are blind to purposes would be considered “inessential” and pointless. Travis points this out by means of the distinction between what he calls “introduction” and “elimination” rules. The elimination rule concerns particular purposes and informs, as Travis puts it, “what a good introduction rule would be” (2006, 19), namely if it accommodates getting on with relevant projects.

part of most of our linguistic transactions, and inform which standards of correctness will be suitable on given occasions, we can conclude that, *pace* Hacker, grammar is *not* arbitrary in the relevant sense, and that our uses of language, as well as the rules of constructed language-games, are importantly informed by extra-linguistic purposes.

#### **1.4.2 Contrasting Wittgenstein's early and later work: the role of agreement in judgement**

We've seen in earlier sections that the standard conception of grammar takes the principle of autonomy to play an important role in Wittgenstein's later conception of grammar. This principle is intimately associated with what Hacker calls 'the independence requirement' according to which questions of sense are antecedent to, and independent of, questions of truth. He takes it that "Wittgenstein embraced this principle in his earlier writings and adhered to it... through-out his life" (Hacker 1972, 161). In a more general sense, this means that language, as Hertzberg puts it, "is impervious to any contingencies" (*forthcoming*, p. 354).

In contrast to Hacker's focus on the autonomy of grammar where "the rule and nothing but the rule determines what is correct" (B&H 1985, 172), the anthropological conception emphasises the ways in which our language, our concepts and what we say, are fundamentally dependent on facts about us as practical thinkers and judgers, our life with others and the world we live in. The ultimate appeal for later Wittgenstein is not to rules but to *forms of life*. Neither "the grasping of universals or the books of rules" can ensure that we will use words correctly in different contexts, but the fact that we normally do use them consistently is a matter of our shared human forms of life (Cavell 2002, 52; 1979, 29-30). The idea that human beings agree not merely about definitions and rules, but also in the form of life and in judgements they make (*PI* §§241, 242), is, on this conception, one of the *Investigations'* central insights. The notion of combinatorial grammar that *a priori* decides what counts as a proposition with sense, as well as correctness (truth)-conditions, is taken to belong to the old picture where "language must operate no matter how the world is, in a vacuum of fact" (Goldfarb 1997, 85).

Thinking of grammar and language as "presuppositionless" (Goldfarb) and immune to contingencies is not, on the anthropological interpretation, something that Wittgenstein

subscribes to anymore in the *Investigations*. The anthropological interpretation is not committed to the view Hacker rejects – i.e. that grammar is justifiable by, or answerable to, the nature of things – but rather, the point is that grammar alone (understood as a set of rules for well-formed combinations) is here not thought to decide the bounds of sense, that is, what *we* will be ready to count as a proposition with sense. Here is how Hertzberg describes the contrast between Wittgenstein's early view of the independence of language from facts and his later critical response to this view:

On this view, if the character of our concepts were not such that their application in every possible case was unambiguously given, then the question of how they were to be applied, and whether they had any application at all in particular cases, would depend on something external to language, hence to that extent meaning would be an a posteriori matter. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, however, these are no longer seen to be two separate options. The application of what is said does not depend on the form of words itself, but is a matter of the part they play in a context of human interaction. (Hertzberg *forthcoming*, p. 355)

On Wittgenstein's mature view, in contrast to what the standard interpretation suggests, grammar understood as a set of general, combinatorial rules does not have the last word *vis-à-vis* the sense of what is said, because "there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments" (*PI* 242). To be sure, Hacker does not discard the role of the agreement in judgement all together, but construes it as "part of the framework within which a language-game is played" (B&H 1985, 243), rather than making it a constitutive factor in determining the sense of what is said.<sup>53</sup> By introducing the idea of agreement in judgement, Wittgenstein, on the anthropological view, brings to the fore the role the human sensibility to particular contexts in which language is used plays in linguistic communication. Thus, grammar's proposals as to what makes sense and what does not can be significantly modified by what we can find or understand as sensible (or

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<sup>53</sup> On Hacker's account the agreement in judgement collapses into the agreement in definitions in that agreeing about the methods of measurement (definitions) *ipso facto* represents "an agreement over the method of application, hence an agreement in the practice of measuring" (B&H 1985, 250). But Wittgenstein's remark in *PI* §242 suggests that "agreement in definitions" and "agreement in judgement" are, after all, different things.

not) relative to a particular circumstance and occasion in which a sentence is uttered.<sup>54</sup> Travis formulates this constraint on grammar's (arbitrary) proposals by what he dubs "our parochial sensibilities" as follows:

"So there is, after all, one sort of criticism that can be made of grammar: what it presents as propositions are not things *we* are able to treat as propositions. A grammar can go wrong in that sense... Note that the crucial reference [in *PI* §520] to *us*. Who the 'us' is may be somewhat negotiable. But something on the order of we humans; *not*, in any event, we thinkers... So the point needs to be about an entirely parochial form of thought. We are thinkers of a particular kind, equipped by our nature with certain sensitivities, equipped to treat the world, in thought and deed, in certain ways." (Travis 2010, 203)

I mentioned earlier (1.2.2) that the notion that grammar is arbitrary also raises the issue of the extent to which Wittgenstein's later account of language is a conventionalist one. On the anthropological conception, the notions of conventionalism and naturalism are not in conflict when it comes to human beings and their life with language. Human conventions are not something we agree *upon* beforehand, but rather, the conventional character of human language comes from the fact that human users of language normally agree *in* forms of life and judgements (in the sense of being *attuned*). This notion of conventionality is, however, a way of characterising human nature itself. Cavell writes, "[we] are thinking of convention not as the arrangements a particular culture has found convenient... but as those forms of life which are normal to any group of creatures we call human" (1979, 111). Similarly, the concept of normality is closely tied with the idea of naturalness and primitive reactions, but also with having to do something as "we do it", hence, in accordance with certain conventionally developed techniques of counting, inferring, measuring, continuing a series etc. With regards to these elementary human abilities and practices, the conventional and the natural aspects of life are seen as inseparable. Investigations of grammar are thus closely related to investigations of the natural history of mankind, since determining what we mean or say in using language can't be disconnected from its application in our lives. Even so, a grammatical investigation as a sort of philosophical inquiry is not concerned with matters of fact. It does not collapse into a historical or anthropological study of actual

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<sup>54</sup> Hertzberg (2001) talks about a circumstance "[excluding] taking words in a certain way" (2001, 100).

human practices because it is concerned with *possibilities* and imaginary, invented histories and language-games, as well as it is with our actual practices.<sup>55</sup>

By highlighting the role of our agreement in judgement and not just in definitions, the anthropological reading brings to light that in Wittgenstein's later framework grammar's arbitrary proposals *vis-à-vis* sense (the representational content of our sentences) are constrained by our sensibilities to particular occasions. The standard reading downplays the contribution of our sensitivity to surroundings to determining what is said, which contribution resists the formulation in terms of occasion-invariant rules. Developing on this position, in chapters 4 and 5, I shall argue that Hacker's emphasis on the autonomy of grammar in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, and his claim that this challenges the metaphysical realism of the *Tractatus*, completely misunderstands both the early and the later work, and thus the relation between the two. I shall argue that the right place to focus on in understanding this contrast is on Wittgenstein's later criticism of the grammar's sense-determining role, namely, what grammar alone, as a set of combinatorial principles (combinatorial grammar), can and cannot achieve *vis-a-vis* the sense of what is said.

## 1.5 Summary

It was my main aim in this chapter to introduce three different treatments of the concepts of rules and grammar in Wittgenstein's later work. We can now summarise important contrasts between the standard, methodological, and anthropological interpretations of rules and grammar as follows.

On the standard view the grammar of our ordinary language consists of rules which function as standards of correctness or norms for correct application of words. The rules of grammar determine which combinatorial possibilities are licit, and which aren't; they, thus, distinguish meaningful from meaningless sentential constructions. But they also function as norms we follow when we speak meaningfully. Rules are inherently general and valid for the multiplicity of occasions. On this view, meaningful uses of language (understood both as combinatorial possibilities of words and particular instances of speech) are *necessarily* rule governed: there is no such thing as a meaningful use independently of rules. The claim that grammar is arbitrary i.e. not answerable to, or justifiable by, reality marks

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<sup>55</sup> "What is of concern to philosophy... are not the facts of nature themselves, but the relation between them and language: the way in which language is dependent on them" (Hertzberg 1994, 93)



Wittgenstein's turn from the metaphysical realism of the *Tractatus* to his later philosophy. Understanding of grammar as a free-floating system of rules that govern meaningful speech is intimately connected with understanding of Wittgenstein's philosophical method as aimed at the clarification of confusions that arise due to violations of grammatical rules.

The methodological conception of grammar and rules is formulated as a critique of the standard conception. On this view, the standard conception misses the real point of Wittgenstein's turn and thus ascribes to later Wittgenstein the dogmatic, essentialist view of language and methodology that characterised his earlier philosophy. This interpretation calls for a re-thinking of the status of Wittgenstein's notion of rule. Rather than understanding the notion of rule as normative and as a general standard of correctness that speakers actually follow, we should understand rules purely as instruments of clarification belonging to Wittgenstein's later methods. This notion has a status of an object of comparison with the actual language use and it shouldn't be taken as something that must be given in our linguistic practices that a philosopher gives an expression to. Only if we understand the notions of rules and grammar in this way could we avoid attributing to Wittgenstein philosophical theses.

Finally, the anthropological reading criticised the role of the notion of a rule as a principle that determines what counts as an instance of meaningful speech independently of a particular language-game or occasion. This view highlights that the central characteristic of the later Wittgenstein's concept of grammar (as a description of operating with words) consists in identifying the context of human activities as part and parcel of the investigation of what our words mean and what we mean by using them. Certain facts about human beings as those who speak and understand language, pragmatic or natural-historic elements, and other facts about circumstances in which language is used, ought to enter into the discussion about the semantics of our expressions.<sup>56</sup> The idea of arbitrariness of grammar is an object of the later Wittgenstein's criticism rather than something he adheres to in the *Investigations*. Grammar's proposals concerning what is meaningful are significantly constrained by human agreement in judgement and form of life, and by the work of our parochial sensibilities that resist exhaustive formulation in rules.

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<sup>56</sup> For two senses of pragmatics and semantics see: Travis's essay "Pragmatics" in his 2008, p. 109ff.

One of the key features of the standard view advocated by Peter Hacker is that no relevant distinction has been made between two dimensions of use; there is a single notion of use that covers both the logico-syntactical employment of expression and significant utterances of them on particular occasions. A corollary of this treatment is that both aspects are understood as apt to be accounted for in terms of “inherently general” rules. Correspondingly, the standard interpretation adopts a single model of grammar conceived of as rules that equally govern combinatorial possibilities of words in meaningful sentences and instances of meaningful speech on different occasions. In contrast, the other two interpretations, in their own ways, emphasised the importance of distinguishing different notions and dimensions of grammar. Thus, they brought to view (i) the contrast between grammar of our actual linguistic transactions, or extant language games, and grammar that the philosopher constructs to describe our actual uses of language (by means of constructed games with strict rules); and (ii) the contrast between the logico-syntactic employment (which may be captured by the model of combinatorial grammar) and the use of expressions on particular occasions or in particular language-games (where *general* rules or definitions are *not* sufficient for determining the sense of what is said).

In the next two chapters it will become clearer that these distinctions between different notions and dimensions of grammar and use, which the standard view takes no notice of, are very important to the later Wittgenstein. They are particularly important for his conception of philosophical problems and the methods of their solution. They also reflect the contrast between Wittgenstein’s early and later philosophy. To the extent that it glosses over these fundamental distinctions, the standard interpretation demonstrates a misunderstanding, not only of the concept of grammar, but of the relation between the early and later philosophy of Wittgenstein, of the source and nature of philosophical problems that preoccupy Wittgenstein in the *Investigations*, and of his way of responding to them.

In chapter 2 I show how the standard and anthropological interpretations conceive of the distinction between “surface grammar” and “depth grammar” as Wittgenstein’s own way of contrasting two dimensions of grammar and use. I shall argue that, in a failure to notice a fundamental contrast between two dimensions of use and grammar, the standard interpretation interprets Wittgenstein’s notion of “depth grammar” as a more refined variant of “surface grammar”, whilst the anthropological interpretation insists on there being a

substantial contrast between the two dimensions. The discussion of surface and depth grammar will also introduce important themes that concern Wittgenstein's later methodology of clarification of philosophical problems relating to language use.

## CHAPTER 2

### *The Distinction Between Surface Grammar and Depth Grammar*

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In the use of words one might distinguish 'surface grammar' from 'depth grammar'. What immediately impresses itself upon us about the use of a word is the way it is used in the construction of the sentence, the part of its use--one might say--that can be taken in by the ear.--And now compare the depth grammar, say of the word "to mean", with what its surface grammar would lead us to suspect. No wonder we find it difficult to know our way about. (PI 664)

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Wittgenstein called the sort of philosophical investigations he was involved in 'grammatical' or 'conceptual' (PI 90). This name suggests a substantial connection between the way he envisaged philosophy and his conception of grammar. In the introduction I said

that the central motivation for this shift in thinking about the notions of grammar and meaning along the lines of use stems from the idea that philosophical problems arise in our failure to command a clear view of how we use language. Philosophical descriptions of grammar, or the ways we use words, “gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems” (PI 109). The aim of the philosophical investigation of grammar is “to get rid of certain puzzles” (AWL 31).

One way Wittgenstein describes the potential source of philosophical problems is by means of the distinction between what he calls “surface grammar” and “depth grammar”. He uses these terms only once in *Philosophical Investigations* in order to indicate the contrast between two aspects of the use of a word, and to suggest that the “surface” aspect of its use is in some sense misleading. In PI 123, Wittgenstein says that “A philosophical problem has the form: ‘I don’t know my way about’”. In PI 664, where he introduces the distinction between surface and depth grammar, he connects the difficulty in “knowing one’s way about”, and hence the source of philosophical problems, with the contrast between the word’s surface and depth grammar. Wittgenstein does not say much about the notion of the depth grammar of a word, except that we ought to compare it to “what its surface grammar would lead us to suspect” (PI 664). It is clear from his remark that both surface and depth grammar describe an aspect of use. About surface grammar, Wittgenstein says three things: that it is the part of an expression’s use that immediately impresses itself upon us, that this aspect of use is the way the word is used in the construction of the sentence, and that it can be taken in by the ear. Therefore, the task in explaining the distinction between surface and depth grammar will consist in looking for the two contrasting aspects of use, one of which is the use of a word in the construction of a sentence.

We’ve said earlier that there are at least two ways of interpreting Wittgenstein’s notion of use: we can understand use in a narrow sense, as logico-syntactical employment or combinatorial possibilities of words in sentences, or we can understand it in a broad sense as operating with expressions on particular occasions. I proposed that parallel to these two aspects of use, it is constructive to distinguish two different models of grammar: one that is typically thought of as consisting of general combinatorial rules that govern meaningful combinations of expressions in sentences, and the other where those kinds of occasion-insensitive rules do *not* seem to capture the relevant features of language use that pertain to

sense.<sup>57</sup> In this chapter I want to explicitly connect these two dimensions of use and two models of grammar with the distinction Wittgenstein makes in PI 664 between surface and depth grammar. I shall present two rival interpretations of this distinction that correspond to what I called the standard and anthropological interpretation of grammar. I shall argue that, because it conflates narrow and broad dimensions of use, and because it understands use *tout court* as a matter of the licit or illicit combining of expressions in speech, the standard interpretation construes the domain of “depth grammar” as a more ramified variant of “surface grammar”. On the other hand, the anthropological reading, because it insists that there is an important contrast between the two dimensions of use, and thus between two possible models of grammar, claims that Wittgenstein’s notion of depth grammar cannot be reduced to a more complicated version of combinatorial surface grammar. Furthermore, this view associates what is significant and idiosyncratic about the later Wittgenstein’s approach to language and clarification of philosophical problems relating to language primarily with the broad dimension of use and the relevant idea of occasion-sensitive depth grammar.

Another matter whose central importance for the interpretation of Wittgenstein will emerge through the discussion of surface and depth grammar of words is the distinction between sense and nonsense. As I mentioned in the earlier chapter, the standard interpretation claims that the distinction between sense and nonsense is determined by the rules of grammar, and that evaluating a philosophical claim as nonsense based on citing combinatorial rules is the main kind of criticism Wittgenstein makes against philosophers. In contrast to this, the anthropological view dissociates the questions of sense and nonsense from the consideration of occasion-invariant grammatical rules; the distinction between sense and nonsense, on this conception, can only be drawn with respect to a particular context in which a speaking takes place, and is not made on the basis of “inherently general” rules.

## 2.2 The standard interpretation of PI 664

In this section I introduce the standard interpretation of the distinction between surface and depth grammar whose main proponent is Peter Hacker. On this reading, surface grammar “consists of obvious syntactic features of the sentence and the words of which it is

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<sup>57</sup> Only the rules of particular language-games used as objects of comparison can play a role in describing the broad dimension of use.

composed” (Hacker 2000b, 434). Surface grammar might be described as what expressions grammatically appear to be, or what they merely look like, constructed on a basis of just a few paradigmatic cases. Surface grammar does not reveal the real grammar of an expression; an expression’s real grammar is its depth grammar. Grammatical ‘appearances’ generated by misleading surface analogies between different kinds of expression are responsible for the emergence of “philosophically important nonsense”. Philosophically important nonsense includes “apparent sentences”, such as “I know I have hands”, “The mind is identical with the brain”, “Understanding is a mental state” or “I know that I am in pain” (see Hacker 2000a, 99). Furthermore, the notion of misleading surface appearances is intimately related to a lack of perspicuity in grammar. To say that our grammar is lacking in perspicuity is just another way of saying that “expressions with very different uses have similar surface grammars” (Hacker 1996, 107). Thus, a central claim of this reading is that surface grammar is misleading with regards to a word’s real (“grammatical”) category<sup>58</sup> and this is why philosophical confusions arise. Hacker writes;

[The] analogy between words and tools was invoked by Wittgenstein to emphasise the fact that words of a given syntactical category (form) can have different uses, and that it is the latter, not the former, which must be grasped in order to comprehend correctly the notion of the meaning of a word... In many cases, the form of a sentence (like the syntactical category of a word) may be wholly misleading with respect to its use. (B&H 2005a, 75)

The expression’s *depth* grammar, by contrast, can be “made evident by a description of the overall use of the relevant expression, by a survey of its combinatorial possibilities and impossibilities, of the circumstances of its use, and of its consequences” (Hacker 2000b, 434). The depth grammar of an expression is, on the standard reading, understood as consisting of a set of familiar grammatical rules that govern the meaningful use of expressions in sentences and in speech. Thus, what Hacker calls “depth grammar” is simply the grammar that consist of inherently general rules, which determine the bounds of sense. Hence, when Wittgenstein talks of grammar *simpliciter* he means “depth grammar” rather

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<sup>58</sup> Note that “grammatical” here means everything that pertains to sense or meaning of expressions, thus everything semantically relevant.

than surface grammar. A philosopher needs to be reminded of the rules that characterise depth grammar in the course of therapeutic-conceptual analysis of problematic words.<sup>59</sup>

According to the standard interpretation, the (syntactic) *form* of an expression, which is said to correspond to its surface grammar, does not reflect the way an expression is *used*, which corresponds to its depth grammar. And only the latter is relevant to determining its meaning (B&H 2005a, 325). Therefore, to know what a word means i.e. to which semantic category it *really* belongs, or how it should be interpreted, we need to look at its use, i.e. logico-syntactic employment, in a broad range of sentences, not merely at its superficial ‘form’. A crucial part of describing the use of an expression, or its depth grammar, amounts to surveying the ways it can (and can’t) meaningfully combine with other expressions in well-formed sentences. For instance, according to its surface grammar ‘to mean’ belongs to the (‘largely syntactic’ as Hacker sees it) category of action-verbs<sup>60</sup>: “The surface grammar of ‘to mean’ is that of an action-verb, akin to ‘to say’” (Hacker 2000b, 434). However, once we inspect its depth grammar – that is, the combinatorial possibilities and impossibilities of this word with other expressions in a greater number of constructions – we see that it is mistaken to take it as an action-verb. (I discuss this example and Hacker’s analysis in more detail in the next section). The key message is that grammarians and philosophers ought to be more alert to “the differences in the use of grammatically similar forms” (Hacker 1996, 116).

To make the point clearer, here is a list of some examples of the mismatch between classifications based on surface and depth grammars respectively that can bring about philosophical problems. The expressions ‘I have a pin’ and ‘I have a pain’ have very similar surface grammar, but the former signifies a form of ownership of some thing, whilst the latter does not (it is a first-person avowal). “To say” and “to mean” both look like verbs of action that denote parallel physical and mental activities whereas only the former is of this kind (Hacker 2000a, 262); “expecting”, “opining”, “hoping” and “knowing” have the

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<sup>59</sup> I discuss Hacker’s conception of philosophy and its method in the next chapter.

<sup>60</sup> It’s worth noting that Hacker’s treatment of the concepts of activity- (dynamic) and stative verbs as ‘largely syntactic’ is not quite accurate. Cf. Quirk (1985, 175ff.). Quirk insists that the stative-dynamic distinction applies to *meanings* (i.e. is semantic) and not to syntactical category of verbs: “On this basis we draw a broad distinction between DYNAMIC (count) meanings and STATIVE (non-count) meanings of verbs. It should be noted, though, that we talk of dynamic and stative *meanings*, not dynamic and stative *verbs*. This is because one verb may shift, in meaning, from one category to another” (Quirk, 1985, 178). For discussion about the use of statives in progressive aspect see Smiecinska (2002).



surface grammar of mental states and “seeing”, “thinking”, “hearing”, “willing” grammatically look like mental processes (ibid., 263); the verb “to understand” in some constructions has the surface grammar of stative verbs that signify mental states such as “to be depressed” (Hacker 2005a, 364). Also, “I am in pain” and “He is in pain” seem to have same surface grammars, i.e. they both seem to describe a state of affairs; however, the former, first-person case, is not a description but an avowal, whilst the third-person case is a proper description. And so forth.

In all these cases the assumption is that an expression which, based on an impoverished diet of examples, surface-grammatically looks as if it belongs to a certain category, actually does not belong there; this can be established once we inspect a wider range of possible combinations. In the following section I want to look more closely at how Hacker analyses some of the examples.

### **2.2.1 Hacker on expecting, meaning something, and understanding**

In PI 572, Wittgenstein writes:

Expectation is, grammatically, a state; like: being of an opinion, hoping for something, knowing something, being able to do something. But in order to understand the grammar of these states it is necessary to ask: "What counts as a criterion for anyone's being in such a state?" (States of hardness, of weight, of fitting.)

On the standard reading, at first blush, this remark is puzzling. If grammatically, expectation is a state, and “grammar tells us what kind of object anything is” (PI 373), then might we not take Wittgenstein here to be conceding that to expect someone or something means to be in a mental state of expecting? Hacker argues that it would be quite odd if that were the case, for a number of reasons. First, the so called “states” of hardness, of weight, or of fitting are not *prima facie* states; second, being of an opinion, hoping for something, knowing something, being able to do something are not *prima facie* states, but powers and abilities, and third, powers and abilities are contrasted to states in discussion of “understanding” (cf. Hacker 2000b, 298). So, why is Wittgenstein saying that “expecting”, “hoping”, “knowing”, “being able to” etc. are *grammatically* states?

The point here, Hacker suggests, is a methodological one. Instead of opting for the “superficial interpretation”, we need to accept the one that diametrically opposes it, whereby “expecting” is only superficially, that is, according to its surface grammar, a state. However, to know whether “expecting” *really* is a state we need to inspect its depth grammar:

[Scrutiny] of their depth grammar i.e. of the grammatical articulations of these expressions, of their logical implications, of what does or does not make sense to say in connection to them, shows them to be strikingly different from psychological expressions which do incontrovertibly signify such states. This will be brought to light, *inter alia*, by investigating the criteria for someone’s expecting something, opining, hoping, knowing, or being able to do something. (Hacker 2000b, 298).

The standard interpretation therefore sees the point of PI 572 to be that there are two distinct ways to classify something according to its grammar, where only one of those classifications would be a correct one. In the case of “expecting something”, “opining”, “hoping”, “knowing”, or “being able to do something”, their surface-grammatical features are altogether deceptive; “expectation” is depth-grammatically not a state, even though it is surface-grammatically behaves like a stative verb. The claim is that there are certain things one would have to be able meaningfully to say about “expecting”, if it were truly a state. That is, it ought to make sense to combine “to expect” with some other expressions that are characteristic of genuine states (such as “continuously”); these combinations reveal the *criteria* for counting something as a state.<sup>61</sup>

Another example Hacker discusses in connection with the distinction between surface and depth grammar is the expression “to mean something”. Hacker claims that this expression has a deceptive surface grammar, according to which it is to be categorised as an action-verb that signifies a mental activity. He writes,

The surface grammar of the verb ‘to mean’ and its cognates suggests a parallelism between ‘meaning something’ and verbs of action. It looks as if the [sentence] ‘When I said “He is there”, I meant N’... [refers] to a pair of actions

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<sup>61</sup> Note that elsewhere (2005a 372) Hacker claims that ‘genuine duration’ is a criterion of what counts as a state. But it makes perfect sense to say: “I was expecting him for a couple of hours and then I gave up”.

or activities — saying and meaning, which are done concurrently. (Hacker 2000a, 262)

However, there are certain *criteria* that a verb must satisfy in order to be counted as an activity- or action-verb that signifies an activity; otherwise it is not to be called an activity-verb.<sup>62</sup> Note that the notion of a criterion is, on this interpretation, equivalent to the notion of a rule for the use of a word (see Hacker 1972, 291).<sup>63</sup> Here are some examples of (depth grammar) criteria (or rules) for action-verbs that we find in Hacker:

If ‘to *V*’ is an action-verb, then one can intend to *V*, decide to *V*, be ordered to *V*, and agree or refuse to *V*. It makes sense to remember or forget to *V*; in many cases also to begin to *V*, be busy to *V*-ing, or to be interrupted while *V*-ing. One may know or fail to know how to *V*, be skilled or incompetent at *V*-ing, find it easy or difficult. There may be ways, manners and modes of *V*-ing (quickly or slowly, elegantly or clumsily, gladly or reluctantly), and one may enjoy *V*-ing or find it a bore. (Hacker, 2000b, 434)

On this view, when in PI 572 Wittgenstein asks for a criterion for anyone's being in a state of expecting or hoping, he is asking us to produce some similar examples of combinations that are typical of stative-verbs. One criterion that is necessary for states and processes (including mental states and processes) is, as we shall see shortly, the feature of “genuine duration”. Similarly, if “to mean” was indeed an action-verb, as its surface grammar, according to Hacker, seems to suggest, it ought to make sense to say about it any of the things that are on his list of the criteria for action-verbs, e.g. that “I was busy meaning him” or that “He meant something quickly”. Since none of this makes sense to say, i.e. none of these constructions is a well-formed sentence, “meaning something” is not a verb of action and does not signify an activity. The procedure by which we establish to which “grammatical” category an expression belongs (by pointing out its combinatorial

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<sup>62</sup> It is not entirely clear whether Hacker defends something that no-one seriously denies i.e., that ‘to mean’ is *not* a dynamic- (or activity) verb, since it clearly does not have a progressive aspect and it does not pass the usual grammatical tests for dynamic verbs. Or whether he denies something that is generally accepted, i.e. whether his claim is that, despite passing standard tests, ‘to mean’ is not a stative-verb. Similarly, it is not clear whether the list of criteria he gives for activity-verbs is a more fine grained version of the standard list of criteria (that he elsewhere calls ‘syntactic’), or is it incompatible with the standard list. Finally, it is not clear whether he denies that ‘meaning’ is an activity-verb or merely that it corresponds to a mental activity (whilst being an activity-verb).

<sup>63</sup> See Affeldt (1998) against Mulhall’s interpretation of Cavell’s notion of criterion as a rule of grammar.

possibilities) can be described as “tabulating the rules for the use of words” or “assembling reminders of how words *are* [really] used”:

Reminding ourselves of such grammatical facts (viz. that there is no such thing as meaning something quickly or slowly, and no such thing as deciding to mean something or trying to mean something, etc.) enables us to resist the temptations generated by the surface grammar of ‘to mean’, which resembles the surface grammar of activity verbs and process verbs. For the sentence ‘When I said “...”, I meant ...’ appears to make reference to a pair of acts: saying and meaning. (Hacker 2007, 105).

My final example is Hacker’s analysis of “to understand”. Hacker argues that, contrary to what its surface grammar suggests, “understanding” is not a mental state. On this view, Wittgenstein shows us in the *Investigations* that it is a misconception to think of understanding as a mental state. Since its surface grammar suggests that it belongs to the grammatical category of stative verbs, *and* because such verbs are generally taken to denote states, understanding is typically regarded as a state. A mistaken assumption that there is a *correspondence* between stative verbs and states, dynamic verbs and activities, and performance-verbs and performances, is, according to Hacker, a common one among grammarians (see B&H 2005a, 364). According to Hacker, grammarians use certain “syntactic” criteria to determine which category a verb belongs to i.e. whether it is an activity-, performance- or stative-verb.<sup>64</sup> Stative verbs are defined in contrast to dynamic-verbs – the former behave (grammatically) differently from the latter; and so placing stative verbs in sentential constructions (contexts) that are specific to dynamic verbs produces ungrammatical structures. It is characteristic of stative verbs that they lack a progressive aspect and an imperative mood, they lack the modification by manner adverbs such as “quickly”, “slowly”, “reluctantly”, and it is impossible to form a pseudo-cleft sentence with a Do-pro form.<sup>65</sup> This means, for example, that we cannot say (i.e. it is ungrammatical): “What I did was to understand...” or “I understand this word quickly (slowly or reluctantly)” (B&H 2005a, 364). Since “to understand” seems to satisfy all the usual tests

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<sup>64</sup> Hacker refers to Quirk (1974), Lyons (1968) and Palmer (1974). The criteria or tests he cites for stative verbs are in Lakoff (1966) taken explicitly as syntactical and a basis for semantic categorisation.

<sup>65</sup> It is implied in Hacker’s exposition yet nowhere explicitly stated that these are indeed ‘syntactic’ criteria. It is unclear, however, whether Hacker would agree with the classification of these criteria as syntactic at all.

for stative verbs, and since cognitive stative verbs are said to correspond to mental states, it seems to follow that “to understand” signifies a mental state (B&H 2005a, 365).

Part of Hacker’s strategy is to show that “it is an error to suppose that our concept of a mental state is simply the correlate of stative verbs” (B&H 2005a, 371). Furthermore, he adds to this criticism another objection to the effect that to determine whether something is or it isn’t a mental state is *not* based on “purely syntactic criteria” (ibid. 371). On the contrary, we know if something is a mental state or not regardless of syntactic features of a given word, based on the overall employment of the word, and its connection with other words in a broader conceptual network, which provides relevant (semantic) criteria for the application of a concept. One such necessary criterion for something to be called a mental state is a feature of “genuine duration”: “Both states and processes have genuine duration” (Hacker 2000b, 429).<sup>66</sup> Since the ways we speak indicate which concepts we have, how they work and how they connect with other concepts, whether this particular criterion is satisfied or not, will be indicated in the kind of meaningful sentence (sentence-type) we would utter when saying something about mental states such as pain. It means that, for instance, it makes sense to say “I have had pains in my arm since 2 o’clock continuously”, but not “I was understanding a word since 2 o’clock continuously”.

The crux of Hacker’s argument is that understanding lacks a (necessary) feature of “genuine duration” which other mental states such as pain or depression have.<sup>67</sup> We could formulate his argument as follows: it is a necessary feature of mental states and a criterion for (something to be counted under the concept of) mental state that it possesses the feature of genuine duration. If understanding were a mental state then it ought to have the feature of genuine duration; this would be indicated by the fact that the sentence-type “I understand the word continuously since yesterday” would be an instance of something we could meaningfully say, something that makes sense to us (within a given conceptual scheme). However, since it does not make sense to say this, understanding obviously lacks a feature of genuine duration and is, therefore, not a mental state.

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<sup>66</sup> Quirk *et al.* discuss the feature of ‘duration’ in their discussion of the semantics of verb phrase, or more precisely, its progressive aspect (cf. 1985, 198).

<sup>67</sup> One way to unfold this thought is: the fact that the verb ‘to understand’ cannot be modified by the adverb ‘continuously’ suggests that understanding is not a mental state. This would almost certainly be contested by Hacker as ‘purely syntactic’ consideration (or, better, quasi-syntactic).

One premise in the above argument is that to evaluate the correctness of a certain description of the word's meaning it must be possible to produce an instance of a (meaningful) combination, that is, to show evidence of the word being used in the same combinations as other words that normally signify mental states. That is, if understanding were a mental state it would be possible to say "He is in a state of understanding" or "He understood this word continuously since yesterday". Both are, on Hacker's construal, ill-formed and nonsensical.<sup>68</sup> However, were we to rely only on "purely syntactic considerations" (B&H 2005a, 372) about the category of "to understand", i.e. on its surface grammar as a stative-verb, this would allow for the possibility of such sentences. In other words, syntactical considerations wouldn't exclude nonsensical constructions.<sup>69</sup> A depth-grammatical investigation into "use" *qua* combinatorial possibilities of 'to understand' with other expressions such as 'continuously' or 'uninterruptedly', ought to show us that mental states are not simply correlates of (cognitive) stative verbs, and that certain verbs in the category of statives may have entirely different uses in different sentential contexts. That is, this "syntactic" category is too general and too coarse-grained to determine specific meanings of verbs that fall into this category.<sup>70</sup> To suppose that syntactical categories and distinctions map onto or pick out "grammatical" (i.e. semantic) categories and distinctions is, according to Hacker, mistaken. We would be deeply misguided were we to insist that understanding signifies a mental state based merely on the classification of this word as a stative-verb – this would amount to "[transgressing] the grammar of "understand", allocating the concept to the wrong category" (B&H 2005a, 367).

The general lesson is that a philosopher oughtn't to trust the suggestions made by surface grammar and to make hasty conclusions about a word's meaning based on its syntactical classification (or its "form"). For these categories are, typically, too coarse grained to pin down the correct "grammatical" category. As Hacker notes, "One is suffering here from a severe shortage of categories" (Hacker 2000a, 215). Thus, "understanding", "expecting" and "meaning", despite being surface-grammatically stative-verbs, do not signify mental

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<sup>68</sup> "Understanding, like knowing, is not a mental state. There is no such thing as being in a state of understanding" (B&H 2005a, 373).

<sup>69</sup> In chapter 4 I shall argue that this is the model Wittgenstein adopts in the *Tractatus* and RLF.

<sup>70</sup> It is worth noting that the grammarian's classification of stative and dynamic verbs with respect to 'progressive aspect' is much more refined, fine-grained and tentative than Hacker here suggests. See Quirk *et al.* (1985, 201).

states.<sup>71</sup> Misleading similarities in surface grammar (“syntactic form”) that ‘to understand’ shares with words that signify mental states, such as being depressed or being in pain —for instance, that they both lack progressive aspect and can’t be modified by manner verbs such as “quickly” — is overridden by the asymmetry in “use” or depth grammar, which is exhibited by a broader range of well-formed (meaningful) combinations in which the word is used.

## **2.3 The anthropological interpretation of PI 664**

In this section I turn to a different reading of the distinction between surface and depth grammar, formulated in the opposition to the standard reading. I have called it the anthropological reading, because it is associated with the anthropological conception of grammar presented in chapter one. The main advocate of this reading is the later work of Gordon Baker. I shall first outline Baker’s exposition and criticism of the standard view; in the next section I look in more detail at his alternative to the standard view of depth grammar.

### **2.3.1 Baker on the standard view**

In the opening paragraph of his paper “Wittgenstein’s ‘Depth Grammar’” (2001/2004), Baker highlights two crucial things about the notion “depth grammar”: first, depth grammar is what, according to Wittgenstein, needs to be grasped in order to avoid philosophical confusion, and second, clarifying the depth grammar of an expression is another way of describing Wittgenstein’s “general programme” of describing “the use of our words” or “the grammar of our language”. This places the notion of depth grammar in the centre of thinking about Wittgenstein’s method. However, PI 664 does not explain these terms, nor are they explicitly referred to anywhere else in the *Investigations*. Accordingly, the central question that drives Baker’s consideration is: “What is the intended contrast between surface and depth grammar?”. Baker first gives an outline of the standard reading of PI 664 and, more generally, of Wittgenstein’s method in the *Investigations*. He then spells out two possible conceptions of *Satzklang* – the feature of sounding like a well formed sentence or having a “ring” of a proposition – that support two possible interpretations the notion of

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<sup>71</sup> The suggestion is that some of them rather signify abilities or powers: “If we wish to locate the shelf upon which to locate understanding, then it is together with abilities” (B&H 2005a, 380)

surface grammar. Finally, Baker offers an alternative account of “depth grammar” which complements his alternative construal of “surface grammar”.

On the standard reading, the distinction between surface and depth grammar is the distinction between ordinary (say, English) grammar (or syntax) and philosophical or logical grammar. The main idea is that ordinary (surface) grammar is too coarse grained, and hence it allows for the construction of nonsensical structures, whereas logical (depth) grammar allocates the words to more fine grained logical categories, and shows why certain combinations of words, which might slip through ordinary grammar as well-formed, are in fact forbidden. Where ordinary grammar “[sorts] words into kinds according to crude grammatical classifications (e.g. verb, noun, adjective)”, logical grammar allocates words into categories according to their depth grammar into colour-words, numerals, names of persons, sensation-names, propositional connectives, quantifiers, *n*-place predicates signifying sensible properties or relations, numerical properties or relations, etc. (Baker 2004, 74).

According to Baker’s reconstruction of the standard reading of PI 664, the idea of surface and depth grammar is meant to underscore the contrast between two different levels of restrictiveness for differentiating word-types, two different ways of determining well-formedness of sentences, based on these levels, and two different ways of considering sentence construction. Here is Baker’s summary of the standard view of depth grammar:

‘Depth grammar’ is taken to impose more restrictive conditions on legitimate *word-combinations* than does ‘surface grammar’... [it] is taken to govern the combinatorial possibilities of words in constructing *significant* sentences, i.e. to delineate the *logical* types of terms and the *logical* forms of propositions. It is assumed that conformity with depth grammar guarantees that a sentence is significant, and contravention of these rules ensures that a sentence is nonsensical... combining expressions in contravention of the rules of *depth* grammar produces strings of words which are *logically* nonsensical... Infringements of logical grammar are often called ‘category-mistakes’ (Baker 2004, 74).



Baker argues that this conception of the distinction between surface and depth grammar, and the vision of Wittgenstein's method that comes with it (which Baker describes as "putting words into their conceptual harnesses") stand in need of further critical scrutiny.

Baker pays special attention to the second sentence of PI 664 in which Wittgenstein speaks about the notion of surface grammar.<sup>72</sup> Based on this formulation, surface grammar represents only one aspect of the use of a word, namely, in "the construction of a sentence" [*Satzbau*]. This aspect of use "can be taken in by the ear". Baker connects these features of surface grammar with the notion of *Satzklang* that is specified in PI 134. On his view, the idea of *Satzklang* as something that sounds like a well formed sentence to a competent speaker (has a ring of a proposition) can be unfolded in a number of ways. If we take only basic syntactic categories such as verbs, nouns, adverbs etc. and the subject-predicate form of sentence, as our main criteria for *Satzklang*, then a sentence such as "Green ideas sleep furiously" will be accepted as well-formed. Chomsky's criterion of grammaticalness is an example of such an unfolding of *Satzklang*, since he dissociates the questions of grammaticalness from questions of meaningfulness.<sup>73</sup> But if the idea of well-formedness is associated, not with syntactic, but with *logical* categories that might not be *prima facie* available even to a competent speaker, then the idea of *Satzklang* will be different. In this case the job of a philosopher would be "to find ways of making nonsense *audible*" (Baker 2004, 76).

Let us look to an example of what might count as an instance of *making nonsense audible*. In the *Investigations* (59/50n(a)) Wittgenstein asks us to imagine as case where an utterance of the *prima facie* significant sentence "Since yesterday I have understood this word" is followed up with the question "Continuously?". Once the question is asked, the oddness of the initial sentence becomes apparent – the latent nonsense becomes patent. The example clearly ties in with the issue discussed in the previous section where we saw that, on the standard interpretation, the question "Continuously?" would make patent that "to understand" lacks the feature of "genuine duration" and that the original sentence is therefore not meaningful, but ill-formed.

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<sup>72</sup> "What immediately impresses itself upon us about the use of a word is the way it is used in the construction of the sentence, the part of its use--one might say--that can be taken in by the ear" (PI §664)

<sup>73</sup> As Chomsky writes, "the notion 'grammatical' cannot be identified with 'meaningful' or 'significant' in any semantic sense" (Chomsky 1957/2002, 15).

Baker, however, argues that such a procedure of making nonsense audible, by pointing out incompatibility between logical categories, would be an investigation of what Wittgenstein calls surface, and not *depth* grammar. His main objection to the standard reading of PI 664 can be summed up as follows: we misidentify the intended contrast between surface and depth grammar if we construe it on the model of coarse and fine-grained grammatical categories. The result of this misidentification is a collapse of the relevant distinction between surface and depth grammar in favour of surface grammar. Baker suggests that this kind of concern with logical categories and rules for their combinatorial possibilities and impossibilities, independently of any particular occasion of speaking – which the standard reading interprets as an investigation of depth grammar – is essentially a “traditional” concern with the use of a word in the construction of a sentence. Hence, it is *a concern with surface and not the depth grammar of a word*. Baker writes:

Rules for constructing *significant* sentences could be precisely what Wittgenstein meant to pick out there by the phrase ‘surface grammar’ hence *not* by the phrase depth grammar. If so, his declared intention to describe depth grammar was presumably to *differentiate* his later method of describing the grammar of our language from the standard method of constructing a classification of words into logical categories or types (namely, investigating intersubstitutability *salva significatione*). His primary concern in ‘depth grammar’ must then be *different* from pointing out category-mistakes or clarifying type-restrictions or combinatorial possibilities and impossibilities. (Baker 2004, 77)

Baker’s argument is that the standard interpretation’s conception of “depth grammar” actually amounts to what Wittgenstein means by “surface grammar”. The crucial point here is that, on Baker’s conception of Wittgenstein’s distinction between depth and surface grammar, any consideration regarding how words are combined with other words in a sentence, or which sentence-types are meaningful and which not, is a consideration of surface grammar. That is, what we have been referring to as combinatorial grammar just is surface grammar on Baker’s interpretation. This, as Baker says, “would connect ‘surface grammar’ with a major preoccupation of the philosophers who are the principal explicit targets of critical investigation in PI: namely Frege, Russell, and the author of TLP and

RLF” (2004, 77). To be interested in rules, categories, semantic types and category mistakes, as Hacker certainly is, means to be interested in what Wittgenstein calls the surface grammar of a word, which is its use in the construction of a sentence.

One way to understand what Baker is getting at is this. To say, for instance, that colour predicates can’t be combined with number words (as in “Number 1 is red”) or that genuine duration is not a property of ability-verbs (“He is continuously able to read German”), that the phrase “John sees...” cannot be completed by an expression that signifies a sound, or that predicate can’t be placed before subject (‘Is blue the car’), etc., are essentially all part of the same enterprise: to understand the way individual words combine into (meaningful, interpretable) wholes, namely, sentences. Regularities with regard to these combinations are described in the form of rules of sentence-formation or the rules that capture inference relations. Some of these rules are sensitive to the underlying logical type or category and prevent the construction of nonsense, some aren’t (“Colourless green ideas sleep furiously”). However, whilst, on the standard reading, the latter are taken to be as part and parcel of a more restrictive “depth grammar”, which is sensitive to logical categories of words, on Baker’s interpretation, *both* kinds of rules, by virtue of saying something about the possible or impossible combinations of words in a sentence, or which expressions are syntactically or semantically well-formed, belong to the species of “surface grammar”. In other words, on Baker’s anthropological reading, any type-theory style of logical grammar that is concerned with combinatorial possibilities and issues of well-formedness depicts what Wittgenstein would call the surface aspect of use. Accordingly, Hacker’s conception of Wittgenstein’s grammar wrongly connects the notion of depth grammar with the investigation of use in terms of more restrictive, more fine-grained variant of categorial differentiations based on grammatical rules. Nonetheless, there is another dimension of use that goes beyond the boundary of a sentence and rules for combination of words. This, Baker argues, Wittgenstein intends to identify as “depth grammar”.

### **2.3.2 Baker’s depth grammar: new anthropological dimensions**

How, then, are we to understand Wittgenstein’s notion of “depth grammar” on Baker’s anthropological interpretation? He suggests that the term “depth” refers, first and foremost, to “exploration of *new dimensions* different from any investigations of the principles of sentence construction (‘surface grammar’)” (Baker 2004, 84). There are at least six items,

Baker argues, that can fit the bill of Wittgenstein's depth grammar. As it will be evident to the reader, most of the candidates for "depth grammar" are already introduced with the anthropological interpretation of rules (see 1.4). These candidate aspects of depth grammar can be seen as spelling out the features of the broad use understood as an activity of speaking or operating with words on particular occasions. The relevant features of depth grammar that Baker proposes are the following:

1. "Differences in the ways individual words are integrated into human activity, the different ways of *operating* with words" (*ibid.* 78)
2. "Differences in the ways *complete* sentences are *employed*" (*ibid.*)
3. "The dependence of the question whether a particular utterance of a well-formed sentence... really makes sense (i.e. has a role in a language-game) on the *circumstance* surrounding its utterance" (*ibid.* 80)
4. "[The] nonsensicality (uselessness) of a proposition based on a *wrong calculation*" (*ibid.* 81)
5. "[The] construction of imaginary or hypothetical language-games as objects of comparison" (*ibid.* 81)
6. "[A concern] with *pictures* which individuals may associate with the uses of particular words" (*ibid.* 83).

One might ask, however, *why* all these things count as part of "grammar"? Hacker, for instance, objects that none of the listed items plausibly characterises something that can be called "grammar". He argues that "Baker's construal of Wittgenstein's conception of the depth-grammar of *words* specifies things that are not *grammar* at all, and that concern not words but *sentences* and their uses" (Hacker 2007, 120 fn. 24).<sup>74</sup> The response to this

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<sup>74</sup> The full quotation is as follows: "Baker cites this passage (misidentified as occurring in Vol. XII, 132) as supporting his interpretation of the depth-grammar of words as having to do with the integration of *sentences* into human activities, the *uses of sentences*, the context-dependence of the senses of *sentences*, the invocation of imaginary language games as objects of comparison, etc....Baker's construal of Wittgenstein's conception of the depth-grammar of *words* specifies things that are not *grammar* at all, and that concern not words but *sentences* and their uses. But Wittgenstein (in PI 664) is concerned with the deceptive surface-grammar of the word 'to mean' (meinen): namely, that it looks like a verb of action; and the sentence 'When I said "...", I meant ...' looks as if it refers to two actions that I performed. The next thirty remarks show that the grammar of 'to mean' is more akin to that of 'to intend' than to activity or process verbs" (Hacker 2007, 119-20 fn. 24).

question is intimately associated with what the later Wittgenstein took to be relevant for the proper understanding of our concepts and how our language functions, in contrast to “what logicians have said about the structure of language. (Including the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*)” (PI 23). The neglected element pertains to the ways in which speaking a language “meshes” with other human activities. If we bear in mind this wider conception of language use as speech, then it is understandable why one should list human activities, pictures, language games and different circumstances as pertinent for identifying the dimension of “depth grammar”. Baker’s attempt to identify things that might be allocated to depth grammar is, at the same time, an attempt to specify those aspects of use that stretch beyond the employment of a word in the construction of a sentence, and which transcend the rules for sentence construction. In this way, the contrast between Hacker’s and Baker’s interpretations of Wittgenstein’s notion of depth grammar represents the contrast between the traditional and the new approach to investigating language use.

The first item on Baker’s list amount to different ways of *operating* with words in the course of various activities, whence the asymmetry in use amounts to the asymmetry in a mode of operation. We can recognise relevant grammatical differences between individual words and between different parts of speech, if they are taught and handled differently, and if they presuppose the development of different *techniques* and *abilities*. The paradigm example here is the shopkeeper’s way of operating with (three) words in the simple language-game in PI 1. A key points here is that the contrast between the modes of operation indicates that we are dealing with different kinds of words, but also that words can be classified only with regards to a specific purpose and language game (speaking) in question i.e. with regards to a specific occasion of utterance, and not generally based on the rules that allocate the word into a logical category. The same word could be applied differently on different occasions, thus giving grounds for different classifications. Hence, it is the use of words and sentences *qua* employing and operating with them on particular occasions that is relevant for identifying depth-grammatical differences, rather than similarities and dissimilarities in their logico-syntactic employment or their logical categories.

The anthropological reading of PI 664 suggests that the way logicians look at language and pertinent logical distinctions, including the rules they give from within this perspective for

the construction of meaningful expressions, do not reflect the differences words exhibit when people use them on specific occasions.<sup>75</sup> The asymmetries between kinds of words, between the uses of a single word and significant distinctions in the sense of what is said, can become patent once we attend to the ways these words are integrated with human activities, such as reporting, ordering, describing, asserting, asking, translating, measuring, counting, playing a game etc. Only when they are embedded in a context of a certain activity, can we properly talk about similarities and dissimilarities between words and what they say. This is what, on the anthropological reading of PI 664, counts as “depth grammar”.

## 2.4 The distinction between sense and nonsense

### 2.4.1 Key contrast between two conceptions

An important concern that the anthropological model of Wittgenstein’s depth grammar brings to the fore is whether the distinction between sense and nonsense can plausibly be drawn on the basis of rules which allow for certain combinations of words and exclude certain others. Is the depth-grammatical investigation of the use of words aimed at identifying “inherently general” rules that distinguish sense from nonsense, as the standard interpretation suggests? If Wittgenstein’s notion of depth grammar has nothing to do with the use of words in the construction of a sentence, does this give rise to a different understanding of the distinction between sense and nonsense, one which does not depend upon the idea of rules for sentence construction?

We’ve seen that, on the standard reading, the surface grammar of an expression refers to a misleading syntactic form, and depth grammar to finer-grained categories that are based on “use”. On the anthropological reading, the distinction between surface and depth grammar describes different aspects of *use*, where the surface grammar of an expression depicts its use in the construction of a sentence. Correspondingly, I want to suggest that the account of sense and nonsense that one would give solely by looking at how a word is used in the construction of a sentence, and the account of sense and nonsense one would give based on

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<sup>75</sup> Wittgenstein invites us to compare “what we see in our examples with the simple and rigid rules which logicians give for the construction of propositions” (BB 83). He says the similar thing in the *Investigations*, namely, that “[it] is interesting to compare the multiplicity of the tools in language and of the ways they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language. (Including the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*)” (PI 23)

understanding of the use of an expression in the context of a certain human activity, will be importantly different. Baker draws attention to this new aspect of the distinction between sense and nonsense in his list of items that belong to depth grammar (see above). He emphasises that to have sense or to lack sense, in the sense of depth grammar, means that an utterance may have or lack a use on a particular occasion or relative to a particular language-game.<sup>76</sup>

The main contrast between the standard and anthropological conception of depth grammar *vis-à-vis* the distinction between sense and nonsense lies in what each of them takes the distinction to be applicable to. Thus, while the standard interpretation takes the distinction to apply to sentence-types, the anthropological interpretation associates sense and nonsense primarily with particular utterances of a sentence on particular occasions. Furthermore, whereas on the standard reading the sense-nonsense distinction is decided by considerations of the combinatorial possibilities of words in forming meaningful wholes (i.e. sentence-types), thus with the logico-syntactic employment of a word, on the anthropological reading, the sense of an utterance is decided relative to an occasion of speaking, that is, occasion of its *use*. Here is how Baker describes the contrast between two interpretations of this distinction:

Logical grammar tends to treat rules for the ways words are used in the *construction of sentences* as something fixed and antecedent to speech-production; sentences (type-sentences) are regarded as correct or incorrect *absolutely*... Wittgenstein's way of connecting sense with *use* leads to a radically different conception. One token-sentence may make sense while another token of the same type-sentence makes no sense... Treating the question whether or not a sentence is significant as dependent on the circumstances in which it is uttered completely undermines the philosophical ideal of constructing unique complete classification of expressions into logical types. (Baker 2004, 80)

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<sup>76</sup> Baker writes that the question “whether a particular utterance of a well-formed sentence (one having unexceptionable *Satzklang*) makes sense [depends on] the *circumstance* surrounding its utterance” and it is “treated as strictly relative to *particular language-games*” (Baker 2004, 80). To say that a sentence makes sense depending on a circumstance surrounding a speaking of it, or that it makes sense relative to a particular language game, both highlight the same point: namely, the set-up of a particular language game, including relevant speakers, their background assumptions, and purposes *ipso facto* models the circumstance against which an utterance is to be evaluated as meaningful.

On the standard interpretation, “apparent” sentences, such as “I know I feel a pain” or “This stick is both one meter long and two meters long”, are evaluated as nonsense relative to our existing “conceptual scheme” (grammar) and not with regards to any particular circumstance of use. Hacker argues that “[in] our existing grammar, this combination of words [‘is both one meter long and two meters long’] is senseless” (Hacker 2000a, 90). Given the logical categories of our words and their combinatorial possibilities, given the way we actually use these words in significant sentences, there is no such thing as being both one and two meters long or knowing what one feels. A failure to comply with the rules of grammar, understood as occasion-invariant combinatorial rules, amounts to nonsense, which can be either “philosophically trivial” (“Three men was in the field”, “Ab sur ah”, “chair has and”) or “philosophically important” (Hacker 2000a, 99). On this view, something is a well-formed sentence, or simply a sentence of a language, if and only if it is used in discourse. Hence, *pace* Chomsky, it is impossible for something to be a grammatically well-formed sentence and not to be usable in discourse. As Hacker writes;

Grammarians are inclined to say that ‘Green ideas sleep furiously’ is a syntactically well-formed sentence, while conceding that it is semantically deficient and hence makes no sense. That is, at best, highly misleading. For to say that it is nonsense is precisely to say that it is *not*, despite its appearance, an English sentence, that it has no use in discourse. (Hacker 2000a, 97)

On the standard reading, the exclusion of “philosophically important nonsense” is, therefore, wholesale and general, since it excludes sentence-types or certain *combinations* of words, rather than particular *utterances* of sentences on particular *occasions*. Accordingly, there is no such circumstance or occasion relative to which the apparent sentences “I know I am in pain” or “This stick is both one and two meters long” would make sense *within* the existing conceptual scheme (i.e. where the existing use is governed by existing rules). Our existing conceptual scheme characterised by existing rules imposes a general standard of correctness for particular applications of words. Any merely apparent sentence, according to this view, could never actually be uttered by the standards of our existing grammar. The philosopher who says that he knows he’s in pain is violating existing rules that determine sense, and he fails to say anything at all.



#### 2.4.2 The occasion-sensitive determination of what is said as nonsense

I noted earlier that, on the anthropological reading of depth grammar, sense and nonsense are terms that apply primarily to a particular speaking of a sentence in a particular circumstance on a particular occasion. An utterance can be judged as nonsensical only relative to an occasion in which it takes place. This view implies the possibility that one utterance of the same sentence-type makes sense on one occasion and circumstance, and does not on another, because occasion and circumstance make an *essential contribution* to the sense of what is said, so that, as Hertzberg notes, “[circumstances] exclude taking the words in a certain way” (Hertzberg 2001, 100). Thus, the role in determining the bounds of sense that the standard view assigns to “inherently general” rules of grammar, is here attributed to our competence to judge what (if anything) the words (would) say on a given occasion; the role of rules as that which determines the boundary between sense and nonsense is taken over by our “parochial sensibilities” (see Travis 2006, 60).

Travis identifies the contrast between thinking of the distinction between sense and nonsense in terms of rules and thinking of it in terms of our understanding of words against the background of particular occasions with the contrast between Wittgenstein’s early and later account of nonsense. He argues:

In the early conception, nonsense is a matter of grammar (or lack thereof)... For late Wittgenstein, matters are very different. Paired with a new dimension of truth (a dimension represented, in the abstract, by rules of language games) is a new dimension in which nonsense might arise: not in grammar, but in use. (Travis, 2006, 6)

Note that the relevant notion of use here is the broad one: Travis talks of nonsense arising with regards to our employment of expressions on particular occasions, not with regards to “grammar” understood as a set of occasion-invariant rules that determine combinatorial possibilities of words (surface or combinatorial grammar). On this reading, nonsense arises when one says something in a circumstance where no understanding of what is said is available, and a speaker can provide no intelligible explanation of his utterance:

What you say (if anything) in describing things in given terms always depends on the circumstances of your saying it. For you to have made good sense to

have said something either true or false, circumstances must do work which they *can* always fail at. On a sunny day, someone, out of the blue, may call the sky blue. There is a truth near to mind that could be so expressed. We may count him as having expressed it. If, out of the blue, someone tells us that Sid is blue, we are likely to be baffled. When we encounter his blue-tinged, rather troglodytic complexion, we may see how one *could* call that someone being blue, and then may be willing to allow that *that* is things being as said. If pointing to a thoroughly overcast sky, someone sighted says, out of the blue, ‘The sky is blue’, there may be *no* answer to the question what he said, or none which settled how things would be if he were right – even if there *are*, as there are, *some* truths that could sometimes be told in so describing an overcast sky. (Travis 2008, 9)

As it is clear from this passage, different utterances of the sentence “The sky is blue” will make sense (and be apt for truth or falsehood) or fail to make sense depending on the context in which they are made, and our ability to understand and judge what is thus said relative to that particular context. On this view, the evaluation of an utterance as saying something (or not) does not depend on any general rules for sentence-construction, but on understandings of it that are available to us in a given context. As it turns out, no such understanding is available in the context where someone sighted with no apparent reason calls an overcast sky blue. But the claim is not that such understanding is logically impossible or conceptually prohibited. The nonsensicality of this utterance has nothing to do with the question of grammaticalness, well-formedness, or conceptual impossibility. In contrast, the standard view according to which sense and nonsense mark the agreement or disagreement of uttered sentences with our current conceptual scheme has to either count a sentence (as type) as part of a language, or exclude it from belonging to the language, absolutely. Conversely, on the anthropological reading, particular utterances of the sentences “Caesar is a prime number” or “This object is red and green all over” will make sense, or fail to do, so only with regards to those occasions (and particular purposes) in which they are said.<sup>77</sup> As Travis observes, “there is such an understanding of being red and being green if we (thinkers of our sort) are prepared, in the circumstances, to recognize this

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<sup>77</sup> See Hertzberg (2001, 92ff.) for a discussion of “Caesar is a prime number” and Travis (2010, 218) for “That sculpture is both red and green just there”.

as an understanding of that” (Travis 2010, 218). No occasion-insensitive rule of grammar can decide which utterances *we* will be able to understand in a particular way in particular circumstances, and which we’ll treat as unintelligible.

I said at the beginning that by calling attention to the distinction between surface and depth grammar in PI 664, Wittgenstein describes a potential source of philosophical problems. We’ve seen that, on the standard interpretation, misleading surface grammar of expressions presents the source of confusion for philosophers. But in which sense can surface grammar be misleading on the anthropological interpretation? I shall attempt to give a comprehensive answer to this question in chapter 4. More specifically, I shall connect the notion “surface grammar”, understood as a potential source of philosophical problems, with the phenomenon Wittgenstein in his later work called “subliming the logic of our language”. We can understand this metaphor as trying to bring out a philosopher’s tendency to exclude from her investigation of language use those considerations that pertain to the relevant (anthropological) notion of depth grammar, and interpreting the notion of language use (*qua* speaking of a language) from the point of view of combinatorial possibilities of words in sentences, i.e., from the point of view of surface grammar. It is crucial to note, however, that focusing on questions of sentence-formation is not as such misleading as an investigation of certain regularities pertaining to language; what is misleading is thinking that focusing on this aspect of use will give the philosopher everything that is needed for understanding what can be meaningfully said.

## 2.5 Summary

It was my aim in this chapter to further motivate the divide between different conceptions of the later Wittgenstein’s notion of grammar and use, and to substantiate my suggestion that Hacker’s reading conflates narrow and broad use, by looking at the distinction he draws between surface and depth grammar in *Philosophical Investigations* PI 664. The distinction represents a way to articulate one source of philosophical confusion, although, as I tried to show here, there are at least two radically different ways to unfold the notions of surface and depth grammar. According to the standard interpretation, surface grammar is meant to represent misleading syntactical form that different expressions appear to share, whilst depth grammar brings to light the aspect of use understood as combinatorial possibilities and impossibilities of words in the construction of significant sentences that

are regulated by the rules of grammar. Particular utterances of sentences are considered meaningful only if they agree with the rules of the existing conceptual scheme. In this way, the standard reading construes the notion of depth grammar as a more ramified, more exhaustive and restrictive version of surface grammar. As a result, whether an utterance makes sense or not is decided relative to the rules rather than to particular occasions, and sense/nonsense are attributed to sentence-types rather than to particular utterances (tokens) of a sentence.

The anthropological interpretation, in contrast, pays attention to a new dimension of language use that is typically neglected when we focus on the use of words in the construction of well-formed sentences (their logico-syntactic behaviour), or on what Wittgenstein denotes by the term “surface grammar”. This reading criticises the standard reading for assimilating considerations of depth grammar to an essentially surface-grammatical aspect of use. Rather than being merely a more restrictive layer of surface grammar, Wittgenstein’s concept of depth grammar is meant to emphasise a wider domain of language use, such as the integration of speech with other human activities, thus connecting considerations of sense and nonsense primarily with our ability to understand utterances in particular contexts, rather than with the occasion-invariant rules. The anthropological interpretation understands Wittgenstein’s qualification that surface grammar is misleading as a tendency to exclude essential aspects of language use from philosophical considerations, or to assume that “if anyone utters a sentence and *means* or *understands* it he is operating a calculus according to definite rules” (PI 81).

The discussion of the distinction between surface and depth grammar has given further support to my claim made in the previous chapter that the standard interpretation mistakenly conflates two different dimensions of use and grammar, which the later Wittgenstein clearly wants to keep separate. It, therefore, assimilates aspects of “depth grammar” to investigations of the logico-syntactic employment of words by means of inherently general rules. The anthropological interpretation, in contrast, insists on keeping the contrast between occasion-invariant aspects of language use – which may be captured by means of general rules – and occasion-sensitive aspects of language use – which are not aptly encapsulated by inherently general rules – perspicuous.

So far I have mainly been attempting to identify critical points of disagreement between different interpretations of Wittgenstein's notion of grammar, without, however, adjudicating between them by reference to textual evidence. I aim to support the claim that the anthropological interpretation gives more cogent account of Wittgenstein's conception of grammar, and his later conception of language and philosophy, in Chapters 4-6. But already the reader could see that on the standard interpretation Wittgenstein's distinction between surface and depth grammar drawn in PI 664 collapses, insofar as the overall concern with grammar reduces to the problems of sentence construction and licit combinations of words, including their connections with other words. In the next chapter I shall examine more closely Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as clarification or perspicuous representation of our grammar (of the way we use language). As we shall see, there is a similar disagreement between Wittgenstein's interpreters when it comes to understanding the exact role of rules in the process of clarification of philosophical problems, as well as the domain of their applicability, or identifying Wittgenstein's most distinctive methodological contribution. We'll see that the anthropological interpretation insists on those techniques of Wittgenstein's later methods (such as simple language-games with specific rules, or investigating particular cases) that keep in view the key role particular occasions (purposes) have for understanding someone's use of language, whereas the standard interpretation sees Wittgenstein's grammatical investigations as aiming at the synoptic account of our rule-governed linguistic practices represented by inherently general rules.

## CHAPTER 3

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### *Perspicuous Representation*

A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of the use of our words.--Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in 'seeing connexions'. Hence the importance of finding and inventing intermediate cases. 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. (Is this a 'Weltanschauung'?) (PI 122)

#### **3.1 Introduction**

So far we've seen three different interpretations of the role of rules in Wittgenstein's later conception of grammar (chapter 1), and two different interpretations of the distinction between surface and depth grammar (chapter 2). I emphasised that Wittgenstein draws the latter distinction in order to call to our attention one possible source of philosophical confusion. By comparing these two aspects of grammar, the philosopher can see something about our language use that she failed to see before, and which can remedy her confusion. I

will assume that PI 122 (above) with its reference to “perspicuous representation” makes essentially the same point: we fail to understand how our language functions because we do not command the clear view of that aspect of our use of words Wittgenstein calls “depth grammar”. We’ve seen that, according to the anthropological interpretation, what is characteristic about this aspect of use is that it has nothing to do with the way a word is used in the construction of a sentence. The way a word is used in the construction of a sentence, or in terms of surface grammar, “lacks in perspicuity” in that it does not reflect how we operate with words on particular occasions; it does not let us see similarities and differences between the uses of an expression in different contexts. In other words, the sentence itself taken in isolation from particular contexts will not give us an insight into all pertinent “semantic”<sup>78</sup> elements that understanding of the uses of words requires. Wittgenstein’s main suggestion is that to avoid misunderstandings regarding our concepts (or the use of words) the philosopher needs to look outside the boundary of the sentence, to the way sentences “mesh with our life” (PG 65).

Whilst the notion of depth grammar denotes the aspect of use that transcends the bounds of a sentence, the notion of perspicuous representation is meant to highlight the way in which this broader aspect of use and its specific contribution to understanding of concepts can be made visible to the philosopher whose exclusive focus on the narrow use and surface grammar has led her astray. “Perspicuous representation” signifies the methodology of representing depth grammar, and places that aspect of use to the forefront of philosophical investigations of grammar. Its function is to “[produce] just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connexions’” (PI 122). It is the main aim of this chapter to identify which particular methods are most suitable for this purpose of letting depth grammar show itself. Again, I will contrast the anthropological interpretation of perspicuous representation, which I ultimately want to defend as a more compelling interpretation of later Wittgenstein, with the standard interpretation as exemplified by Hacker. We shall see that there are fundamental disagreements as to which methods deserve to be called “perspicuous representation”, and what exactly facilitates representing depth grammar in a perspicuous way.

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<sup>78</sup> For the relevant notion of semantics see Travis (2008, 109ff.)

The structure of this chapter follows the pattern of the discussion in previous chapters: I start with the standard interpretation of the notion of perspicuous representation and then introduce two alternatives to the standard interpretation. I argue that, among these conceptions, the anthropological interpretation identifies the best candidates for perspicuous representation as defined above.

### **3.2 The standard interpretation of PI 122**

We start with the standard interpretation of PI 122, whose main advocate is Hacker. My main intention is to specify what the concept of perspicuous representation on his view amounts to. According to Hacker, on the later Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as a grammatical investigation, philosophy is taken to have two separate, yet essentially complementary tasks: one negative and one positive. The negative task of philosophy is to get rid of philosophical problems that originate in misleading analogies, the surface grammar of expressions or misleading underlying pictures. The positive task is to produce a survey, map, or an overview of conceptual (grammatical) relations that define our conceptual scheme (grammar). In relation to the negative task, the method of philosophy is that of "therapeutic analysis" (Hacker 1996, 107) or "intellectual therapy" (B&H 2005a, 284). In relation to its positive task, philosophy is seen as "connective analysis" (Hacker 1996, 107) or "conceptual geography" (B&H 2005a, 284). Hacker characterises the latter as a surveyable rearrangement of "humdrum grammatical facts" *à la* Ryle's "logical geography" (see Hacker 2007, 112). The ultimate aim of both methods is to eradicate "philosophically important nonsense", understood as a transgression or violation of grammatical rules, and to establish the surveyable order in our concepts.<sup>79</sup> For Hacker, "[philosophical] problems are an awareness (not typically a self-conscious one) of a disorder in our concepts. They can be solved by ordering those concepts" (B&H 2005a, 274). The positive and negative tasks of philosophy complement each other in that "[the] point of arranging the 'grammatical facts' in a readily surveyable form is to dissolve philosophical problems and destroy philosophical illusions" (B&H 2005a, 285).

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<sup>79</sup> "We must draw attention to familiar grammatical rules (for 'certain grammatical rules become interesting only when philosophers want to transgress them' (BT 425)), and arrange them in such a manner that an overview of the conceptual structure will be achieved and the philosophical problem at hand dissolved. The aim of philosophy is to stop people from transgressing the bounds of sense: 'to erect a wall at the point where language stops anyway' (BT 425)" (Hacker 2007, 100).



Wittgenstein's grammatical investigations, understood in their negative sense, target various conceptual confusions that instantiate common philosophical doctrines, such as idealism and solipsism in metaphysics, Platonism, formalism or intuitionism in philosophy of mathematics, and dualism or behaviourism in philosophy of mind. Grammatical investigations, *qua* therapeutic analyses, show, through a series of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments, not that these doctrines are false, but that they are *nonsense*.<sup>80</sup> Their aim is to make plain that philosophical doctrines "[draw] an overdraft on Reason, [violate] the rules for the use of an expression and so, in subtle and not readily identifiable ways, [transgress] the bounds of sense" (B&H 1985, 55). The concept of perspicuous representation is held to describe the positive aspect of Wittgenstein's later method. As Hacker explains, it belongs to the tradition of scientific and philosophical methodology (Goethe, Boltzmann, Hertz, Spengler) of using simple, idealised models or analogies for a representation of relevant data. It belongs to this method that everything that we need to know lies already open to view (PI 89); we do not need to look behind the phenomena or beneath their surface, but to re-arrange or re-order them.

What motivates the need for perspicuous representations of grammatical data are philosophical problems that arise due to a lack of surveyability of the ways in which our concepts are related. I argued in chapter two that Hacker connects the idea of the lack of perspicuity in our grammar with misleading analogies in the surface grammar of expressions. On that view, Wittgenstein's comment that "our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity" just means that coarse-grained syntactic "forms" conceal the way we "use" words, or their depth grammar: "[The] uses of expressions cannot be taken in at a glance, and their surface grammar is deceptive" (B&H 2005, 325). The difficulty lies in our inability to *describe* or *survey* our uses of words. Philosophical problems indicate "a disorder in our *reflective* mastery of [concepts]" (Hacker 1996, 109) and not in our day-to-day ability to use them. A philosopher needs to rearrange the rules that are already given by the very fact that we are able to speak a language:

[What] is needed for resolution of philosophical problems is a rearrangement of what we already know, i.e., of the rules for the use of words... It is by bringing such rules into view and rearranging them into a perspicuous order that

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<sup>80</sup> See B&H 2005a, 294.

conceptual entanglements that characterise the problems of philosophy can be resolved. (Hacker 2001, 334).

Hence, philosophical problems arise, not in the process of using language, but in attempts to reflect about and describe our rule-governed use words. The subject matter of the philosopher's representation is the rules of grammar, which need to be rearranged in order to become perspicuous.

Take as an example the idea that sensations are private. To think of sensations as being private is, on this view, an absurdity, which results from a lack of perspicuity in our grammar. The one who says that sensations are private is, strictly speaking, uttering nonsense. The entire process of clarification, which aims to remove the "absurd idea" that sensations are private, consists in a rearrangement of familiar grammatical rules, the aim of which is to show that somewhere along the way we have been misled by a surface analogy, and that the combination of words needed to describe the alleged privacy of sensations is actually excluded from our language. Thus, Hacker writes:

If we are beset by conceptual problems regarding sensations – for example, pain – and are inclined to think that a pain is an object, like a pin, only mental and private, then we must arrange the grammatical rules for the use of the word 'pain' in juxtaposition with the rules for the use of the word 'pin'. (Hacker 1996, 108)

Hacker holds that what happens when one absurdly claims that "pains are private" can be described as "being taken in", or "being deluded", by the superficial grammatical similarities that lead one to "project the grammar of ownership ('I *have* a pin')... the grammar of perceptible objects on to the grammar of sensations, and having done so, infer that 'mental objects' like pain have further startling properties" (Hacker 1996, 109), properties such as being inalienable and epistemically private. This is connected with the idea that the surface grammar of expressions is typically misleading and that it is a source of absurdities. However, "illusion and confusion... can be dissipated by careful comparison of the familiar rules for the use of sensation-words such as 'pain' with the rules for the use of material object words like 'pin'" (Hacker 1996, 109).

The collection of grammatical facts we accumulate in the process of comparing things we would say about pains and pins represents *evidence* for evaluating philosophical utterances. It is incoherent to accept this list of rules and at the same time claim that sensations are privately owned, or to hold that the sentence ‘Only I know that I am in pain’ makes sense. Importantly, however, the underlying assumption is that one cannot but accept the correctness of the grammatical facts on such a list, because these are just those rules any speaker of language follow when she speaks meaningfully. Insofar as the confused philosopher is a competent speaker of a language, she’ll have to agree with the evidence (rules) that underlies her linguistic competence.<sup>81</sup> Wittgenstein’s grammatical remarks have either the status of grammatical *truisms* “concerning our use of expressions and undisputed rules for their use”, or they play the role of *synoptic descriptions* “drawing together and interrelating a myriad of truisms in a single *Übersicht*” (B&H 1985, 23). An example of a truism is: “It makes sense to say ‘I know you have toothache’”. An example of a synoptic description is the statement “Inner states stand in need of outward criteria”. The latter, Hacker admits, do indeed *sound* exactly like general philosophical theses, but he thinks that appearances are misleading in this case.

Hacker says that there are a number of methods employed by Wittgenstein in the course of his grammatical investigations. Nevertheless, on this interpretation, the method of “tabulating rules for the use of words” is still by far the most frequently used method. An illustration of this method is given by providing, as mentioned above, a summary of things we would or would not say about having pains and pins (see Hacker 1996, 108-9), or, say, by listing grammatical criteria for a verb of action (see 2.2.1). Noting necessary relations between concepts and entailment patterns that follow from these relations that characterise our grammar is equivalent to “tabulating rules”. This procedure most commonly involves stating rules in either the “formal meta-linguistic mode” or by means of “grammatical propositions couched in the material mode” (B&H 2005a, 291). The example of the first sort would be the statement ‘It is correct to say “I know what you are thinking”, and wrong to say “I know what I am thinking”’. As for the second, Hacker gives the following example, “I can only see, not hear red and green – but sadness I can hear as much as I can see”. Sometimes the rules are “intimated” rather than stated in the process of “lengthy

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<sup>81</sup> See Kuusela’s critique of Hacker’s and Glock’s interpretation of the notion of “agreement” in his 2008, 247ff.

grammatical investigations” or, Wittgenstein “merely nudges us to the direction of bringing to mind the rules and differences between rules” (B&H 2005a, 292). Notably, in all these cases a grammatical investigation consist in reminding us of the salient rules that underlie and govern meaningful speech.

Hacker argues that the procedure of tabulating grammatical rules is the most likely method suitable for the purpose of achieving what Wittgenstein called “perspicuous representation”. Conversely, he explicitly dismisses simple language games that are used as objects of comparison as a possible candidate, because “they certainly do not fit the original requirement of tabulating the grammatical use of words” (B&H 2005a, 329). One reason Hacker gives in support of this claim is that the method of comparison of our concepts with the concepts employed in simple language games is unlikely to lead to a “comprehensive”, “complete”, or “exhaustive” overview of how a concept is used (see B&H 2005a, 330). And if a representation is to be perspicuous, if it is to offer an overview of the use of a word or detailed account of conceptual connections, it must also aim at comprehensiveness.

Another related objection against considering the use of simple language games as a candidate for yielding perspicuous representation is that describing the use of a word in a simple language game is not describing *our* use. This clearly rests on the assumption that the method that achieves a surveyable representation of grammar must accurately describe our actual uses of words i.e. “grammatical facts”. It must detail the geography of *our conceptual scheme*. Thus Hacker writes,

[The] supposition that primitive language games are surveyable representations of those fragments of grammar with which they are meant to be compared sits rather poorly with the geographical metaphors Wittgenstein commonly employs... For if what we are lacking is a map of the grammatical landscape that will enable us to find our way around, then a map of a different, much simpler landscape will not answer that need... (B&H 2005a, 329).

Hacker’s conclusion concerning the relationship between simple language games and the task of producing a surveyable representation is that the procedure of clarification that is associated with language games is only *preparatory* for the procedure of producing the surveyable representation of *our* grammar. Simple language games constructed as objects

of comparison with our use only “facilitate the attainment of an overview of the grammar of problematic concepts” (B&H 2005a, 332).<sup>82</sup> The object of clarification in simple language games, say in §2 or §48, is “misconceptions”, such as Augustine’s conception of language and Plato’s conception of simple elements. But this “fitting” of misconceptions is, for Hacker, not the same as “illuminating our existing grammar” (B&H 2005a 332/fn. 39). To illuminate our grammar, or to give a perspicuous representation of it, as stated above, means to tabulate salient grammatical rules that actually govern existing language use. The procedure of tabulating grammatical rules, and thus the notion of surveyable representation achieved by such a procedure can, according to Hacker, be understood broadly or narrowly:

Taken as ‘tabulating’ of salient grammatical propositions, the notion of a surveyable representation allows both a narrow and a broad interpretation. Narrowly understood, a surveyable representation of the grammar of an expression appears to be a grammatical proposition or a few grammatical propositions that shed light on the matter at hand to dispel illusions and to highlight the grammatical category or role of the expression in question. Broadly understood, a surveyable representation is a synopsis of the grammatical rules for the use of an expression. (B&H 2005, 332)

What are typical examples of “narrow” and “broad” perspicuous representation in the *Investigations*? For Hacker, paradigmatic examples of perspicuous representations narrowly understood are the following propositions arrived at in surveying some limited domain of our conceptual space: that samples are instruments of language, that naming is preparatory for the use of a word, that a sample is a paradigm not something described by an ostensive definition, that understanding is not a mental state but is akin to ability, that to mean something is not the same as to think of it, and so forth (see B&H 2005a, 333). Hacker writes:

[A] well-chosen, illuminating grammatical proposition concerning a problematic term may be deemed a surveyable representation of its grammar.

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<sup>82</sup> Hacker writes, “I suspect that the simple language games introduced as objects of comparison are designed, as Wittgenstein himself said, to clear the fog that envelops the landscape, and *then*, having an overview of the conceptual terrain, one may be able to give a perspicuous representation of the grammar of the problematic expression, geared to the solution or dissolution of the problems that beset one” (B&H 2005a, 329).

For some such grammatical propositions (rules) provide an epitome of the grammar of the expression – perhaps because they clarify (roughly) to what category the expression belongs (e.g. understanding is akin to an ability, and is not a state, process or activity, or to what categories it does *not* belong (e.g. ‘to think’ is not an activity verb). (B&H 2005a, 331)

Stating a grammatical rule, such as “Understanding is an ability”, is deemed a perspicuous representation narrowly understood (i.e. perspicuous representation (map) of a limited region of our grammar) because it clarifies the correct grammatical category of the word “to understand”. It should be emphasised that stating such a rule, which thus represents “an epitome of the grammar of the expression”, is exactly like giving a *definition* of a concept by stating necessary conditions for something to fall under it. Hacker’s definition of the concept of understanding as an ability is meant to represent a “synoptic generalisation” based on possible combinations “to understand” can enter into with other expressions. Formulating such definitions by reflecting on combinatorial possibilities of an expression is the model for a perspicuous representation in the narrow sense.

What is an example of a surveyable representation *broadly* construed? Recall that for Hacker this would amount to a comprehensive and also surveyable map of all grammatical rules that govern our uses of expressions; it would be a map of our entire conceptual space constructed out of a large number of regional surveyable representations, by compiling them into the one comprehensive map.<sup>83</sup> Hacker’s answer to this question is that, all things considered, even if he aimed at this goal, Wittgenstein never actually produced an example of perspicuous representation of our grammar broadly understood. Although there is no evidence or example in Wittgenstein’s main philosophical work of something that is “of fundamental significance”, for Hacker the comprehensive conceptual map is what Wittgenstein’s investigations of grammar were ultimately aimed at. Hacker thus concludes:

If we take the [surveyable representation] broadly, as Wittgenstein’s geographical metaphors invite us to do... it is true that he rarely practices what he preaches. The exception to the rule is his plan for the treatment of psychological concepts (Z §§472ff.). Of this readily surveyable morphological

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<sup>83</sup> Note that this presupposes that “regional” representations are “additive”. See Baker 2004 for the critique of the idea that particular perspicuous representation can be added up.

investigation he wrote: ‘It can answer a series of different philosophical problems. It is a method of getting clear about various conceptual difficulties’ (MS 134, 156). And so indeed it is. But, illuminating though this sketch is, he never actually executed the plan. And there are no further examples of such systematic tabulations of grammatical propositions. (B&H 2005a, 333. emphasis mine)

This conclusion raises several concerns. First, if Hacker is right that the later Wittgenstein rarely practiced what he preached, then his whole philosophical project can indeed be considered a failure, since clearly Wittgenstein took philosophy to mean practice and activity of clarification, rather than empty speculation. Second, if Hacker is right that the comprehensive conceptual map indeed was what Wittgenstein’s meant by perspicuous representation, yet he failed to give examples of such a representation of grammar in the *Investigations* or elsewhere in his later work, then the contrast between the dogmatism of the early philosophy of the *Tractatus* – one of whose aspects consists in a “one-sided diet of examples” – and Wittgenstein’s later philosophy – where particular examples play a critical role – is obliterated. Interestingly enough, Hacker, compares the non-existence of a perspicuous representation (broadly construed) in the *Investigations* with the non-existence of examples in the *Tractatus*, and concludes that “this is no odder than the fact that in the *Tractatus*, the standard-bearer of the method of analysis, there are (with the exception of the account of tautologies of logic) no actual analyses on any propositions whatsoever” (B&H 2005a, 333. fn 40). This conclusion evidently suggests that the contrast between Wittgenstein’s early and later philosophy in appreciating the importance of examples and particular cases is not properly understood by the standard interpretation.

### 3.3 The methodological interpretation of PI 122

In this section I turn to the methodological interpretation of the notion of perspicuous representation.<sup>84</sup> The methodological interpretation’s treatment of this notion is intimately related to its treatment of the notion of the rules of grammar, which we encountered in chapter 1. According to that treatment, rules are constructed in the process of clarification, rather than being a property of actual language use. Rules are thus understood as instruments of clarification: “the point of grammatical rules is ultimately that they

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<sup>84</sup> See Kuusela (2008, 228-238)

constitute a means of presenting language use... they provide us with an ‘easily surveyable’ characteristic picture of language use” (Kuusela 2008, 231). Kuusela’s methodological interpretation of PI 122 critically challenges Hacker’s interpretation of it.

I have shown in the previous section that, on the standard interpretation of PI 122, the aim of philosophical investigation of grammar is to achieve a perspicuous representation of grammar by tabulating the rules that govern the uses of our words so as to make them explicit. In this way, a perspicuous representation is a representation *of* the rules that are not given to us clearly, although we follow them when we use language. The assumption is that the rules are given, albeit in a non-orderly fashion. To represent these rules thus means to *rearrange* them or to establish a new, perspicuous order. As Kuusela notes, “for Baker and Hacker, grammatical investigation is an activity whereby the rules of grammar themselves (conceived as rules we actually follow) *become perspicuous* through their rearrangement” (Kuusela 2008, 229).

As I pointed out in chapter 1, an objection raised against the standard interpretation is that to conceive of rules as something that philosopher’s representations are *about* is to imply that our actual use of language is rule governed. In contrast to this idea, Kuusela’s suggestion is that “only if grammar is comprehended as the means of description it is possible to come to terms with the fact that philosophical descriptions have a grammar of their own and to counteract the problem of dogmatically projecting that grammar onto language” (Kuusela 2008, 232). His critique of the standard reading of PI 122 hinges upon the ambiguity of the term “grammar”. Since “grammar” can be both the subject matter of representation and a means of representation, the second sentence of Wittgenstein’s comment in PI 122 – “Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity” – can be read either as a reiteration of the first sentence – “A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of the use of our words” – or as saying that our failure to understand our concepts is the result of a lack of perspicuity in “our grammar” (where this expression is understood as “our mode of description”, not “our use of words”). Hacker takes the first option, treating the second sentence as a reiteration of the first. Kuusela, however, believes that it is crucial to consider the second option:

[T]he [second] sentence describes the lack of perspicuity as a problem with our descriptions of language use. ‘Our grammar’, i.e. the grammatical descriptions



of language we provide, fails to make language use perspicuous, and does not enable us to command a clear view of the use of words. (Kuusela 2008, 233)

By interpreting the locution “our grammar” as the grammar of philosopher’s statements, we can avoid projecting our mode of representation onto the object of representation, i.e. our actual language use. The lack of perspicuity is thus characteristic of the rules that the philosopher employs in representing how we use language, rather than of use itself.

On the methodological interpretation, rules are not the exclusive mode of presentation the philosopher might employ to represent the use of language. There are other means of making language use perspicuous, other forms of perspicuous representation, such as using examples as centres of variation, or articulating an organisational principle or schema for arranging facts (see Kuusela 2008, 234).<sup>85</sup> Still, the methodological interpretation agrees with the standard interpretation about the importance of the method of “tabulating” or “stating” grammatical rules in Wittgenstein’s investigations of grammar; in particular, the two readings agree that “it is possible to resolve philosophical problems this way” (Kuusela 2008, 226). Thus *stating definitions* such as “Meaning is use” or “Language is a rule governed activity” ought to be understood as a paradigmatic example of tabulating grammatical rules which are employed as an object of comparison for the purpose of clarification. For instance, on Kuusela’s reading the idea that numbers are abstract objects is problematic because it postulates the existence of mysterious abstract entities. This idea, Kuusela argues, comes from a lack of clarity in the philosopher’s way of representing the use of the word “meaning”. The problem has roots in a “referentialist” definition of meaning, and it can be removed by *stating an alternative definition* of meaning, whereby the meaning of a word is not the object named by the word, but its use. As Kuusela states, “The rule “The meaning of a word is its use in language” may be offered as a response to the problem with abstract objects. As a consequence the need to postulate such objects disappears” (Kuusela 2008, 256). So, when faced with a philosophical problem arising from language use, the philosopher’s job is to come up with an alternative definition of the same word, which makes the problem at stake disappear.

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<sup>85</sup> Kuusela writes that “the definition of grammatical investigation as the tabulation of rules should not be regarded as *the* definition of ‘grammatical investigation’” (ibid. 255) and that descriptions of language use should sometimes be ‘multidimensional’ (see ibid. 258ff.).

An important aspect of the methodological interpretation of PI 122 relates to Wittgenstein's comment about producing that understanding which consists in "seeing connections", and to his emphasis on the importance of finding or inventing intermediate cases. The notion of 'seeing connections' is closely associated with the idea that (some of) our concepts are *family resemblance* concepts, which means that particular instances falling under them need not share all common features, but are rather connected by a network of overlapping and criss-crossing similarities. The notion of perspicuous representation is, therefore, inseparable from the idea of family resemblance. The point of Wittgenstein's reference to "seeing connections" further unfolds this connection, inasmuch as it "[differentiates] Wittgenstein's 'way of looking at things' from philosophy as a search for unified definitions or theses of essences in terms of universally shared essential features" (2008, 236).

One of Kuusela's overall aims is to show that philosophical definitions are given a novel status in Wittgenstein's later work. Philosophical definitions are not to be understood as statements of necessary and sufficient conditions for all the cases that fall under a concept, but rather as instruments of clarification that have the status of objects of comparison. In this sense a definition does not claim that it holds for all possible cases, although it still has the status of a statement of exceptionless necessity. For example, to define meaningful uses of words as rule-governed is not to say that in order for something to be meaningful it *must* possess the feature of rule-governedness. This statement would merely describe *one* aspect of our concept of meaningful use. However, once this important "functional" change in our understanding of definitions is taken into account, Wittgenstein's conception of philosophical clarification and the method of achieving perspicuous representation can still be described as "an activity of stating rules" (Kuusela 2008, 152). This interpretation thus sees Wittgenstein's major contribution not so much in his original choice of philosophical tools, or the new forms of representations – for he employs definitions which are conventional philosophical tools – but rather in his novel understanding of the grammatical status of those conventional tools. It is this novel understanding of the status of rules as objects of comparison which prevent our falling into dogmatism.<sup>86</sup> Once the proper status

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<sup>86</sup> This conclusion is most clearly formulated in the following remark: "Finally, although Wittgenstein's point about the role of rules may seem radical, there is also a sense in which he is simply building on something already accepted by many philosophers. Their own attempts to give definitions show that they are happy to talk about concepts and language use in terms of rules. Wittgenstein might then be seen as making only a

and scope of definitions is taken on board, the threat of dogmatism is removed, and one can keep on employing definitions as an effective method of perspicuous representation.

In 1.3 I tried to show how Kuusela's understanding of grammatical rules in later Wittgenstein stands in stark contrast to Hacker's standard interpretation. Kuusela recognises two important claims in Hacker's interpretation: (i) that actual linguistic practices must be rule-governed, and (ii) that it is plausible to attribute to Wittgenstein the view on which it is possible to tabulate and put into a perspicuous order *all* the rules that govern applications of our concepts. According to Kuusela, both of these claims are dogmatic in that they both presuppose that "there is a certain definite logical order implicit in language, which logical investigation aims to make perspicuous" (Kuusela 2006, 90). Were such claims correct, it would mean that the later Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy and its aim (i.e. a complete conceptual map) is very similar to the one Wittgenstein entertained in the *Tractatus*. To that extent, the standard interpretation of perspicuous representation is in tension with Wittgenstein's later criticism of the *Tractatus* ideal of laying out a "complete grammar".

### **3.4 The anthropological interpretation of PI 122**

So far we have seen two different conceptions of perspicuous representation: one that finds familiar rules and their surveyable rearrangement to be the object of such a representation; and another according to which the rules are only the means of representation formulated by a philosopher for the purposes of clarification. The former rejects simple language games as having to do with the perspicuous representation of *our* grammar. In this section I turn to the anthropological conception of perspicuous representation, which is compatible with Kuusela's methodological interpretation in that it construes the relationship between simple language-games and actual linguistic practices in terms of the idea of objects of comparison, and is thus critical of the standard interpretation. However, the anthropological reading places little significance on the method of "tabulation" or "stating" rules or definitions. Instead, rules are typically taken as embedded within particular language-games, and as instructions they determine the standard of correctness for particular moves

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slight (albeit arguably crucial) methodological adjustment when he says that definitions should not be projected onto language in the form of theses." (Kuusela 2008, 145)

in a game. The whole language game (*qua* a constructed use (system) of language)<sup>87</sup> represents an object of comparison with our actual language use on an occasion. Because it focuses on *simple language-games* (i.e. artificial uses of language)<sup>88</sup> rather than mere definitions, the anthropological interpretation brings to light how crucial an understanding of occasions of use is for understanding language use more generally.

### 3.4.1 Baker on perspicuous representation

In his later writings, Baker (2004) criticises what he calls the “bird’s eye view” model of perspicuous representation, which corresponds to the standard interpretation described in 3.2. According to Baker, the “bird’s eye view” model understands Wittgenstein’s notion of perspicuous representation as an heir to the *Tractatus*’s notion of a “correct logical point of view”. It is meant to be a representation of grammatical rules that transcends any particular, context-specific point of view. Since comprehensiveness and “striving towards a more systematic philosophy” represent an ultimate aim of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, the bird’s eye view model takes local perspicuous representations to be *additive*: they all contribute towards the overarching map of our conceptual space. Furthermore, perspicuous representation, on the “bird’s eye view” model, is nothing more than an ordering or arrangement of grammatical rules, which are implicitly given in our actual linguistic practices. Hence, as Baker observes, “it must be possible for anyone to command a clear view... [since these are rules] which competent speakers follow on speaking a language” (Baker 2004, 29). Finally, Baker points out that the adjective “perspicuous”, on the standard model, is used attributively so that it “ascribes a property to a particular arrangement of grammatical rules” (Baker 2004, 28).

As should by now be clear, the standard interpretation understands rules as governing the applications of our concepts across different occasions. Insofar as rules define concepts, they govern their application on the multiplicity of occasions, and they also determine what makes sense and what does not in terms of combinatorial possibilities, rather than relative to particular contexts. Baker’s reading, and the anthropological interpretation more generally, finds the objective of specifying overarching standards of sense to be in conflict

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<sup>87</sup> Here I follow Wittgenstein in describing the shopkeeper or builder language-game as “the use of language” or “system of communication”.

<sup>88</sup> See below and 1.4.1 for the discussion on the term “language-game” in later Wittgenstein. For Hacker, language-games are, first and foremost, actual, rule-governed linguistic practices.

with the later Wittgenstein's views regarding the role of particular cases in understanding our concepts. A perspicuous representation should make perspicuous pertinent differences in the way a concept is applied on particular occasions for particular purposes. In contrast to the standard reading's preference for tabulating grammatical rules as the main form of perspicuous representation, Baker urges that a perspicuous representation can be "anything which has the function of introducing 'perspicuity' into some aspects of the use of some of 'our words'... there is no general restriction on what form a perspicuous representation may take" (Baker 2004, 31). More specifically, in contrast to Hacker's rejection of simple language-games as candidates for perspicuous representation, "on this understanding, there seems no problem about describing a simple language-game as... a perspicuous representation of the use of our words" (ibid. 33). Moreover, the adjective "perspicuous" is not used attributively as a manner of arranging grammatical rules in a surveyable way. Perspicuous representation is rather "a representation which *makes perspicuous* what is represented" (Baker 2004, 42), and particular such representations need not be additive at all, but could be exclusive too. In other words, comprehensiveness is not a necessary feature of Wittgenstein's concept of perspicuous representation, but rather a dogmatic requirement.<sup>89</sup>

### 3.4.2 Language on holiday and simple language games

In 1.4 I argued that the anthropological interpretation of grammar denies that rules, understood as something that determines "the bounds of sense" in an occasion-insensitive manner, play any (positive) role in Wittgenstein's later writings. On this interpretation, philosophical problems are not related to the supposed violations of familiar rules which perspicuous representation is meant to remind us of, but rather to forgetting that specific human activities and purposes of particular occasions represent an ineliminable background to our understanding of language use. To fall into philosophical confusion means to speak "outside language games" or outside any particular contexts.<sup>90</sup> The main suggestion of the authors that defend this view is that the existence of philosophical problems indicates instances wherein something essential to understanding what is said by using language is excluded from philosophers' considerations. Cavell characterises this philosophical impulse as a tendency to reject the ordinary or the human:

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<sup>89</sup> For a similar interpretation to one defended by Baker see: Hutchinson and Read (2008)

<sup>90</sup> See 1.4 and below for the explanation of the term "language-game"

Wittgenstein's motive... is to put the human animal back into language and therewith back into philosophy. But he never... underestimated the power of motive to reject the human. He undertook... to trace the mechanisms of this rejection in the ways in which, in investigating ourselves, we are led to speak 'outside language games', consider expressions apart from, and in opposition to, the natural forms of life which give those expressions the force they have. (Cavell 1979, 207)

Philosophical problems, on this reading, arise, not in connection with violations of grammatical rules, but when language is "on holiday".<sup>91</sup> To say that an expression of language (such as English) is on holiday is to say that it is not used, that it is "merely a particular bit of a certain language" (Travis 2006, 62) with no role as a move in a particular language-game. The sentence of English on its own, with no context of human doings, is, on this view, *incomplete*. The whole in which a sentence counts as saying something meaningful, or as "an expression in use", includes not merely the sentence, but also an occasion in which it counts as a (correct or incorrect) move. To separate a sentence from an occasion of speaking is to turn a bit of used language into something incomplete and idle, something that expresses no thought. As Travis argues;

To ask when the *sentence* 'Pigs grunt.' would be true is to ask of language on holiday what could only be answered sensibly, or truly, for language in use. It is to treat language on holiday as working the way language at work does — having features which language only has when at work. *Thus*, Wittgenstein tells us, philosophical problems arise. (Travis 2006, 62)

Philosophising amounts to taking our words to say something determinate outside any occasion in which they could make sense, or express some thought. Outside their natural surroundings, there is nothing to fix how our sentences should be understood, which *sense* they are meant to express or what they are meant to say.<sup>92</sup>

Similarly, Baker connects philosophical confusions with "aspect-blindness", and perspicuous representations with "seeing aspects". A lack of perspicuity in our grammar is

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<sup>91</sup> The reference is, of course, to PI §38.

<sup>92</sup> This view is defended, among others, by Cavell (1979), Diamond (1991), Conant (1998), Hertzberg (2001), Travis (2006).

associated with craving for generality and it amounts to being “unable to see something in more than one way” (Baker 2004, 34). When a philosopher reflects about expressions in isolation, she fixates her attention only on one aspect of its use, on one dominant example, which she interprets as being its essential, necessary feature. She thus neglects that we use and understand words in a variety of ways on different occasions; in reflecting about concepts in abstraction from particular contexts, she becomes “blind” to other aspects or possibilities of use.<sup>93</sup> Accordingly, a perspicuous representation needs to bring neglected aspects, or other possibilities of the use of words into view. It exposes new aspects, thus bringing out that words are used in more than one way, and that different cases from the one the philosopher takes as her paradigmatic case are possible.

In accordance with the idea that philosophical problems arise because certain aspects essential to understanding what is said are excluded from consideration (i.e. particular contexts of activities with which speaking of language is woven), the anthropological interpretation of Wittgenstein’s later methods denies that tabulating “inherently general”, occasion-invariant rules represents the central method of clarifying our use of language broadly construed, or of removing confusions that arise in philosophising. Insofar as philosophical confusions do not amount to transgressing familiar rules, tabulating definitions is not the kind of thing that could disperse philosophical confusion. Wittgenstein employs novel terms of criticism and forms of clarification, which do not depict philosophical problems as resulting from violations of familiar rules. As Cavell explains;

What is left out of an expression if it is used ‘outside language game’ is not necessarily what the *words* mean (they may mean what they always did, what a good dictionary says they mean), but what we mean in using them when and where we do. The point of saying them is lost... What we lose is not the meaning of our words – hence, definitions to secure or explain their meaning will not replace our loss. What we lose is a full realisation of what we are saying; we no longer know what *we* mean. Wittgenstein’s ‘methods’ in

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<sup>93</sup> In chapter 4 I connect this aspect of philosophical confusion with the idea of subliming the logic of our language.

philosophy are guided by the realisation that the goal of philosophy cannot be found in the classical ‘search for definition’ (Cavell 1979, 207).<sup>94</sup>

If, on the anthropological interpretation of perspicuous representation, general rules that specify necessary conditions for applications of concepts are not the right kind of thing that could disperse philosophical confusion, what does it mean to make language use perspicuous, and how can we achieve that? The answer to this question is given in the way the anthropological interpretation describes the source of philosophical problems. That is to say, insofar as philosophical problems are an outcome of treating language as if it were “on holiday”, or taking sentences as saying something “outside language games”, or being “blind” to different aspects and possibilities, what needs to be brought to our attention in order to overcome these problems are precisely those neglected aspects of language use that have been excluded from philosophical considerations. Accordingly, any method that can bring to light, in a perspicuous manner, the differences that particular occasions make to how we might understand an expression will deserve to be called a “perspicuous representation” of our (depth) grammar. Insofar as the features of particular contexts of application make important difference to our understanding of expressions and concepts, perspicuous representation should call attention to the particular cases.

One important method of perspicuous representation, which brings to view the role of particular cases and occasions of use, is the method of *simple language-games*. This term in Wittgenstein’s usage denotes actual linguistic practices, but also hypothetical or constructed models of linguistic practices. Language games in the former sense signify what Hilmy (1987) calls “loci of our extant linguistic practices”.<sup>95</sup> This use of the term “language game” is, as Wittgenstein himself notes, interchangeable with the term “form of life”<sup>96</sup> and it highlights the fact that language is, essentially, something spoken by human beings in the context of different practices. Actual linguistic practices such as giving orders, describing an object, reporting an event, making a joke, etc. (see PI 23), should be

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<sup>94</sup> The similar thought that the question of nonsense is not merely the problem with the meaning of words, but rather with whether something is said by words in particular circumstance, is argued by Travis: “[If] words’ meaning underdetermines what they say, then it is wrong to suppose that, if *X* spoke perfectly meaningful, well-formed sentence, then grasp of their meaning alone makes evident *what X* thus said, or even that it follows that there is anything *X*, or his words, said. Pick an unnatural enough home for words, and they may express no thought at all” (Travis 2008, 92)

<sup>95</sup> See Hilmy 1987, esp. ch.4

<sup>96</sup> See Hilmy (1987, ch.5) for an extensive textual analysis of how these two notions relate to each other.



distinguished from constructed, simple language-games with rules (e.g. the invented uses of language described in PI 1, 2), which can be used as *objects of comparison* with the former.<sup>97</sup> A simple language-game with rules is “a device—an artificial one—which we can use to connect content and action explicitly” (Travis, *forthcoming*); it is employed as a model of a particular occasion on which an expression is used, and it represents language and activities with which it is woven, as well as setting up more or less explicit standards of correctness.<sup>98</sup>

On this interpretation, Wittgenstein uses artificial, simplified, rule-governed models of language use for perspicuous representation of our “blurred”, multi-faceted concepts, or of our fluctuating language use. Importantly, the grammar of a word that is used without any strict rules (the grammar of its actual use) and the grammar of a word used according to strict rules in a simple language-game are not identical – they are like a figure with blurred and a figure with sharp edges.<sup>99</sup> Hence, to employ simple language-games, where the correct use of a word is clearly described, does not imply that our actual linguistic practices, our extant language-games, must be like that at all. The use of simple language-games as objects of comparison represents a novel philosophical method that aims to bring to our attention, in a simplified and perspicuous manner, those aspects of use that transcend the boundary of a sentence in isolation (an expression’s “depth grammar”) yet are essential to our understanding how we operate with language. In effect, simple language games represent the occasion-sensitive grammars of expressions. That is, the considerations I have emphasised here make room for a notion of grammar – which for Wittgenstein is that which “describes the use of words in the language” – that takes into account the inherent occasion-sensitivity of such use. An “occasion-sensitive grammar” is a grammar whose rules capture the ways in which particular occasions of use bear on our understanding of utterances.

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<sup>97</sup> See 1.3 and 1.4.1 for the distinction between actual fluctuating uses of words and constructed exact calculi.

<sup>98</sup> Travis explains the connection between actual use and simple language-game as follows: “[an] expression in use, or the whole of which it is a part... is modelled by particular moves in particular language games” (Travis 2006, 62).

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein’s comment on the relationship between two modes of grammar: “But when we use a word without strict rules and later lay down strict rules for its use, its grammar cannot be entirely alike that of its former use. It would be similar in the way a figure drawn with sharp outlines and a blurred figure are similar”(LWL 48).

### 3.5 Summary

In this chapter we have seen how the earlier discussion of the role of rules and the distinction between surface and depth grammar can be brought to bear on Wittgenstein's later grammatical method, which is aimed at making our language use perspicuous. It has been suggested that "perspicuous representation" signifies a method in which the broad aspect of use or depth grammar can be made clear to the philosopher whose exclusive focus on surface grammar in understanding how language works has led her astray. A perspicuous representation places the broad aspect of use to the forefront of philosophical investigations of grammar. Still, since there are disagreements as to what exactly represents the contrast between surface and depth grammar, there are, as I tried to show in this chapter, parallel disputes regarding how to understand the methodology of perspicuous representation of the depth aspect of grammar.

Since the standard interpretation fails to identify the pertinent contrast between two dimensions of grammar and use, thus interpreting depth grammar as a more fine-grained network of rules that govern combinatorial possibilities of expressions, it understands perspicuous representation as aiming at a comprehensive survey or mapping of conceptual relations that determine our existing conceptual scheme. A perspicuous representation is a representation *of* the rules that speakers of a language actually follow when they speak meaningfully on particular occasions. Still, our ability to describe our use of words does not match our ability to use them. Hence, the main philosophical task is to map relevant conceptual relations whose lack of perspicuity generates philosophical problems. The method of tabulating grammatical rules is, on this reading, the main method for achieving perspicuous representations of our concepts. Simple language-games are rejected as a model for perspicuous representation because they do not meet the requirement of comprehensiveness that the geographical metaphor suggests as a feature of such a representation. However, there is no evidence in the *Philosophical Investigations* to suggest that we ought to define the notion of perspicuous representation as one that serves the end of producing a comprehensive conceptual map of language use. The very notion that leads Hacker to reject simple language-games as examples of perspicuous representations – i.e. that these items could not contribute to the task of outlining an exhaustive conceptual geography of *our* conceptual space – leave him with a conception of perspicuous

representation (*broadly* understood) that is supported by *no* examples in Wittgenstein's main philosophical text.

In opposition to the standard interpretation, the methodological interpretation proposes that a perspicuous representation is not a mere rearrangement of the rules of grammar that are already implicitly given to us through our ability to meaningfully use language. Rather than conceiving of the rules of grammar as norms that govern our actual linguistic practices, we should understand this notion as part and parcel of the philosopher's mode of representation, something she formulates and employs in order to bring clarity into our language use. This task is inseparable from particular philosophical problems (e.g. treating numbers as abstract objects) that indicate the lack of perspicuity in our grammar. But "our grammar" is to be understood as the grammar of philosophical statements, not as a property of actual language use. The method of tabulating grammatical rules or juxtaposing definitions is one of the central methods of perspicuous representation, although it is not the only one. Wittgenstein's biggest methodological achievement lies in his novel treatment of philosophical definitions as objects of comparison, instead of their traditional treatment as statements of necessary and sufficient conditions. Since (some of) our concepts are family resemblance concepts, a definition is able to capture only one of its facets rather than its essence. This important insight about the limited applicability of philosophical definitions precludes dogmatic treatment of our concepts.

A similar point is made by the authors who defend the "anthropological" reading. Wittgenstein's notion of perspicuous representation ought to be seen as a response to the philosophical misunderstanding of concepts as having essential features specifiable by general rules. Insofar as philosophical problems amount to blindness with regards to other aspects or possibilities of use, a perspicuous representation could be understood as facilitating the seeing of neglected aspects and possibilities. The anthropological conception emphasises that a perspicuous representation is any representation that is apt to make its object perspicuous, and it is not limited to some particular form, such as grammatical rules. However, in contrast to the standard interpretation, this approach stresses the significant role of simple language-games with rules in Wittgenstein's later methodology. Simple language-games, understood as rule-governed constructed uses of language, and employed as objects of comparison with our complex linguistic practices,

certainly deserve the name of perspicuous representation. Since philosophical perplexities arise because our concepts are discussed when language is “on holiday” and when we speak “outside language games”, the aim of simple language games is “to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use” (*PI* 116). On this interpretation, simple language-games that are compared with our more complex and fluid uses of words are an important form of representation that can bring about perspicuity to our reflections about the way we use language. Two key features of language-games that facilitate perspicuous view of our concepts are: their simplicity and the fact that they can successfully model relevant activities and occasion and with which the speaking of language is paired.

This chapter concludes the comprehensive scrutiny and critical assessment of dominant interpretative models of Wittgenstein’s concepts of grammar and philosophy as grammatical investigation. My aim, so far, was to delineate key concepts and arguments, as well as the main points of contention, in this area of later Wittgenstein scholarship. In particular, I wanted to point out that Hacker’s attempt to account for the ability to produce, understand, and make sense of particular utterances on particular occasions in terms of inherently general, combinatorial rules that speakers follow in speech shows a lack of appreciation for how radically different the later Wittgenstein’s notion of depth grammar is from the *Tractatus*’s rule-based view of language.<sup>100</sup> I suggested that the tendency to explain meaningful language use in terms of combinatorial rules is motivated by the failure of readers who endorse the standard interpretation to distinguish between the (combinatorial/narrow) aspect of using words in sentences and the (occasion-sensitive/broad) aspect of using expressions on particular occasions. Hence, such readers fail to appreciate that the kind of contribution occasions of use make to the sense of our utterances could not be adequately captured by means of occasion-insensitive rules. Accordingly, whilst on the standard interpretation, the terms of sense and nonsense are ascribed to sentence-types, on the anthropological view, these locutions describe our (parochial) understanding, or lack of understanding, of what is said by particular utterances on particular occasions.<sup>101</sup> That is, there is an element of understanding that depends on one

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<sup>100</sup> In remaining chapters the pertinent contrast between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* will become clearer.

<sup>101</sup> As Travis correctly observes, “understanding what it is that given words express requires exercise of an ability independent of, so not entailed by, mere possession of the concept of being F, where the words speak of being F, plus acquaintance with the objects spoken of” (2008, 280).

possessing a certain sensibility to occasions of use. The critical point is, as Travis puts it, that “[a] rule is no *substitute* for a suitable sensibility” (2008, 284).

In remaining three chapters my main goal will be to convince the reader that the anthropological interpretation of Wittgenstein’s conception of grammar and philosophy is indeed the correct interpretation by developing an interpretation of the later Wittgenstein’s idea of “subliming the logic of our language” formulated in *Philosophical Investigations* and of his response to such subliming. My strategy will be to show that the Hacker-style interpretation of grammar misconstrues the relation of Wittgenstein’s early and later philosophy, and creates the tension between, on the one hand, his later views on grammar and philosophy as grammatical investigation, and on the other, Wittgenstein’s later criticisms of his early views. In other words, I intend to show that, if we accept the standard interpretation, then it becomes difficult to understand a number of the later Wittgenstein’s objections to some of the claims he made in the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein’s later criticisms and his later views on grammar interpreted as Hacker suggests turn out to be incompatible.

In chapter 1, I emphasised that Wittgenstein’s investigations of grammar (or use) are inseparable from his understanding of philosophical problems that arise because of a lack of clarity in our grammar and our failure to understand the logic of our language, including Wittgenstein’s aim to remove those problems. In 2.4.3, it has been suggested that clarifying the idea of subliming is equivalent to clarifying the way in which the aspect of use Wittgenstein labels as “surface grammar” can be misleading. I shall make the notion of subliming the main focus of subsequent inquiry, in particular because it has, as a *term of criticism*, an uncontroversial connection with Wittgenstein’s early work. Wittgenstein used the metaphor to bring out the way in which the *Tractatus* (and similar approaches of Frege and Russell) was misleading *vis-a-vis* understanding our concepts and how our language use functions. By focusing on the notion of subliming and the concepts that in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein directly connects with it (i.e. naming, logic, proposition and thought), we can identify those aspects of Wittgenstein’s early work that can be described as “sublimed”, including the methods and techniques Wittgenstein deploys to liberate or “de-sublimate” (our understanding of) our concepts. The discussion of the idea of “subliming” in the next three chapters will show that the standard view of Wittgenstein’s notion of grammar and grammatical method fails to acknowledge the relevant contrast

between Wittgenstein's early and later philosophy, as well as the distinctive contribution of depth or occasion-sensitive grammar to understanding of language use.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Subliming the Logic of Our Language*

.....

'A proposition is a queer thing!' Here we have in germ the subliming of our whole account of logic. The tendency to assume a pure intermediary between the propositional signs and the facts. Or even to try to purify, to sublime, the signs themselves.--For our forms of expression prevent us in all sorts of ways from seeing that nothing out of the ordinary is involved, by sending us in pursuit of chimeras. (PI 94)

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In the first three chapters I have been concerned with introducing and contrasting three different interpretative models of Wittgenstein's conception of grammar and grammatical investigation. I suggested that problems with the standard interpretation largely stem from its insensitivity to the important contrast between the aspect of use which captures the way expressions combine with others in a sentence, and the other, broad aspect, which describes

how we employ expressions on particular occasions for particular purposes. I also suggested that the anthropological interpretation, in contrast, insists on keeping this distinction perspicuous. In the remaining three chapters I shall argue that the anthropological interpretation best explains how Wittgenstein's conception of grammar and grammatical investigation connects with his main goal of resolving philosophical problems, and gives a more compelling account of Wittgenstein's philosophy as a whole. In particular, I shall argue that, insofar as the *Tractatus* exemplifies for the later Wittgenstein the view that embodies and generates philosophical confusions, the anthropological interpretation also best captures the pertinent contrast between Wittgenstein's early and later work.

In this chapter I shall propose that the central notion for understanding the kind of confusion the *Tractatus* embodies, as well as Wittgenstein's later response to it,<sup>102</sup> is that which he refers to in the *Investigations* as "a tendency to sublime the logic of our language".<sup>103</sup> The tendency to sublime the logic of our language is precisely what (the later) Wittgenstein takes to be the problematic aspect of his early work, and consequently it is that very tendency that his later methods and the concept of depth or occasion-sensitive grammar are aimed at overcoming. Wittgenstein sometimes describes this tendency as a tendency "to invent a mythology of symbolism or of psychology" (PR 65; see also PG 56). I suggested in Chapter 3 that the metaphor of subliming the logic of our language should be understood as another way of formulating the point about the surface grammar of expressions being misleading. I take the relevant contrast between surface and depth grammar to be the one defended by the anthropological interpretation (see Chapter 2). To the extent that philosophical problems are intimately related to the philosopher's neglect of

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<sup>102</sup> I shall show that this reaction is described as attending to 'the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language', going 'back to the rough ground', 'bringing words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use' and I shall explain later what these ideas amount to.

<sup>103</sup> The notion of subliming explicitly occurs in only three places in the *Investigations*: in connection with the concepts of names and naming in PI 38, logic in PI 89, and proposition and thought in PI 94. There are numerous other cases of subliming in the *Investigations* that are not explicitly tagged as such: for instance, the idea that concepts must have sharp boundaries (PI 71), that objects must be simple (PI 46), that there must be something absolutely simple or composite (PI 47), that every explanation hangs in the air unless supported by another one (PI 87), that the application of a word must be everywhere bounded by rules (PI 79), that when one utters a sentence and means or understands it he is operating a calculus according to definite rules (PI 81), that the word 'true' and 'false' must fit our concept of a proposition (PI 136) or that the act of meaning determines all the steps (the application) in advance (PI 188) and so forth. An interpretation of the idea of subliming can be found in Hacker (2004a). I shall discuss Hacker's interpretation of this notion in the next chapter.



characteristic depth-grammatical aspects of use, focusing on the notion of subliming represents a useful approach in interpreting the later Wittgenstein's conception of the nature, or source, of philosophical error. I shall argue that it is not "violating grammatical rules" or "transgressing the bounds of sense" that captures how the later Wittgenstein thinks of the nature of philosophical puzzlement, but it is rather the notion of *subliming* that aptly describes how philosophical problems arise, and thus suggests what kind of solution is to be sought.

This chapter aims to clarify what Wittgenstein takes to be involved in this tendency to sublime the logic of our language, understood as a way of explaining the nature of philosophical error. The main questions I want to ask about subliming are: (i) How does the metaphor of subliming explain the metaphysical elements of the *Tractatus*<sup>104</sup> and, more broadly, the nature of philosophical confusion arising from misunderstanding concepts and how we use language; and (ii) what does (what I call) "de-sublimation" understood as part of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as clarification of language use, consist in? In this chapter I shall focus on the former question; I consider the latter in Chapter 6. It is uncontroversial that Wittgenstein introduces the metaphor of subliming the logic of our language in the *Investigations* in order to bring out what went wrong in the *Tractatus*. Understanding what he means by this notion is thus crucial for understanding the problems the later Wittgenstein identified in the *Tractatus* and to which he is responding in the *Investigations*. In particular, clarifying this metaphor is crucial for understanding the way in which the *Tractatus* counts as metaphysical from the point of view of the *Investigations* and thus for understanding what is involved in bringing words back from the metaphysical to their everyday use.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> There are different ways of understanding this notion. See below.

<sup>105</sup> It should be stressed here that there are at least two rival ways of understanding the so-called metaphysics of the *Tractatus*. As I shall discuss in great detail in chapter 5, the standard view sees the opening sections of the book as setting up a language-independent ontology to which the structure of propositions is answerable. This reading commits the early Wittgenstein to a form of metaphysical realism. On the alternative view, metaphysical aspects of the *Tractatus* have nothing to do with the alleged commitment to realism. Rather the *Tractatus*'s metaphysics lies in certain dogmatic requirements and preconceptions that are projected onto language. For instance, according to Cora Diamond "[the] metaphysics of the *Tractatus* - metaphysics not ironical and not cancelled - is in the requirements which are internal to the character of language as language, in there being a general form of sentence, in all sentences having this form" (1991, 19). The interpretation of the metaphysics of the *Tractatus* I defend here belongs to this second way of reading the way in which the *Tractatus* is metaphysical.

Another important aspect of the discussion in this chapter has to do with the fact that the claim that philosophical problems arise out of misunderstanding of how language functions is not unique to later Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy: the *Tractatus* already introduces the idea that philosophical puzzles are a "failure to understand the logic of our language" and that most of the philosophical propositions and questions "are not false but nonsensical" (TLP 4.003). Hence, there is an important question concerning how the *Tractatus* and *Investigations* relate as regards the idea that language represents the source of confusion. Understanding the metaphor of subliming our language, I want to argue, is vital for a proper interpretation of the main contrast between the early and later philosophy *vis-à-vis* his conception of philosophical problems. I submit that the *Tractatus* itself represents an example of the kind of confusion that is connected with a sublime view of language.

Moreover, by exploring the contrast between the *Tractatus* and *Investigations*, it will be easier to see that the standard interpretation still continues to think of the source of philosophical problems and grammar in Wittgenstein's later work on the model of the *Tractatus*, a model, which, I shall argue, he later rejected. In chapter 5, I shall present an alternative account of subliming to the one defended in the present chapter, and argue that the standard view, advocated by Peter Hacker, misunderstands Wittgenstein's idea of subliming, the way in which the *Tractatus* is metaphysical, and the essence of Wittgenstein's turn. All this is reflected in the standard view's insensitivity as regards the relevant contrast between two dimensions of use and grammar, and the contribution depth or occasion-sensitive grammar makes to our understanding of concepts.

I start the discussion of subliming with a brief textual analysis of this notion, so that the reader has a clearer idea of the phenomenon Wittgenstein is targeting. In 4.3 we move on to the conception of philosophical problems in Wittgenstein's early philosophy. In 4.4 I identify relevant aspects of subliming in the *Tractatus*, which are discussed in more detail in 4.5 from the point of view of the *Investigations's* critique of the *Tractatus's* sublime view of language. I pay special attention to Wittgenstein's considerations of logic, thought and names as something sublimed.

## 4.2 Subliming - textual analysis

What is involved in the philosopher's tendency to sublime the logic of our language or to invent the mythology of symbolism and psychology? What kind of problems does subliming or inventing mythologies give rise to? We can begin to answer these questions by considering how Wittgenstein uses the notion of subliming in his later writings, and trying to identify some of its characteristic features.

The earliest occurrence of the notion of subliming can be traced to *Philosophical Remarks* where it appears as the process that turns the harmless model into something harmful:

The harm does not lie in the imperfection and crudity of our models, but in their lack of clarity (vagueness). The trouble starts when we notice that the old model is inadequate, but then, instead of altering it, only as it were sublimating it. While I say thoughts are in my head, everything's all right; it becomes harmful when we say thoughts aren't in my head, they're in my mind. (PR 287)

To describe the soul as a thing in our heads is, Wittgenstein says, crude but harmless description. To escape this crudity the philosopher has to alter her model, but instead of altering it she *sublimates* it. The ordinary concept of having thoughts in the head, in the process of sublimation, is replaced by something more sophisticated and ethereal ("having thoughts in the mind"), whilst its original grammar is preserved. We'll soon see that a similar contrast between the crude (i.e. ordinary) and the ethereal motivates the *Tractatus* distinction between sign and symbol.

The notion of subliming also occurs in the context of Wittgenstein's suggestion that philosophical investigations of language are investigations of "the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language, not... some non-spatial, non-temporal phantasm" (PG 121). Wittgenstein here contrasts the treatment of sentences as something homespun, ordinary and used by human beings, with the treatment of sentences as something sublimated, abstract and idealised. By abstracting away from their diverse uses on a multitude of occasions, the philosopher distorts the meaning of our ordinary notions such as "thought", "sentence", or "name":

In reflecting on language and meaning we can easily get into a position where we think that in philosophy we are not talking of words and sentences in a quite common-or-garden sense, but in a sublimated and abstract sense.--As if a particular proposition wasn't really the thing that some person utters, but an ideal entity (the "class of all synonymous sentences" or the like). (PG 121)

Subliming as a symptom of dissatisfaction with ordinary language use has another important aspect associated with depriving our understanding of sentences of the essential practical surroundings. This aspect of subliming is what makes the use of our words *metaphysical* (see PI 116; also PI 38).<sup>106</sup> To think that our understanding of what is said by the use of sentences can be achieved in isolation from practical contexts, and to think that sentences express propositions *in vacuo*, is a defining feature of the sublime view of language. The tendency to sublime is, to this extent, analogous to the notion of language "on holiday" that I discussed earlier (3.4.2) in connection with the anthropological interpretation's view of philosophical problems. An example of such a treatment of words as something sublime with a unique essence is the notion that once we understand its use in one context, we know what it contributes to every possible context. We'll see in 4.4 that this sublime picture of the logic of our language, where super-words are taken to make a unique, systematic contribution to every possible sentence, regardless of the contribution a particular occasion would make, is precisely the picture that characterised the *Tractatus*.

Another feature of subliming concerns thinking that some concepts are *unique* in their status, and are essentially more important than others, since they are performing important functions within a theory. In this context, to think that a concept has a special place in a hierarchy of concepts is to think of it as sublimed (Cf. PG 334). In the 1932-1935 Cambridge lectures Wittgenstein attributed this aspect of subliming to Frege:

[It] was Frege's notion that certain words are unique, on a different level from others, e.g., "word", "proposition", "world". And I once thought that certain words could be distinguished according to their philosophical importance:

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<sup>106</sup> Here is how Wittgenstein describes this sublimated treatment of our sentences to his students: "In general the sentences we are tempted to utter occur in practical situations. But then there is a different way we are tempted to utter sentences. This is when we look at language, consciously direct our attention on it. And then we make up sentences of which we say that they also ought to make sense. A sentence of this sort might not have any particular use, but because it sounds English we consider it sensible. Thus, for example, we talk of the flow of time and consider it sensible to talk of its flow, after the analogy of rivers." (AWL 13)

"grammar", "logic", "mathematics". I should like to destroy this appearance of importance (AWL 13).

The early Wittgenstein makes an analogous distinction between concepts proper and formal concepts in the *Tractatus*. The former can be expressed in meaningful propositions, whereas the latter represent only features of our symbolism and are expressed by different types of variables. Furthermore, when someone understands a word as an instance of a formal concept (say, the symbol "red" as an instance of the formal concept "colour"), one sees something different in it than when one sees the word as an instance of the first-order predicate: "when he understands variables as variables he sees something in them which he does not see in the sign for the particular case" (PG 270).

In another manuscript Wittgenstein writes about the idea of the sublime, ideal language, which results from dissatisfaction with the unstable, fluctuating nature of everyday expressions. Here the tendency to sublime is a tendency to assume that there must be a perfect logical order that underlies unregulated uses of ordinary language, something that our messy language use conceals. Although the notion of a perfect order is only the philosopher's ideal, she attributes it to natural language:

It seems to us that super-order *must* be found in the actual language. So we also ask ourselves what is the *real* authentic word, the *real* proposition of our language, for the written and uttered words and propositions don't possess in their nature the clarity that the sublime language requires. So we search for the real word and we believe we find it perhaps in the idea of the word. And so it happens that we have a conception of an ideal and say it *must* be applicable to the reality of language, but we can't say how. (MS 157a, 53r)

The tendency to sublime is directly associated with a tendency to *generalise* and with essentialism, that is, with the idea that all cases falling under a concept, everything called such and such, must share a common *essence*:<sup>107</sup>

The tendency to generalize the case seems to have a strict justification in logic: here one seems *completely* justified in inferring: "If *one* proposition is a picture, then any proposition must be a picture, for they must all be of the same nature.

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<sup>107</sup> See especially BB 17ff.

(Every proposition says: This is how things are.)" For we are under the illusion that what is sublime, what is essential, about our investigation consists in its grasping *one* comprehensive essence. (MS 142, p.88; see also Z 444, MS 157a 56r)

Wittgenstein here refers to his early sublime conception of propositions as pictures: every proposition, insofar as it is a proposition, is essentially a picture of a possible situation. I show below that grasping and spelling out "one comprehensive essence" of a meaningful proposition is what the *Tractatus* aims to do. The sublime view of signs presupposes "the singularity of meaning"<sup>108</sup> (i.e. words have only one core meaning, concepts have the essential features), and that one can safely ignore particular contexts in which we employ words, since these make no significant contribution to our linguistic understanding. Words have the meaning they have, and thus a *uniform use* in every possible context.

The final comment concerns warnings against the philosopher's tendency to turn our ordinary concepts into "purer" philosophical concepts. Wittgenstein suggests that this conceals the fact that 'philosophical' concepts after all originate in ordinary language-games and presuppose criteria relevant to their application in those contexts.

Some will say that my talk about the concept of knowledge is irrelevant, since this concept as understood by philosophers, while indeed it does not agree with the concept as it is used in everyday speech, still is an important and interesting one, created by a kind of sublimation from the ordinary, rather uninteresting one. But the philosophical concept was derived from the ordinary one through all sorts of misunderstandings, and it strengthens these misunderstandings. It is in no way interesting, except as a warning. (RPPii 289)

This short overview of Wittgenstein's use of the metaphor of subliming reveals a number of significant characteristics:

- (1) Subliming represents the adherence to certain ordinary paradigms, which are endowed with ethereal qualities (because of certain deficiencies);

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<sup>108</sup> I discuss this concept in greater detail in chapter 5.

- (2) Philosophical investigations of language use that move away from the ordinary, by involving the processes of abstraction, generalisation and idealisation, are subliming the logic of our language;
- (3) In the process of subliming the philosopher disregards and glosses over important differences between particular cases;
- (4) Subliming involves an over-simple view of expression's meaning;
- (5) As a result of subliming, our expressions are isolated from particular applications and are considered in isolation ("language on holiday");
- (6) Subliming amounts to thinking that among our concepts some are essentially more important than others because they are taken to perform some unique functions;
- (7) Subliming is a symptom of dissatisfaction with the ordinary means of expression, that is, with its fluctuation, blurriness and instability; it aims at something supposedly *hidden* beneath the surface of the ordinary which it deems 'real' or 'proper';
- (8) The sublime is akin to the *essential*; the tendency to sublime is in the family of a tendency to *generalise*; subliming rests on the idea that all objects falling under a concept share the same essential properties (see esp. the discussion in BB 17ff.)
- (9) A philosophical (sublimed) concept is created by distorting the ordinary concept; this process hides various misunderstandings.

A tendency to sublime the logic of our language, or to invent a mythology of symbolism and psychology is an expression of a myriad of philosophical requirements imposed on ordinary language as a system of representation. These include: completeness, explicitness, exactness, simplicity, purity, determinateness, analysability, elimination of vagueness or ambiguity, and so forth. It is worth noting that, on the reading defended in this chapter, the metaphor of subliming or mythologizing about language and its use, which Wittgenstein deploys to specify the nature of philosophical problems, does not presuppose a commitment to metaphysical realism in the *Tractatus*.<sup>109</sup> It rather has to do with idealisation, essentialism, the rejection of the ordinary, abstracting away from practical contexts, craving

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<sup>109</sup> The reader should note that on the standard reading the idea of subliming describes the alleged commitment to metaphysical realism primarily. See chapter 5.

for generality and similar tendencies of philosophical thinking, which may apply to any metaphysical position, not merely to the species of realism.<sup>110</sup> The metaphor of subliming, as it is employed in the *Investigations*, describes the way the philosopher is inclined to envisage the phenomena to which concepts “language”, “proposition”, “logic” or “thought” apply.<sup>111</sup> It is about philosophical preconceptions and demands that are, as Diamond (1991) argues, projected onto “language”, rather than about putative claims about the reality mirrored in language.

### 4.3 Ordinary language and philosophical problems in TLP

I proposed that we explain how the later Wittgenstein thinks about the nature of philosophical confusion by considering what he means by a tendency to sublime, or to invent a mythology of, language and psychology. As we saw in 4.2, this tendency presupposes certain preconceived requirements concerning (the concept of) language, which ordinary language then fails to meet. Subliming results from a distortion of our ordinary concepts “language”, “thought”, “sentence”, “understanding”, “naming” etc. in accordance with these requirements.<sup>112</sup> To the extent that particular contexts and circumstances of use seem immaterial to our understanding of words (i.e. they are said to contribute nothing essential), and to the extent that words or concepts seem to allow for such an abstraction away from particular uses, language itself can be said to be misleading or to be a source of philosophical confusion. Since both the *Tractatus* and *Investigations* find language an important source of philosophical puzzlement, the aim of this section is to specify the way in which our language is misleading according to the *Tractatus*. This discussion will help establish a clearer contrast between the *Tractatus* and *Investigations* concerning how they see language as misleading, and it will also bring to view key similarities between the *Tractatus* and Hacker’s construal of the role of the distinction between surface and depth grammar in Wittgenstein’s later work.

In the preface of the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein describes its aim as follows:

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<sup>110</sup> Thus, in chapter 5 I argue that Hacker’s anti-realist reading of the later Wittgenstein’s concept of grammar is equally metaphysical as is any realist position.

<sup>111</sup> Of course, the idea of subliming thus understood applies more generally to a philosophical treatment of any concept (say “knowledge”) in abstraction from our application of it on particular occasions. My focus here is on the concepts or words such as “language”, “proposition”, “word”, “thought”/“thinking” etc., because they are the main subject matter of the *Tractatus*’s philosophy of language and logic.

<sup>112</sup> See n.111



The book deals with the problems of philosophy and shows... that the method of formulating these problems rests on the misunderstanding of the logic of our language. (TLP, preface)

The book is concerned principally with language, in particular, with how language, in representing the world, becomes meaningful or remains a collection of mere signs with no significance. In connection with this, the *Tractatus* also aims to show how philosophical problems arise and how to get rid of them. It aims to draw a limit to thinking by drawing a limit in language, since, it is assumed language is a way of perceptibly expressing thoughts about the world (TLP 3.11-3.12). But ordinary language not only expresses thoughts, it also disguises them “so that from the external form of the clothes one cannot infer the form of the thought they clothe, because the external form of the clothes is constructed with quite another object than to let the form of the body be recognised” (TLP 4.002). It is ‘humanly impossible’, Wittgenstein writes, to gather the logic of language from our colloquial language since it is meant to serve other, not strictly logical, purposes. At any rate, despite their logical imperfection, ordinary signs are used, more or less successfully, as representational vehicles.

One of the big questions Wittgenstein sets out to answer is this: what constitutes a meaningful proposition (sentence) and how do sentences manage to represent the world (cf. PI 435)? Insofar as the sense of sentences depends on their representational role, philosophical propositions such as “Socrates is identical” (i.e. nonsense) are, for the early Wittgenstein, an indication of the ordinary language’s failure to express thoughts that represent reality: “most questions and propositions of the philosophers result from the fact that we do not understand the logic of our language” (TLP 4.003). Put differently, philosophical confusions indicate that the connection between ordinary language and thoughts expressed in it is lost. This typically results in associating no thought with a given propositional sign, because “we have failed to give a *meaning* to some of [proposition’s] constituents. (Even if we think that we have done so)” (TLP 5.4733). The construction “Socrates is identical” is uninterpretable because there is no such thing as the one-place predicate with the meaning “identical” in English (though we could give it such meaning).

Wittgenstein explains the mechanism behind philosophical confusions (and *ipso facto* defines the aim of philosophy as logical analysis) by means of the distinction between “sign” and “symbol”:<sup>113</sup>

In the language of everyday life it very often happens that the same word signifies in two different ways—and therefore belongs to two different symbols—or that two words, which signify in different ways, are apparently applied in the same way in the proposition. (TLP 3.323)

The distinction between sign and symbol distinguishes a perceptible unit of the language from a logical type that specifies the contribution of a propositional element to the sense of the whole.<sup>114</sup> One can recognise the logical category of a sign only if we take into account its use (i.e. combinatorial potential) in propositions with sense (cf. TLP 3.326, 3.327). The *Tractatus* thus treats “use” at the logico-syntactic employment of signs (or what we have called “narrow use”). A sign represents a symbol (or expression) only in the context of a meaningful proposition; correspondingly, the categories of symbols can be distinguished only relative to the system of propositions, because a symbol “is the common characteristic mark of a class of propositions” (TLP 3.311). A symbol represents “part of a proposition that characterises its sense..., [it] is the mark of a form and a content” (TLP 3.31), and is “presented by a variable, whose values are the propositions which contain the expression” (TLP 3.313). The relevant connection therefore between a perceptible and logical unit of language to the effect that the former contributes to the proposition’s saying something, or to its sense, exists only in the context of a meaningful proposition. Individual words considered in isolation do not link up with any logical unit or symbol (TLP 3.3). Hence, on the *Tractatus*’s view, a symbol “has meaning only in a proposition” (TLP 3.314).<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Conant (1998, 2000, 2001) places a great emphasis on the role of the sign-symbol distinction in the *Tractatus*’s account of nonsense.

<sup>114</sup> “The sign is the part of the symbol perceptible by the senses” (TLP 3.32)

<sup>115</sup> It is important to note that a disregard for the contribution a particular context of use makes to our understanding of words is, *to some extent*, also the topic of the *Tractatus*. Thus, so called ‘resolute readers’ (Conant, Diamond, Kremer etc.) see this to be a main line of continuity between Wittgenstein’s early and later work. They argue that already in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein has understood the critical role that the context plays in meaningful use of language. Resolute readers see both the early and later Wittgenstein as committed to (a strong version of) the Fregean context principle, whereby words don’t have any meaning outside the context of use. This reading trades on the ambiguity of the notions of “context” and “use”. As I tried to show in earlier chapters, there is an important difference in how Wittgenstein understands these notions in the *Tractatus* and in *Philosophical Investigations* (see also Stokhof 2002, 162). Namely, in the *Tractatus*, “use” is understood as logico-syntactic employment of expressions, and, correspondingly, “context” is a *sentential*

In ordinary symbolism it is possible that the same sign represents different symbols in which case they will “signify in different ways” (3.321). In Wittgenstein’s example of the sentence (1) “Green is green”, the sign “green” has different “modes of signification” and represents different symbols: the same sign “green” occurs in two different ways in a sentence, as a proper name and as an adjective, and it thus signifies in two different ways. The differences between symbols and their modes of signification can be expressed by means of propositional variables where “the expression is *constant* and everything else *variable*” (3.312). For instance, we can express the relevant logical difference between symbols in (1) as follows:

- (i)  $G(x)$  – whose values are propositions  $\text{Green}(a)$ ,  $\text{Green}(b)$ ,  $\text{Green}(c)$  etc.
- (ii)  $\Phi(g)$  – whose values are propositions  $F(\text{Green})$ ,  $G(\text{Green})$ ,  $H(\text{Green})$  etc.

In (i) the sign “green” has a predicative role (semantically speaking, it’s a colour-predicate) and in (ii) it has a logical role of a proper name (representing an individual). In a logically perspicuous notation, this *prima facie* similarity between two occurrences of the same sign is removed, “[for] the sign, of course, is arbitrary” (TLP 3.322). As specified in 3.23, philosophical confusions can arise for two reasons. Namely, because of,

- (i) the ambiguity of ordinary signs with regards to their logical category and mode of signification (as in the above case of “Green is green”)
- (ii) misleading surface analogies between logico-syntactical employments of ordinary signs (see below).

One can either fail to distinguish between different modes of signification of the same sign (that represent different symbols), or one can fail to acknowledge that different signs have merely superficially similar employment in a proposition, have superficially similar logical forms.<sup>116</sup> The second sort of mistake would result from a deceptively analogous syntactic

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context. It is characteristic of this narrow dimension of use (in a *sentential* context) that it can be captured by the rules of logical syntax. This is precisely the method that is not available to the philosopher according to Wittgenstein’s later conception of use and context, at least not where the job of rules is to determine the bounds of sense for every occasion of use; combinatorial rules are too general to determine the sense words have on particular occasion.

<sup>116</sup> As Kremer puts it “[in] such cases two signs with the same apparent grammatical form signify in different ways, and so having different real form. One could say that in such cases it is not so much the signs that are ambiguous as it is the grammatical forms of the language itself” (Kremer, forthcoming, p.22).

employment of the signs, such as “red” and “colour”, in the ordinary sentences “This apple is red” and “Blue is a colour”. If it were the case that they have same logico-syntactic employments, in a perspicuous logical notation both would be represented by means of functions. However, according to the *Tractatus*, this would conceal the fundamental difference between logical roles of “concepts proper” and “formal concepts”, inasmuch as the formal concept “colour” cannot “be represented by a means of a function as concepts proper can” (4.126).<sup>117</sup>

For reasons related to the ambiguity of a sign with regards to its logical category and deceptively similar logico-syntactic employments of signs “there easily arise the most fundamental confusions (of which the whole of philosophy is full)” (3.324). In other words, it is because of the indeterminacy of ordinary signs with regards to the symbols (if any) they are associated with that philosophical problems arise. Nonsense can be characterised as a failure to recognise a relevant mode of signification and to give meaning to an element of a sentence in a particular sentential context; as Diamond, for instance, highlights “*anything* that is nonsense is so merely because some determination of meaning has *not* been made” (Diamond 1991, 106).<sup>118</sup> Put differently, nonsense indicates that there is a sign associated with no “rule of projection” which determines its contribution to the truth-conditions of the whole (see McGinn 2006, 243).<sup>119</sup>

The lack of one-to-one correlation between signs and symbols motivates the use of a sign-language governed by the “logical grammar” or “logical syntax”, whose sole purpose is to unambiguously display the form of symbols expressed by the signs,<sup>120</sup> and which could be

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<sup>117</sup> Hacker argues that the prevalent source of nonsense lies in confusion between concepts proper and formal concepts (see Hacker 2001, 101). As we’ve seen here, this is only one case of misleading syntactical employment of signs.

<sup>118</sup> Conant (1998) shares the same conception of nonsense as Diamond and other “resolute readers”. He argues that “[if] a sentence is nonsense, this is not because it is trying but failing to make sense (by breaking a rule of logic), but because we have failed to make sense with it” (Conant 1998, 245).

<sup>119</sup> It is worth noting that there has been a lot of disagreement in last few decades among the interpreters of the *Tractatus* concerning how the conception of nonsense is to be understood. “Resolute readers” have argued against what they called a “substantial view of nonsense” according to which nonsense is a result of putting together words whose meanings clash (where this presuppose that words have meanings in isolation). I agree with resolute readers that one need not read the *Tractatus* as being committed to the view that nonsense is a result of a clash between signs that have their meaning independently of the context of a proposition. However, I do think that the rules of logical syntax keep record of the forms of symbols i.e. how they combine in meaningful propositions. So I take it that logical syntax, *formally* speaking, is about combinatorial possibilities of symbols i.e. their “modes of signification”. See also note 115.

<sup>120</sup> As Conant observes: “in... a proper logical grammar, each sign would wear its mode of symbolizing on its sleeve” (2000, 192).

used to show whether *prima facie* sentences are formally apt to express thoughts (have sense) or not:

[We] must make use of a sign-language that excludes [philosophical errors] by not using the same sign for different symbols and by not using in a superficially similar way signs that have different modes of signification: that is to say, a sign-language that is governed by logical grammar—by logical syntax. (The conceptual notation of Frege and Russell is such a language, though, it is true, it fails to exclude all mistakes). (3.325)

The early Wittgenstein envisages logical syntax as a set of rules that describe combinatorial possibilities of propositional elements (symbols), thus making explicit logical forms of meaningful propositions, which we use as projections of possible states of affairs.<sup>121</sup> Specifying and using the notation governed by the rules of logical syntax to express thoughts *ipso facto* precludes the possibility of nonsensical constructions (signs that fail to represent). The rules of logical syntax that reveal the logical forms of symbols, or their modes of signification, correspond to the (internal) rules that facilitate the projection of possible states of affairs (situation) onto perceptible propositional signs (TLP 3.11, 3.12). Every such projection of a possible situation onto a propositional sign presupposes the “rules of projection” which determine the contribution each element makes to the truth-conditions (sense) of the thought, and to the propositional sign in which the thought is expressed.<sup>122</sup> In this way, the method of the logical analysis of propositions in a logically perspicuous notation *ipso facto* reveals the form of our thought beneath the ordinary language clothing.

An important application of a perspicuous symbolism governed by logical syntax lies in its capacity to dissolve philosophical problems and exclude nonsense (or any possibility of misunderstanding). In his 1929 paper “Some Remarks on Logical Form”, Wittgenstein notes that “[by] syntax in this general sense of the word I mean the rules which tell us in which connection only a word gives sense, thus excluding nonsensical structures” (RLF

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<sup>121</sup> Stokhof’s characterisation of logical syntax is useful here. He describes it as “a set of rules for the use of signs that are formulated in terms of expressions, that is, symbols... [and it] abstracts from the accidental properties of concrete signs, one of which is what they refer to”. Logical syntax is “concerned with the combinatorial properties of the symbols that [signs] express... [it is] concerned with the form of symbols” (Stokhof 2002, 73-4).

<sup>122</sup> See McGinn 2006, 85ff.

161). The syntax of ordinary language, he argues, is not suitable for the purpose of excluding nonsense because grammatical categories are simply too coarse-grained and general.<sup>123</sup> Crude grammatical categories such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, pronouns and adverbs, including the subject-predicate form of sentences, do not correspond to logical forms, which are much more diverse and more fine-grained than standard grammatical categories:

[these] forms are the norms of our particular language into which we project in ever so many different ways ever so many different logical forms. And for this very reason we can draw no conclusions-except very vague ones - from the use of these norms as to the actual logical form of the phenomena described. (RLF 165)

This is why the exclusion of nonsense can only be accomplished by the use of a sign-language that is governed by logical syntax, i.e. a language in which *all* logical properties and distinctions are made explicit by the rules which describe the form of symbols, and where the level of categorial granularity exactly corresponds to that the implicit rules of projection determine.

In Chapter 2 I argued that, on the standard interpretation, the later Wittgenstein's distinction between surface and depth grammar represents the contrast between coarse-grained (syntactical) and fine-grained (depth-grammatical) categories. Surface grammar is said to be misleading as to real categories of our concepts. Clearly, there is a strong correlation between Hacker's reading of this distinction and Wittgenstein's early view about the status of logical grammar in determining what can be meaningfully said. Like the early Wittgenstein, Hacker holds that depth grammar provides much richer range of categories, that it is much more restrictive with regards to possible combinations of signs than surface (ordinary English) grammar is, and is thus able to preclude misunderstandings. Similarly, as argued in chapter 3, on Hacker's view the aim of philosophical investigations is to make explicit the rules of grammar that govern meaningful speech in order to prevent misunderstandings. This is precisely the aim of philosophy as logical analysis in the

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<sup>123</sup> Wittgenstein writes, "The syntax of ordinary language, as is well known, is not quite adequate for this purpose [excluding nonsensical structures]. It does not in all cases prevent the construction of nonsensical pseudo-propositions (constructions such as "red is higher than green" or "the Real, though it is an *in itself* must also be able to become a *for myself*", etc.)" (RLF, 161)

*Tractatus*. Therefore, the standard view evidently associates Wittgenstein's later conception of grammar, philosophy, and use with the model we find already in Wittgenstein's early work.<sup>124</sup> On this model, what counts as a meaningful proposition (as well as an instance of a meaningful speech) is fully determined by the possibilities of words to logically and syntactically combine with other words.

Is this, however, the correct characterisation of “misunderstanding the logic of our language” and of the aims of philosophical clarification as understood by Wittgenstein in the *Investigations*? I want to argue that this is not the case. On the view defended in this thesis, philosophical misunderstandings are symptoms of adopting the sublimed perspective on language whereby one thinks particular occasions of use can be omitted from consideration, because they do not seem to contribute in any significant way to our understanding of language use. By treating the *Tractatus* as a model for understanding Wittgenstein's later conception of how misunderstandings arise, the standard interpretation fails to acknowledge the essential contribution particular contexts of use make to our understanding (or misunderstanding) of language. I want to argue that the phenomena of ambiguity and the misleading surface similarities of signs, which are treated as main sources of philosophical misunderstanding both in the *Tractatus* and in Hacker's reading of later Wittgenstein, are actually much less relevant for Wittgenstein's later work. Correspondingly, aims and methods of the philosophical investigation are not defined by such phenomena. On the contrary, once we focus on the idea of subliming, we can see that the *Tractatus*'s conception of grammar, and thus of philosophical problems as having their source in violations of grammar, itself provide a paradigm case for what misunderstanding of the logic of language amounts to.

To conclude, on the *Tractatus*'s conception, most philosophical problems and questions manifested in nonsensical pseudo-propositions are the result of logico-syntactical ambiguities, or misleading analogies of the signs of ordinary language with regards to their real logical forms. One way to capture this phenomenon is by arguing that ordinary grammar is too coarse-grained, and so it fails to exclude uninterpretable constructions such as “Red is higher than green”. By taking a word to possess a meaning and mode of signification in isolation from its employment in a meaningful sentence, the philosopher

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<sup>124</sup> Kuusela mounts a similar argument against Baker and Hacker's conception of the underlying rule-governed order of ordinary language (see 2008, 90ff.). See also Diamond (2004, 217)

fails to give the sign a meaning in a given sentential context. No thought thus gets associated with the propositional sign and no projection takes place.

These problems of understanding the role of signs in particular sentential contexts, which result in the failure of sentences to represent, can be overcome by using a logically perspicuous notation in which there is a one-to-one correspondence between a sign and its symbol. All philosophical problems are in principle dissolvable by using a symbolism that is governed by logical syntax. Logical analysis as a method of clarification seeks to lay bare all the rules relevant for the sign's logico-syntactical employment and "to give a definitive dissection of propositions so as to set out clearly all their connections and remove all possibilities of misunderstanding" (PG 211). In this way, "a complete logical analysis would give the complete grammar of a word" (AWL 21). This view presupposes, however, that there is a definite logical (semantic) order implicit in our language use that can be uncovered in logical analysis: "[in] propositions thoughts can be so expressed that to the objects of the thoughts correspond the elements of the propositional sign (3.2). These elements [are called] "simple signs" and the proposition "completely analysed" (3.201).

#### 4.4 Aspects of subliming in TLP

In the present section I endeavour to specify, as an alternative to Hacker's interpretation of the nature of philosophical problems, key aspects of subliming in the *Tractatus* that Wittgenstein challenges in his later work. In the next section (4.5) these ideas are revisited from the point of view of the *Investigations's* criticism of the *Tractatus*.

A prominent feature of Wittgenstein's approach to investigating language in the *Tractatus* is, as McGinn writes, "a temptation to value generalisations over the particular case" (McGinn 2006, 11). "Craving for generality" (BB 17) is an aspect of subliming of linguistic phenomena that is systematically targeted in the *Investigations*.<sup>125</sup> The tendency to generalise and to assume things have hidden essences is manifested on all levels and in all dimensions of Wittgenstein's early work, including general questions about the nature of language, logic, representation, thought, or truth, and more specific questions about the essence of a symbol, sign, proposition, the general propositional form, internal properties

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<sup>125</sup>As it will be clearer in next two chapters these strategies involve, first and foremost, the notion of family-resemblances are a new characterisation of the conceptual unity, the method of simple language games used as objects of comparison, and, above all, paying attention to particular cases in which words are used.



and relations, logical space, formal concepts, and so on. In what follows I will try to specify what I think the early Wittgenstein's essentialism and tendency to generalise consist in.

Wittgenstein's "contemptuous attitude towards the particular case" (BB 18) in the *Tractatus* is most clearly manifested in the following remark:

A particular mode of signifying may be unimportant but it is always important that is a *possible* mode of signifying. And that is generally so in philosophy: again and again the individual case turns out to be unimportant, but the possibility of each individual case discloses something about the essence of the world. (TLP 3.3421)

Evidently, what is of interest to Wittgenstein about a particular case is its essence or form, what it has *in common* with all other instances falling under a concept. What is essential must be shared by all particular instances. An individual case discloses something about the conditions of its possibility. Each symbol has a property that is essential to all of its instances, and to understand a symbol means to grasp this common property. Thus, the essential in a proposition is that "which is common to all propositions which can express the same sense", and in a symbol "that which all symbols which can fulfil the same purpose have in common" (TLP 3.341). The shared, general form of proposition represents "the essence of proposition" (5.471) and "[to] give the essence of proposition means to give the essence of all description, therefore the essence of the world" (5.4711). In the *Blue Book*, commenting on his early philosophy, Wittgenstein notes that one crucial aspect of our craving for generality is reflected in "the tendency to look for something in common to all the entities which we commonly subsume under a general term" (BB 17). He explains that "the idea of a general concept being a common property of its particular instances connects up with other primitive, too simple, ideas of the structure of language" such as "the idea that *properties* are *ingredients* of the things which have the properties" (BB 17).

A case at hand that illustrates the early Wittgenstein's aim to abstract away from particular cases in order to disclose their pure, shared essence (form) is his treatment of the notion of a symbol.<sup>126</sup> We said that symbols are the building blocks of meaningful propositions. In

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<sup>126</sup> Stokhof (2009) sees this procedure as a kind of transcendental deduction. He writes, "This reads the larger part of the *Tractatus* as some kind of transcendental deduction that starts from the given of meaningful

the meaningful propositions “A is blue” and “A is yellow”, the symbols “blue” and “yellow” make different contributions as regards the content (truth-conditions), but make the same contribution as regards their form. That is, one can be substituted for another in all constructions without the loss of sense (though such substitutions bring about a *change* of sense). This is because the meanings of these symbols fall under the same formal concept (cf. TLP 4.126) and have the same “mode of signification”. By turning all symbols (propositional elements) into different types of variables, we omit from our consideration any of their contingent features, i.e. their arbitrarily assigned contents, and reveal their underlying logical form or prototype. Logical form is “not dependent on any convention, but solely on the nature of the proposition” (TLP 3.315). Sharing of a logical form, as Wittgenstein puts it in the *Investigations* PI 108, means that symbols have a “formal unity”, and this unity is what matters to our understanding of the nature of representation. The rules of logical syntax keep the record of the formal essence of individual symbols, thus allowing and prohibiting certain substitutions (3.344).

Wittgenstein’s essentialism is also manifested in the idea that logic is the essence of all representation. Inasmuch as there is the unique logical essence of all representation, the attempt to spell out (the foundations of) a logically perfect sign-language in which all logical distinctions are clearly laid out is simultaneously an attempt to make explicit the form of our thought. Since the world is represented in thought, and since thought is perceptibly expressed in propositions of language, and since they all share the same essence (TLP 4.014), “the *whole* task consists in explaining the nature of the proposition” (NB 39). By investigating the concept of a proposition and its logical form one is “giving the nature of all being” (NB 39); by explaining its nature, one explains the essence of language and of other concepts (the world, picture, thought) that are internally connected with it. “They are all”, Wittgenstein emphasises, “in a certain sense one” (4.014). The idea of a shared logical form is an expression of this internal connection.

The attempt to specify the general form of a proposition represents perhaps the finest expression of a tendency to sublime the logic of our language in the *Tractatus*. The *Tractatus* sees the essence of a proposition as the general form that *all* propositions, once all their accidental features are analysed away, are revealed as possessing. The general form

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language and then derives the fundamental conditions of its possibility, basically by abstracting away from anything contingent that enters into actual meaningful language” (2009, 217).

of a proposition can be paraphrased by a propositional schema “Such and such is the case” (TLP 4.5). The general form of a proposition presupposes (i) a level of elementary propositions which consist of simple names in concatenation and (ii) that *all* propositions are truth functions of elementary propositions (6.001). Values of this variable are all those propositional signs that are apt to represent, i.e., signs that stand in a projective relation to the world, as well as propositions that are the limiting cases, i.e., tautologies and contradictions.

The tendency to look for something in common is thus not only a feature of Wittgenstein’s general conception of essence in the *Tractatus*, but is also built into the picture of the structure of language and (calculus-like) linguistic understanding that the *Tractatus* advocates. Wittgenstein envisages language as a *system* with a definite, implicit order, and understanding and use of language as operating a calculus governed by strict rules. These conceptions form the foundation of the notion of propositions (and thoughts) as essentially structured. On this view, propositional elements (symbols) are only those items that are common to a range of propositions in logical space: “Although a proposition may only determine one place in logical space, the whole logical space must already be given by it...The proposition reaches through the whole logical space” (TLP 3.42). To be an element of a proposition – a symbol<sup>127</sup> – just is to be “the common characteristic mark of a class of propositions” (TLP 3.311), something that a proposition has in common with other propositions in terms of their sense. As Travis puts it, “[proposition’s] elements and their structuring in it, mark paths through the system from it to other members of the system with (some) structure in common with it... each thought, through its structure, reflects the structure of the system to which it belongs” (Travis 2006, 83-4).

The notion of language as a system of representation whose propositions share elements and are essentially structured,<sup>128</sup> underpins the view of linguistic understanding whereby “to understand a proposition means to know what is the case if it is true”.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, Wittgenstein argues that “[a proposition] is understood by anyone who understands its constituents” (TLP 4.024). For instance, an ability to understand the proposition “*a* is F”

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<sup>127</sup> Note, however, that “A proposition is itself an expression” (3.31)

<sup>128</sup> “[It] is the essential feature of a proposition that it is a *picture* and it has compositeness. (WVC 90)

<sup>129</sup> In *Notes on Logic* Wittgenstein formulates it as follows: “What we know when we understand a proposition is this: We know what is the case if the proposition is true, and what is the case if it is false. But we do not know (necessarily) whether it is true or false” (NB 98)

presupposes an ability to understand all propositions of the form “*a* is  $\Phi$ ” and “*x* is *F*”. That is, the ability to understand the proposition to the effect that “*a* is *F*” reflects the ability to understand *any* proposition that has the logical form “*x* is  $\Phi$ ” (‘something has such and such property’). Hence, if the meanings of simple names “*G*”, “*H*” “*E*”... and “*b*”, “*c*”, “*d*” etc., and their modes of combinations are explained to us (TLP 4.026), we will be able to understand the sense of the propositions “*a* is *G*”, “*a* is *H*”, “*a* is *E*”..., or “*b* is *F*”, “*c* is *F*”, “*d* is *F*”. That is, we’ll know what is the case if these propositions are true, and we will be able to determine their truth-conditions.<sup>130</sup> On this view, every symbol makes a systematic, unique contribution to the sense of propositions in which it can occur. To understand how each individual sign signifies is to know everything there is to know about language as a system of representation that stands in a projective relation to the world (cf. 2.0123, 2.0124). The possibility of understanding new propositions “without having [their] sense explained to us” (4.021) is based on having a grasp of the modes of combination of propositional elements, as well as *what* they signify in a particular language, i.e., their (conventionally assigned) meanings. Every proposition “must use old expressions to communicate a new sense” (TLP 4.03).

Later Wittgenstein challenges the picture of language as a system of propositions with sense, and linguistic understanding understood as an ability to produce meaningful propositions with determinate sense simply by virtue of combining symbols. Important part of this challenge lies in pointing out that the correlation between ordinary language predicates, such as “red” or “green”, and their putative logical counterparts (symbols) is far more complicated than the *Tractatus* assumes. Based on the later Wittgenstein’s idea of family resemblances,<sup>131</sup> predicating saying of *A* that it is red can serve as the projection of infinitely many possible situations.<sup>132</sup> Individual signs of ordinary language would have to be “receptacles”<sup>133</sup> for the contents of infinitely many logical symbols (the elements of

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<sup>130</sup> In the philosophy of language and mind this has come to be referred to as “systematicity” or the “generality constraint”. See Travis 2008, 271ff.

<sup>131</sup> See chapter 5 for discussion of how the idea family resemblance challenges the sublime view of signs

<sup>132</sup> Travis develops this argument in various places. For the connection between family resemblances and the *Tractatus*’s view see his (1994/2008) and (2006).

<sup>133</sup> In his 1914 paper “Logic in Mathematics” Frege explains why he thinks that those definitions that are not mere stipulations, although without logical significance, can still be psychologically important. He explains how a word (or any sign in general) is comparable to a ‘receptacle for sense’, which we carry with us “while being always aware that we can open this receptacle should we have need of what it contains” (in: Beaney 1997, 315). When we grasp a thought (which is sharply distinguished from the content of one’s consciousness) we grasp its sense and senses of individual words it contains. Whereas it is “very seldom the

thought). This reveals that the *Tractatus*'s notion of a symbol as a "purified sign" is a result of subliming, and an *idealisation* that is too far removed from its ordinary counterpart. The *Tractatus*'s system of language and linguistic understanding effectively rests on a too primitive, sublime view of meaning ("the singularity of meaning" as Wittgenstein calls it later<sup>134</sup>), which disregards the fact that an ordinary word such as "red" is used in many different ways, in different language games, thus making different contributions to the sense of the wholes which it occurs in.

The *Tractatus*'s sublime view of the logic of language is characterised by another set of assumptions, namely, that the grammar of a symbol can be completely spelled out,<sup>135</sup> that thought has an uninterpretable content, and that sense must be determinate. As we shall see in greater detail in the next section, the sublime view of signs involves, not only purification or idealisation of signs, but identifying such a purified "language" with hidden psychological processes, thus inventing a mythology of both symbolism and of psychology. In an internalisation of purified signs, ordinary phenomena of thinking, understanding and meaning are distorted.<sup>136</sup> Where our ordinary signs seem to fail us, the purified, internalised signs are taken to be successful. Thus, for the early Wittgenstein, even if our ordinary sentences are vague and what we say is imprecise, "[it] seems clear that what we MEAN must always be *"sharp"*" (NB 68). What one *thinks* and *means* when uttering an ordinary sentence must be determinate and complete, so that "there is enormously much added in thought to each proposition and not said" (NB 70). Moreover, since ordinary signs are interpretable, thought is treated as something itself uninterpretable, something that "breathes life" and uninterpretable content into ordinary signs. Internal processes of thinking, meaning and understanding have a key role as *formal* procedures by means of which the representation of reality in signs is brought about. For, "the method of projection is the thinking of the sense of the proposition" (TLP 3.11). As a result of preconceived philosophical requirements, our ordinary psychological concepts "thinking", "meaning" and "understanding" are subjected to a misleading construal.

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case" that we are always conscious of everything appertaining to the sense of some word (such as 'integral') the ordinary word is like a little box where its sense resides and can be pulled out or unfolded when needed. The job of definitions is to do this pulling out and shoving in again.

<sup>134</sup> See chapter 5.

<sup>135</sup> Later he argues that "there is no such thing as a completed grammar" (AWL 21)

<sup>136</sup> I show what this distortion involves in chapter 6.

To sum up: in this section I attempted to specify some aspects of the *Tractatus* that either express or result from a tendency to sublime the logic of language. I showed that essentialism and a tendency to generalise or abstract away from particular cases represent the driving force of Wittgenstein's account of language and representation. Essence is understood as a hidden and shared logical form whose disclosure is the aim of logical analysis. I argued that Wittgenstein's notion of a symbol represents an idealisation, which is purified and in tension with our ordinary signs. The sublime view of language presupposes an over-simple view of meaning and understanding, which seem to justify abstracting away from particular contexts of use. I pointed out that preconceived requirements, such as that sense must be determinate, that the thought-content must be uninterpretable, and the grammar of a sign completely spelled out, are the aspects of a sublime view too. These requirements form a basis for the internalisation of purified signs (the *Tractarian* symbols), giving rise to a mythology of psychology.

#### 4.5 Subliming in the *Investigations*

In this section I turn to *Philosophical Investigations* in order to examine how those aspects of subliming the logic of language I identified in the *Tractatus* feature as objects of criticism in Wittgenstein's later work. There are only three references to the notion of subliming in the *Investigations*: §§38, 89, and 94. Sections §§89-133 of the *Investigations* are standardly taken as considerations of the nature of logic, philosophy and philosophical method that follow from considerations of more specific topics in §§65-88 concerning the essence of language and other concepts, the idea of conceptual unity as the common feature of all of its instances, the idea of the completeness of definitions, explanations and rules, etc.<sup>137</sup> A great number of them are aspects of the sublime view of language Wittgenstein addresses in §§89-133. My aim here is to further specify in what sense logic, thought, propositions, and names can be understood as products of subliming, and to what extent subliming distorts the philosopher's understanding how ordinary language works.

##### 4.5.1 "The hardest thing there is"

Section PI 89 opens with the sentence: "These considerations bring us to the problem: In what sense is logic something sublime?". In the *Tractatus*, logic is understood as the

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<sup>137</sup> As Hacker writes, "Wittgenstein turns... to the misunderstandings that underlay the *Tractatus* conception of logico-philosophical investigation" (2005b, 191)

common structure that connects the world, language, and thought, and is the essence and the condition of possibility of representation. I suggested earlier (see 3.1 and 4.1.) that the idea that surface grammar is misleading, and that this is a source of philosophical confusions, can be given more content by connecting it with a tendency to sublime the logic of our language. The philosopher's blindness as regards key aspects of depth grammar (i.e. the contribution of particular occasions to our understanding of utterances), and her tendency to sublime ordinary signs, is most acute in explaining away logical imperfection of ordinary language (its indeterminacy, ambiguity, vagueness, etc.). Her considerations start off from the fact that communication or representation is successful, and that people are capable of producing and understanding meaningful sentences ("I understand the propositional sign, I use it to say something" (PI 102)). Furthermore, the philosopher assumes that this would be possible only on the condition of there being a perfect logical order. The difficulty is, however, that there seems to be no obvious logical order in ordinary symbolism. Now, how is *that* possible (cf. PI 428)? The requirements that "there can't be any vagueness in logic" (PI 101)<sup>138</sup> and that "where there is sense there must be perfect order" (PI 98) lead her to a conclusion that there must be such an order "[laying] *beneath* the surface" (PI 91).

The conclusion that there must be a hidden logical order beneath the surface of ordinary language gives rise to the idea that hidden, "real" signs (symbols) do something extraordinary, queer or remarkable, which ordinary signs are not cut out for. Wittgenstein expresses the thought thus:

'A proposition is a queer thing!' Here we have in germ the subliming of our whole account of logic. The tendency to assume a pure intermediary between the propositional *signs* and the facts. Or even to try to purify, to sublime, the signs themselves.--For our forms of expression prevent us in all sorts of ways from seeing that nothing out of the ordinary is involved, by sending us in pursuit of chimeras. (PI 94)

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<sup>138</sup> "If what belongs to logic, as the formal essence of thinking, language and the world, were in any sense vague or indeterminate, then true or false thoughts would be impossible. There would be no logical pictures of anything" (NB 63).

On the *Tractatus*'s picture, logic represents "the a priori order of the world: that is, the order of *possibilities*, which must be common to both world and thought" (PI 97).<sup>139</sup> Possible situations, thoughts about possible situations, and the sentences that express the thoughts about possible situations all share the same "logical form". The sharing of a "logical form" is what makes a representation of reality in thought and language possible. Thought *a priori* contains the possibility of all situations it represents (TLP 3.02). Everything essential for representation is given in the form of *a priori* possibilities, or what Wittgenstein later calls "shadows". The subliming of our whole account of logic is here explained as assuming that there is a realm of "pure thought" that mediates between facts and dead signs (Frege), or a tendency to sublime and purify our ordinary signs (TLP). On this picture, sentences can do their remarkable job, not because they are instruments in everyday human practices, but because there is a perfect logical order hidden beneath the impure surface of our sentences. This hidden order must be "of the purest crystal" and it "does not appear as an abstraction; but as something concrete, as it were the *hardest* thing there is" (PI 97). In this way, the mythology of symbolism and of psychology compensates for the exclusion of depth grammar.

Subliming can also be characterised as "[predicating] of the thing what lies in the method of representing it" (PI 104). The philosopher has a tendency to think of logic as something essentially crystalline and pure, that is the epitome of exactness, simplicity, generality and shared essences. It is because the "crystalline purity of logic"<sup>140</sup> is taken as the "hardest thing there is", rather than a mere abstraction, that the philosopher attributes to our language the features that belong to his method of representation.<sup>141</sup> Section PI 105 captures this process as follows:

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<sup>139</sup> I discuss the notion of a priori order in more detail in the next chapter. I show that this idea need not presuppose the realist commitment about language being answerable to reality.

<sup>140</sup> For an excellent discussion of the notion of "crystalline purity" (or "rigour") of logic see: Kuusela 2008, 134ff.

<sup>141</sup> Kuusela (2008, 133ff.) argues against Baker & Hacker's interpretation according to which the idea of the crystalline purity of logic is discarded after the turn. Kuusela suggests that this is mistaken, and that the idea of rigour and purity of logic assumes rather another position in the aftermath of the turn (as an object of comparison with our language). I agree with Kuusela on this point. Namely, Wittgenstein's point is not that rigour should be bargained out of logic, and that logic should become "fuzzy" and inexact (see PI 108). The aspect that I think is targeted as illusory concerns the *projection* of the notion of sublime logic onto "the logic of our language", not the notion itself. Nonetheless, to the extent that the ideals of determinateness, uninterpretability, completeness, exactness, generality, systematicity or definiteness, become *requirements* that are imposed onto our language and thus lead to a distortion of our ordinary concepts of propositions, thoughts, names, the world etc., this projection is *substantially*, not just methodologically damaging.



When we believe that we must find that order, must find the ideal, in our actual language, we become dissatisfied with what are ordinarily called "propositions", "words", "signs". The proposition and the word that logic deals with are supposed to be something pure and clear-cut. And we rack our brains over the nature of the *real* sign. (PI 105)

The *a priori* logical (formal) order can be made explicit by the rules of logical syntax and these "strict and clear rules of the logical structure of propositions appear to us as something in the background" (PI 102).<sup>142</sup> The hiddenness of logical structure sets the main task for logical analysis: to explicate the logical order that is "hidden in the medium of the understanding" (PI 101). Insofar as the system of internal rules (for the projection of possible situations onto propositional signs) is definite and complete, there is no room for misunderstandings to occur. Reconstructing this internal system of rules in a symbolism that is governed by the rules of logical syntax, and making the rules that determine the sense of propositions explicit, removes any possibilities of misunderstandings or sources of philosophical nonsense.<sup>143</sup>

We saw earlier that, according to the *Tractatus*, philosophical problems are results of misunderstanding the logic of our language, where this is understood as a failure to recognise symbols behind ordinary signs due to their ambiguity or their misleading logico-syntactic employment. Misunderstandings arise when a philosopher fails to observe the sign's significant use in sentences, and instead considers its meaning in isolation. In doing this, she interprets ordinary signs as possessing a certain mode of signification (i.e., the way of combining with other signs) and meaning generally, without considering a given propositional context. Nonsense produced in this way could be prevented by employing a symbolism in which combinatorial possibilities of different forms of symbols are made explicit (by specifying the rules of logical syntax). Some such rule would exclude the

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<sup>142</sup> Compare also the following remark: "[Language] it seems must possess a kind of ideal order. An ideal rule-governed grammar. And we are inclined to speak of the totality of rules which govern the use of a word (and to ask what this totality looks like)" (MS 157a, 105-107).

<sup>143</sup> In *Philosophical Grammar*, Wittgenstein explains his early view as follows: "Formerly, I myself spoke of a 'complete analysis', and I used to believe that philosophy had to give a definitive dissection of propositions so as to set out clearly all their connections and remove all possibilities of misunderstanding. I spoke as if there was a calculus in which such a dissection would be possible. I vaguely had in mind something like the definition that Russell had given for the definite article, and I used to think that in a similar way one would be able to use visual impressions etc. to define the concept say of a sphere, and thus exhibit once for all the connections between the concepts and lay bare the source of all misunderstandings, etc. At the root of all this there was a false and idealized picture of the use of language." (PG 221)

combination of colour-signs with number-signs, insofar as there is no such logical form that embodies such a combination.

On this model, nonsensical constructions are excluded from a language by means of logical grammar in a wholesale manner (i.e. not occasion-sensitively), and meaningful constructions are determined on the basis of existing, a priori logical forms. Therefore, on the *Tractatus*'s sublime view, logic as the essence of representation determines the distinction between sense and nonsense absolutely, and logical analysis aims to spell out the logic's (grammar's) ruling by means of specifying existing logical forms of expressions in terms of grammatical rules.

The reader should note the kinship between Hacker's standard interpretation of the later Wittgenstein's notion of grammar (as that which determines the distinction between sense and nonsense) and the *Tractatus*'s sublime view of logic. On both accounts, as I shall argue in more detail in chapter 5, logic or grammar is given a key sense-determining role. But, if the anthropological reading is correct, namely, that the distinction between sense and nonsense in later Wittgenstein is decided only relative to a particular occasion, rather than in a wholesale manner (based of combinatorial possibilities), the standard view once again stays too close to the *Tractatus*'s sublime picture of logic.

#### **4.5.2 Thoughts as shadows**

The grammatical investigations Wittgenstein undertakes in the *Investigations* largely represent a critical response to the mythology of signs and psychology in the *Tractatus*. The discussion of "thinking" and "thought" (including other intentional states) in the *Investigations* is prompted by Wittgenstein's early misconceptions about language and its use, and the role of psychological processes in representation.<sup>144</sup> In this section I shall be concerned with clarifying what, according to later Wittgenstein, motivates the kind of thinking about "thinking" that makes it something "queer" and sublime.

I have shown above that in the *Tractatus*, internal processes of thinking, meaning, and understanding are taken to have an important function in representation. Thinking the sense of a proposition is the method of projection of a possible situation onto perceptible signs (TLP 3.11). This procedure, in the later Wittgenstein's idiom, "breathes life" into otherwise

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<sup>144</sup> I discuss Wittgenstein's response to the subliming of "thinking" in chapter 6 in greater detail.

dead signs. The young Wittgenstein imagines thoughts to be a “kind of language”, only logically superior to ordinary language, and free from the problems associated with the use of ordinary signs. In his 1916 notebook, he writes;

Now it is becoming clear why I thought that thinking and language were the same. For thinking is a kind of language. For a thought too is, of course, a logical picture of the proposition, and therefore it just is a kind of proposition.  
(NB 82)

The language of thought does not consist of mere words but of super-words or purified signs (“symbols” or “indefinables”), which are “psychical constituents that have the same sort of relation to reality as words” (NB 131). Ordinary language becomes a symbolic system only when it is used to express thoughts about possible situations.

As an upshot of neglecting crucial aspects of depth grammar, ordinary language, in the *Tractatus*, represents a collection of mere signs, which can be interpreted in indefinitely many ways. Understanding an ordinary sentence, on this view, always requires an interpretation. We said that the *Tractatus* lays down a number of representation-related requirements, all of which are the consequences of excluding the depth grammar of expressions. One of them says that only what is itself uninterpretable is apt to represent something as thus-and-so. In the *Blue Book* Wittgenstein expresses this requirement as follows: “What one wishes to say is: “Every sign is capable of interpretation; but the *meaning* mustn't be capable of interpretation. It is the last interpretation”” (BB 34). That is, the thought expressed by a propositional sign is, unlike a “mere sign”, *immune to interpretation*; the thought must be absolutely determinate and uninterpretable in order to do its job of representing something truly or falsely. Wittgenstein calls such items “shadows” (see BB 32).<sup>145</sup> Construed as “the last interpretation”, thought and meaning are treated as doing something remarkable that no mere sign can do: “When we say, and *mean*, that such-and-such is the case, we--and our meaning--do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean: *this--is--so.*” (PI 95). The inner realm of shadows – thoughts that

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<sup>145</sup> Travis connects the notion of shadows with uninterpretable thoughts: “[thoughts], thus conceived, are not open to interpretation. They are what Wittgenstein called ‘shadows’: semantic items interpolated between words and states of affairs that make words true or false, and somehow more closely tied to those state of affairs than mere words could” (Travis 2008, 127).

provide interpretations of words without themselves admitting of interpretations – is meant to replace our ordinary practices of using signs.

The conception of thoughts as shadows of our sentences can be further elucidated by an example. In PI 1, Wittgenstein describes a use of language: a shopkeeper operates with three different words. Then the following question is raised: “But how does he know where and how he is to look up the word 'red' and what he is to do with the word 'five'?”. In other words, how could the shopkeeper possibly know what to do with the word “five” when all he is given are dead signs and nothing more, i.e., no instruction how to interpret these signs? What will tell him what to do with the signs? In PI 1 the question is responded by drawing attention to the shopkeeper’s way of acting: “Well, I assume that he *acts* as I have described. Explanations come to an end somewhere”.<sup>146</sup> But, although in PI 1 the need for further explanation is dissipated by shifting the focus onto the shopkeeper’s skill to use (as in *operate with*, not merely *combine*) words, the way of thinking about ordinary signs as intrinsically dead and interpretable is examined in the *Investigations*’s remarks on “thinking” and other intentional states. In that context similar questions re-emerge: “How does he know at all what use he is to make of the signs I give him, whatever they are?” (PI 433), “How do sentences manage to represent?” or “How do sentences do it?” (PI 435).

These questions express an anxiety about ordinary language’s capacity to represent, and a concomitant anxiety about our ability to understand the indeterminate, dead signs we hear or see. The conclusion is that internal processes of understanding or thinking must accompany our utterances. The signs with which these processes operate must be uninterpretable and reach right out to reality. Hence, “only in the act of understanding is it meant that we are to do THIS. The *order--why*, that is nothing but sounds, ink-marks” (PI 431). In our example, only by virtue of the connection between ordinary interpretable signs and an uninterpretable thought, the shopkeeper is in a position to understand and obey the order. Understanding an expression is grasping in a flash its complete grammar. The complete grammar of a sign is tacitly contained in the inner medium of understanding.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> That is, an implicit answer Wittgenstein gives here is that the shopkeeper has learned what to do with the words ‘five’ and ‘red’; he has learned these language games or practices, he was trained how to *operate* with those signs (the methods of teaching the use of these signs were different).

<sup>147</sup> As Wittgenstein describes this view in *Philosophical Grammar*, it is “as if the sign contained the whole of the grammar; as if the grammar were contained in the sign like a string of pearls in a box and he had only to

This leads to the conclusion that thought, meaning and understanding must be something unique, because they achieve something that no mere sign could do.

However, Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations show that the sublime picture of thought as a kind of uninterpretable language has a fatal flaw. Namely, on the view of understanding as an interpretation of signs, there is nothing that can stop the process of interpretation from an infinite regress. No sign with content, including a sublimed "rule of projection", is immune to interpretation.<sup>148</sup> Wittgenstein raises this objection to Frege's view of understanding as grasping thoughts (*qua* pictures) which give life to otherwise dead signs in the following passage:

In attacking the formalist conception of arithmetic, Frege says more or less this: these petty explanations of the signs are idle once we *understand* the signs. Understanding would be something like seeing a picture from which all the rules followed, or a picture that makes them all clear. But Frege does not seem to see that such a picture would itself be another sign, or a calculus to explain the written one to us. (PG 40)

The same objection applies to the *Tractatus*.<sup>149</sup> Insofar as a thought-element (or a rule of projection), which is supposed to give ordinary signs their life, is itself just another sign with content, it will be, in principle, *interpretable*. So, each Tractarian symbol as "the mark of a form and a content" (TLP 3.31) is interpretable in an infinite number of ways just like any ordinary sign is, which then implies an infinite regress of interpretations.<sup>150</sup> If the later Wittgenstein's criticism is correct – and there are numerous examples of language use that

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pull it out... As if understanding were an instantaneous grasping of something from which later we only draw consequences which already exist in an ideal sense before they are drawn" (PG 55).

<sup>148</sup> According to Travis, the notion of "uninterpretable representation" is incoherent: "[a] rule, like any other item with content, admits of various interpretations" (2008, 283) and "[there] are no interpretation-proof rules" (Travis, 2006, 115). To the extent that there is no such thing as representation (rule, sign, picture, symbol) that does not admit of interpretations or understandings, the role of the (inexplicit) parochial sensibilities in determining understanding the words bear on occasion (truth-conditions) is ineliminable.

<sup>149</sup> There is an important distinction between Frege's conception of thought and the *Tractatus*. Namely, what Frege means by "thought" is nothing inner or mental. Thoughts are, for Frege, shared and objective senses of our sentences. In the *Tractatus* thinking is construed as an formal psychological, inner procedure that brings about the projection, even though Wittgenstein is explicit about it being psychological only in *Notebooks* and letters to Russell, not in the *Tractatus*.

<sup>150</sup> As Wittgenstein emphasises: "even if there were such a shadow it would be susceptible of different interpretations just as expression is... You can't give any picture which can't be misinterpreted... No interpolation between a sign and its fulfilment does away with the sign" (Quoted in Moore 1993)

substantiate it<sup>151</sup> – it brings into question the feasibility of any *Tractatus*-style calculus whose aim is to lay bare all the internal connections between linguistic expressions in order to preclude any possibility of misunderstanding.

Once again I want to call the reader's attention to the inconsistency between, on the one hand, Hacker's optimism as regards the project of comprehensive tabulation of sense-determining rules of grammar, and, on the other hand, Wittgenstein's scepticism concerning the idea of uninterpretable thoughts, and his criticism of these as sublimed shadows, which are really no more than further signs, subject to interpretation. Analogously to the Tractarian symbols whose combinatorial potential is recorded in the "rules of logical syntax", the role of Hacker's "rules of grammar" is to determine combinatorial possibilities of words. To that extent, they are also an example of uninterpretable signs with content, which are there to fix the interpretation and "give life" to other signs. Like the Tractarian "symbol", Hacker's "rule of grammar" inasmuch as it has content<sup>152</sup> is just another shadow Wittgenstein criticises as part of the sublimed view of language. As Travis correctly points out commenting on Wittgenstein's rule-following lessons, "[there] are no interpretation-proof rules" (Travis 2006, 115). Discussions of the concepts of understanding, meaning, thinking, expecting, imagining etc., in the *Investigations*, are aimed at shattering this picture of shadows that breathe life to our ordinary language, by showing that successful communication and understanding of what is said by our sentences are essentially connected with our practical competence to operate with signs on different occasions, rather than with the realm of shadows.

#### **4.5.3 Subliming of names and naming**

The treatment of the objects of thought as shadows and peculiar (simple, indefinable) entities partly stems from the following puzzle:

Our difficulty could be put this way: We think about things,--but how do these things enter into our thoughts? We think about Mr. Smith; but Mr. Smith need

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<sup>151</sup> Among the later Wittgenstein's interpreters, Charles Travis invents the most appealing examples that illustrate the point about interpretability of anything with content.

<sup>152</sup> I agree with Travis that one of Wittgenstein's most important later insights is that "[a] rule, like any other item with content, admits of various interpretations" (2008, 283). Hacker's rules would lose their sense-determining power if he were to say that they were merely formal. We saw in earlier chapters that these rules are meant to capture the semantics of expressions, their meaning, not merely their formal features.

not be present. A picture of him won't do; for how are we to know whom it represents? In fact no substitute for him will do. Then how can he himself be an object of our thoughts? (BB 38)

The question "When I say: 'I expect Mr. Smith' what is the nature of the connection between my words and the man I expect?" asks for the connection between our words and things. When the man is present I can point to him and say "When I say 'Mr. Smith, I mean him'", but when he is not there I, obviously, cannot point to anything. On the sublime view, when we say the word "Mr. Smith" and *mean* Mr. Smith, we perform the act of *mental pointing* to the man Mr. Smith, despite him not being present. We point to him not with our hand, but with our mind, and, in this way, our mind establishes the peculiar connection between our signs and objects that constitute their meaning. Hence "we are tempted to think that while my friend said, "Mr. N. will come to see me", and meant what he said, his mind must have made the connection. This is partly what makes us think of meaning or thinking as a peculiar *mental activity*" (BB 39). Wittgenstein notes that what makes it difficult to see that the connection between the word "Mr. Smith" and the man Mr. Smith is nothing "queer" – that it was made when explaining the meaning of the word "Mr. Smith" we pointed to a man saying "this is Mr. Smith" – lies in "a peculiar form of expression of ordinary language, which makes it appear that the connection between our thought (or the expression of our thought) and the thing we think about must have subsisted *during* the act of thinking" (BB 39). But no such "queer" mental connection needs to be there, if we take into account that we learned how to operate with proper names.

A paradigmatic example of seeing the connection between names and objects as a result of "queer" mental pointing is Russell's theory of logically proper names. In PI 38 Wittgenstein treats the Russell-style conception of the connection between simple signs (names) and what they signify as an instance of the subliming of our ordinary practice of naming and using names. According to Wittgenstein, Russell is one of those philosophers who think that the kind of connection between signs, thought and the meaning must subsist during the act of thinking. When a thing is named, the invisible mental connection between the name and the thing named is established, and this connection is mentally re-enacted every single time we think of that thing. He writes,

Naming appears as a *queer* connexion of a word with an object.--And you really get such a queer connexion when the philosopher tries to bring out *the* relation between name and thing by staring at an object in front of him and repeating a name or even the word "this" innumerable times (PI 38).

Subliming of names and the practice of naming is most prominent in giving names and naming the central role in explaining the possibility of understanding sentences.<sup>153</sup> It is a counterpart of the sublime conception of meaning that naming must achieve something important: knowing what a word names (and how it syntactically combines with other words to form sentences) is a necessary and sufficient condition of our understanding any sentence it can occur in. As we saw earlier, on the *Tractatus's* view of linguistic understanding, to know how and what each individual word signifies suffices for understanding the truth-conditions of any proposition in which it can occur. To be a name fulfils the single most important semantic role, because the subsequent meaningful employment of a name presupposes an underlying correlation between words and their meaning established by means of naming: "*Naming* here appears as the foundation, the be all and end all of language" (PG 56). On the sublime view, once we understand what an expression names and how it combines with other expressions, we are given its whole *use*: "Once you know *what* the word stands for, you understand it, you know its whole use" (PI 264). However, the same conflation that the standard view makes between two dimensions of use, also happens here: the *broad* notion of use, which describes our ability to understand what is said relative to the context of speaking, is *assimilated* to the narrow notion of use (combining). Thus, an understanding of what is said by any novel proposition is effected solely by knowing what expressions name and how they combine with other expressions in well-formed propositions, without consideration of any particular context in which the speaking takes place. In this way, the standard reading instantiates the sublime view of use, which is, in the same as the *Tractatus*, the target of Wittgenstein's criticism in the *Investigations*, rather than something he defends there.

The way of thinking about the connection between words and things that one finds in Russell's theory of logically proper names arises, Wittgenstein says, "when *language goes on holiday*" (PI 38). That is, subliming of names and naming is a result of the exclusion of

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<sup>153</sup> For the critical discussion of the role of naming in use broadly understood see: Travis 1989, 2006.



the particular environment in which words have their “life” or significance. The life of a sign does not lie in the hidden mental processes that breathe life into it, but only “in use [a sign] is *alive*” (PI 432). The idea of “language on holiday”, as discussed in chapter 3, clearly contrasts with language-in-use broadly understood, and with understanding our concepts, including names and naming, in the context of their application in our life, rather than as something independent from this. The metaphor of “language on holiday” brings out that treating “propositions”, “names”, or “thoughts” as performing peculiar acts, or as having mysterious functions and properties, happens only because we have abstracted away from practical contexts in which we apply these notions, when we assume that everything essential to our language use can be specified by considering regularities pertaining to surface grammar.

#### 4.6 Summary

My main aim in this chapter has been to develop an interpretation of the later Wittgenstein’s idea of subliming in order to give more content to the notion that surface grammar is a source of philosophical confusion. I argued that we can see the *Tractatus* as Wittgenstein’s main example of the sublimed view of language and psychology. I identified those aspects of the *Tractatus* that I think Wittgenstein targeted in the *Investigations* as contributing to the subliming of the logic of our language, and which also determine the way in which the *Tractatus* can be called “metaphysical”. I claimed that, according to the *Tractatus*, philosophical problems arise because of a failing to recognise symbols in signs, and I drew the connection between, on the one hand, the *Tractatus*’s understanding of the wholesale exclusion of nonsense on the basis of rules that describe existing logical forms, and, on the other hand, the standard view’s interpretation of the distinction between sense and nonsense, the grammar’s sense determining role and the nature of philosophical problems in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy. I claimed that the standard interpretation is mistaken inasmuch as there is an important contrast between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* regarding all these matters, and that the *Tractatus* itself represents a prime example of the way the logic of our language can be misunderstood. Moreover, the aspect of use I have been calling “narrow” – which the standard interpretation associates with the later Wittgenstein, and which, as I argued in chapter 2, is what Wittgenstein understands as “surface grammar” – is, as a matter of fact, the notion of use as logico-syntactical

employment of symbols that Wittgenstein develops in the *Tractatus* and criticises later. Hence, in this sense too, Hacker's interpretation fails to observe the relevant contrast between Wittgenstein early and later philosophy.

Pertinent elements that define the way in which the *Tractatus* embodies the sublime view include philosophical requirements and ideals Wittgenstein projects onto his object of investigation; i.e., our language use and associated concepts. Some of these are the philosopher's craving for generality and hidden essences, the ideals of determinacy and completeness, as well as over-simple ideas concerning the structure of language, meaning, psychology and conceptual unity. I argued that the sublime view of language, seen as encompassing all these aspects, is another formulation of the "language on holiday", that is, a belief that one can fully understand language use and linguistic understanding in isolation from particular contexts of use. To view our language use as "language on holiday" means to see it as a collection of mere signs whose representational powers come from elsewhere, only because we have abstracted away from the use of signs broadly understood. In this way, one fails to take into account our everyday practices of operating with signs, where signs are treated as tools that are integrated with various purposes and activities. The sublime view thus postulates something other than the dead signs whose function is to fulfil the void created by disconnecting our language from occasions of its employment. But what it thus postulates are nothing other but the signs which like anything else with content admit of interpretation. I applied the later Wittgenstein's critique of uninterpretable signs to Hacker's notion of "rules" suggesting that these tabulated, sense-determining items, whatever they are, would be just another instantiation of sublimed shadows.

Insofar as subliming is essentially connected with the philosopher's systematic neglect of the relevant notion of "depth grammar", methods of "de-sublimation" or perspicuous representation will aim to remind the philosopher that in a successful human communication and interaction by means of language "nothing out of ordinary is involved" (PI 94).<sup>154</sup>

In the next chapter, I discuss and criticise the standard interpretation's view of subliming and of Wittgenstein's turn. I argue that this interpretation is incorrect because: first, it fails to acknowledge that the sense-determining role of grammar is the object of Wittgenstein's

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<sup>154</sup> See chapter 6 on this.

later criticism, rather than something he subscribes to in *Philosophical Investigations*; and second, it misses some of the critical elements of Wittgenstein's turn away from his early philosophy, in particular, the importance of the notion of family resemblances in his new account of language use.

## CHAPTER 5

### *Wittgenstein's Turn*

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This craving for generality is the resultant of a number of tendencies connected with particular philosophical confusions. There is... the tendency to look for something in common to all the entities which we commonly subsume under a general term.--We are inclined to think that there must be something in common to all games, say, and that this common property is the justification for applying the general term "game" to the various games; whereas games form a family the members of which have family likenesses. (BB 17)

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I developed an interpretation that explains how the metaphor of subliming employed in the *Investigations* can be applied, as a term of criticism, to Wittgenstein's early work. I argued that this notion illuminates the way in which the *Tractatus* is metaphysical, and, more generally, the nature of philosophical confusion. His

use of the metaphor of subliming indicates that the philosophical problems he has in mind are not produced by misleadingly analogous logico-syntactic employment of words. It is rather our tendency to reflect about language use outside of particular contexts of use, and to try to specify conditions for a correct use of expressions occasion-insensitively, that creates philosophical confusions and instigate metaphysical thinking.

I have suggested that the metaphysics of the *Tractatus* lies in its commitment to certain preconceptions about our language, which are driven by the philosopher's craving for generality, essentialism, idealisation, the ideals of absolute exactness, determinacy and simplicity, and similar tendencies of philosophical thinking. My interpretation of the *Tractatus*'s "metaphysics" mainly belongs to so called "anti-realist" interpretations, defended by authors such as Diamond (1991), Conant (1998, 2000, 2001), McGinn (2006), Kuusela (2008) and so on. According to the standard interpretation, however, the *Tractatus* is concerned with articulating, in its opening remarks, strictly speaking ineffable features of an independent reality, which are essentially mirrored in propositions of our language.

Hacker's interpretation of subliming as based on the idea of grammar mirroring an a priori order of things reflects his standard interpretation of the metaphysics of the *Tractatus*.<sup>155</sup> According to this interpretation "[grammar], or logical syntax, is ineffably justified by reference to the metaphysical structure of the world" (Hacker 1986, 189). On Hacker's view, "the *Tractatus* conception of grammar, is a reflection of (and hence justified by reference to) the structure of reality" (Hacker 2000b, 181). This interpretation of the *Tractatus* has a crucial impact on Hacker's conception of Wittgenstein's "turn", which he understands as a moving away from the early metaphysical realism, or from grammar justified by the a priori order of things, to the idea that grammar is unjustified and autonomous.<sup>156</sup> As I shall show in section 5.2, Hacker also explicitly rejects the importance of the idea of family resemblance for Wittgenstein's turn, and sees the turn as, essentially, the renunciation of the realist metaphysics of the *Tractatus*. This allows Hacker to hold that the notion of "inherently general" grammatical rules maintains its central role as a standard of correctness, which determines the bounds of sense.<sup>157</sup> On this view, therefore,

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<sup>155</sup> Hacker refers to Wittgenstein's "earlier 'sublime' conception of philosophy as an investigation into the essence of the world" (Baker & Hacker 2005, 210)

<sup>156</sup> See 1.2.2, 1.4.2 and 2.4.2 on the idea of arbitrariness of grammar.

<sup>157</sup> Only now these rules are not hidden or answerable to the nature of reality (B&H 1985, 40)

Wittgenstein's central "concern with rules" starts in the *Tractatus* and continues throughout his later work.

Against this I want to argue that, insofar as the idea of subliming has no significant connection with the commitment to metaphysical realism, Wittgenstein's turn away from the sublime picture of language and psychology, including his later conception of grammar and grammatical method, are not to be understood as the abandoning of this commitment. I suggest that, if we reject Hacker's reading of the metaphysics of the *Tractatus* (from the perspective of Wittgenstein's later work), then we have a rather different picture of Wittgenstein's turn, his later conception of grammar, of the origins of philosophical problems, the conception of nonsense, and the aims of grammatical investigations. Moreover, "the concern with rules", which allow or prohibit certain combinations of expressions in a wholesale manner, is not taken to be a defining concern of Wittgenstein's later work, but rather as his critical target. On the view defended here, the point of Wittgenstein's turn does not consist in abandoning the idea that logic is grounded in reality and endorsing the thesis of the autonomy of grammar. Instead it is about getting one to see that logic is not something "out of the ordinary" or sublime, that our concepts of language, sentence, thought etc. do not possess a "formal unity" (PI 108), but represent "a *family* of structures" and essentially belong to human life and practices. This pivotal practical aspect of our use and understanding of language was neglected in the *Tractatus*, which motivated the subliming of the logic of our language.

I start by presenting Hacker's realist reading of the *Tractatus*, including his idea of the turn. Second, I show how Hacker's idea of subliming fundamentally presupposes the realist reading of the *Tractatus*. I raise some concerns about Hacker's two theses about subliming, which I discuss in more detail in the next two sections. In 5.3 I develop the reading of PI 97 on which the notion of an "a priori order" does not lend itself to the realist view. The later Wittgenstein's critique of the idea of the "a priori order" represents a criticism of the sense-determining role of logic or grammar. In 5.4 I argue that the notion of family resemblance concepts plays much more important role in the turn than Hacker suggests, and that his deflating of the role of family-resemblances is at odds with Wittgenstein's own account of the turn.

## 5.2 Hacker's realist interpretation of the metaphysics of the *Tractatus*

Hacker endorses the standard realist reading of the *Tractatus* according to which the *Tractatus*'s opening sections put forward a substantial account of how language represents reality. Even though Hacker (1986) rejects his earlier view that the *Tractatus* expounds a realist theory of meaning and truth, and that the later Wittgenstein defended a version of an anti-realist theory of meaning, he continues to argue that the ontology of the *Tractatus* is realist: “[the] ontology of the *Tractatus* was... certainly realist. Among the 'objects' that constitute the substance of the world are simple unanalysable properties and relations” (Hacker 1986, 63).<sup>158</sup>

On the standard realist interpretation that Hacker defends, the simple objects which are the meanings of simple signs are understood as concrete relations and properties such as “redness” or “sweetness”,<sup>159</sup> and combinatorial possibilities of objects determine combinatorial possibilities of names that represent them:

Properties, relations, points in space and time must have seemed excellent candidates for the indestructible substance of the world—that which can be referred to ‘come what may’... It is further of the nature of properties to occur only in concatenation and it is an internal feature of, for example, colours that they can concatenate with shapes but not with sounds; or of sounds that they can be louder or softer than other sounds, but not than smells or tastes, etc. (Hacker 1986, 71)

Thus understood simple objects represent the foundation of the *Tractatus*'s metaphysical realism. They are “heir to the realist ontologies of Frege, Moore and Russell” (Hacker 1996, 23) in that they are “unsaturated”, “sempiternal”, “unanalysable”, and “indecomposable”. An object belongs to a particular “ontological type” based on its combinatorial possibilities with other objects, i.e., its “metaphysical combinatorial possibilities”. These are mirrored in logico-syntactical (grammatical) combinatorial possibilities of names standing for objects: “[just] as the combinatorial possibilities of an object constitute its ontological type, so too the grammatical combinatorial possibilities of a name constitute its logico-syntactical category” (Hacker 1986, 20). In this way, logical

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<sup>158</sup> Insight and Illusion: revised edition; see also Hacker 1996, 30.

<sup>159</sup> B&H 2005a, 103

syntax mirrors the a priori order of things in the world. The main thesis of Hacker's realist reading is that logical syntax, and language more generally, is "ineluctably but ineffably justified by reference to the metaphysical nature of the world" (Hacker 2000a, 74). Hacker writes;

The forms of simple names necessarily reflect the forms of objects which are their meanings. So, e.g., the logico-syntactical form of a simple colour name corresponds to the form of the colour of which it is the name: the licit grammatical combinations of the colour-name, e.g. that it can form a sentence in co-ordination with the name of a point in the visual field but not in combination with the name of a musical note, reflect the metaphysical combinatorial possibilities of the object, the colour, which it signifies... Logical syntax pays homage to metaphysical essence. (Hacker 2000a, 72)

On this reading, the central role of the "picture theory" is to explain what counts as a meaningful proposition; it gives the general standard to distinguish sense from nonsense, meaningful from senseless and nonsensical propositions. Only those propositions that represent a possible state of affairs and have true and false poles are properly called propositions with sense. All other pseudo-propositions, including "necessary truths", are either senseless (tautologies and contradictions) or nonsensical. Hacker thus argues;

The bipolarity thesis rules out any necessarily true propositions other than the vacuous tautologies of logic. In particular it rules out the possibility of any elementary propositions which are necessary truths. For they would not meet the condition of bipolarity... Indeed, the *Tractatus* itself consists largely of such. (Hacker 2004b, 144)

The ineffability of "the harmony between language and reality"<sup>160</sup> is a direct consequence of what the picture theory sets as the condition of sense, namely the principle of bipolarity. Insofar as putative ascriptions of internal relations and properties would violate the bipolarity principle, those propositions that attempt to *say* something about internal relations such as the one that holds between language and reality will, on the *Tractatus*'s standard of sense, count as nonsense. Although logical syntax as "the common depth

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<sup>160</sup> Cf. Hacker (2004b, 146).



structure of any possible language” (Hacker 2000a, 74) is essentially answerable to the metaphysical nature of reality, still the justification of logical syntax by reference to reality is *ineffable* because its expression in propositions would violate the bipolarity principle. “[Any] attempt at such a justification”, Hacker argues, “results in transgressing the bounds of sense. For justification would have to employ formal concepts which characterise the metaphysical forms of the objects in question, e.g. ‘property’, ‘relation’ or... ‘colour’” (Hacker 2000a, 73). On Hacker’s interpretation, Wittgenstein made precisely such an attempt to express necessary truths “in order to bring his readers to apprehend necessary features of reality which cannot be stated in language”.<sup>161</sup> As a result, what he thus said was, by the lights of the *Tractatus* itself, nonsense: he tried to spell out what can only be shown by the employment of names in meaningful propositions.

The central point of the turn away from the metaphysics of the *Tractatus* to later philosophy, on this reading, lies in a realisation that there is no such thing as justifying grammar: “[after] Wittgenstein returned to philosophy in 1929, one central preoccupation became the impossibility of justifying grammar as correct by reference to reality, not because the justification is ineffable, but because there is no such thing as justification” (Hacker 2000a, 74). Later Wittgenstein apprehended that the isomorphism that connects the structure of language and the structure of the world is not metaphysical, ineffable isomorphism created by language’s mirroring capacities, but is the “shadow cast by our grammar”:

In the *Investigations* the essence of language is still, in a qualified sense, the subject of investigation (PI 92). Moreover it might still be said to be isomorphic with the ‘structure of reality’ (for the proposition that p does indeed correspond to the fact that p, if it is true), not because language must mirror the logical form of the universe, but because the apparent ‘structure of reality’ is merely the shadow cast by grammar. (Hacker 1986, 179)

On this view, the later Wittgenstein’s key insight lies in appreciating that what seemed to him to belong to the ineffable metaphysical harmony that holds between objects in the

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<sup>161</sup> The quote from a manuscript of the paper “Was he trying to whistle it?”. It is omitted from the published version.

world and simple names in propositions was all along a feature of our grammar.<sup>162</sup> It means that an internal or *grammatical* relation holds between a proposition and the fact that makes it true or between an expectation and what fulfils it. What changes is our understanding of the nature of these internal relations. Hence, in turning away from understanding internal relations as ineffable, metaphysical links between language and reality characterised through the idea of isomorphism, to treating them as rules which belong to our grammar, the need to found grammar in the nature of things disappears. Thus Hacker notes;

It was confused to think that propositions and states of affairs in the world are set over against each other, the one isomorphic with the other... There is, to be sure, a connection between an expectation and what fulfils it. That connection is indeed logical or 'internal', for the expectation is internally related to what fulfils it. But this internal relation is not forged by a metaphysical harmony between language and reality, but rather by grammatical, intra-linguistic, connections. (Hacker 1986, 117-118)

As I already mentioned in Chapter 1, Hacker believes that grammatical rules such as “Red is a colour” in Wittgenstein’s later work still have the status of necessary truths; the main difference is that the rules are later treated as *grammatical truths* that determine necessary connections between our concepts, instead of being ineffable truths about the concatenations of language-independent objects in the world. On this view, it gradually becomes clear to Wittgenstein that “it is grammar that determines the nature of things” (B&H 2005a, 96). Propositions which were treated as nonsensical because they tried to say what belongs to the essence of things, i.e. internal relations and properties of things – something that can only be shown – are now recognised as an important sort of proposition, which, unlike empirical propositions, are neither true nor false, but set the standards of a correct, meaningful use of words. These propositions form a class that defines our conceptual scheme or grammar.

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<sup>162</sup> This insight is primarily about the autonomy of grammar, grammar being that which determines sense: “The claim that grammar is autonomous is central to Wittgenstein's later philosophy. It involves, *inter alia*, a repudiation of the *Tractatus* doctrine of the ineffable isomorphism between language and reality. We are deeply tempted to think that inasmuch as grammar constitutes our form of representation, the way we see the world, it must surely be features of the world which justify us in adopting the grammatical rules we have” (Hacker 1986, 187)

I have already noted in 1.2.2 that the defining feature of Hacker's standard reading is that, despite the anti-metaphysical turn, there is the crucial point of continuity as regards the normative function of logico-syntactical rules. The claim is that in the *Tractatus*, as well as in his later work, the main function of rules is to determine the boundary between sense and nonsense.<sup>163</sup> The only difference between the early and later conception of rules is that, in the *Tractatus*, rules are "strictly speaking ineffable" and are answerable to the world. Otherwise, there is a perfect continuity in how Wittgenstein perceives them. Hacker expresses the claim about the essential continuity most clearly in the following passage:

It is evident that... Wittgenstein thought that logical syntax, as conceived in the *Tractatus*, and later (until 1930-31), and grammar, as conceived after 1930-31, consist of general rules that lay down which combinations of words are licensed and which excluded. In doing so, they determine the bounds of sense, fixing what makes sense and what is nonsense. Far from seeking to exorcise this view, Wittgenstein advanced and defended it. (As Baker and I wrote... Wittgenstein's 'rules of grammar' patently serve to distinguish sense from nonsense, they settle what makes sense, and they determine what is a correct use of language.). (Hacker 2003, 13; emphasis mine)

We shall see in the next section that Hacker's metaphysical reading of the *Tractatus* and his understanding of the turn, in which general rules maintain their central sense-determining role, represent the foundation for Hacker's interpretation of subliming.

### 5.3 Hacker on subliming

In his paper "Turning the examination around: The recantation of a metaphysician" (2004a/2005a), Hacker aims to give an interpretation of PI 108 which links the notion "turning our investigation around" with the notion of subliming. Hacker's intention is to "show that rotating the investigation involves abandoning the 'sublime' conception of logic that characterized the *Tractatus*" (Hacker 2004a, 4). I agree with Hacker that the turn essentially implies, as he puts it, "desisting from 'sublimating' concepts such as 'name', 'proposition', 'language'... and bringing such words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" (Hacker 2004a, 4). However, in addition I want to show that Hacker's theses

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<sup>163</sup> Hacker's view of the role of the rules of logical syntax in prohibiting certain combinations of words as nonsensical has been criticised by Conant (2001) and Diamond (2005).

concerning the idea of subliming are mistaken, and that this is partly an upshot of his interpretation of the *Tractatus* and partly of his misreading of PI 108. There are two theses that Hacker's interpretation of subliming presupposes: positive and negative. I think that both can be challenged.

Hacker's *positive* thesis is the claim that to have a sublime vision of logic means to confuse *grammatical* features of our norms of representation with *metaphysical*, a priori features of things in the world, and to confound the object of logical investigation with that of empirical investigation. Accordingly, to renounce a sublime vision "[above] all, involves abandoning the metaphysical aspirations of investigating an objective essence of the world by means of a logical investigation, and relinquishing the very conception of such an a priori order of things mirrored in logic and discoverable by depth-analysis" (Hacker 2004a, 4). Thus, understood through the idea of subliming, the turn from the *Tractatus* to Wittgenstein's later philosophy consists in his apprehension that grammar is autonomous rather than being answerable to the metaphysical properties of objects.

Hacker's *negative* thesis amounts to the claim that abandoning the *Tractatus*'s sublime vision is "independent from the existence of family resemblance concepts, no matter how important their recognition was for Wittgenstein himself" (Hacker 2004a, 19). Therefore, the insight that "what we call "sentence" and "language" has not the formal unity that [Wittgenstein] imagined, but is the family of structures more or less related to one another" (PI 108), on Hacker's reading, has no significant bearing on the turn away from the sublime picture that characterised the *Tractatus*.

Let us first clarify assumptions on which Hacker's *positive* thesis rests. His interpretation of subliming presupposes an interpretation of the *Tractatus* according to which the early Wittgenstein defended the following claims:

- (i) that there is a language-independent (metaphysical) order of things that is mirrored in the logical structure of language ('the answerability thesis')
- (ii) that the relation between the reality and language is internal and, therefore, ineffable ('the ineffability thesis').

Hacker argues that the sublime vision is “strictly speaking the ineffable vision of young Wittgenstein” (Hacker 2004a, 4). The sublimity of logic is intimately associated with “the doctrine of the ineffable” (Hacker 2004b, 143). “Ineffability” applies both to the notion that language-independent objects in the world have certain internal properties and stand in certain internal relations to other objects, and also to the idea that these metaphysical combinatorial possibilities of objects in states of affairs are mirrored in logico-syntactical combinatorial possibilities of names in propositions (answerability). On this view, it is a consequence of the picture theory of representation that all necessary truths, including the internal relation between language and reality, are ineffable. Any attempt to assert internal relations and properties (e.g. the proposition that *p* is made true by the fact that *p*), to say what falls under a formal concept as one of its objects, would either lack a false pole or would use formal concepts as concepts proper and would therefore be nonsensical.<sup>164</sup>

On Hacker’s reading, the idea that there are necessary properties of things (which are their combinatorial possibilities with other things), which are mirrored in language, represents a sublimation of logic and of what belongs to it as our norm of representation. Hence, to adopt the sublime vision means to see logic as the “great mirror” of the world. Hacker argues that,

This was a metaphysical vision par excellence: the world had an essential nature, which could be uncovered only by logical analysis; logic, that is the logical forms of thought and language, represented the a priori order of the world, the order of possibilities common to both thought and the world, the forms of all things. What was unique about this vision were the claims that logic - the logic of language - *mirrors* the metaphysical properties of the world, and, hence, that *logical* (or logico-*linguistic*) investigation explores the essence of all things, and that what is thus inevitably *shown* in language *cannot be said by means of language*. So conceived, logical investigation was, indeed, sublime. (Hacker 2004a, 5)

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<sup>164</sup> Hacker writes, “One cannot say of a thing that it belongs to a given category, e.g. that red is a colour. For the ontological category of a thing is given by its logical form, which consists in its combinatorial possibilities with other objects... But the form of an object cannot be named, since it is not itself an object, but the common features of a whole class of objects. The formal concept *colour* is the common form of all colours, their shared combinatorial possibilities with spatial objects (and their combinatorial impossibilities with auditory objects)... Hence one cannot say of an object of a certain kind that it belongs to one type rather than to another.” (Hacker 2004b, 148)

What makes the *Tractatus's* view of language and logic sublime lies in its seeing the structure of language, in particular, the combinatorial possibilities of names, as being determined by the structure of the world, including an attempt to *justify* the structure of language by reference to the metaphysical structure of the world. Subliming is therefore interpreted as a sort of *reification* of logico-linguistic relations and properties, and as misinterpreting these essentially linguistic properties and relations as internal (and thus ineffable) properties and relations of things.

Wittgenstein's motivation for the turn lies in his realising that *de re* and *de dicto* conceptions of essence and necessity in the *Tractatus* have been confused. On Hacker's interpretation Wittgenstein realises that "[grammar] tells us the essence of a thing, not because it *reflects* the objective, language-independent, essential nature of what is represented, but because it *determines* essence" (B&H 2005b, 252).<sup>165</sup> More specifically, instead of seeing logic (i.e., "the ideal") as that which determines combinatorial possibilities and impossibilities of simple names – which is what the notion "a priori order" denotes<sup>166</sup> – in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein assigned this sense-determining role to the world. Accordingly, the turn consists in realising the genuine role of logic as that which autonomously determines combinatorial possibilities of names in meaningful propositions, or simply, "the a priori order". Here is how Hacker explains it:

The re-orientation of our viewpoint is a consequence of realizing that the role of the ideal has been misconstrued. It seemed as if the ideal was the reflection in logic of the 'a priori order of things'. But the ideal of an objective a priori order of the world is itself merely a part of the mode of presentation... The very idea that logic must reflect the logical form of the world must disappear... We have to relocate the role of logic. It is not a mirror image of the world, but a form of representation. (Hacker 2004a, 17)

Note that in interpreting the idea that the role of the ideal has been misunderstood along these lines, namely, that the logic's sense-determining role has been projected onto the world as the (mistaken) object of logico-linguistic investigation, there is no mention of those more specific philosophical requirements (i.e. absolute exactness, determinateness,

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<sup>165</sup> See esp. Hacker 2004a, 19 n. 3; B&H 2005b, 252.

<sup>166</sup> For more discussion regarding the notion of a priori order see the next section.

completeness, generality, essentialism, uninterpretability, systematicity etc.) we identified in the last chapter as characterising the idea of subliming. Hacker does not recognise these aspects of the *Tractatus* as part of the sublime view of logic, but only the notion of wrongly assigning to the world the sense-determining role that belongs to logic. The turn, therefore, consists merely in logic's reclaiming its sense-determining role. All this is, clearly, in perfect agreement with the rest of the standard interpretation of Wittgenstein's notion of grammar, in particular, the role of inherently general grammatical rules in Wittgenstein's later philosophy and the idea that grammar determines the bounds of sense.

Now that we clarified with which particular aspects of the *Tractatus* Hacker associates the later Wittgenstein's notion of subliming, we can turn to Hacker's negative thesis. Getting rid of the sublimity of logic is, on this reading, supposed to be *independent* of understanding that "what we call "sentence" and "language" has not the formal unity that [Wittgenstein] imagined, but is the family of structures more or less related to one another" (PI 108). The following passage illustrates Hacker's view to the effect that Wittgenstein's idea of family-resemblances plays only a secondary role in renouncing the sublime vision of the *Tractatus*, whilst the real essence of Wittgenstein's turn lies in acknowledging logic's sense-determining role. I quote the relevant passage in full.

For the deepest transformation in [Wittgenstein's] conception of logic, language and, indeed, of philosophy and its method, stemmed from realization that the conception of an a priori order of the world that is to be disclosed by logical investigation into the deep structure of language, was an illusion. This insight is independent of the question of the existence of family-resemblance concepts, no matter how important their recognition was for Wittgenstein himself. If anything deserves to be called 'turning our investigation around' it is the transformation of 'the a priori' from being the metaphysical 'order of things' into being a mere form of representation and hence the dissolution of the sublime conception of logical investigation and its replacement by the investigation of the pathos of philosophical illusion. (Hacker 2004a, 19)

There are several contentious points in this passage I shall address in more detail below. Here I introduce some general objections. First, the textual evidence Hacker uses to support his negative thesis is a single remark from a notebook: MS 157a 48r. It reads as follows:

“The concept ‘language’ is, to be sure, a family, but even if it were not, our current point of view would differ from that of the *Tractatus*. But *then* where would be the difference?”. What is striking about this remark is that Wittgenstein *seems to* suggest that his current point of view would differ from his early thinking even if the concept of language were not conceived as a “family”. Still, Hacker does not take notice of Wittgenstein’s immediately bringing into question this suggestion by asking where, in that case, would the difference lie. There is nothing in the remark in question which would support, with no further argument, Hacker’s attempt to undermine the role of the idea of family-resemblances for the turn, and to locate its axis elsewhere. What is more, as we’ll see below, a number of textual references concerning an overcoming of the sublime vision of formal concepts that characterised the *Tractatus* directly involve the idea of general terms forming “families”.

Second, Hacker’s gloss on confusing the form of representation with the object of representation, understood as projecting logic’s role in determining combinatorial possibilities of names onto the world, is far more dubious as an explanation of subliming and the turn than is the role of family-resemblances. Is there any reference in the *Investigations* that supports Hacker’s positive thesis about subliming? PI 97 says that “logic, presents an order, in fact the a priori order of the world”, so perhaps Hacker might count it as support. In the next section I shall show that the reading of PI 97 that would support the realist reading of the *Tractatus* is not mandatory to say the least. PI 97 can be easily read as identifying the notion of logic presenting the *a priori* order of the world as a corollary of the early Wittgenstein’s central concern with clarifying the nature and possibility of representation, not with his interest in the metaphysics of reality.

Third, undermining the role for the idea of family-resemblance in “turning our investigation around”, and connecting the latter primarily with giving up the supposed realist commitments of the *Tractatus*, is exegetically unsound; the reference to “language” and “sentences” being “the *family* of structures more or less related to one another” in PI 108 is simply ignored. We should not dismiss the relevance of the idea of family resemblance for Wittgenstein’s turn. For, this notion directly challenges the sublime idea that the hidden “common essence”, “formal unity”, and “singularity of meaning” characterise our concepts of language, proposition, thought, object, etc.



## 5.4 The *a priori* logical order

We have seen that Hacker's interpretation of subliming and of Wittgenstein's turn presupposes that the *Tractatus* was committed to a realist claim about the language-independent order of things that is mirrored in language, and ineffably justifies its grammar. I indicated that, from the point of view of the later Wittgenstein's criticisms of the *Tractatus*, there is no good reason to believe that he had such commitments. I also indicated that Hacker *might* want refer to PI 97 to look for support for the realist reading, since there Wittgenstein does indeed mention that logic presents the *a priori* order of the world. Here I want to propose a reading of PI 97, in particular of the notion of "a priori order", that does not involve any realist commitments, and yet it does directly connect with the idea of subliming, as I have interpreted it (in Chapter 4).

In the previous chapter I suggested that the tendency to sublime the logic of our language involves, as one its crucial features, thinking that there must be a perfect logical order that underlies the indeterminacy and logical imperfection of ordinary signs:

It seems to us that super-order *must* be found in the actual language. So we also ask ourselves what is the *real* authentic word, the *real* proposition of our language, for the written and uttered words and propositions don't possess in their nature the clarity that the sublime language requires. So we search for the real word and we believe we find it perhaps in the idea of the word. And so it happens that we have a conception of an ideal and say it *must* be applicable to the reality of language, but we can't say how (MS 157a, 53r)

I argued that, in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein envisages language as a system with a definite order, a calculus governed by strict rules. This *a priori* logical order is supposedly hidden beneath the surface of our language, in an internal medium of thought, by which possible situations are projected onto signs. The order is meant to be "of the purest crystal" and represents "the *hardest* thing there is" (PI 97). The existence of the hidden logical order means that logic determines the conditions of possibility for a representation of possible situations. Thoughts, whose essence is logic, *a priori* contain the structure of all possible situations, all thinkable combinations of symbols (3.02). The notion of a *a priori* logical order I have been defending in Chapter 4 is primarily related to philosophical requirements

Wittgenstein believed must be satisfied for representation to be possible. Accordingly, the notion that there must be a perfect logical order in our language, and the idea of the logic's sense-determining role, is part of the sublime view of signs, and, thus, a superstition that has to be "removed by turning our whole examination around" (PI 108).

In the *Investigations* PI 108, Wittgenstein suggests that the "preconceived idea" of an underlying, *a priori* logical order, which could be described in the rules of logical syntax, *has to be removed*: "the axis of reference of our examination must be rotated" (PI 108). As he emphasises elsewhere: "The 'order of things', the idea of the *form(s)* of phenomena, hence the *a priori* itself, is a grammatical illusion" (MS 157b, 1r).<sup>167</sup> These remarks indicate a way in which Hacker's understanding of the notion of *a priori* order is profoundly mistaken: not for a moment does Wittgenstein suggest that *there is such an order* after all, only whose source is logic, not the world. To agree with Hacker that the turn marks the "transformation of 'the *a priori*'" from being the metaphysical order of things to being an order established by grammar would mean to miss the whole point of Wittgenstein's criticism of the *Tractatus* outlined in the metaphor of subliming. What Wittgenstein identifies as an illusion is precisely the sense-determining role of logic or grammar, or logic's aptness to decide irrespective of particular occasions of use and our parochial sensibilities what counts as a meaningful combination of words, which is exactly what Hacker's interpretation of his later conception of grammar and subliming attributes to Wittgenstein. Therefore, when Wittgenstein in PI 97 speaks about the "order of *possibilities* that must be common to both world and thought" this does not, *pace* Hacker, amount to the claim that the world possess an *a priori* structure to which the structure of our language is answerable. Rather, the pertinent notion of order here is the notion of a formal order, the order of logical possibilities or combinations of propositional elements; what is at stake is the logical order that any representation of reality by language presupposes. Accordingly, the idea of "*a priori*" is synonymous with "something purely logical" (NB 41), with what logic takes care of independently of any future experience, any contingencies and particular cases. However, on Hacker's reading of the *Tractatus*, the world seems to take care of logic, since the logic of language mirrors "an objective *a priori* order of the world".

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<sup>167</sup> Quoted in B&H 2005b, 216.

In the previous chapter, I argued that the key reason for subliming is abstracting away from particular contexts in which our concepts are applied and constructing the relations between concepts, or thinking about words, when “language is on holiday”. In that respect, the *Tractatus*’s account of “proposition”, “language”, “thought”, and “the world” is certainly established in isolation, without regard for how these notions are actually used. It naively assumes that words have a single meaning and uniform use. Accordingly, the *Tractatus*’s concept of the world, of concatenations of simple objects, are the result of Wittgenstein’s isolated reflections on the nature of a proposition with sense and what makes representation possible. As Wittgenstein notes in the following paragraph, all those *super*-concepts that he took as “[standing] in line one behind the other, each equivalent to each” (PI 96) are construed and defined with no care for how we, as a matter of fact, *use* the words “world” or “proposition” in particular cases:

The crystalline purity/clarity/ of logic was not given, rather I demanded it... Believing that I was investigating the order of things, I *presupposed an order of things*. The idea of the *essence* (of the world, of the proposition, etc.) was presupposed. (The proposition, that queer entity)... If one states the essence of the proposition, then everything else must follow. Then it cannot be otherwise. But the proposition was equivalent to language, and language to the description of what is the case, with the world. I presupposed as given the singularity of the meaning of the words ‘world’ & ‘language’ without having a conception of a *use* of the word ‘world’ (MS 157a, 69v–71r).

The notion of an a priori order, as it occurs in PI 97 and in this passage, does not refer to the alleged ‘logico-metaphysical’ order of things, to ineffable truths about what the world is like, how concrete properties and relations combine with each other, and which combinations are impossible. It rather highlights the idea that *logic* provides, independently of the experience of particular cases everything essential for representation, by presenting the order of *possibilities* that must be common to both world and thought. There are no *ontological* requirements for representation, because it is *logic* that “presents... the order of *possibilities*, which must be common to both world and thought” (PI 97). According to the later Wittgenstein, logic is not something sublime because it (or language) is *answerable* to independently structured, a priori order of the world, but because logic *determines*,

conclusively and “independently of any future experience” (PI 92), the *general form* that every proposition that stands in a projective relation to the world must have to represent it.<sup>168</sup> That certain logical forms exist and not some others is not a result of empirical investigation of particular sentences, but rather an a priori requirement concerning the way logic determines the form that everything that represents reality must have.

In the *Notebooks* Wittgenstein writes;

We portray the thing, the relation, the property, by means of variables and so show that we do not derive these ideas from particular cases that occur to us, but possess them somehow *a priori*. (NB 65)

Thus it must be possible to erect the general form of proposition, because the possible forms of proposition must be *a priori*. Because the possible forms of proposition are *a priori*, the general form of proposition exists. (NB 89)

If the interpretation I am proposing here is correct, that is, if the notion “a priori order of things” amounts to philosophical *preconception* that logic determines “*form(s)* of phenomena”, independently of its application, once and for all (TLP 5.557), and has nothing to do with the thesis regarding the answerability of logic to the world, then it follows that Hacker’s notion of subliming, which relies on the claim that logical syntax mirrors metaphysical combinatorial possibilities of objects, should be rejected. I have argued that from the point of view of the *Investigations*, there is no indication that the *Tractatus* had any commitment to the thesis that there is a language-independent reality to which grammar is answerable. On the view defended here, the later Wittgenstein’s criticism of the *Tractatus* gives us no ground to hold that the early Wittgenstein had some independent ontological or metaphysical interests, or that he said something about the structure of the world (apart from its role in his attempt to clarify the essence of language)

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<sup>168</sup> This conclusion concerning the irrelevance of experience and particulars for a determination of sense is, for instance, supported by the following remark: “So it seemed as if we had to get to know the essence of language. (The essence of the proposition, of inference, of grammar) And in the answer to this question was to be found whatever can be said about the ‘essence of the world’, and the answer to our questions. And it was essential that that answer must be capable of being given once and for all, hence independently of future experience. And so this answer could not say There are thirteen kinds of . . . And then perhaps tomorrow we shall find a fourteenth. So there was to be no talk whatever of kinds. And so it seemed as if our answer must be to the highest degree simple. Indeed, not even ‘onefold’. In this requirement lay the sublime; and it could of course have no sense to say: you must just lower this requirement.” (MS 157a 47v-48r)

and the answerability of grammar to this structure, that he then contested in his later writings.

The later Wittgenstein's critique of his early views does not focus on the supposed confusion of grammatical with the metaphysical concerns, since his concerns were always only with the former. It rather focuses on his *sublime treatment of the grammatical* insofar as "[he] presupposed as given the singularity of the meaning of the words 'world' & 'language' without having a conception of a *use* of the word 'world'" (MS 157a, 69v–71r). It is this "*singularity* of the meaning of words" that the turn challenged by bringing out two crucial facts about our language: (i) that "the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (PI 23); and (ii) that the so called formal concepts and the rest of our words have "a family of meanings" (PI 77).

To sum up. I argued against the standard interpretation's thesis to the effect that Wittgenstein's critique of an a priori logical order consists in acknowledging that logic does not mirror the combinatorial possibilities of objects, but rather represents itself the source of determination of possible combinations of signs. I suggested that in the *Tractatus* logic was already understood as that which determines the bounds of sense and nonsense, *a priori* and once and for all. In other words, there is a perfect logical order underlying any meaningful use of language. It is this preconception that Wittgenstein challenges in the *Investigations* by arguing that it is us (our parochial sensibilities) who decide what makes sense and what does not, with respect to a given occasion, not the grammar with its general combinatorial rules (cf. PI 520). As I argued earlier (1.4 and 2.4.3), the anthropological interpretation puts a great emphasis on the shift in Wittgenstein's thinking regarding how the boundary between sense and nonsense is determined. The argument I mounted in this section builds on this line of interpretation.

### **5.5 PI 108 and the role of family resemblances and particular cases in Wittgenstein's turn**

In PI 108, Wittgenstein writes about what is involved in turning one's investigation around. How does one get *back* from "slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal... but [where] we are unable to walk" to "the rough ground"

(PI 107)? How does one focus their attention on the particular case?<sup>169</sup> In other words, how does one reject the sublime view of language and psychology, such as the one that characterised the *Tractatus*? In PI 108, Wittgenstein specifies the way in which we need to look at language and sentences, and what we need to see them as, to make this move:

We see that what we call "sentence" and "language" has not the formal unity that I imagined, but is the family of structures more or less related to one another.—But what becomes of logic now? Its rigour seems to be giving way here.—But in that case does not logic altogether disappear?—For how can it lose its rigour? Of course not by our bargaining any of its rigour out of it.—The *preconceived idea* of crystalline purity can only be removed by turning our whole examination round. (One might say: the axis of reference of our examination must be rotated, but about the fixed point of our real need.) (PI 108)

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein set out to clarify the nature of a proposition. However, the kind of inquiry that he pursued there misinterpreted what this task amounts to. His investigation presupposed that to clarify the nature of a proposition means to identify something that *all* propositions must have in common as their shared, hidden essence. It is the underlying logical *form* that everything representing the reality possesses. Every instance of a proposition says “This is how things stand” and this general propositional variable ranges over *every* possible proposition. The concept “proposition” therefore had the *formal unity*. The sublime view of (formal and psychological) concepts “symbol”, “proposition”, “name”, “the world”, “function”, “thought” etc. involves the idea that these concepts have a special status in a symbolism. That is, they indicate that everything that falls under them shares a common essence, and this commonality of features that all particular instances share is expressed in the fact that they are all values of the same type of variable that represents these concepts. To understand a general form of some concept means to know all of its applications in advance, combinatorial possibilities and impossibilities of, say, colour-symbols. Possessing a general form of a concept means to have “something with an *empty* argument place” (PG 272) that only things sharing certain essential features will satisfy, features which are predetermined in its general form.

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<sup>169</sup> See MS 152, 83f

Accordingly, on the sublime view of signs, when a general concept or the meaning of a general term is explained by means of particular examples, what we grasp are their common features or essence; a particular example appears to us as “an uncompleted form with the essential features ready printed” (PG 271). When we make an application of a word thus conceived, namely, as representing a formal unity, it is as if we have a general “picture” in our mind which (ideally) contains and determines all particular applications of this concept in advance. It is as if “all the steps have already been taken [and] the act of meaning... had in its own way already traversed all those steps: that when you meant it your mind as it were flew ahead and took all the steps before you physically arrived at this or that one” (PI 188). On the sublime view of understanding signs, when one learns the meaning of a sign, that is, once the connection between it and its “meaning” is established, one comes to possess a general rule or picture for every possible application of a sign so that particular applications are given like “a string of pearls in the box”. In uttering a propositional sign, one is mentally connected with the whole array of possibilities of the sign’s application, with its “complete grammar”.<sup>170</sup>

From the point of view of the *Investigations*, the sublime, essentialist view of signs with uniform use stands in conflict with the way actual language works:

[the] more narrowly we examine actual language, the sharper becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not a *result of investigation*: it was a requirement.) The conflict becomes intolerable; the requirement is now in danger of becoming empty. (PI 107)

The key aspect of Wittgenstein’s turn, as argued in Chapter 4, lies in realising that the Tractarian symbols (super-words) are idealised and purified, and almost nothing like our ordinary words. The *Tractatus*’s picture of how we operate with symbols falsifies the way we actually use words. The requirements that all instances of “proposition” must share the common form, that they must be logically complex, articulated and bipolar, that sense must

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<sup>170</sup> As Wittgenstein writes in the *Blue Book*, “we... imagine this calculus, as it were, as a permanent background to every sentence which we say, and.. think that, although the sentence as written on a piece of paper or spoken stands isolated, in the mental act of thinking the calculus is there--all in a lump. The mental act seems to perform in a miraculous way what could not be performed by any act of manipulating symbols” (BB 42).

be determinate, that objects must be simple – the requirements embodied in the *Tractatus*'s notion of “a symbolism... which obeys the rules of logical grammar – of logical syntax” (TLP 3.325) – is now seen to be in danger of becoming hollow. When we say that “a proposition is whatever can be true or false”, or that “every sign signifies something”, that “sensations are private”, which particular language games or applications do we have in mind? What are these proposals for? How are these pictures going to be applied? As Wittgenstein observes in the *Investigations*:

These concepts: proposition, language, thought, world, stand in line one behind the other, each equivalent to each. (But what are these words to be used for now? The language-game in which they are to be applied is missing.) [...]

Whereas, of course, if the words "language", "experience", "world", have a use, it must be as humble a one as that of the words "table", "lamp", "door" (PI 96-97)

It is implied in these remarks that first we need to get rid of the idea that these concepts have a special, sublime status among all other words. They are, just like all other words, *learned* in particular ways and circumstances, and are *used* in particular occasions for particular purposes. However, the philosopher, including as the author of the *Tractatus*, forgets that the concepts he reflects about (whose “essence” he defines when language is “on holiday”) are taken from particular cases of their everyday use. In addition, governed by the over-simple picture of meaning, he ignores the fact that words are used in various ways, and that that affects what is said by these words. Hence, “[when] philosophers use a word--"knowledge", "being", "object", "I", "proposition", "name"--and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home?” (PI 116).

A kind of philosophical investigation, which requires of the philosopher to remind himself of the context in which the picture of a concept he had construed originates, is an investigation which *brings words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use*: “What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use” (PI 116). The fact that the philosopher's use is metaphysical hinges on the way in which the words are treated by the philosopher, namely, as if particular applications have no bearing



on what words may be used to say. In other words, the metaphysical use of words rests on a mistaken assumption that our words have a uniform use across all contexts and possess the “singularity of meaning”. Take as an example the early Wittgenstein’s claim that all propositions are pictures of possible situations, and that they all say: “This is how things are”. This *metaphysical* claim about the concept “proposition” has its roots in the form of expression that we use in our everyday discourse. Thus, the reason this is a metaphysical use of word “proposition” does not lie in its meaning something different from what it normally means, but in the fact that the picture has lost contact with its everyday use, that is, with the context in which the picture has a familiar application (cf. PI 422-424). To ask how and where this picture of propositions as pictures is applied, in which circumstances, on what occasions, for which purposes etc. amounts to “bringing words back” to their everyday use.

Once the philosopher is “back on the rough ground” he will be able to look and see that only within the confines of *particular* language-games, *particular* uses, does his picture have a familiar application, but certainly not across the board. One reason the definition of a proposition as representation does not apply across the board is because there are sentences that do not represent anything in particular. And there are also different kinds of pictures such as portraits, photographs or genre-pictures. There are also nonsense drawings, optical illusions, and so forth. Hence, the notion of a picture is not something sharply bound and *determinate* that can be used to determine what propositions are. The notion of truth is not something determinate either (cf. PI 136).<sup>171</sup> Different ways we use these words can’t be simply foreseen by calling all propositions true or false pictures, but we need to look and see how the words “picture”, “true”, “language”, or “sentence” are used on particular occasions. Once we decide to turn our investigation around to particular cases and acknowledge the contribution of depth grammar, we may come to accept that we use these words in a variety of ways to speak of a variety of different things that are in *some* ways connected, yet need not share a common, essential feature.

The notion that things we call “language”, “proposition”, “function”, “sentence”, etc. are not related by their sharing the common essence refers, of course, to “family resemblances”. I want to claim, *pace* Hacker, that this notion indeed is central for

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<sup>171</sup> Travis develops this idea in his 2006, ch.3

Wittgenstein's turn. The relation of family resemblance that unites particular instances that fall under a concept is set directly against the notion that things that concept applies to (its extension) must share a common general form, and thus have a "formal unity". In PI 108, Wittgenstein contrasts the *Tractatus*'s requirement the formal concepts must have the formal unity with the fact that each of these represents "the *family* of structures more or less related to one another". His insight that "formal concepts" are actually used to cover a variety of cases – these will have some similarities in common, but not the common essence or "formal unity" – represents the heart of Wittgenstein's turn. If family resemblance accurately depicts how we use words, then there will be no variables in the *Tractatus* sense that mark the distinctive formal properties of certain symbols. "Formal concepts" and variables that express them are idealisations, or products of subliming, based on the assumption that "symbols" have a uniform use, or mark a unique path in the system. But, our ordinary words do not have a unique employment and yet they are, representationally speaking, successful. Thus, in contrast to Hacker's negative thesis, it is precisely the notion of family resemblances that drives the turn away from the sublime vision of signs in the *Tractatus*. As Travis quite correctly notes, "[it] is... family resemblance which here brings our philosopher's language back from holiday" (Travis 2006, 66).<sup>172</sup>

Besides, there are a number of important points in the second part of PI 108, *none* of which supports Hacker's positive thesis about the turn as "the transformation of 'the a priori' from being the metaphysical 'order of things' into being a mere form of representation" (Hacker 2004a, 19). Quite the contrary, Wittgenstein here emphasises that the philosopher of logic speaks of sentences in exactly the same way as we do; the philosopher needs to remind herself that she investigates "the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language, not... some non-spatial, non-temporal phantasm".<sup>173</sup> Nevertheless, a philosophical investigation of

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<sup>172</sup> Warren Goldfarb (1997) mounts a very similar argument showing how the discussion of family-resemblances, fluctuating and unregulated applications, using words without fixed meaning, vague concepts, lack of final explanation, rule-following, etc. in PI PI 65-89 are all part of a "sustained attack" on the idea of "fixity of meaning".

<sup>173</sup> Wittgenstein makes the similar point in BT. He writes, "How strange if logic were to occupy itself with an "ideal" language and not with *ours*. For where should we get this ideal language from? And what should this ideal language express? Presumably, what we now express in our everyday language; so logic has to investigate that. Or investigate something else: But in that case, how am I to have any idea what that is? – Logical analysis is the analysis of something that we have, not of something we don't have. Therefore it is the analysis of propositions *as they are*. (It would be strange if humans had been speaking all this time without managing to utter a single correct sentence.)" (BT 204)

language isn't an empirical investigation: it is possible to be interested in a phenomenon in a variety of ways, and Wittgenstein's interest in language isn't the interest of a natural scientist or linguist, but an interest of the philosopher who wants to clarify certain confusions by describing language-games with rules and using them as objects of comparison with our concepts. The key thing is to distinguish idealisations from actual language use, and to clearly specify their role in investigating language use.<sup>174</sup>

That there is a clear link between renouncing the sublimity of the *Tractatus* and a new way of looking at language, based on the idea of family-resemblances and the autonomy of particular cases, is evident from the discussion in PI 65, where Wittgenstein considers a possible objection to his new conception of language *qua* the activity of playing language-games:

Here we come up against the great question that lies behind all these considerations.—For someone might object against me: "You take the easy way out! You talk about all sorts of language-games, but have nowhere said what the essence of a language-game, and hence of language, is: what is common to all these activities, and what makes them into language or parts of language. So you let yourself off the very part of the investigation that once gave you yourself most headache, the part about the *general form of propositions* and of language." (PI 65)

This passage brings into focus a sharp contrast between Wittgenstein's early and later conceptions of language: considerations of numerous language-games in the *Investigations* systematically avoid the "great question" concerning the general form of a proposition and the essence of language the *Tractatus* hoped to answer. Wittgenstein admits this to be true and continues:

Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,— but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all "language". (PI 65)

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<sup>174</sup> See 3.4

From within his new perspective on language use and linguistic understanding, Wittgenstein is more than happy to accept that the way we actually use the word “language” on various occasions, to talk about very different cases, indicates that our concept lacks the “singularity of meaning”, and that it rather covers a “family of structures more or less related to each other”. To think that our concepts have a unity or general form was a “grammatical illusion”. This consisted in thinking that concepts must be absolutely determinate and have a uniform application, and that all instances falling under them must share essential features, which can be clearly specified. He wrote in MS 157b, 6r and MS 142, p.86 respectively:

I used a simile (of method of projection etc.). But through the grammatical illusion of a unified concept it didn’t seem to be a simile. The more obvious this illusion becomes, the clearer it becomes that language is a family [...]

I used a simile — but through grammatical illusion — that one thing corresponds to the concept-word, what is common to everything that falls under it — it didn’t seem like a simile<sup>175</sup>

The *Tractatus* compared propositions to models and pictures that can serve as projections of possible situations. It used a simile to clarify how a proposition is capable of representing, saying something true or false. However, the idea that propositions have *something* in common with models and pictures didn’t seem like a fruitful analogy or object of comparison but as “a state of affairs of the highest generality” (PI 104). Every proposition just *is* a picture. The idea that the essence of elementary proposition lies in its formal capacity to *model* possible situations (whilst all others are truth-functions of elementary ones) motivated the search for the general form of a proposition, to account for an insight into the proposition’s nature. Everything that counts as a proposition is a value of the general propositional variable, since every instance of a proposition has the essential property of being a picture (or it depends on such propositions *vis-à-vis* their sense).<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Both quotations are taken from B&H 2005b, 227.

<sup>176</sup> The analogy between propositions and pictures also suggested a way to solve the problem of truth, which lead the young Wittgenstein to conclude that “[it] must be possible to demonstrate everything essential by considering this case” (NB 7).

The primitive philosophical idea of conceptual unity to the effect that everything that falls under a concept must share a common property was shattered when Wittgenstein acknowledged that the *Tractatus*'s formal concepts are only sharply bounded, idealised (sublimed) versions of our ordinary concepts, and have no higher order in a conceptual hierarchy. Most of our concepts and general terms, in fact, constitute *families* and have fluctuating, not clearly defined or fixed uses (cf. BB 19, 25, 27, 28; PG 63, 68, 77; PI 68, 79, 81, 130). They are *indeterminate* in the sense that one cannot foresee, without taking into account particularities of an occasion and relevant application-criteria, to which particular objects a concept is correctly or truthfully applied; one can foresee something like that only by a stipulation of concept's boundaries and by spelling out the conditions of concept's application to one sort of cases but not the others (PI 68); however, this is *not* how we use the words such as "game" or "proposition" (cf. PI 68).<sup>177</sup> As Wittgenstein makes clear in the following remark:

The concept of a family strikes two blows against this [i.e. crystalline clarity of logic and understanding as an ethereal process]. It shows that I didn't have a general concept of a proposition and of language. I had to recognise such & such as a sign — and couldn't give its grammar. What is ethereal disappears, and with it the etherealness of sense (MS 157b 5r-6r).

All textual examples examined in this section suggest that Hacker's negative thesis, according to which the turn was independent of the idea of family resemblances, is untenable. The concept of a "family" and attention to different particular cases covered by a general term clearly play an essential role in the turn away from the sublime investigation into the essence of language to an investigation of the use and understanding of language, as they are integrated with other human activities in the form of life. Wittgenstein's turn represents a turn to neglected aspects of depth grammar.

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<sup>177</sup> Cf. "If I let "that is how things stand" count as the general form of proposition, then I must count " $2 + 2 = 4$ " as a proposition. Further rules are needed if we are to exclude the propositions of arithmetic" (PG 124).

## 5.6 Summary

My main aim in this chapter was to show that Hacker's interpretation of subliming, developed on the basis of his realist reading of the *Tractatus*, is mistaken. More particularly, I argued that the relevant textual evidence does not properly support both of Hacker's main assumptions about Wittgenstein's turn away from the sublime vision of the *Tractatus*. Hacker's claims that the essence of subliming in Wittgenstein's early philosophy lies in a mistaken projection of the logic's sense-determining role onto the world, which motivates the wrong conception to the effect the logical structure of our language is answerable to, and justifiable by, the metaphysical order of things, misinterpret what Wittgenstein later found distorted, and what his new methodology and conception of language aimed to expose as a superstition.

By focusing merely on *what* determines combinatorial possibilities of words and the bounds of sense (i.e. whether it is the world or logic), that is, what determines the logical order, Hacker overlooks the critical point of Wittgenstein's critique, namely, that it is precisely the notion of an *a priori determination*, regardless of its source, that is here criticised as expressing the "sublime" view.<sup>178</sup> Hence, Hacker's standard interpretation of the later Wittgenstein's conception of grammar endorses the *Tractatus's* sublime view whereby grammar determines, regardless of any application to particular cases and the role of our parochial sensibilities in these applications, which combinations of words will count as propositions with sense, and, thus, as something that we ought to understand (or not). The anthropological interpretation reveals this to be, as Wittgenstein puts it, a "dream of our language" (PI 358), inasmuch as, on the *Investigations's* new conception of language use and understanding, (surface) grammar's proposals as to what counts as a proposition with sense are accepted or rejected by *us* and our parochial agreement in judgements (see 1.4.2). Thus as Wittgenstein highlights in PI 520, "[it] is not every sentence-like formation that we know how to do something with, not every technique has an application in our life; and when we are tempted in philosophy to count some quite useless thing as a proposition, that is often because we have not considered its application sufficiently". Hacker's standard interpretation of the sense-determining role of grammar and rules completely misses the

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<sup>178</sup> Kuusela reaches a very similar conclusion about Baker and Hacker's reading but discussing their interpretation of the idea that "essence is expressed by grammar". He shows that on their reading grammar *determines* rather than expresses the essence. See his 2008, 184ff.

crucial aspect of Wittgenstein's later conception that brings to view the role of human agreement in judgement in deciding (occasion-sensitively) what can be understood as a proposition with sense.

The second part of my argument against Hacker's reading of subliming challenged his claim that the notion of family-resemblances plays no important role in Wittgenstein's turn. I aimed to show that this assumption is mistaken. To this end, I demonstrated in more detail how the sublime view of words aims to render unimportant particular uses of a general term by assuming that understanding of a concept or of a general term contains everything essential for every possible meaningful application. Insofar as, on this view, particular instances that fall under a concept are understood as sharing essential properties, the role of family-resemblances and attention to particular cases for Wittgenstein's turn is undeniable. The notion of "singularity of meaning", which Wittgenstein explicitly connects with the subliming of the logic of our language, is brought into question with the idea that most of our words have "a family of meanings" (PI 77).

The discussion in this chapter elucidated one more aspect in which the standard interpretation of Wittgenstein's later philosophy remains on the level of the *Tractatus*, thus failing to recognise the relevant contrast and a point of discontinuity between his early and later investigations of language and its use. It thus stays wedded to the model of language and grammar Wittgenstein later abandoned and criticised. In the final chapter of this thesis I aim to bring to light one final contrast between the standard reading and anthropological reading with regard to the way the later Wittgenstein's methods of perspicuous representation work on clarifying a particular conceptual confusion related to the concept of thinking and thought.

## CHAPTER 6

### *Clarifying the Grammar of 'Thinking'*

.....

"Language (or thought) is something unique"--this proves to be a superstition  
(*not* a mistake!), itself produced by grammatical illusions. (PI 110)

#### **6.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter I criticised the standard interpretation of subliming, advocated by Peter Hacker, and claimed that it misinterpreted Wittgenstein's ideas regarding subliming. I argued that, on Hacker's interpretation, the idea of subliming, as a way of describing a source of philosophical confusion, reduces to one key notion, namely, the answerability of grammar (or logical syntax) to the metaphysical essence of the world, or more precisely, combinatorial possibilities of objects in the world. What is sublime about the *Tractatus*'s conception of logic and language lies in its projecting of logic's sense-determining role onto the world. Accordingly, the key aspect of Wittgenstein's turn consists in rejecting the thesis of answerability and adopting the idea of the autonomy or arbitrariness of grammar,



which thereafter remained, on this view, one of the pillars of the later Wittgenstein's view of language.

I argued that the standard interpretation of Wittgenstein's turn exploits the alleged realist/anti-realist (idealist) oppositions<sup>179</sup> between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*, and that, by looking in the wrong place (i.e. at these alleged oppositions), it downplays some of the central contrasts between two phases of Wittgenstein's work. In particular, Hacker explicitly denies the central role of the idea of family resemblances for Wittgenstein's turn, which I showed is one of the critical elements that drives Wittgenstein's turn, and facilitates what I shall call the "de-sublimation" of the logic of our language. Central aspects of the turn, that is, a new method of grammatical investigations and a new conception of grammar, on my interpretation include:

- (i) the idea of *family-resemblances* as a novel way to account for the conceptual unity i.e., relations between particular instances that fall under a concept (that challenges essentialism *vis-à-vis* our concepts);
- (ii) a focus on the *uses* of words and applications of concepts on *particular occasions* (that challenges the ideal of generality, systematicity and the primitive idea of meaning);
- (iii) the method of *simple language-games*, which brings to view "the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (PI 23);
- (iv) turning one's attention to the techniques of *learning* and to human *practices* with which the meaningful use of words is integrated (which challenge the idea of determinacy of sense and the infinite regress of interpretations and explanations).

In this chapter, I want to illustrate how particular methods of clarification work on clarifying the sublimed grammar of a particular (psychological) concept, namely, that of thinking and thought. I want to show that this process relies on the elements (i-iv). In particular, I aim to argue that the problem Wittgenstein had with construing the essence of

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<sup>179</sup> Only in his early writings Hacker explicitly defends this view and later he denies this. However, the main idea, as I argue, is still basically the same, since the move is from the answerability of grammar (to the metaphysics of the world) to metaphysics being merely 'a shadow of grammar'. See also Kuusela (2008, 185ff.)

psychological verbs on the model of *mental* activities, processes, or experiences is an upshot of one's adherence to a sublime conception of signs and a primitive philosophical conception of a hidden realm, rather than with misleading surface analogies between "thinking" and other words that signify activities, processes or experiences, as Hacker's model of Wittgenstein's method suggests. The aim of grammatical investigations of "thinking" and "thought" (understood as concepts *or* phenomena<sup>180</sup>), *pace* Hacker, lies *not* in identifying the real "grammatical" category of "thinking", or with explicating alleged rules that govern its correct application. It rather consists in reminding us about the importance of (neglected) contexts in which these concepts are applied (words are used) for our understanding of "thinking" and "thought". Such considerations show that thinking and thought are nothing "queer" or "out of the ordinary".

I begin with Hacker's analysis of "thinking". I show how it involves two key features: (i) the distinction between surface and depth grammar to the effect that depth grammar represents more restrictive level of categories thus preventing the formation of nonsensical constructions; and (ii) tabulating grammatical rules as the main method for achieving perspicuous representation of our grammar. In 6.3 I develop a critique of Hacker's standard reading by showing that it has no bearing on what goes on in the discussion of "thinking" and other intentional concepts in *Philosophical Investigations*. In particular, section 6.3.1 shows that main techniques of perspicuous representation (or "de-sublimating" the concept of thinking) do not involve tabulating rules, but rather employ analogies, comparisons, simple language-games and questions, so all those methods that are, according to the anthropological interpretation, aimed at bringing out the aspects of the depth or occasion-sensitive grammar of "thinking". In 6.3.2 I show how Hacker's standard interpretation of "synoptic generalisations" that describe grammar embodies the sublime view of thinking. Finally in 6.4 I propose what conceiving of the phenomena of thinking and thought as being "nothing out of the ordinary" could amount to.

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<sup>180</sup> It is crucial to note that, for Wittgenstein, an investigation of concepts is *eo ipso* an investigation of phenomena those concepts are about. See PI 370.

## 6.2 Hacker's conception of a grammatical investigation of 'thinking'

In Chapter 2, I argued that, on Hacker's interpretation of Wittgenstein's method, the main source of philosophical nonsense lies in our transgressing the bounds of sense, where this is understood as violating grammatical rules that are manifest in the word's "depth grammar" or its possibilities for meaningful combinations with other expressions. In particular, words are taken to have misleading surface grammar inasmuch as their syntactic employment suggests similarities with other expressions that are only apparent. A philosopher is misled by these apparent similarities of form into making claims about a (semantic) category of a word that is not its real category. By employing expressions in ways that are based on misleading surface grammar, the philosopher violates grammatical rules and speaks nonsense. To unravel the muddles that this gives rise to, we need to show that the category based on surface grammar is not the word's real category, and we do this by highlighting *dissimilarities* between the actual use of the word and the use that its surface form has led us to expect. This procedure involves a tabulation of the rules that the philosopher has violated and outlining of the depth grammar of a word, i.e. describing its proper category. Such a process of clarification has both negative and positive aims: (i) it remedies the philosopher's misdescription of the word's grammar; and (ii) it represents a contribution to a comprehensive, synoptic map of our conceptual space. In this section I aim to show that Hacker interprets Wittgenstein's considerations of the concept of thinking on the model of "misleading grammatical analogies" (Hacker 1993a, 146), whilst in the next section I raise some objections to Hacker's interpretation.

In his essays that discuss the concept of thinking, Hacker puts forward a series of "grammatical" observations on Wittgenstein's behalf, saying what "thinking" is *not* (contrary to what the bewildered philosopher might normally assume). Whilst the philosopher knows how to use expressions correctly, he is incapable of *describing* his own uses of words correctly: "[philosophical] confusions typically arise when one does know how to use a word correctly, i.e. in accord with established use, but lacks a synoptic view of its use" (Hacker 1993a, 147). Such a view is provided by "synoptic generalisations" which "[draw] together and [interrelate] a myriad of truisms in a single *Übersicht*" (B&H 1985, 23). What is needed for clarification is a "rearrangement of familiar *grammatical* facts"

(Hacker 1993a, 146).<sup>181</sup> The main technique is bringing to light *dissimilarities* between “thinking” and other words that signify activities or processes, the process which Hacker calls “tabulating or rearranging grammatical rules” as standards of the correct use of words.

What does Wittgenstein see as the problem with the idea that thinking, understanding, meaning are mental activities or processes? According to Hacker’s analysis, the problem is that one misleadingly classifies “thinking” with other typical physical activities and processes (adding the attribute “mental” to mark the difference in kind), whereas this concept has more sophisticated use analogous to that of adverbial verbs such as obeying, mimicking, parodying, pretending, and shamming, doing something experimentally, practicing, demonstrating or undoing (see Ryle 1968/2009). The aim of analysis is not merely to deny that thinking is a mental activity or process, but also to suggest its proper semantic type, i.e. identify a group of words with which it semantically patterns, something that can be obscured by misleading similarities of surface grammar.

Hacker notes (cf. 1993, 149ff.) that grammarians are prone to interpret the semantics of verbs such as “to think” as that of an activity-verb, because it shares certain surface grammatical features with other activity-verbs, features such as a progressive aspect, admitting of an imperative, aptness to be qualified by manner-adverbs, and so on.<sup>182</sup> “‘To think’ *in some of its uses*”, Hacker writes,

resembles such activity-verbs as “to speak” or “to write”, and we naturally conceive of thinking as an activity, though we add that it is an activity of the mind (as speaking and writing, crudely speaking, are activities of the body). We then project features of physical activity onto thinking, and then straight away (rightly) find thinking thus conceived to be a mystery (Hacker 1993a, 146).

The idea of thought as something *mysterious* is, on this interpretation, a result of misleading analogies and surface similarities between activity- or process-verbs and

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<sup>181</sup> According to Hacker, “[the] rules for the use of the word ‘think’ constitute what is to be called ‘thinking’, and that *is* the essence of thinking” (1993a, 147). That is, the way we use the word ‘to think’ is what the phenomenon of thinking is, it expresses what we mean by this concept: “the use of the sign ‘thinking’ could have been different; but if it had been different, it would not have the meaning it has, and so it would not have signified *thinking*” (ibid., 147). Since our uses of words reveal our concepts, changing the rules for their use, would disconnect the word from its meaning and we would not be talking about the same concept anymore; we would be talking about something else. Thus, even if grammar is, in principle, arbitrary, a change in rules would cut our words off from the existing conceptual scheme.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. 2.2.1. Hacker’s analysis of “thinking” is virtually the same type of analysis I reconstructed there.

“thinking”. According to Hacker, “we sense a mystery because we lack a clear view of the grammar of such expressions, and hence naturally gravitate towards misleading analogies” (Hacker 1993a, 146). Those surface similarities are the philosopher’s basis for a claim that thinking must be a mental activity: “‘Thinking is a mental activity’ seems a truism which no sane man would deny” (ibid., 150). Hacker sees Wittgenstein’s investigations of the grammar of thinking as aimed at revealing the opposite, namely, that thinking is *not* a mental activity (process or experience), and that it is completely unlike any typical activity: “[...] parallels between the grammar of thinking and the grammar of activities are misleading” (ibid., 152). By means of tabulating grammatical rules we can then get rid of “the bogus mystery” about thinking as a mental activity that accompanies speaking. We realise that “to do something with thought is akin to (and indeed instantiated by) doing it with care, attention, or concentration; hence that notion is, to use Rylean terminology, *adverbial*” (Hacker 1993b, 174).

To disprove the truism, Hacker examines more closely the concept of activity, which he claims is fluid and has an extremely blurred meaning. Nevertheless, Hacker is able to identify a feature that an activity must have to be called so: “[fluid] though it is the idea of an activity does involve the notion of a constituent series successive (and occasionally simultaneous) acts systematically related to each other” (Hacker 1993a, 150). He goes through a series of examples telling us which are and which are not activities. For instance, on this view, listening is “arguably” not an activity and sleeping is “certainly” not an activity, although both are according to their surface grammar activity-verbs. A physical activity must involve the use of a certain organ:

[One] engages in a typical physical activities by doing things, acting in certain ways, with one’s body, limbs or other other organs. One writes by moving one’s hand, as one swims by moving one’s limbs or sings by using one’s mouth and vocal cords. If thinking is an activity, it is an activity we engage in *without using any organs at all*. (Hacker 1993a, 151)

Hacker here aims to demonstrate that thinking is not an activity of the brain, since we, strictly speaking, do not use the brain as we use our limbs; we have no control over it or do not in general know what our brain is doing. This, however, only seems to work against

assimilating thinking with (certain) physical activities, which is not what the truism claims anyway.<sup>183</sup>

Hacker then moves on to consider if thinking could be compared to a *mental* activity, an activity of the mind rather than the brain. This is what the truism claims. He emphatically dismisses this possibility on the ground that “[here] we cast the mind in the role of an immaterial object. But the mind is not an ethereal appendage with which one can do things” (1993a, 152). A series of further assertions follow that dismissal:

[Nothing] *need* go on when one thinks... nothing typically goes on in one’s mind... apart from the fact that one is thinking... an interruption or break in thinking is altogether unlike a hiatus in an activity... reciting the multiplication-table or the alphabet in one’s mind is not thinking... [to] report what one thought when one thought through an argument is not to describe what one *said* to oneself; nor is it to describe a series of *mental* images that crossed one’s mind (Hacker 1993a, 152-154).

Even saying, “in a reductive spirit”, that thinking is an activity is nothing but what happens when we speak will not do. Hacker emphasises that “this too would be misleading, as if thinking is sometimes talking, other times walking and occasionally diving!” (Hacker 1993a, 154). Whereas activities are typically voluntary, taught and practiced “there are not, and could not be special lessons at school in thinking... [and] one cannot practice thinking *per se*” (ibid., 154). A comparison of thinking to paradigmatic activities reveals that “what in the superficial grammatical *form* looks like the name of an activity... has in numerous respects a quite different use from verbs signifying paradigmatic activities” (ibid., 155).

Principally the same treatment is employed for establishing that thinking is not (or is unlike) mental processes. We are tempted to conceive of thinking as an activity or a process because of misleading analogies with speaking and writing; we think that thinking occurs, or that thoughts are stored, in our heads. Hacker assures us that this is all either wrong or confused, or that it simply makes no sense. And he also emphasises that by denying that

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<sup>183</sup> We might ask here: what about reading, playing chess, solving puzzles or crosswords, playing an instrument, doing mental arithmetic, admiring artwork, watching movies, listening to music, calculating, imagining? Are these physical or mental activities? Which organs do they involve? And is the active employment of a certain bodily organ decisive in all these cases?

thinking is a mental activity or process, Wittgenstein is not “propounding theses” but is merely repudiating “a misleading picture that is fostered by the similarities between the verb ‘to think’ and process-verbs such as ‘to grow’, ‘to change’, ‘to deteriorate’” (ibid., 158). Moreover, thinking is “categorially quite distinct” from the concept of experiences.

So, what is a proper “grammatical” category to which “thinking” belongs? As we saw earlier, Hacker believes that “thinking” has a character of adverbial-verbs rather than typical activity-verbs:

Having ‘a mental life’, i.e. thinking, wishing, believing, doubting, having mental images, being sad or merry, and so on, is not analogous to: eats, drinks, walks, runs, but to: moves now fast, now slow, now towards a goal now without a goal, now continuously, now in jerks. Here Wittgenstein anticipated (but did not elaborate) Ryle’s comparison of verbs of thinking to so-called adverbial verbs (1993a, 159).

Based on this exposition, we can see that, on Hacker’s view, there are certain “grammatical facts” about “thinking” that are *in principle* open to view, but are, at the same time, obscured by “misleading grammatical analogies” with words that signify processes or activities. A synoptic view of the grammar of “thinking” by means of tabulating grammatical rules that govern its correct use brings to light important dissimilarities in use between thinking and other typical activities or processes, but also its similarities to adverbial-verbs.<sup>184</sup> Rules thus tabulated are used as the basis for exposing the fact that what philosophers say about thinking and thoughts is nonsense. This synoptic view is the prologue to drawing the bounds of sense and showing where these bounds are transgressed.

### 6.3 Against Hacker on ‘thinking’

In what follows I want to show that the interpretation of the distinction between surface and depth grammar as the one between coarse and fine-grained grammatical categories, and tabulating grammatical rules as a method of achieving perspicuous representation, adopted by Hacker, misrepresents the discussion of “thought” and “thinking” we find in the *Investigations*. The style and tone of Wittgenstein’s discussion of these notions, as I shall

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<sup>184</sup> Note that for Ryle adverbial verbs are “active verbs that are not verbs for separately do-able, lowest-level doings” (1968/2009, 501).

try to demonstrate in following sub-sections, better fits the interpretation of depth grammar and perspicuous representation formulated by what I call the anthropological interpretation. This interpretation, as we shall see, is also in agreement with the idea of subliming and the methods of de-sublimating the logic of our language that was developed in the last two chapters.

### 6.3.1 Perspicuous representation of “thinking”

We saw in the previous section what, according to the standard interpretation, constitutes the source of confusions about the concept thinking and thought, as well as the method of clarification of such confusions. Earlier (2.3) we saw that, on the anthropological interpretation, the notion of depth grammar that Wittgenstein employs in PI 664 is meant to underscore the dimension (i.e. particular occasions of use) which focusing on the combinatorial possibilities of words in sentences typically excludes from considerations of their use. I connected this way of looking at words – namely, focusing exclusively on their “surface grammar” or the employment of words in significant sentences – with the *Tractatus* and argued that the standard interpretation of the later Wittgenstein’s conceptions of use and grammar adopts the old *Tractatus* model. In contrast, the anthropological interpretation of depth grammar, understood as occasion-sensitive grammar emphasises the ways human beings operate with signs in the context of various activities, differences in the ways sentences are employed on particular occasions, the dependence of the sense of one’s utterance on the circumstances in which it takes place, rather than on the general rules, the use of simple language games as objects of comparison, and so forth.

Similarly, the notion of perspicuous representation as what grammatical investigations aim at, involves the deployment of different clarificatory techniques from those that are suggested by the standard interpretation. So, as we have seen in Chapter 3, the method of tabulation of rules plays little or no role in perspicuous representations of grammar, as this representation is conceived according to the anthropological interpretation. The way that the rules come in as a means of clarification is only as the rules of simple, constructed *language-games* used as *objects of comparison* with our concepts.<sup>185</sup> Apart from (i) *simple*

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<sup>185</sup> The rules of particular simple language-games are significantly different from those Hacker envisages as “grammatical rules”. Firstly, there is no commitment that our language is used according to such rules, and, secondly, insofar as language-games are models of particular occasions of use, their rules are essentially local, rather than something that applies generally and holds for the whole conceptual space. See 1.4.1 and 3.4.2



*language-games* used as objects of comparison, the anthropological interpretation stresses (ii) the importance of looking at the details of *particular cases* or at different aspects of a concept that are relevant to particular occasions of use (since our concepts do not have a uniform application and apply to a family of different cases), (iii) the use of analogies and comparisons that are easier to understand, (iv) the role of extra-linguistic purposes and points, (v) the use of questions and invented dialogs, (vi) the construction of cases that bring to light the absurdity of certain presuppositions, (vii) examining or inventing circumstances in which a word is learned or used etc. The four key elements of “de-sublimating” our concepts I listed in 6.1 are also the techniques of achieving a perspicuous representation of our grammar that the anthropological interpretation finds to be at work in the *Investigations*. This is not a representation *of* the rules that can be taken in at a glance, but a matter of making clear the way we operate with words, which may be done by our coming to see a range of particular cases clearly, without deriving any general rule for the use of the expression. In other words, on the view defended here, perspicuous representation involves nothing “synoptic” or comprehensive. My aim in this section is to show that it is those and similar elements of de-sublimating that Wittgenstein uses in sections on “thinking”, and not the method of tabulating rules.

Wittgenstein’s discussion of the concept of thinking and thought in *Philosophical Investigations* falls roughly between PI 316 and 362, but the discussion resumes at PI 428, where Wittgenstein returns to some of the topics discussed earlier. In particular, he turns once again to the idea that certain ways of construing the notion of thought, thinking, and the notion of there being an agreement between thought and reality results in the sublimation of phenomena of thought and thinking. On the sublime view of thought, in grasping a thought, we grasp “in a flash” all future applications of that thought. All such “future developments” of the thought are understood to be contained *in* it in “a queer way” (cf. PI 197). As I shall try to show, Wittgenstein’s aim is to show that we will avoid this “queer” construal of the process of grasping thoughts or thinking, or the idea to the effect that the future uses being anticipated in such a grasp, only if we learn to pay enough attention to the role of our sensibility to particular surroundings in our representing something as thus and so. Acknowledging thinking as a practical everyday skill of operating with concepts on different occasions helps to “de-sublimate” this phenomenon. In what follows I shall go through some of the important remarks and highlight the techniques

Wittgenstein employs to clarify particular applications of “thought” and “thinking”, and to expose philosophical preconceptions about their grammar. To begin, I look at some of the remarks that demonstrate Wittgenstein’s concerns regarding the very idea of what would be required of one in order to think about thinking.

At PI 316 Wittgenstein employs an *analogy* to show that it would be absurd to hold that one can understand the meaning of the word “to think” by introspection: to think that one can get clear about the use of “thinking” by closely observing what goes on while we think, i.e., by focusing on inner processes, would be like trying to discern what “mate” means by close observation of the last move of a game of chess, yet without knowing how to play chess. Just as the word “mate” in chess is not used merely as the name for the last move, but presupposes the game of chess as a whole, and the ability to play it, so the word “thinking” is not used merely as the name of an inner process that is happening while we think. At PI 317 another analogy is used to suggest a misleading parallel between the expression of a pain in a cry and the expression of thought in a proposition: “As if the purpose of the proposition were to convey to one person how it is with another: only, so to speak, in his thinking part and not in his stomach”.

At PI 318, Wittgenstein distinguishes two ways we speak about thinking with regards to its duration, or two kinds of cases in which we say that someone thinks. On the one hand, we speak of someone’s thinking whilst speaking or writing. In this case we do not say that thinking is quicker than speaking or writing and “the thought seems *not to be separate* from the expression”. On the other hand, we talk about the speed of thought, or of a thought’s being grasped in a flash, of a thought’s going through one’s head like a lightning, of someone’s being struck by a thought etc. Hence, although we have here two distinct *uses* of the same word, there is a tendency, when we reflect about the meaning of this word, to conflate these two ways of talking and to see them as two different occurrences of the essentially same underlying phenomenon we call “thinking”. Wittgenstein articulates this tendency as follows: “it is natural to ask if the same thing happens in lightning-like thought--only extremely accelerated--as when we talk and 'think while we talk.' So that in the first case the clockwork runs down all at once, but in the second bit by bit, braked by the words” (PI 318). A way to consider the concept “understanding a whole thought in a flash”, suggested in PI 319, is on an *analogy* with making a note of such a thought in only a

few words, which can be subsequently developed into a sentence or a series of sentences. Once again, Wittgenstein employs a comparison between one case (which has a potential to be mystified) and another case that he thinks is *easier* to grasp as an instance of something ordinary.

A connection between lightning-like thought and the spoken thought can be *compared* to the way the algebraic formula is connected with the sequence of numbers which one works out from it, as suggested in PI 319. This comparison associates discussions of “thinking” with discussions on “understanding” and “following a rule”. In latter discussions Wittgenstein uses the example of working out a series of numbers from a formula as a *simple language-game* that is employed as an *object of comparison* with more complex and potentially more confusing concepts of “grasping something in a flash” and “following a rule” (the simple language game is first introduced in PI 143). The analogy between lightning-like thought and algebraic formula, however, can be misleading, inasmuch as we might interpret the role of the formula, or a rule that we grasp in a flash, as that which *contains* the sequence of numbers one later develops from it “in a queer way”. As Wittgenstein notes in *Philosophical Grammar*, this is “as if understanding were an instantaneous grasping of something from which later we only draw consequences which already exist in an ideal sense before they are drawn” (PG 55).

The philosopher who adopts the sublime view of signs and primitive conception of conceptual unity and meaning, which both undermine the significance of particular cases, will be inclined to see these two different uses of the same word as two aspects of the essentially same phenomenon of thinking. The thought can be seen in its extended form as an unfolding of what is already given to us in a pure form when we grasp it in a flash, and there might be an inclination to use expressions such as “The steps are *really* already taken, even before I take them in writing or orally or in thought” (PI 188), as well as to wonder how the whole thought and its future development can be contained in a split second of time in which we grasp it. Wittgenstein’s primary aim is to show that thinking is nothing “queer” and that “[in] our failure to understand the use of a word we take it as the expression of a queer *process*” (PI 196). In other words, a “contemptuous attitude towards the particular case” (BB 18) and inability to distinguish between two different uses of the

word<sup>186</sup> contribute to the subliming of this phenomenon, treating it as something remarkable and queer. The analogy is helpful insofar as it facilitates seeing the connection between a formula and the series one subsequently works out in such a way that “nothing out of the ordinary is involved”, that is, as involving a practical human skill to use a word on different occasions, the skill that we have acquired and employ in this kind of practical task. Hence, as Wittgenstein puts it, the “certainty [that I shall be able to work out its values from the arguments 1, 2, 3, ... up to 10] will be called 'well-founded', for I have learned to compute such functions, and so on. In other cases no reasons will be given for it--but it will be justified by success” (PI 320).

In PI 321, Wittgenstein turns once again to the tendency to explain the meaning of the expression “sudden understanding” (to which the expression “lightning-like thought” is closely related) by pointing to some object, event or process that we think is denoted by this expression. As we have seen, on the primitive (Augustinian) picture of meaning there is a tendency to think that to explain what a word means it will, in general, suffice to point to the object or process that it names. Pointing can be directed either inwards towards “private”, or outwards towards public, objects and processes. Part of Wittgenstein’s criticism in discussions of “thinking” is directed towards the primitive explanation of the meaning of words by pointing to what they name.

“What happens when a man suddenly understands?”--The question is badly framed. If it is a question about the meaning of the expression “sudden understanding”, the answer is not to point to a process that we give this name to.--The question might mean: what are the tokens of sudden understanding; what are its characteristic psychological accompaniments? (PI 321)

If we interpret the question in the latter way, mental or physical processes that may accompany sudden understanding of how to continue a series of numbers are, for instance, that a formula comes to one’s mind, that a man feels certain facial movements, that there are some alternations in his breathing, that he has the feeling “that’s easy”, or simply nothing similar happens. However, since none of these processes that accompany sudden understanding is necessary or sufficient for what we mean by “understanding” – continuing

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<sup>186</sup> I.e. the distinction between a formula which determines a unique answer (e.g.  $y = 2(x)$ ), versus my state of understanding.

a series may happen without any of them occurring or any of them may occur and yet one may fail to continue the series – we may wish to “[try] to get hold of the mental process of understanding which seems to be hidden behind those coarser and therefore more readily visible accompaniments” (PI 153). Or, as Wittgenstein puts it in PI 322, “the question what the expression means is not answered by such a description; and this misleads us into concluding that understanding is a specific indefinable experience”. Once again, the philosopher who focuses on inner processes that he thinks are denoted by some psychological expression treats psychological phenomena as something sublime, that is, something inexplicable, indefinable, and peculiar.

In contrast to the construal of “sudden understanding” or “lightning-like thought” as indefinable inner processes, at PI 323 Wittgenstein offers an alternative interpretation of the expression “Now I know how to go on!” as an *exclamation*. Such an exclamation signals one’s confidence that one can go on and continue a series or express one’s thought in words. This expression, Wittgenstein writes “[corresponds] to an instinctive sound, a glad start” rather than a *description* of some hidden mental process that makes its appearance in a flash. Nevertheless, there *are* cases in which my expression of a “glad start” will not correspond to my ability to actually continue the series; namely, “it does not follow from my feeling that I shall not find I am stuck when I do try to go on” (PI 323). That is, I *may* fail to justify myself in practice in *certain* cases, after I exclaimed that; what I say is not always a criterion of “understanding”.<sup>187</sup> Wittgenstein thus concludes;

[the] criteria which we accept for 'fitting', 'being able to', 'understanding', are much more complicated than might appear at first sight. That is, the game with these words, their employment in the linguistic intercourse that is carried on by their means, is more involved--the role of these words in our language other--than we are tempted to think (PI 182)

None of the remarks discussed thus far employ “synoptic generalisations” or “tabulate familiar grammatical rules”, as Hacker’s interpretation suggests. We’ve seen that main grammatical techniques used to clarify the meaning of “thinking” are: analogies, comparisons, simple language-games, pointing out different uses of a word or differences

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<sup>187</sup> Wittgenstein suggests there may be cases in which we say that someone did understand when he said he can go on, even though he fails when asked to so. He suggests that in these circumstances there must be a certain sort of explanation of why he failed, e.g. sudden trauma.

between particular cases. These are the techniques of perspicuous representation of grammar that the anthropological approach finds central to Wittgenstein's later grammatical method. The style and aim of Wittgenstein's discussions of "thinking" in the *Investigations* hardly support Hacker's picture in which the main aim is to identify a "more specialised", "fine-grained" semantic type of "to think" (see 2000, 166), and to give a comprehensive, synoptic account of the rules for the use of this concept.

Textual evidence Hacker gives for his reading of the passages I discussed in the previous section is: RPP II 226-8; RPP II 217; BB 6f; PG 106; Z 88; PI 328. There is a single reference from the following remark in the *Investigations*:

Well, what does one include in 'thinking'? What has one learnt to use this word for?--If I say I have thought--need I always be right?--What *kind* of mistake is there room for here? Are there circumstances in which one would ask: "Was what I was doing then really thinking; am I not making a mistake?" Suppose someone takes a measurement in the middle of a train of thought: has he interrupted the thought if he says nothing to himself during the measuring? (PI 328)

The reader should note that in this remark every sentence is a question. The remark gives nothing like the "grammatical generalisations" that Hacker marshals. Hacker interprets the last two questions as rhetorical, and thinks that both of them have negative answers (see Hacker 1993b, 169).<sup>188</sup> I disagree with Hacker's treatment of these questions as merely rhetorical. Asking questions is another important technique Wittgenstein employs in his grammatical investigations, and dubbing them "rhetorical" could easily downplay their importance. These are genuine questions we do not immediately know how to answer, or whose answer involves thinking about the cases and possible circumstances in which we would say something like that.

At PI 330, Wittgenstein raises the question: "Is thinking a kind of speaking"? Again, I do not think this is merely a rhetorical question with an obvious (negative) answer. On the conception Wittgenstein succumbed to in the *Tractatus*, thinking is indeed treated as a kind of language. On such a view, when we learn to speak a language we learn how to

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<sup>188</sup> See Katherine Morris (1994) for a critique of interpretations that gloss over modals and questions in the *PI*.

“translate” the content of our thoughts from a private language of thoughts into public language (cf. McGinn 2006). That is, we learn to associate “psychical thought-constituents” with perceptible signs of ordinary language. It seems that thinking as a process can accompany speaking or it can go on its own, as when we represent something to ourselves, and then thought is an accompaniment of a sentence that breathes life into it.<sup>189</sup>

At PI 332, in contrast to Hacker’s insistence that thinking is not a mental process, Wittgenstein writes, “[while] we sometimes call it “thinking” to accompany a sentence by a mental process, that accompaniment is not what we mean by a “thought””. The point is similar to the one made about “sudden understanding”: there are certain characteristic accompaniments of thinking which we might identify with “thinking” on a given occasion (conscious attentiveness, certain characteristic expressions, pictures that occur in one’s mind, gestures etc.), but none of them is what we mean by “thought”. In other words, “the thought is not essentially a mental event” (MS 145, 25); sometimes “thought” is simply a sentence with sense. Thus, what is at stake here is again the attempt to distinguish between different uses of “thinking” and “thought” to which Hacker’s account of this concept *via* general rules is simply insensitive.

At other places too, Wittgenstein suggests that sometimes the word “thinking” is used to signify a mental process. For instance, in *Philosophical Grammar* he writes: ““Thought” sometimes means a particular mental process which may accompany the utterance of a sentence and sometimes the sentence itself in the system of language” (PG 51).<sup>190</sup> *In some of its uses*, as the following remark suggests, the word “thought” is used to signify a psychological phenomenon or a conscious event, but also the sense of a proposition: “Different meanings of the word ‘thought’. The thought as the sense of a proposition [or sentence]; [the thought as] a psychological phenomenon; [the thought as] a conscious

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<sup>189</sup> “One would like to say [thinking] is what distinguishes speech with thought from talking without thinking.--And so it seems to be an accompaniment of speech. A process, which may accompany something else, or can go on by itself” (PI 330)

<sup>190</sup> Wittgenstein also distinguishes between a few different ways one can talk about thought: “It is correct to say “Thinking is a mental process” only if we also call seeing a written sentence or hearing a spoken one a mental process. In the sense, that is, in which pain is called a mental state. In that case the expression “mental process” is intended to distinguish ‘experience’ from ‘physical processes’.--On the other hand, of course, the expression “mental process” suggests that we are concerned with imperfectly understood processes in an inaccessible sphere. Psychology too talks of ‘unconscious thought’ and here “thought” means a process in a mind-model. (‘Model’ in the sense in which one speaks of a mechanical model of electrical processes). By contrast, when Frege speaks of the thought a sentence expresses the word “thought” is more or less equivalent to the expression “sense of the sentence”” (PG 106).

event” (MS 145, 25). Thus, an important aspect of Wittgenstein’s method is to make us attentive to *different uses* of the word “thought” and to preclude positing any of them as what thought or thinking *essentially* are. For, “craving for generality” rests on a primitive conception of conceptual unity and meaning whereby a concept is said to have common essential features that all of its instances share, or that the word has a uniform use across all contexts. Hacker’s suggestion that the “notion [thought] is... *adverbial*” (1993b, 174) goes against Wittgenstein’s aim to keep different applications of “thinking” separate.

### 6.3.2 “Craving for generality” and the importance of circumstances

In this sub-section, I point out a more general worry about Hacker’s reading of the sections on “thinking” to the effect that it attributes the view of language to Wittgenstein, which Wittgenstein is clearly critical of.

One of the central problems Wittgenstein has with interpreting “thought” and “thinking” on the model of an accompaniment of sentence or speech is a tendency to picture thinking or thought as that which has the (ontological) priority over signs, and thus “breathes life” into otherwise dead signs. As Wittgenstein formulates the sublime view of thought he wants to criticise: “It might be said: in every case what is meant by “thought” is the *living* element in the sentence, without which it is dead, a mere succession of sounds or series of written shapes” (PG 107). We saw earlier that the *Tractatus* adheres to this picture of thought. According to it, thought, albeit closely connected with speaking and colloquial language, is also fundamentally an independent and self-subsistent way of representing reality. A philosopher, when he guesses how the word functions, forms the picture of thinking as “talking to oneself”, or silent inner speech that precedes or accompanies the speaking of language: “Augustine describes the learning of human language... as if the child could already *think*, only not yet speak. And “think” would here mean something like “talk to itself” (PI 32). Now, it is not controversial that *sometimes* we do talk to ourselves inaudibly. However, on the primitive picture of how language works, it seems to make perfect sense to suppose that “If people always said things only to themselves, then they would merely be doing *always* what as it is they do *sometimes*” (PI 344).

This is another characteristic feature of the philosopher’s “craving for generality” that Wittgenstein is concerned to subject to scrutiny. It consists in the general assumption that,



as Wittgenstein puts it, “one need only make the easy transition from some to all” (PI 344). The tendency to think that there is no problem in generalising from certain (familiar) cases to *all* possible cases comes in various varieties. For instance, it is embedded in the *Tractatus*’s idea of generality whereby if “ $F(a)$ ” makes sense “ $(x).F(x)$ ” must make sense too (PI 345), or in its notion of systematicity whereby if I understand “ $a$  is  $F$ ” and “ $b$  is  $G$ ” I then also understand “ $a$  is  $G$ ” and “ $b$  is  $F$ ”, since all symbols (super-words) make unique, systematic contribution to the sense of propositions they occur in (see chapter 4). One corollary of this craving for generality is that, if a sentence makes sense in one context (on one occasion), then it must make sense *tout court*.<sup>191</sup>

A famous analogy for showing how this tendency to generalise sometimes has absurd consequences, and how the “explanation by means of *identity*” need not always work, is given in the following reasoning pattern: “You surely know what ‘It is 5 o’clock here’ means; so you also know what ‘It’s 5 o’clock on the sun’ means. It means simply that it is just the same time there as it is here when it is 5 o’clock.” (PI 350). As this example illustrates, the philosopher is inclined to treat the sense of utterances as something independent from any particular occasion or circumstance of use; the fact that something sounds like (or is) an English sentence should guarantee that it will be understood regardless of the circumstance in which it was learned and used. However, to understand what the utterance “It’s 5 o’clock” says in familiar circumstances does not entail understanding of what it will say on the Sun. As Wittgenstein warns us in PI 349, “in ordinary circumstances these words and this picture have an application with which we are familiar.--But if we suppose a case in which this application falls away we become as it were conscious for the first time of the nakedness of the words and the picture”. The sense of the sentence in those special circumstances has yet to be explained to us; it does not have a sense automatically just by virtue of “sounding like a proposition” and having a familiar ring.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Travis thus correctly observes: “One is a basic point of Wittgenstein’s methodology: we understand how concepts would apply in, or to, particular circumstances for which they are designed; a main source of philosophical (pseudo) problems is the impression that we understand their application — that is, just the same as what we are familiar with – to circumstances for which they are really not defined at all” (2008, 14; see also Kuusela (2008, 38ff)).

<sup>192</sup> Cf. the diviner example from the *Blue Book*.

Not everything that sounds like a proposition according to some general combinatorial rules will have an application in our lives, or will be useful to us. So even if surface grammar permits a certain combination of signs as “meaningful”, this combination of words *need not* have any application in a particular circumstance in our life with language:

So does it depend wholly on our grammar what will be called (logically) possible and what not,--i.e. what that grammar permits?"--But surely that is arbitrary!--Is it arbitrary?--It is not every sentence-like formation that we know how to do something with, not every technique has an application in our life; and when we are tempted in philosophy to count some quite useless thing as a proposition, that is often because we have not considered its application sufficiently. (PI 520)

This remark suggests, contrary to what the standard interpretation argues for, that there are no overarching, general grammatical standards of sense or correctness that will decide, independently of particular circumstance and application in our life, whether some particular sentence makes sense or not, or what it can be used to say. If some combination of signs has an application (i.e. is part of ordinary techniques or operations with signs) will depend on us as users and our life with those words (including purposes for which it will be used) and not simply on what (surface, combinatorial) grammar suggests. “Depth grammar” understood as the occasion sensitive grammar emphasises precisely the dependence of sense on those dimensions of use that transcend the boundaries of surface grammar (which, as we saw earlier, is primarily interested in meaningful sentence-types).

Another important technique of perspicuous representation of “thinking”, besides the use of analogies, comparisons, questions, particular cases, and simple language-games, motivated by the importance of circumstances for the sense of what we say, is asking about circumstances and contexts in which a word is learned, when and for what purposes it is used. This method will frequently involve asking for the way in which we could explain the meaning of a word to someone or asking for useful teaching methods: “What is it like to say something to oneself; what happens here?--How am I to explain it? Well, only as you might teach someone the meaning of the expression "to say something to oneself" (PI 361). Again, in PI 117, in order to reject the idea that the sense of a sentence is like an

atmosphere accompanying it, which the sentence carries in every application, Wittgenstein stresses the importance of asking for circumstances of use:

If, for example, someone says that the sentence "This is here" (saying which he points to an object in front of him) makes sense to him, then he should ask himself in what special circumstances this sentence is actually used. There it does make sense. (PI 117)

It is time to take stock. My main aim in this section has been to show that Hacker's interpretation of Wittgenstein's method of perspicuous representation of "thinking" is at odds with the clarificatory techniques Wittgenstein actually employs in the text. I argued that, in contrast to Hacker's own analysis, there is no evidence of Wittgenstein doing anything that can be characterised as "tabulating grammatical rules" or putting forward "synoptic generalisations" in these sections (or elsewhere in the text). On the contrary, what we find here are numerous other methods whose role in perspicuous representation of our grammar was stressed by the anthropological reading. These methods frequently involve analogies, comparisons, questions, simple language games, distinguishing different uses of a word, asking for circumstances in which an expression is learned, used or would make sense, and so forth. By employing these techniques Wittgenstein aims to bring into question the sublime picture of signs and thought, the primitive ideas of meaning, explanations of meaning and conceptual unity, and to counteract the philosopher's craving for generality and "a temptation to misunderstand the logic of our expressions... to give an incorrect account of the use of our words" (PI 345).

Although philosophical confusions regarding "thinking" and "meaning" have their roots in a certain philosophical approach to language and concepts, these are not something that stems from misleading logico-syntactic employment of words and "violating grammatical rules", as Hacker argues. The philosopher who describes the essence of thinking as a mental process that accompanies speaking needs to be reminded that you cannot *guess* how a word is used, and hence how the concept of thinking functions in isolation from particular cases, but you must look at how we operate with this word in particular cases. Clearly, this philosopher will not be reminded of particular uses which his generalisations have falsified, by being given another "synoptic generalisation", such as that "thinking" has a semantics of an adverbial, which itself pays no attention to other uses. The critical point of

Wittgenstein's grammatical investigations of "psychological verbs", as we saw in this section, is that there is no way of getting past considerations of the details of a particular case and circumstances in which we learn and use these expressions, if we want to understand how we operate with these concepts and the role they play in our language.

#### **6.4 Depth grammar of thinking as operating with signs**

In order to get rid of the sublime picture of signs and the primitive view of how psychological concepts function, the philosopher needs to comprehend that "nothing out of the ordinary is involved" when we think or use language. This involves attending to those dimensions of language use that have been abstracted away from, and which, on the view defended here, can be represented by the occasion-sensitive grammar. In this way, the idea of depth or occasion-sensitive grammar has a direct bearing on the idea of subliming of signs, insofar as it suggests the way to avoid treating phenomena, such as thought, language, or sentence, as doing or being something remarkable and "queer". In this section I shall be concerned with specifying those aspects of depth grammar that help "bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use".

I suggested earlier that the sublime picture of thought and thinking as a kind of inner language, or the activity of "talking to oneself" (i.e. "the mythology of psychology"), is a consequence of the sublime view of signs characterised by certain philosophical preconceptions. Instead of looking at how we use the word "thinking", we take the word as a label for a shadowy process with which we associate purified signs: "in our failure to understand the use of a word we take it as the expression of a queer *process*" (PI 196). The philosopher is thus misled by his preconceptions about language and its use into postulating an inner realm of mysterious mental entities and processes: the inner realm of shadows. Some of these preconceptions include the notion that the possibility of true or false representation of reality requires that the sense of what is said must be determinate, or that what is capable of representing must be uninterpretable. Other preconceptions involve "craving for generality" or thinking that super-words make stable contributions to the sense of every proposition.

In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein adopts the view of ordinary language in which vagueness, indeterminacy, and interpretability of signs is treated as inimical to the possibility of

representation. He sees the flexibility<sup>193</sup> our words have as indeterminacy and interpretability of a pernicious kind, since he reflects about language in abstraction from our skilful use of it in the course of our lives. Flexibility seen as pernicious creates an anxiety concerning the possibility of representation, and this leads to a postulation of the sublime inner language made of “indefinables” or super-signs, which are meant to resolve the anxiety regarding the indeterminacy of sense and to make representation possible. Simple names have fixed meanings and they make systematic contributions to the sense of propositions they occur in. The idea is that when we think, i.e. represent possible situations to ourselves, we operate with these sublimed “indefinables” and not just with any signs. Construed as “the last interpretation”, thought and meaning are seen as doing something remarkable, something unique that no mere sign can do. The inner realm of shadows – thoughts that provide interpretations of words without themselves admitting of interpretations – here replaces our ordinary practices of using signs.

Another aspect of this philosophical construal of thinking and thought as something remarkable, as the previous section argued, consists in the idea that when a thought is grasped in a flash, the future development of that thought in speaking or writing is already contained and predetermined “in some queer way” in the act of grasping:

[The] act of meaning the order had in its own way already traversed all those steps: that when you meant it your mind as it were flew ahead and took all the steps before you physically arrived at this or that one... And it seemed as if [the steps] were in some *unique* way predetermined, anticipated--as only the act of meaning can anticipate reality. (PI 188)

I argued that in order to overcome the picture of thinking or understanding as a hidden mental process, Wittgenstein urges that one should pay attention to how the word “thinking” is actually used, and to what matters to us in each particular case in which we judge something as a case of thinking or understanding. Wittgenstein turns once again to the idea of thought and thinking as achieving something unique and remarkable in PI 428, which reads as follows:

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<sup>193</sup> I discuss this notion below

"This queer thing, thought"--but it does not strike us as queer when we are thinking. Thought does not strike us as mysterious while we are thinking, but only when we say, as it were retrospectively: "How was that possible?" How was it possible for thought to deal with the very object *itself*? We feel as if by means of it we had caught reality in our net. (PI 428)

The central aim here, I want to argue, is to show that when we think and operate with signs "nothing out of the ordinary is involved" (PI 94). A tendency to think of thinking as a remarkable act of mind, and of thought as an uninterpretable inner language, is a result of the view of signs which excludes an essential practical dimension of using language from its considerations. Thus, in order to see that nothing out of the ordinary is involved when human beings use language or think about the world, the philosopher needs to pay special attention to those aspects of language that his treatment of "language as being on holiday" had neglected. We need to pay attention to human practices of operating with signs – measuring, calculating, counting, inferring, describing, ordering, copying, translating, explaining etc. – to see where and how "dead signs" acquire their life. As Wittgenstein emphasises, only "in its use, is [the sign] *alive*" (PI 432). However, "use" is not to be understood in a narrow sense as combinatorial possibilities of words in significant sentences (Hacker), but in a broader way as operating with signs on particular occasion for particular purposes.

From the sublime point of view, a thought must do something unique and remarkable that no dead sign can do – it *represents something as so* – so that in the act of grasping a thought we take all its future applications to be contained in it in some "queer" way.

"Everything is already there in...." How does it come about that this arrow *points*? Does not it seem to carry in it something besides itself?--"No, not the dead line on paper; only the psychical thing, the meaning, can do that."--That is both true and false. The arrow points only in the application that a living being makes of it. This pointing is *not* a hocus-pocus which can be performed only by the soul. (PI 454)

On the sublime conception, everything essential for representation is contained in the realm of thought in a "queer way". However, as I argued in Chapter 4, this conception of thoughts

as uninterpretable signs with determinate content is incoherent, since, as Wittgenstein shows, everything that has some content is in principle interpretable. In this way, “thought” becomes a name for a shadow. On the anthropological interpretation, everything is already there too (cf. PI 195, 228). Only, one must see this *givenness* in the right way. For, it is *not* merely in signs, nor in hidden processes of meaning and thinking (‘a hocus-pocus performed only by the soul’). The philosopher can comprehend that there is nothing “queer” about the fact that the whole use of a word is given in a flash, that the fulfilment is anticipated in a wish, that the execution is predetermined with an order and that that which makes a proposition true is already given with the proposition, *only if* she takes into account those thus far neglected dimensions of language use that account for this “givenness” in an *ordinary* way. Hence, “the only thing wrong with what [the philosopher says] is the expression “in a queer way”” (PI 195).

On the sublime view of language, when we represent something to ourselves in thought we connect names with their bearers in a remarkable act of mind. Thus, every time I think of Mr Smith the “queer” mental connection between a name and Mr Smith is forged. In thought I connect the name to its bearer in a remarkable act of mental pointing. In both of these cases, the sublime view of signs overlooks important aspects of our language use and understanding that can account for these curiosities in an ordinary way. In thinking about the connection between a name and its bearer, the philosopher abstracts away from language-games in which the meaning of a name is explained to us, and where the meaning was learned. The connection between the name and the thing named is established when we learn how to use the word as the name of a thing, we learn how to refer to something by employing the word as the name of that thing or person. As Wittgenstein writes in the *Blue Book*: “the connection between our thinking, or speaking, about a man and the man himself was made when, in order to explain the meaning of the word “Mr Smith” we pointed to him, saying “this is Mr Smith”” (BB 38). That is, when we remind ourselves of the ordinary context in which the connection was made to explain the meaning of a word, we see that “there is nothing mysterious about this connection... no queer mental act which somehow conjures up Mr. Smith in our minds when he really isn’t there” (BB 38).

Analogously, the answer to the question “[w]hence this *determining* of what is not yet there? This despotic demand?” (PI 437) does not lie in the idea of the *a priori* order that is

“in a queer way” contained in thinking, but in our ordinary practices of using signs. The harmony between thought and reality is achieved through our mastery of words and ability to employ them meaningfully in different contexts for different purposes: “We say “The order orders *this*--” and do it; but also “The order orders this: I am to....” We translate it at one time into a proposition, at another into a demonstration, and at another into action” (PI 459). There is nothing mysterious in the agreement, on the one hand, of what we say, think, wish, expect, order etc. and, on the other, facts, actions, fulfilment, or responses that are anticipated. In becoming a competent *user* of a language, we learn what to expect as a meaningful response and *ipso facto* what to mark as an inappropriate response (given the relevant circumstance and occasion).

The philosopher who adopts the sublime view of signs is invited to consider the notion that our ordinary signs may well be vague and interpretable, but we learn how to employ this flexibility (generality, indeterminacy) of our tools to our advantage to express infinite number of thoughts on multitude of occasions. The “givenness” thus resides in our *skilful* uses of signs in particular situations for determinate purposes: “the arrow points only in the application that a living being makes of it” (PI 454). The words that belong to a particular language such as English are *flexible* to be applied to different situations. And we are *skilful* in using their flexibility to serve our determinate purposes in particular situations: “we *calculate*, operate, with words, and in the course of time translate them sometimes into one picture, sometimes into another” (PI 449). We *know* (in the sense of having a practical ability) what to do with words on particular occasions; we gain the skill of recognising (judging) which aspect of their meaning would be relevant *here* and which one *there*. Accordingly, we know how to recognise and judge when things go wrong, when the use of a tool is odd and inappropriate.<sup>194</sup> The flexibility of our words to be used on a number of occasions and our skilful operations with them on particular occasions are one.<sup>195</sup> Once they are separated in philosophical reflections on language, the pernicious indeterminacy results and subliming of our concepts ensues – but only *insofar as* the meaningful use of language is to be achieved without the work of human practical sensibilities and capacities to operate with signs. We are *masters* of our words in this way: we typically know what to

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<sup>194</sup> This, of course, directly connects with the anthropological conception of nonsense

<sup>195</sup> As Travis would say “[where] family resemblance applies, that is to say that there the parochial is ineliminable” (2006, 59). The word’s flexibility is, of course, the other side of the family-resemblance coin.



*do* and what *not* to do with them on different occasions. We *act* in a similar way as the occasion-sensitive grammars of language games describe our activities. And also “[e]xplanations come to an end somewhere” (PI 1).

## 6.5 Summary

In this final chapter my central aim was to show that the standard interpretation’s picture of grammatical investigations as tabulating grammatical rules is at odds with the methods employed in *Philosophical Investigations*. In particular, I wanted to show that Hacker’s analysis of the notion of thinking and thought misrepresents Wittgenstein’s discussion, and that the anthropological view gives much more compelling interpretation of pertinent passages.

We’ve seen that according to Hacker’s analysis, Wittgenstein aims to uncover the real (depth) grammatical category of thinking, by uncovering and tabulating general rules speakers follow when they meaningfully employ this notion. It is assumed that there *are* such rules or norms that regulate our uses of the word “thinking”, and that the job of clarification and therapy is to bring them to view. Our task is to expose these rules by means of a synoptic generalisation. This, of course, illustrates Hacker’s general view on what the distinction between surface and depth grammar amounts to, as well as the conception of perspicuous representation, which were both discussed in earlier chapters. Hacker concludes his analysis of Wittgenstein’s discussion of thinking concludes by suggesting that thinking of thinking as a mental activity or process is simply nonsense; “thinking” belongs to the grammatical category of adverbials.

I offered a close reading of the relevant passages of the *Investigations* showing that what goes on in them hardly supports Hacker’s conclusions. What we find in the text are numerous analogies, comparisons, examinations of different, easier cases, simple language games, non-rhetorical questions, and so forth, which are the methods of perspicuous representation emphasised by the anthropological model, all used for the purpose of making the importance of depth grammar for understanding of language perspicuous. When it comes to the notions of thought and thinking, we should be attentive to different ways and circumstances in which we use them, rather than letting them become a label for the realm of shadows. Wittgenstein’s discussions reveal that the *Tractatus*’s sublime treatment of

signs resulted in a construal of “thinking” and “thought” that have so little to do with how we use these words. More specifically, the subliming and mythologizing turns “thinking” into something impossible and incoherent, inasmuch as there is no such thing as “uninterpretable sign” with a determinate content (see Chapter 4). To avoid such an outcome, we must pay attention to how we actually use this word and what we mean by “thinking”, instead of guessing that its use is uniform and smooth.

In the final section I proposed that thinking need not be something mysterious, incoherent, or unexplainable, if we accept that it need not be some hidden process or language running parallel to our operating with ordinary signs. We are invited to see that our operating with signs just *is* thinking; the former does not stand in need of the latter. Whatever goes inside us when we use language need not have any essential bearing to the success or failure of our communication or representation. Our psychology shouldn’t be mythologised and turned into the repository for shadows. And our practical skill to use language (for different purposes on different occasions) shouldn’t be abstracted away from, if our aim is to understand what can be done with words, including their aptness to represent the reality. As I tried to show, this human skill or sensibility is an essential ingredient of our language use, without which our investigations are forced into postulating shadows, and into subliming of the phenomena under investigation.

## 6.6 Conclusion

My main goal in this thesis was to elucidate Wittgenstein’s statement that “grammar describes the use of words in the language” (PG 60). To this end, I defended an interpretation of Wittgenstein’s conceptions of grammar and philosophy as grammatical investigation, which keeps the relevant contrast with his early work and Wittgenstein’s own criticisms of the *Tractatus* perspicuous. I also developed a sustained critique of the standard interpretation of grammar and grammatical investigation, which, I argued, tends to obliterate those contrasts, and to present Wittgenstein’s later account of grammar and philosophy as being essentially compatible with the model Wittgenstein adopted in the *Tractatus* but has rejected later. More specifically, I proposed that in interpreting Wittgenstein’s statement, one should be sensitive to a distinction between two different notions of use, which gives a reason for distinguishing between two different types of grammar: namely, the grammar that describes the use of words in the context of sentences,

and the grammar that describes the use of words in the context of particular activities on different occasions. I defended the anthropological interpretation because it keeps this distinction clear, and I criticised the standard interpretation for not observing the important difference between the two types of grammar as well as for attempting to explain the sense of our utterances by means of general combinatorial rules.

Another question that the thesis was addressing is what, for Wittgenstein, motivates investigations of grammar in the first place. I tried to show that Wittgenstein's interest in grammar is prompted by the existence of particular philosophical problems that arise because, in reflecting on her subject-matter (in the early Wittgenstein's case, language and representation), the philosopher loses sight of certain essential aspects of the concepts she reflects upon, namely their application on particular occasions. I argued that this process, whereby philosophical problems arise because an essential dimension of use has been abstracted away from, can be illuminated by clarifying the idea of subliming Wittgenstein deploys to characterise what went wrong with his early account of language and psychology in the *Tractatus*. To that extent, Wittgenstein's later conception of grammar and philosophy as aiming at the clarification of philosophical problems arising from grammar are intimately related. Wittgenstein's aim is to "de-sublimate" sublimed phenomena by bringing out how we apply concepts on particular occasions, thus also making perspicuous different facets of our concepts that become relevant in connection with different purposes of activities we are engaged in.

The interpretation of Wittgenstein's conception of grammar I defended draws on insights of a number of authors who are careful to stress just how significant the activities with which our language is integrated are for our understanding of its use. Part of subliming the logic of our language consists in rejecting or forgetting the role of our parochial sensibilities to pertinent features of a given occasion in which we say something. The anthropological interpretation thus aims to remind the philosopher that something is said only in the context of particular activities, where what is said is determined relative to different purposes of such activities. Accordingly, the term "nonsense" marks the exclusion of an utterance by the features pertinent to a given occasion, rather than the illicit combination of words, whereby combinatorial possibilities and impossibilities are determined occasion-insensitively.

The interpretation of Wittgenstein's conception of grammar and grammatical investigation defended in this thesis implicitly connects Wittgenstein's later work in this area with many contemporary debates in philosophy of language and mind. In particular, his distinction between surface and depth grammar brings to view the difference between, on the one hand, interests in combinatorial principles and issues of well-formedness, and on the other, interests in how language can be used to express many thoughts on different occasions and issues of intelligibility and content of what is said. Furthermore, his analysis of the notion of "uninterpretable thoughts" as sublimed shadows continues to raise concerns for representational theories of mind.<sup>196</sup> In contrast, the standard interpretation portrays Wittgenstein's later conception of grammar and philosophy as a more sophisticated version of the view he already had in the *Tractatus*. This treatment, however, creates tension between this interpretation and Wittgenstein's own criticisms of his early conception of grammar and philosophy he defended in the *Tractatus*. In effect, not only does the standard interpretation fail to see the pertinence of the later Wittgenstein's arguments concerning language and thought for contemporary debates, but it moreover falls short of comprehending the importance of Wittgenstein's own dissatisfaction with his early approach to language and the role of thought in representation for his mature views on these matters. By contrast, my interpretation intended to capture and articulate Wittgenstein's criticism of his early views by clarifying his deployment of the metaphor of subliming in describing the nature of philosophical treatments of our concepts in isolation from their everyday employment. I insisted that comprehending Wittgenstein's critique of the *Tractatus* is necessary for grasping some key aspects of his later philosophy.

Ludwig Wittgenstein was an idiosyncratic writer, and many of his locutions and idioms still continue to exert great puzzlement amongst the scholars of his work. His usage of the term "grammar" is no exception. Having said that, I hope the thesis represents a step towards a better understanding of Wittgenstein's later conceptions of grammar and philosophy.

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<sup>196</sup> See Fodor 2003.

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