

Call the Midwife: Maieutic Methods of Inquiry in Socrates and Wittgenstein

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Abstract:

This thesis explores a proposed continuity in the philosophical methodology of Plato's Socrates and Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. More specifically, this thesis argues that Wittgenstein is demonstrably a *maieutic* philosopher, where *maieutic* refers to a practice of philosophy as a form of what has been called by various Plato scholars 'intellectual midwifery'. Throughout this thesis, I argue that central aspects of the later Wittgenstein's method have significant points of contact with Socrates' 'hidden doctrine' of philosophical midwifery advanced in the *Theaetetus*, including (but not limited to) an active interest in an interlocutor's *implicit* knowledge, an idea of philosophy as reminding or clarifying what has been said, and a disinterest in advancing philosophical theses to one's interlocutor.

As I argue throughout this thesis, examining certain maieutic practices in the *Investigations* opens the door to clarifying aspects of Wittgenstein's method and practice. It is hoped that this thesis will provide justification for reading Wittgenstein as a maieutic philosopher, and solid foundations for doing so – and in doing so, will expose a continuation of philosophical tradition between the Socrates of the *Theaetetus* and Wittgenstein of the *Investigations*. Furthermore, it is hoped that re-examining Wittgenstein as a maieutic philosopher will bring more attention generally to the practice of maieutic philosophy, and how it might help us as philosophers working in the early 21st century.

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Abbreviations

The following are abbreviations of Wittgenstein's published works and other subsidiary materials such as correspondences, lectures and recollections. They are in alphabetical order.

BB - *Preliminary Studies for the 'Philosophical Investigations', Generally Known as the Blue and Brown Books*, ed. by R. Rhees, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958).

BT - *The Big Typescript: Ts 213* (Wiley, 2000).

CV - *Culture and Value*, ed. By G.H. von Wright, H. Nyman, and A. Pichler, trans. by P. Winch, Revised Edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

F - *Portraits of Wittgenstein*, ed. by Flowers, FA III (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1999).

LFM - *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics, Cambridge 1939*, ed. by Cora Diamond (London: Harvester, 1976).

NB - *Notebooks 1914-1916*, ed. by G.E.M. Anscombe, and G.H von Wright, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961).

OC - *On Certainty*, ed. by G.E.M. Anscombe, and G.H. von Wright, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe, and D. Paul, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

PI - *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, Revised 4th (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

PPO - *Public and Private Occasions*, ed. By James C. Klagge, and Alfred Nordmann, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

PR - *Philosophical Remarks*, ed. By R. Rhees, trans. by R. Hargreaves and R. White (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975).

TLP - *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus: German and English Edition*, trans. by C.K Ogden, (Routledge, 1981).

VW - *The Voices of Wittgenstein, The Vienna Circle, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Friedrich Waismann*, ed. by G. Baker, (London: Routledge, 2003).

Z - *Zettel*, ed. by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H Von Wright, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967).

Wittgenstein's *Nachlass*:

Wittgenstein's *Nachlass*: The Bergen Electronic Edition, ed. The Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

All references to Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* are indicated by manuscript (Ms) or typescript (Ts) followed by page number.

Introduction

0.1 Introduction

This thesis explores a proposed continuity in the philosophical methodology of Plato's Socrates and Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Proposing a continuation of methodology between philosophers that operated at different ends of history isn't *by itself* as remarkable as it sounds. Alfred Whitehead once famously said that the European philosophical tradition could generally be characterised as of a series of "footnotes to Plato", in that much of what Plato deals within his dialogues forms the basis for much of the Western philosophical tradition proceeding him.¹ Generally speaking, Plato's dialogues are (by and large) investigations into the structure of some kind of concept (such as justice, piety, or beauty) and how it relates to its particulars. Some two thousand five hundred years later, Wilfrid Sellars would go on to characterise the aim of philosophy as something very similar, as being the "understand[ing] [of] how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term".² All this to say that there has been a certain consistency in Western philosophical method since Plato, and that as such to a certain extent continuity between the two thinkers is to be expected.

What is remarkable is that this thesis proposes a continuity in the philosophical methodology of Plato's Socrates and Ludwig Wittgenstein, despite the latter's own questioning as to whether or not his philosophical methodology could reasonably be said to fit in a tradition of philosophy started by Plato. As Luigi Perissinotto comments, it seems likely that (at least at one point) Wittgenstein's view was that his philosophy does *not* belong to the tradition of philosophy that is said to originate with Plato.³ Perissinotto points to G. E. Moore's recollection of Wittgenstein explaining to Moore that what he calls 'philosophy' is not the same thing as the 'philosophy' of Plato

¹ A.N Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, ed. by D.R Griffin and D.W Sherburne (New York, 1978), p.39

² Wilfrid Sellars, 'Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man' in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of the Mind*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1963) pp.1

³ Luigi Perissinotto 'The Socratic Method!: Wittgenstein and Plato' in *Wittgenstein and Plato: Connections, Comparisons and Contrasts*, ed. by L. Perissinotto and B. Remon Camara (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013) pp. 49

and Berkely, but rather, ‘takes the place’ of it.⁴ Moreover, there are the critical remarks that Wittgenstein makes regarding Plato and Socrates in the 1930s, where Wittgenstein positions himself as being ‘antithetical’ to Socrates, and admonishes aspects of Plato/Socrates’ method, the Platonic use of dialogue, and Socrates’ ‘contemptuous attitude for the particular case’. Whilst Wittgenstein appears to soften his approach towards Socrates during the later stages of his career on these specific issues (as is argued by Oskari Kuusela in his paper *Wittgenstein’s Reception of Socrates*), it is nevertheless clear that Wittgenstein for the most part conceived of his philosophical approach as being a radical departure from the Platonic western tradition.⁵

The point of my thesis is not simply to demonstrate methodological continuity between Socrates and Wittgenstein on the basis that both are engaged in the philosophical business of how ‘things hang together’. Rather, it is to demonstrate that, despite the view attributed to Wittgenstein by Perissinotto, Wittgenstein’s (later) philosophical methodology bears a striking resemblance to the methodology of Socrates (in particular, in his role as a ‘midwife’) *even in those aspects that Wittgenstein saw as being a radical departure from the Platonic tradition*. It is the view of this thesis that Wittgenstein is demonstrably a *maieutic* philosopher, where *maieutic* refers to a practice of philosophy as a form of what has been called by various Plato scholars ‘intellectual midwifery’. More specifically, I argue that central aspects of the later Wittgenstein’s method have significant points of contact with Socrates’ ‘hidden doctrine’ of philosophical midwifery advanced in the *Theaetetus*, including (but not limited to) an active interest in an interlocutor’s *implicit* knowledge, an idea of philosophy as reminding or clarifying what has been said, and a disinterest in advancing philosophical theses to one’s interlocutor.

Will this thesis result in an exhaustive account of Wittgenstein as a *maieutic* philosopher? No. The scope of the subject matter is far too wide for a single thesis.

⁴ Perissinotto *The Socratic Method!* pp. 49.

See also G. E. Moore ‘Wittgenstein’s Lectures in 1930–1933’ in *Philosophical Papers*, 3rd edition, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), p. 305

⁵ Oskari Kuusela ‘Wittgenstein’s reception of Socrates’ In *Brill’s Companion to the Reception of Socrates*, ed. by Christopher Moore (Brill, 2019)

Examining certain maieutic practices in the *Investigations* merely opens the door to exploring the possibility and impact of maieutic practices throughout the entirety of Wittgenstein's canon. However, it is hoped that this thesis will provide justification for reading Wittgenstein as a maieutic philosopher, and solid foundations for doing so – and in doing so, it will expose a continuation of philosophical tradition between the Socrates of the *Theaetetus* and Wittgenstein of the *Investigations*. Furthermore, it is hoped that re-examining Wittgenstein as a maieutic philosopher will bring more attention generally to the practice of maieutic philosophy, and how it might help us as philosophers working in the early 21st century.

This brief introductory chapter aims to provide some important context to the thesis, the space the project occupies in the literature and what is understood by some of the terms (and philosophers) mentioned throughout. One of the difficulties of writing about both Wittgenstein and Socrates is that there are so many different (and sometimes conflicting) interpretations of both of these thinkers. The Wittgensteinian community is notoriously divided over how to actually read Wittgenstein. The tug-of-war over his texts, compounded by the various phases Wittgenstein went through throughout his career, has given rise to the situation where Wittgenstein scholars have occasionally posed the (sarcastic) question as to how many 'Wittgensteins' there actually are.⁶ Similarly, some two thousand years of scholastic attention that Socrates has attracted has resulted in there being numberless different interpretations of the *agora* wandering teacher of Plato. Consequently, one must make clear in what interpretative traditions one is writing in, and this chapter seeks to do just that.

0.2 Wittgenstein's Relationship with Socrates (and Plato)

On first appearances, the project of building something positive out of a comparison between Wittgenstein's philosophical practice and the philosophical practice of Socrates (or rather, the Socrates of the Platonic dialogues) might not seem the most fruitful area of research, or indeed, may even seem doomed to frustration and failure, given that one philosopher is famed for their search of // insistence on essentialist definitions in philosophy and the other attempts to reorient philosophical inquiry away from such definitional accounts. Indeed, in the 1930s, Wittgenstein made several

⁶ David G. Stern 'How Many Wittgensteins?' In *Wittgenstein: The Philosopher and his Works*. ed. by Alois Pichler & Simo Säätelä, (Berlin, Germany: Ontos Verlag, 2006)

antagonistic remarks distancing himself from the practice of Socrates, famously describing his position as being ‘antithetical to that of Socrates’ on the grounds that Socrates rejects enumerations of particular instances of a concept as answers to philosophical questions such as ‘what is knowledge’. Questions arise if we are to take Wittgenstein’s remarks here seriously. What then should we expect out of comparing the two, outside of finding that the two are diametrically opposed in their philosophical beliefs and methodology? Are we then to (falsely) believe that there is nothing of significant philosophical interest to be found in such a project, outside of merely noting where each differs with respect to the other?

However, and as is argued by Oskari Kuusela in his paper ‘Wittgenstein’s Reception of Socrates’, one need not take Wittgenstein too seriously when he describes his position as being ‘antithetical’ to that of Socrates.⁷ Kuusela observes that these remarks only appear in the 1930s and are conspicuously absent from Wittgenstein’s later writings. Kuusela proposes that one reason for their conspicuous absence is that, after a transformative period of refining his philosophical thought, Wittgenstein eventually comes to some common ground between his method and that of Socrates, and that even the Socratic method of finding definitions is not entirely incompatible with Wittgenstein’s own (mature) methodology. As Kuusela concludes, this leaves the way open to interpreting Wittgenstein as following on in and developing a philosophical tradition started by Socrates, rather than seeing him as being necessarily opposed to such a tradition.⁸

The conspicuous absence of these antagonistic remarks from later versions of Wittgenstein’s philosophical work is certainly not down to a lack of opportunity for bringing Socrates and/or Plato up in discussion. Indeed, Plato (and by extension, Socrates) is by far the philosopher that Wittgenstein quotes the most throughout his later works -- a fact that is more significant when one considers that Wittgenstein notoriously didn’t engage with much of the philosophical canon that preceded him, and rarely referenced other thinkers in his works. As O.K Bouwsma comments when reflecting on his conversations with Wittgenstein, ‘Wittgenstein reads Plato -- the only

⁷ Kuusela ‘Wittgenstein’s Reception of Socrates’

⁸ Kuusela ‘Wittgenstein’s Reception of Socrates’ pp. 906

philosopher he reads'.⁹ That this observation was made by Bouwsma despite Plato not featuring in Wittgenstein's (in)famous 1931 list of authors that had influenced him perhaps speaks to Wittgenstein's changing attitude toward the philosopher as his thought matured and developed.

What Wittgenstein eventually 'got' out of Plato is a matter of some debate, and I suppose that part of the aim of this thesis is to bring some clarity to this area of discussion and offer some ideas. However, I do not make so bold a claim as to suggest that Wittgenstein actively borrowed from the analogy of the midwife, but rather, the softer claim that the content of the *Theaetetus* - the analogy of the midwife, the story of the 'Digression' and the overall narrative of the dialogue - was a demonstrable influence on Wittgenstein's thought and methodology, evidenced by certain significant parallels that I explore in this thesis. Indeed, Bouwsma continues his recollection with the observation that Wittgenstein liked the 'allegories, the myths' in Plato, and whilst what exactly is meant by this is open to some debate, it can nevertheless be said that the *Theaetetus* certainly has its fair share of allegories, metaphors, stories, and myths.¹⁰ If it was the allegories, stories, myths and metaphors that Wittgenstein found insightful when reading Plato, then he wouldn't be disappointed when reading the *Theaetetus*, its allegorical Digression and its myth of the Socratic midwife.

Consequently, my attempt to read Wittgenstein through the lens of a Socratic maieutic method can be seen as an attempt to explore the possibility left open by Wittgenstein's apparent warming to Socrates of a Wittgenstein that continued in and improved on a Socratic tradition of doing philosophy. Importantly, it is not alone in attempting to characterise a relationship between Wittgenstein, Socrates, and Plato. Although small, there is an exciting (and growing) area of the literature that attempts to do just this. Arguably the most comprehensive assembly of this literature is to be found in the anthology *Wittgenstein and Plato: Connections, Comparisons and Contrasts*, the very existence of this (extensive) anthology proving that there is a great deal more to say about the intellectual relationship between Wittgenstein and

⁹ O. K. Bouwsma *Wittgenstein. Conversations 1949-1951* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986)

¹⁰ Bouwsma 'Wittgenstein Conversations' pp.61

Plato/Socrates than the word ‘antithetical’.¹¹ Other contemporary works have also attempted to tie Wittgenstein’s thought with that of Socrates/Plato in a variety of interesting ways. For example, Thomas Wallgren’s *Transformative Philosophy: Socrates, Wittgenstein, and the Democratic Spirit of Philosophy* outlines a philosophical genealogy that Wallgren argues reveals Socratic aspects of Wittgenstein’s method.¹² Joel Backström’s philosophical work explores the therapeutic relationship between Wittgenstein, Freud, and Socrates.¹³ Mark Rowe has explored how biographical similarities between Wittgenstein and the historical Socrates may have led to similarities in their philosophical development (James Conant too has considered the biographical similarities between Wittgenstein and Socrates).¹⁴ Sebastian Grève’s work highlights the importance that both thinker’s methodologies seem to place on mutual understanding.¹⁵ More recently still, Rupert Read (briefly) highlights the possibility of comparing Wittgenstein’s practice with the practice of Socratic midwifery and James Klagge compares Wittgenstein with Plato on a multitude of levels, including both thinkers’ views on the role of the will in philosophical thinking, and on the role of mythic and poetic devices in philosophical thought.¹⁶

Naturally, all of the works mentioned above will be considered in much greater depth throughout the course of this thesis. For now, however, it is worth noting that all of them have something in common: where they all in some way highlight a positive philosophical relationship between Wittgenstein, Socrates, and Plato, and some even explicitly mention the possibility of comparing them both as midwives, they all seem to agree that this relationship is woefully under-characterised and more

¹¹ *Wittgenstein and Plato: Connections, Comparisons, and Contrasts*, ed. by Luigi Perissinotto and Ramón Cámara, Begoña (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013).

¹² Thomas Wallgren *Transformative Philosophy: Socrates, Wittgenstein, and the Democratic Spirit of Philosophy* (Lexington Books, 2006).

¹³ Joel Backström, ‘Wittgenstein, Follower of Freud’, in *Ethics and the Philosophy of Culture: Wittgensteinian Approaches*, ed. by Gustafsson, Ylva, Kronqvist, Camilla, and Nykänen, Hannes (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013).

¹⁴ M.W Rowe. “Wittgenstein, Plato, and the Historical Socrates.” *Philosophy*, vol. 82, no. 319, (2007), pp. 45–85

¹⁵ Sebastian Sunday Grève, “The Importance of Understanding Each Other in Philosophy”, *Philosophy* 90 (2) (2015):213-239.

¹⁶ James C. Klagge, *Wittgenstein's Artillery: Philosophy as Poetry*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press (2021)

work needs to be done in this field. Furthermore, those that do explicitly mention the possibility of comparing Wittgensteinian and Socratic philosophical methods as methods of intellectual midwifery, they fall short in conducting this comparison and explicating the maieutic nature of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Thus, whilst the suggestion that Wittgenstein can be seen as a kind of Socratic midwife might not be a novel one, this thesis nevertheless intends to fill an important hole in the literature by going forward and actually conducting the comparative work, with the intended aim of providing a complete and explicit characterisation of the maieutic elements of Wittgenstein's philosophical methodology.

0.3 On Reading Socrates

My reading of Socrates primarily draws on the dialogue the *Theaetetus*, as it is there that one finds the clearest and most coherent account of Socrates as a philosophical midwife, and maieutic philosophy more generally. Whilst there is certainly grounds for looking beyond the *Theaetetus* towards other Platonic dialogues, in order to find interesting similarities between Wittgenstein and Plato, doing so raises a few issues. Firstly, and as I touch upon in chapter one, it is not clear that there *is* a consistent Socrates or 'Socrateses' across the dialogues (or even just some of the dialogues), much less a consistent 'Socratic' method of doing philosophy. Having written nothing of his own, what little we know of the historical Socrates, his pedagogical practices and his philosophical method, all comes to us second hand from his students, most notably Plato and Xenophon. It is consequently difficult, if not impossible, to distil out a recognisably 'Socratic' method out from the views of the authors that are trying to write him. Insofar as I am interested in comparing Socrates and Wittgenstein on the grounds of *maieutic* philosophy, it makes sense to focus the scope on the dialogue in which the maieutic method of midwifery is explicitly highlighted.

Some might argue here that there are more and less 'Socratic' dialogues or groups of dialogues, depending on when they were written. They might point to the (now fading) convention of splitting up Plato's writing in three distinct phases: an early 'Socratic' phase (that is supposedly a more faithful representation of the historical Socrates), a middle period 'transitional' phase (wherein Plato starts to

introduce some of his own philosophical ideas), and a later period 'Platonic' phase (wherein Socrates serves as a mouthpiece for Platonic philosophy). However, it is not entirely clear that such a division of Plato's writings (once more-or-less accepted by the majority of Plato scholars) is helpful, or even accurate. With no reliable way of dating and ordering Plato's writings, any attempt to impose this kind of structure on them runs the risk of arbitrariness or bias.

My second reason for narrowing the focus of the thesis onto the *Theaetetus* in particular is that I am interested in showing Wittgenstein to be an adherent of *a* Socratic (although not necessarily a historically Socratic) method of doing philosophy, not *the* Socratic method. I am not making the claim that there is a definitive and readily identifiable method belonging to *the* Socrates that Wittgenstein can be said to share in. Rather, I am identifying *a* method that *a* Socrates practices within *a* dialogue, which has significant and interesting parallels with Wittgenstein's own methodology. Consequently, I am making the claim that Wittgenstein can be understood as an adherent to *a* Socratic method; the Socratic method of intellectual midwifery. Whilst the image of the intellectual midwife certainly resonates with many other depictions of Socrates (and is perhaps why the image is so popular, and why the term 'maieutic' deriving from midwife is often used to describe Socrates' practice in general), it is in the *Theaetetus* and the *Theaetetus* only that Socrates describes himself as being an intellectual midwife, and gives an exposition of his method of intellectual midwifery.

This isn't to suggest that maieutic tendencies may not exist elsewhere in the dialogues. Rather, as the clearest presentation of the maieutic Socrates is to be found in the *Theaetetus*, and for the sake of narrowing the scope of this thesis to something more manageable, it is to the *Theaetetus* I will primarily be looking to in establishing a picture of the Socratic maieutic practice of philosophy, for the purposes of comparison with Wittgenstein's philosophy.

In a sense then, I am constructing a version of Socrates that is specific to the *Theaetetus*, but one that can nevertheless be found in the text. To reiterate (and to emphasise): I am not artificially creating a Socrates and then forcing that Socrates into a text that doesn't accommodate him, for my own purposes. Rather, I am interpreting a Socrates out of the text that, whilst not entirely consistent with other Socrateses

from the other dialogues, is nevertheless consistent with Socrates as he is depicted in the *Theaetetus*.

This is not to say, however, that this thesis would not be useful for scholars of Plato and/or Socrates. Outside of clarifying aspects of Socrates' analogy of the midwife (itself a contentious area of discussion within the literature with potentially valuable insights at stake), this thesis incidentally clarifies other aspects of Socratic/Platonic philosophy, and Plato's writing of Socrates. Examining the role of the philosophical midwife in the *Theaetetus* involves solving other puzzles in the text, such as the role of the 'Digression', and solving these puzzles may indeed contribute something to our overall understanding of Socrates and Plato writing as Socrates. However, it must be said that the primary aim and focus of this thesis is to use an understanding of the analogy of the midwife and Socrates' practice of intellectual midwifery to make sense of ideas in Wittgenstein's philosophy, over and above making any historical or definitive claims about Socrates' historical practice, the practice of Socrates in the dialogue, or even Plato's motivations for writing Socrates in this particular way. Consequently, this thesis can and should be understood as being more of an intervention in the Wittgenstein tradition of scholastic study than the Socratic/Platonic tradition.

0.4 On Reading Wittgenstein

Just as the previous section sought to place where this thesis and my particular reading of Socrates belongs in the Socratic/Platonic literature, the role of this section is to show whereabouts in the wide landscape of Wittgenstein study my reading of Wittgenstein is situated. As previously stated, who/what one means by 'Wittgenstein'/'Wittgensteinian philosophy' is a bitterly contentious issue. There exist many different 'versions' of Wittgenstein, and the academic infighting over whose Wittgenstein is the 'correct' Wittgenstein is somewhat notorious. I wish to sidestep this as much as possible, to allow enough time and space to offer something original, and to avoid writing yet another diatribe that merely re-hashes the merits and flaws of choosing one pre-established convention of reading Wittgenstein over another.

To this end, I simply flag here that my understanding of Wittgenstein is indebted to the work of Oskari Kuusela. In particular, one thing that I find especially fruitful is Kuusela's proposal that one of the later Wittgenstein's chief methodological innovations was the idea that philosophical models can serve as objects of comparison, not as assertions of what reality must be like, and that the later Wittgenstein characterised the struggle with philosophical problems as 'a struggle against dogmatism'. Furthermore, I follow Kuusela in holding that one of the hallmarks of Wittgenstein's later philosophical period is his rejection of theses in philosophy. I shall introduce and examine each of these claims at appropriate points: they will feature prominently across this thesis. Whilst I will offer some analysis of pertinent parts of Kuusela's exegesis of Wittgenstein, as and when they become relevant to the discussion (in part to avoid presupposing specialist knowledge), I will not seek to defend it anew and will instead refer the reader to Kuusela's own defence of his position.¹⁷

Taking my cue from Kuusela's reading of Wittgenstein, the reading of Wittgenstein that I develop within this thesis can consequently be said to be 'positive', in that I take Wittgenstein to understand that philosophy and philosophical work can offer productive insights in human understanding. This is to be contrasted against 'negative' readings of Wittgenstein which range from so-called 'therapeutic' readings (à la the later Gordon Baker, the earlier Rupert Read, amongst others), 'anti-philosophical' readings of Wittgenstein (Alain Badiou), and, more recently, the 'liberatory' reading of Wittgenstein being developed by (the later) Rupert Read.¹⁸ What these kinds of reading can (very broadly) be put as follows: that, for various (and differing) reasons, the later Wittgenstein's philosophical methodology should be understood as stopping at the rejection of theses. That is to say, that its prime purpose is to disabuse someone from the philosophical theses they are labouring under, without having anything to offer in their place.

¹⁷ Oskari Kuusela, *The Struggle Against Dogmatism: Wittgenstein and the Concept of Philosophy* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

¹⁸ Gordon Baker, *Wittgenstein's Methods: Neglected Aspects: Essays on Wittgenstein*, ed. by Morris, Katherine (Blackwell, 2004).

Alain Badiou, *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy* (Verso, 2011).

Rupert J. Read, *Wittgenstein's Liberatory Philosophy: Thinking Through His Philosophical Investigations* (Routledge, 2020).

As I said, the reasons for this may differ from reading to reading: more therapeutic readings see this (and consequently, the real purpose of philosophy) as a sort of Freudian or corrective treatment of a tendency that gets us into confusion, where the liberatory reading sees the value and practice of Wittgenstein's philosophy as an emancipation from dogmatic tendencies that stifle the way we think. Whatever the reason, the bottom line is the same: that the aim of Wittgenstein's philosophy is just the dispelling of philosophical problems, and it does not seek to offer us any fresh insights or a new way of looking at things.

By contrast, the reading of Wittgenstein I offer in this thesis does not take the aim of Wittgenstein's philosophical practice to be exhaustively the purely negative task of dismantling philosophical dogmas. Rather, I take this to be merely one (necessary) aspect of doing philosophy, one that is required as preparation for then actually being able to approach and solve philosophical problems, and consequently, being able to come to some kind of fresh insight or positive knowledge as a result of the solution of the philosophical problem at hand. Consequently, one of the chief indicators of the success of this thesis will be whether or not this thesis has coherently laid out a framework for how Wittgenstein's method accomplishes this task.

0.5 The Structure of This Thesis

Now that I have clearly stipulated the traditions within which I am reading both Socrates and Wittgenstein, it is now time to set out what the rest of this thesis will look like. To this end, I will now offer a summary of each of the chapters, what I hope to accomplish with those chapters, and how they will feed into the overall project of the thesis. The basic structure of this thesis is as follows: the first two chapters explore the respective philosophical accounts of the Socratic Midwife and Wittgenstein, the middle two chapters then explore the similarities and differences between the two, identifying the shared maieutic practices between them. The final two chapters of this thesis are case studies, wherein we will explore how reading Wittgenstein as a maieutic midwife changes our understanding of his later philosophy. Chapter five offers a focussed case study, exploring how a maieutic understanding of Wittgenstein's work bears upon the contentious issue of 'perspicuous representation/surveyable

representation'. Chapter six offers a much more general case study, taking a continuous section of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (the opening section), and reading it as an example of maieutic philosophy.

Chapter One:

In the first chapter, I establish an account of Socratic Midwifery, derived from a close reading of the account of intellectual midwifery that Socrates gives in the *Theaetetus*. I begin in 1.2, by locating the *Theaetetus* stylistically and chronologically amongst Plato's other dialogues, in order to explore the relationship between the analogy of the midwife and the perception of Socrates more generally across the dialogues. In 1.3, I critically examine what I take to be the core features of Socrates' account of intellectual midwifery, and translate them into general methodological principles for maieutic inquiry. In particular, I examine Socrates' professed 'barrenness', his proficiency as a match-maker, his proficiency at diagnosing, bringing on and alleviating the pains of 'intellectual labour', his ability at determining the viability of the intellectual 'child' and his expertise in terminating the 'child' when it is demonstrated to be unviable and set out how one might strip back the metaphorical language and establish sensible methodological principles out of them, before concluding in 1.4.

Chapter Two:

In chapter two, I offer a general account of Wittgenstein's later philosophical methodology, through the lens of exploring his conception of philosophical problems. In order to do so, however, I first explore how it is that Wittgenstein's later conception of philosophical problems is both an evolution of and response to his earlier conception of philosophical problems. In 2.2, I explore the Tractarian conception of philosophical problems, and how this shapes the philosophical methodology of the *Tractatus*. In particular, I examine the Tractarian notion of 'fundamental problems' in philosophy, and how this informs Wittgenstein's vision of a 'fundamental method in philosophy'. In 2.3, I examine how and where Wittgenstein eventually came to see the problems in the vision of philosophy and philosophical problems laid out in the

Tractatus, and most notably, Wittgenstein's misgivings over the 'sublimation of logic' he observes taking place in the earlier phase of his career. I then proceed to examine what I argue Wittgenstein takes to be the 'effects' of philosophical problems, and how they shape what Wittgenstein then takes to be the aim of philosophical inquiry, before concluding in 2.5.

Chapter Three:

In chapter three, I explore how both the Socratic Midwife and Wittgenstein can be understood as identifying a 'cognitive' task posed by philosophical problems, how they both then envision dealing with such a task, and how this relates to a maieutic method of practice. In 3.2, I explore how both methodologies conceive of the structure and content of philosophical problems and chart the similarities between the two. In particular, I explicate what is meant by this 'cognitive' or 'conceptual' task and examine the notion that both methodologies conceive of philosophical problems as related to 'ordinarily familiar concepts', a term I describe in more detail in 3.2. In 3.3 and 3.4, I examine how both the Socratic Midwife and Wittgenstein respectively seek to address this aspect, whilst observing similarities between the two and concluding in 3.5 with some observations about how this relates to a shared maieutic nature.

Chapter Four

In chapter four, I explore how both methodologies both conceive of and address an 'ethical' task posed by philosophical problems. In 4.2, I explicate what is meant by an 'ethical task'. I then proceed to explore the Socratic midwife's response to the ethical aspect in 4.3, and argue that the Socratic Midwife finds particular traits of character conducive to doing philosophy, in the sense that they allow one more easily to overcome the ethical task. In 4.4 I explore the 'ethical demand' of Wittgenstein's philosophical writings, before advancing the view that Wittgenstein too finds particular character traits (or 'philosophical virtues') conducive for doing philosophy and overcoming the ethical task. I offer some conclusory remarks in 4.5.

Chapter Five

In chapter five, I offer a detailed analysis of how reading Wittgenstein as a maieutic philosopher impacts our understanding of the contentious issue of *übersichtliche Darstellung* in the *Philosophical Investigations*. I begin in 5.2 by exploring various existing interpretations of *übersichtliche Darstellung*, by comparing Peter Hacker's notion of 'surveyable representation' against the notion of 'perspicuous representation' initially put forward by Gordon Baker. I examine Baker's position and the various developments of it that have taken place within the so-called 'therapeutic tradition' of reading the *Philosophical Investigations*, and also examine the various critiques of Hacker's 'surveyable representations' from Baker's/the therapeutic perspective. In 5.3, I then offer my own critical analysis of the therapeutic understanding of 'perspicuous representations', before advancing my own maieutic interpretation of *übersichtliche Darstellung* in 5.4, complete with examples. I then offer some final observations in the conclusion, 5.5.

Chapter Six

In the final chapter of this thesis, I offer a much more general case study by examining a continuous stretch of remarks within the *Investigations* through the lens of maieutic midwifery established throughout the rest of this thesis. In particular, I explore the opening sections of the *Investigations*, within which Wittgenstein critically examines an 'Augustinian' picture of language. Here, I argue that we can see the principles of maieutic midwifery 'live' and in action and explore how they change our understanding of the text and its meaning.

In 6.2 and following on from conversations throughout this thesis on the importance of knowing one's interlocutor, I explore who exactly Wittgenstein takes his interlocutor to be in the opening sections of the *Investigations*. Within this section, I explore the various contentions around Wittgenstein's portrayal of Augustine and whether or not the portrayal is faithful (it isn't) and why that might be. In 6.3, I identify what I take to be the construction of 'auxiliary devices' (a maieutic device defined in chapter 1 and expanded on in chapter 5) within the opening sections of the *Investigations* and offer an analysis of their import and function in Wittgenstein's exchange with his interlocutor. In 6.4, I then explore how Wittgenstein proceeds to

de-construct the Augustinian picture of language in a maieutic fashion, before offering some concluding remarks in 6.5.

Before getting underway, I must address one final concern, namely, that my project might be seen as an attempt to rehabilitate Wittgenstein into a Socratic philosophical orthodoxy and thus strip of him of his 'radical' status. By proposing a methodological continuity between Socrates and Wittgenstein, am I not in effect discrediting Wittgenstein's attempts to revolutionise philosophy? I do not think this is the case. Rather, and as I hope will become apparent throughout this thesis, I hope to demonstrate that even though Wittgenstein follows Socrates in this maieutic tradition, his *improvement* of the method is itself radical and revolutionary. That is to say, although he may start from a position of Socratic maieutic philosophy, Wittgenstein's method goes further than the Socratic Midwife's, and consequently ends up breaking new ground. Whilst he may not turn out to have been quite as outside the tradition of philosophy as he may have liked, he nevertheless certainly can be said to have reshaped it.

Chapter One: The Analogy of the Midwife in the *Theaetetus*

1.1 Introduction:

Across the dialogues, the character of Socrates uses analogies to characterise or elucidate the characteristics and function of his dialectical method. In the *Meno* 80c 6-10, Socrates describes himself as being like the torpedo fish (or stingray) that numbs those that come into contact with it, with regards to the perplexity that Socrates' method of inquiry has induced in Meno. In the *Apology* 30e 3-5, he compares himself with the gadfly that has stirred the 'great and noble' horse of Athens, with respect to his irritating yet instrumental practice of cross-examining the city's experts and reducing them to *aporia*. Yet the most sustained analogy with Socrates' method is to be found in the *Theaetetus*, where Plato depicts Socrates's dialectical art as being a kind of midwifery. Unlike the above-mentioned analogies, Socrates extends this analogy beyond an off-hand observation (as is the case with the torpedo fish) or extended passage (the gadfly) into a full-blown educational exposition of his methodological practice. If this analogy is worthy of sustained discussion for Socrates (and Plato writing about Socrates), then it is worthy of our careful attention in examining and establishing the outline of a maieutic 'Socratic' method of inquiry, for comparison with the later Wittgenstein's philosophical method (or methods).

The aim of this chapter is to explore the features of a Socratic maieutic method of inquiry, informed by the use of the midwife analogy in the *Theaetetus*. I will begin by making some general observations on the style of the dialogue, highlighting the unusual stylistic similarities it shares with the so-called *aporetic* dialogues, but also noting some key differences in how it presents a particularly unique depiction of Socrates and his methodological craft.¹⁹ From there, I will offer a detailed outline of the midwife analogy as it occurs in the *Theaetetus* in order to construct a sensible methodological structure from it, complete with a list of characteristics, requirements, goals, and measures of success and failure. The characteristics of Socratic maieutical inquiry unearthed in this chapter will be the focus of further attention in later

¹⁹ Although unique, a depiction that is still informed loosely by an overarching 'Socratic' strategy, as we shall come to see.

chapters, in examining their methodological significance and impact on philosophical inquiry, as well as being potential points of overlap between a Socratic method and the method(s) of the later Wittgenstein.

1.2 The Midwife Analogy:

Introducing the Theaetetus

The *Theaetetus* is a dialogue in which the central question of the philosophical inquiry is 'what is knowledge'. The inquiry itself involves Socrates, Theodorus (a teacher and an acquaintance of Socrates), and the eponymous youth Theaetetus. Theaetetus is presented to Socrates by Theodorus as a brilliant student, not just for his intellect but for his humility and character, and so Socrates sets about engaging the young student in philosophical inquiry. Socrates poses the question 'what is knowledge' to Theaetetus, who after an initial failed attempt at answering the question (in which he offers a list of examples of knowledge) offers three different definitions of knowledge, which are each in turn subjected to Socrates' philosophical testing and deemed unviable for one reason or another. By the end of the dialogue, no definitive answer to the question 'what is knowledge' is arrived at, and so the inquiry is brought to a conclusion.

The dialogue itself can be labelled as an *aporetic* dialogue, as the central question as to what knowledge actually is isn't (seemingly) successfully answered, and in this sense the inquiry (again, seemingly) ends in failure. Similarly, the Socrates of the *Theaetetus* bears some characteristics that are often presented in other such *aporetic* dialogues. In particular (and ignoring for now any questions of sincerity) he makes frequent disavowals of knowledge, through his claim of *barrenness* (a notion explored in 1.3) and he presents himself as a purely negative cross-examiner to Theaetetus' proposed accounts, testing and rejecting each of them in turn.

What is particularly interesting about the depiction of Socrates in the *Theaetetus* is that he is unusually candid with Theaetetus about what he is up to. Although it is not unusual for Socrates to engage in philosophical inquiry with a young and inexperienced interlocutor, we nevertheless do not get as much exposition from

Plato regarding the method (or rather *Socrates'* method) of philosophical inquiry as we do in the *Theaetetus*. Indeed, that 'maieutic philosophy' as a term is often associated with Socrates is largely down to Plato's exposition of Socrates' supposed method of midwifery in the *Theaetetus*. The origin of the term maieutic comes from the Greek *Maieutikos*, pertaining to midwifery, and it is in the *Theaetetus* explicitly that Socrates identifies his practice as taking after the practice of midwifery, in the sense that he is helping his interlocutor to bring forth something that is latent within them, in much the same way that a midwife aids their patient to bring forth a child. Consequently, any investigation into Socratic maieutic philosophy should take the *Theaetetus* as its primary source, as I do in this thesis.

However, as I shall show in greater detail later on in the chapter, whilst the method that Socrates employs in the *Theaetetus* does in some respects resemble other stylistically *aporetic* dialogues, there are some subtle key differences. The elenchus at work in other *aporetic* dialogues often seems more destructive than that of the *Theaetetus*, in that it seeks to undermine the interlocutor's proposed account of a given concept or philosophical issue from the word go. By contrast in the *Theaetetus* (as I shall show in 1.3), whilst the dialectical method begins and ends in a very similar fashion—with a proposition being offered by Socrates's interlocutor and that proposition being subjected to an *elenchus* style cross-examination—there is a distinctive constructive phase at each stage, where Socrates first attempts to develop his interlocutor's proposition into a coherent philosophical account. This (as Catherine Rowett identifies it) two-stage process seems to be unique to the *Theaetetus*, in portraying a version of the Socratic method that is both productive as well as destructive.²⁰ We will explore the mechanics of this two phase process in greater detail in 1.3, but for now it is enough to highlight it as something that makes the *Theaetetus* different to other dialogues and consequently unique. Given that the *Theaetetus* is also the only dialogue in which Socrates explicitly highlights his method as being that of 'intellectual midwifery', the uniqueness of this method is clearly

²⁰ Catherine Rowett, *Knowledge and Truth in Plato: Stepping Past the Shadow of Socrates* (Oxford University Press, 2018) p. 171

something that is methodologically significant to the practice of maieutic inquiry, and so is worth investigating.

The Analogy of the Midwife

After an initial failed first attempt from Theaetetus at defining knowledge, the youth complains to Socrates that he is troubled by the fact that neither he (nor anyone else for that matter) seems to have an adequate account of the kind that Socrates is seeking (148e). Furthermore, he complains that he cannot stop worrying about the questions that Socrates is (in)famous for asking (148e).²¹ It is at this point that Socrates diagnoses Theaetetus's worry and perplexity as 'the pains of labour' (148e7) and thus begins to introduce the analogy between midwifery and childbirth, on the one hand, and philosophical/conceptual inquiry and the delivery of successful answers, on the other hand. Here, Socrates tells Theaetetus that he secretly shares his mother's art of midwifery and begins the task of pointing out the similarities and differences between his own dialectical art of 'intellectual' midwifery and the conventional art of the midwife (149a-151d). These similarities and differences, as well as Socrates' actual application of them within the dialogue, will come to shape our understanding of the key characteristics and features of Socratic maieutic inquiry.

In the exchange that follows, Socrates quickly lists four salient features of the practice of conventional midwifery that match features of his own practice shares in, which later provide the basis of the first four features of Socratic maieutic inquiry that we will examine: firstly, that conventional midwives are past the point of bearing children and are assigned the role of assisting in delivering children in virtue of their experience (148b4-148c5); secondly, that midwives are the best suited to detecting

²¹ Theaetetus responds to the question 'what is knowledge?' by listing particulars or instances of kinds of knowledge rather than offering a unitary definition of the concept

One might think, as Myles Burnyeat does, that when Socrates rejects token types here he is repeating the same move as in the *Meno*, where he rejects Meno's 'swarm of virtues' (72a6), requesting instead a single common factor. However, as Rowett notes, here Socrates does not insist on a *single common factor* but instead asks Theaetetus for an analysis of knowledge: that is, a decomposition of it into its component parts. See M. F. Burnyeat, 'Examples in Epistemology: Socrates, Theaetetus and G. E. Moore', *Philosophy*, 52.202 (1977), 381-98 (pp. 381) and Rowett 'Knowledge and Truth' pp.187-189

which women are pregnant and which women aren't (148c 7-9); thirdly, that midwives have the tools and expertise to manipulate labour, inducing and alleviating the pains of labour, bringing on the actual birthing process during a difficult labour, and in causing a miscarriage when the embryo is young (148c11-148d4); finally, and perhaps most surprisingly to Theaetetus, due to its apparent secret nature, that midwives are the best suited to 'matchmaking', that is, at pairing women and men off in order to produce the best kind of offspring (148d 6-10).

However, Socrates also goes on to describe the ways in which his practice of intellectual midwifery differs from that of actual midwifery. Where conventional midwifery is concerned with attending the bodies of women in a state of physical childbirth, Socrates is concerned with the minds of men who are in a state of intellectual 'childbirth' (150b7-b10). Furthermore, and more relevant to our project, Socrates claims that his art differs from conventional midwifery in its ability to test and discern between those intellectual births that have gone awry in some way (being mere imitations and falsehoods, presumably, in this particular enquiry, failed attempts at characterizing conceptual knowledge) and those that are genuine and true (150b10-c3). Unlike conventional midwifery, which Socrates claims has little or no ability to discern between births that are 'genuine' (presumably 'healthy') and those that are imitations (presumably afflicted or malformed in some way), Socrates' intellectual midwifery boasts the ability to be able perform this function on the intellectual offspring of those he is tending to. Indeed, in his own words, it is the greatest thing in his art.

From this brief description we can draw a list of potential characteristics for further investigation, in building a picture of Socrates' method (as represented in the *Theaetetus*):

1. The intellectual midwife is past the point of conceiving intellectual offspring.
2. The intellectual midwife has the expertise to recognize when someone is 'pregnant' with intellectual offspring.
3. The intellectual midwife can induce intellectual labour, can alleviate symptoms of the pain, and can terminate the offspring if required.

4. The intellectual midwife has an ability to matchmake in order to increase the chances of successful intellectual offspring (what Socrates means by this will be explored in further detail below).
5. The intellectual midwife can discern between genuine, successful intellectual offspring and faulty or incoherent intellectual offspring, by testing the offspring for its viability.

The Intellectual Midwife is Past the Point of Conceiving Intellectual Offspring

Socrates' first point of comparison is the observation that conventional midwives are themselves past the point of bearing children (149b 4-8). The reason, he explains to Theaetetus, is down to the childless goddess Artemis' patronage of childbirth and subsequent assignment of the duty to those like herself. However, Socrates makes the interesting yet controversial point that this isn't a duty that is bestowed on inherently barren women, only those that are 'barren' due to being past the age of bearing children (i.e. those who once bore children and now don't, as opposed to those who never could bear children):

She didn't grant the gift of midwifery to barren women, because human nature is too weak to acquire the skill in matters of which it has no experience. But she did assign it to those who are unable to bear children because of their age, in honour of their likeness to herself (148b 10-148c 5)²²

Socrates' point here is that it is not simply by virtue of being barren that one is endowed with the gift of conventional midwifery, but that it is in light of a lifetime of experience in giving birth oneself that one comes to be practised in the art of assisting others in their own births, once one is unable to bring forth any more children of one's own. Anyone familiar with the frequent disavowals of knowledge that Socrates makes in the *aporetic* dialogues will see similar kinds of claims being made by Socrates in the *Theaetetus* when he compares himself with conventional midwives:

I'm unproductive of wisdom (150c 4-5)

²² Plato, *Theaetetus* trans. by John McDowell (Oxford University Press, 2014)

I question others but don't make any pronouncements about anything myself, because I have no wisdom in me (150c 6-8)

God compels me to be a midwife but has prevented me from giving birth. I'm not at all wise myself, and there hasn't been any discovery of that kind born to me as the offspring of my mind (150c 9- 150d 3)

I describe this as no more than a *similar* kind of claim, because I believe there is a subtle – but important – difference between Socrates' disavowals of knowledge in other dialogues and this new claim of being barren of wisdom. Socrates' disavowals of knowledge rarely (if ever) stray out of the present tense. They typically describe his current epistemic status, and imply nothing about any past or future states of knowing or being *sophos* on something:

I certainly do not possess it [*sophia*], and whoever says I do is lying and speaks to slander me. (*Apology* 20e 2-3)

I am very conscious that I am not wise at all (*Apology* 21b)

This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that his wisdom is worthless (*Apology* 23b)²³

The key difference between these disavowal claims in the *Apology* and the claims to barrenness in the *Theaetetus* is that the claims made in the *Apology* do not explicitly preclude the potential for future knowledge or wisdom for Socrates, whereas the claims of the *Theaetetus* seem to specifically deny that Socrates could ever produce wisdom or knowledge from within him, even in the future.

This creates an interesting interpretative dilemma and potential inconsistency within the dialogue, which R.G Wengert has identified as being the 'paradox of the midwife'.²⁴ Wengert describes the paradox as follows. If, as Socrates says, humans are unable to acquire skill in matters of which they have no experience (see above quoted

²³ *Apology* quotations from Plato, *Meno and Other Dialogues: Charmides, Laches, Lysis, Meno* trans. By Robin Waterfield (Oxford University Press, 2005)

²⁴ R.G Wengert, 'The Paradox of the Midwife', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 5.1 (1988), 3-10.

section, 148b 10-148c 5), then one cannot be a midwife unless one has had experience in the matter. If Socrates has never had experience in giving birth to wisdom, then for Wengert it follows that Socrates himself cannot be an intellectual midwife. Wengert makes it seem as if Socrates must be either dishonest or insincere when he claims that he is unproductive of wisdom, or else he must be dishonest or insincere when he professes to be accomplished in the art of intellectual midwifery. But both conclusions, were Wengert right about this, would have repercussions for our project of building a framework for a maieutic method of inquiry from Socrates. It would then follow that barrenness (whatever that may turn out to translate to as a methodological requirement for maieutic inquiry) would not be a strict requirement, or else it seems that Socrates cannot emerge as a reliable or experienced practitioner of maieutic inquiry from which we could build such a framework. But in reality I think that Wengert is mistaken in his account of what Socrates is saying here.

To see why this is mistaken, consider that Socrates' claim that he has never produced wisdom from within him need not imply that he has no personal experience of the process of intellectual labour, since it might be that he has had many a parturition but none of his intellectual offspring was ever successful. There is a third alternative that resolves Wengert's paradox: namely that Socrates was once 'fertile' in the sense that he was actively giving birth to his own intellectual offspring, but since none of those offspring matured into viable philosophical accounts he remains devoid of actual wisdom. Perhaps Socrates became experienced in the art of intellectual midwifery and acquired his ability to detect non-viable ideas as a result of a lifetime of giving birth to non-viable intellectual offspring. On this reading, Socrates' intimate knowledge of how and when to test an account for its viability comes from his personal experience of the process of intellectual labour and its failures. One task still remains, however: to discern how Socrates' professed 'barrenness' serves as a principle of maieutic philosophical inquiry. Transforming metaphor to methodology, why might it be important that the leader of the inquiry not be in the business of offering positive suggestions?

The answer, I believe, is to be found later on in the same passage (150a-e). After proclaiming his infertility regarding wisdom, Socrates claims that the same is not true of those who associate with him. Even if they at first seem incapable of learning,

Socrates claims that those in association with him make (God willing) ‘progress to an extraordinary extent’. The reason for this, as Socrates explains, is as follows:

It's clear that they do so, *not because they have ever learnt anything from me*, but because *they have themselves discovered many admirable things in themselves*, and given birth to them. (150d 8-11, emphasis added)

It seems important for Socrates that those who associate with him do not accept any positive thesis from him at the conclusion of the dialogue, but rather that the real benefit of engaging with Socrates in maieutic inquiry comes from discovering ‘many admirable things’ within one’s self. That is, maieutic inquiry with Socrates seems primarily aimed at drawing out knowledge that is implicit within oneself, as opposed to learning something *from* Socrates (or the inquiry leader) or arriving at conclusions pre-emptively fixed *by* Socrates.²⁵

This notion, that philosophical inquiry is pointed towards internal, implicit knowledge in the *Theaetetus*, has sometimes been thought to be an allusion to the theory of recollection that is explained in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, and illustrated in the *Meno* in the passage where Socrates invites an untutored slave boy to answer a series of geometric puzzles by drawing on his own latent knowledge (82b-85d).²⁶ For example, F.M Cornford, follows the Anonymous Commentator, in suggesting that this aspect of the midwifery motif points to the theory of *Anamnesis*.²⁷ Cornford therefore sees this aspect of the midwife analogy as evidence that the analogy is a contrivance that is meant to point the reader in the direction of Platonism. However, it is not clear that these parallels between the *Meno* and the *Theaetetus* hold. As Timothy Chappell observes, if we accept the traditional dating of the dialogues, then to accept that the Theory of Recollection is implicit in the *Theaetetus* we would also have to explain why Plato decided to re-introduce it in such a covert fashion after little to no mention in the works between *Phaedo* and *Theaetetus*. Chappell concedes that it could be the case

²⁵ This may seem like a surprising claim by Socrates, especially given that one of the more enduring characteristics of Socrates’ inquiries with his interlocutors is that they fail to ever arrive at anything. There seem to be no explicit cases in the dialogues of Socrates successfully overseeing the birth of a valid ‘brain-child’ from his interlocutors. We will explore this further on in this section.

²⁶ The Theory of Recollection, or *Anamnesis*, is the theory that learning is the process of recovering knowledge that is latent in the immortal soul

²⁷ F.M Cornford *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, (London, Routledge,1966) pp. 27-28

that recollection is referred to – albeit covertly – in the works between *Phaedo* and *Theaetetus*, but (as he concludes) this is just as hard to explain as the notion that Plato decided to return to Recollection after barely mentioning it since *Phaedo*. Furthermore, and as Chappell concludes, we might also look to a principle of exegetical economy in that the midwife passage doesn't need the Theory of Recollection to make sense of its intended aims and purposes, to discount the idea that the midwifery passage is an allusion to the Theory of Recollection.²⁸

However, there remains one final issue with interpreting Socrates' claims of intellectual barrenness, which is the issue of how well this claim matches his contributions to the inquiry. On reading the dialogue, Socrates' professed barrenness may seem surprising to us. Although Socrates professes to be deficient in wisdom and incapable of producing ideas of his own, he nevertheless is able to produce a wide array of devices, ideas, and analogies throughout the course of his inquiry with *Theaetetus*. The question then arises as to whether or not Socrates' intellectual barrenness ought to prevent him from doing so, and if so, whether or not Socrates is then being sincere in proclaiming intellectual barrenness. If we are to understand Socrates as being 'unproductive of wisdom', then how is it that he is able to produce the many imaginative and inventive devices that he introduces to the inquiry?

To respond to this issue, it is worth thinking about the purpose of the devices that Socrates introduce to the inquiry. Recall that Socrates states that the 'extraordinary progress' that his previous 'patients' have made is evidenced by the many fine and admirable things they have discovered within themselves. The suggestion, as we have seen, is that Socrates' focus in maieutic inquiry is getting his interlocutor to articulate their own account surrounding whatever the concept under investigation is, rather than simply supplying them with an account and 'answering' the question for them. His role is not to proactively educate his interlocutor into any

²⁸ Timothy Chappell, *Reading Plato's Theaetetus* (Hackett Pub. Co., 2004). pp.46 – Chappell also refers to the points raised by McDowell to back this conclusion, in that Socrates' offspring are just as likely to be incorrect as correct and that the Theory of Recollection has no analogue to the barrenness of Socrates in the *Theaetetus*. However, McDowell's analysis presents a false dichotomy. *Theaetetus*' intellectual offspring need not be characterised as just being 'correct' or 'incorrect'. They could equally be understood as being better or worse attempts at grasping what knowledge is, in that they differ in their ability to explain what knowledge is *like*. See John McDowell, *Plato's Theaetetus* (Oxford: The Clarendon Plato Series, 1973) pp.116-117

particular account or world- view, rather, it is to prompt them towards the discovery of something within themselves.

With this in mind, it is possible that the purpose of Socrates' devices isn't to supplant the interlocutor's own thoughts and ideas with Socrates' own. Rather, if Socrates is sincere in his desire to bring forth his interlocutor's *own* knowledge, then it makes more sense to see these devices as *prompts* – that is, devices that are designed to stimulate the young Theaetetus into thinking more deeply about the accounts he is putting forward, steering him towards re-examining his accounts from different (and perhaps previously unexplored) angles and towards giving a fuller and more in depth articulation of them. On this reading, any wisdom 'produced' by the inquiry isn't Socrates', in the sense that he has provided answers or forced a particular view on Theaetetus. Rather, the conclusions that Theaetetus comes to, and any 'wisdom' he may arrive at, is his own.

With this, I am suggesting a softer interpretation of Socrates' claims of intellectual barrenness, where the claim being made amounts to the claim that Socrates cannot (or rather, will not) produce anything in the inquiry with the purpose of providing a definitive answer to the philosophical question at hand. He is 'unproductive' in the sense that he is unable (or unwilling) to produce an account that is aimed at educating Theaetetus (or any other maieutic patient) into a positive doctrine surrounding whatever the concept under investigation is (for doing so would supplant Theaetetus' account, and bar the way for Theaetetus to discover 'admirable things' within himself). This reading does not disallow Socrates from creating inventive and imaginative devices for use in the inquiry – so long as those cases are only used to prompt Theaetetus to go further in examining his accounts from new and different perspectives.

With the above reading in mind, we can then interpret the requirement of 'barrenness' in the following way. If the goal of maieutic inquiry is to assist our dialectical partner in discovering some implicit knowledge within themselves (i.e conceptual knowledge that is somehow implicit in ourselves) and to come to their own conclusions regarding the object of inquiry, then it stands to reason the maieutic philosopher should not put forward any positive accounts with the view of either supplanting their interlocutor's own accounts, or or attempting to provide a definitive

answer to the problem at hand. In the case of Socrates, being unproductive of wisdom is beneficial in his role as intellectual midwife as it means (if sincere) that Theaetetus is free to explore his own accounts, without simply having an account forced on him²⁹ It assists in bringing about that, whatever the result of the maieutic process is, it is the product of his associate (in this case, Theaetetus), and is, at least in theory, not simply the parroted thoughts and beliefs of his midwife.

Of course, the requirement 'intellectually infertile' seems a pretty strict, perhaps even impossible or incoherent, methodological requirement in actual academic philosophical practice outside of the metaphorical/literary world of the *Theaetetus*. It would be difficult to imagine what such a hard-line requirement might look like in practice, or how it would be measured. Furthermore, Socrates himself clearly has many interesting explanations and invents a number of devices throughout the dialogue, in order to help guide the discussion. But if the point is to ensure that there are no philosophical predispositions forced onto the inquiry then perhaps this can be interpreted in a softer way than maintaining that our inquiry leaders be past the point of producing 'intellectual offspring', or being 'intellectually infertile'. In terms of forming a coherent methodological and pedagogical principle for the purpose of guiding maieutic inquiry, then we might simply state it as being the requirement that within the actual process of philosophical inquiry, the inquiry leader merely adopt a position-less or doctrine-less stance in the interests of pursuing and developing the genuinely authentic philosophical conclusions of their dialectic partner.

The Intellectual Midwife has Expertise in Diagnosing Intellectual Labour

Socrates is first able to diagnose Theaetetus' intellectual labour in light of the perplexity Theaetetus experiences in grappling with the question 'what is knowledge?' (148e 1-10). This sentiment of perplexity in the face of philosophical confusion is touched upon later in the dialogue, where Theaetetus once again expresses a sense of dizziness and 'wonder' at being confronted with conceptual anomalies (155c 10-12). It is

²⁹ We will assess whether or not Socrates truly had no epistemic preconceptions up his sleeve in 3.2

here that we get an oft-quoted (and perhaps often poorly represented) statement from Socrates regarding the proper starting point of philosophical inquiry:

That experience, that feeling of wonder [$\theta\alpha\tilde{\upsilon}\mu\alpha$, *thaûma*], is very characteristic of a philosopher: philosophy has no other starting-point. (155d 1-6)

This is a strong methodological statement from Socrates, in that philosophical inquiry has no other starting-point than a sense of wonder or perplexity. In Theaetetus' case, it seems to go beyond 'wonder' as we might conventionally understand it and might instead be better understood as a disorientating state of bewilderment in feeling ignorant regarding things we would ordinarily think we had a pretty good grasp on. It is not that Theaetetus is simply marvelling at the epistemological and philosophical issues that Socrates is raising; he is *overwhelmed* by them, to the point of worry and dizziness.

We might recognise this as the disorientating effect of coming to realise that a concept or conceptual phenomenon is not as readily graspable as we had initially believed. This is an all too familiar feeling for the philosopher, who, upon launching an investigation into a concept F, only discovers that what we initially took to be F isn't as simple as we had previously thought. Yet I don't believe that this on its own is a necessary and sufficient start for a successful philosophical inquiry for Socrates—successful in that some kind of benefit (be it conceptual knowledge or self-knowledge) is to be derived. It isn't just that Theaetetus is perplexed by the issues Socrates is raising – he has a concern about his inability to form an adequate account of the kind Socrates is looking for.

But I assure you, Socrates, I've often set myself to think about it...But I can't convince myself that I have anything adequate to say on my own account...on the other hand, I can't stop worrying about it either. (148e)

There is a desire to move past perplexity into clarity regarding the philosophical issue(s) at hand. The desire to formulate an account, met with the obstacle of being unable to do so, due to the philosophical issue's perplexing nature, induces in

Theaetetus this sense of *thaûma* and the ‘pains of labour’ in struggling to articulate a conception of what knowledge is. That philosophical perplexity could be a starting point for philosophical inquiry is correct, in a sense, but if it is to progress from a mere state of bafflement into a full-blown philosophical inquiry, then some motivation to clarify the philosophical issue at hand must be present.

Socrates’ seems to demand that one must be willing to see the inquiry through, if any benefit is to be derived from it. Socrates mentions that some have ‘gone away sooner than they should have’, who both miscarry any further intellectual offspring to whom they might have gone on to give birth under Socrates and lose any offspring already delivered by Socrates (150e-151a). Philosophical inquiry is not suitable for everybody, Socrates implies. The inquirer must have the tenacity to see the inquiry to the end, regardless of what that end might be (illumination or further perplexity, albeit seemingly offset by the consolation prize of greater self-awareness (210c)). Indeed, Socrates stresses the importance of accepting the possibility of failure, advising that Theaetetus must not get angry if one (or all) of his intellectual offspring turn out to be failures and must be discarded (151c-d). Those who embark on philosophical inquiry must be bound to the inquiry above the fruits of their own intellectual labour, and so must not unnecessarily (or, one could say, *dogmatically*) hold on to any of their potential offspring for longer than is necessary (i.e, after the offspring is found to be non-viable), and for reasons other than the sake of progressing the inquiry forward.³⁰

Socrates diagnoses this struggle, perplexity and inability to articulate an account, despite the desire to do so, as the ‘pain of intellectual labour’. In response, Socrates prescribes treatment by the intellectual midwife. The methodological aspect to be drawn from this can be characterised as a requirement from potential inquirers to exhibit a willingness to pursue philosophical inquiry wherever it may lead, and a

³⁰ Burnyeat arguably makes a similar point, when he writes ‘Socratic education can only be successful with someone like Theaetetus who is aware of, and can accept, his need for it; that much self-knowledge is an indispensable motivating condition, for always the greatest obstacle to intellectual and moral progress is people’s unwillingness to confront their own ignorance’ – which suggests the desire to clarify a philosophical issue is motivated by awareness of one’s own ignorance. (Burnyeat ‘Examples in Epistemology’ pp.12). Here, Burnyeat highlights the difficulty that philosophical inquiry gets into when the person conducting it does not value the inquiry for truth’s sake, and is instead unwilling to confront their own ignorance to get to the truth.

willingness to drop potential philosophical accounts of concepts for the sake of progressing the inquiry towards that end, be it the potential of illumination of a particular philosophical issue or further perplexity. There is, what Benjamin Grazzini labels, a twofold dialogical bond at work, whereby one must both be bound to bringing intellectual offspring to light and bound to the task of the inquiry, in this case articulating (or attempting to articulate) what knowledge itself is.³¹ As Grazzini observes, these bonds can and do conflict with one another, when one must sever the bonds to their intellectual offspring for the sake of maintaining their bond to the task of the inquiry.³²

The Art of Matchmaking in Midwifery

Perhaps the oddest feature in Socrates' analogy with midwifery is the notion of 'matchmaking'. Socrates professes that both his art of intellectual midwifery and the practice of conventional midwifery share in the expertise of matchmaking: that is, at matching well-suited individuals together in order to bring about the best 'children'. Theaetetus expresses surprise at this, and Socrates insists that this practice is a well-kept secret amongst midwives, due to the midwives' fears of being labelled as 'procurers'. It is likely that this is introduced by Socrates (as an extension of Plato) as some kind of joke or contrivance, for the purposes of developing the midwifery motif towards something that bears even more of a resemblance to Socrates' own practice. Whilst we shouldn't treat Socrates' and/or Plato's claims here as historically or factually accurate, we nevertheless must look to see why this contrivance is included, how it pushes the motif forward, and what maieutic methodological principles can be drawn from it.

That Socrates takes this aspect of midwifery (both conventional and intellectual) to be of fundamental importance to the whole enterprise is evident. Socrates describes how the skill of midwifery goes above and beyond the 'mere cutting

³¹ Benjamin J. Grazzini, 'Of Psychic Maieutics and Dialogical Bondage in Plato's Theaetetus', in *Philosophy in Dialogue, Plato's Many Devices* (Northwestern University Press, 2007), pp. 130–51 (p.139)

³² One might interject here that the bond to bring an intellectual offspring to 'light' (birth) is a different thing entirely from being attached to the child post-birth. Whilst Grazzini doesn't clarify this, it is clear from the rest of his paper that he sees the bond to one's intellectual offspring as being a more general 'maternal' bond. In either case, the image of a two-fold bond where those bonds are occasionally at odds with each other is a useful image, and so I include it here.

of the umbilical cord' in that 'sowing' and 'harvesting' are parts of a single skill (techne) of midwifery. Extending the farming metaphor, he goes on to explain how recognizing what 'kind of seed goes in what kind of soil' is just as important as the actual harvesting (presumably the delivery of the intellectual offspring in the analogy of the midwife). However, Socrates' strongest endorsement of the importance of matchmaking comes shortly after, in his claim that 'only the person who deserves the name "matchmaker" is the true midwife' (105a 5-6). From this, it is clear that Socrates (or Socrates as written by Plato) takes the practice of matchmaking as being integral to the process of intellectual midwifery.

I do not think that we should read the matchmaking purely in terms of Socrates' skill at matching potential students with other suitable teachers. It is better to focus on Socrates' assessment of when he himself is a good match for a student. When we frame matchmaking in this way, we can surely find more evidence of this aspect of midwifery at play in his interactions with Theaetetus and Theaetetus' teacher Theodorus, and thus more material from which we can draw a methodological principle for maieutic inquiry. This is not about determining whether or not a candidate is suited to philosophical inquiry (although that surely factors into it), but rather about determining whether Socrates is the right teacher.

This is the line taken (independently) by both Jill Gordon and Avi Mintz.³³ Both look at the role match-making plays in Socrates' self-assessment of pedagogical suitability in embarking on a philosophical inquiry with Theaetetus, although in subtly different ways. Gordon begins by examining the term that Plato uses for matchmaking in the *Theaetetus*, *promnêstria* (ἡ προμνήστρια, or 'one who solicits or woos for another') and observes the word's roots in the verb *μνάομαι* (meaning 'to be mindful') and the noun *ἡ μνήστις* (meaning 'remembrance' or 'recollection'). Thus for Gordon, Socrates' role as a matchmaker involves reminding or bringing forth aspects of knowledge, and consists in arranging pairings in which one partner serves as a 'catalyst for recollection' for the other. For Gordon, this is deeply rooted in the erotic

³³ Jill Gordon, *Plato's Erotic World: From Cosmic Origins to Human Death* (Cambridge University Press, 2014)

Avi Mintz, 'The Midwife as Matchmaker: Socrates and Relational Pedagogy', in *Philosophy of Education Yearbook*, (2007), pp. 91-99.

subtext of Plato's writing, with the match-maker using the desire he or she has elicited in their partner to inspire desire for inquiry.³⁴

Within the *Theaetetus*, Gordon's Socrates-as-matchmaker is more concerned with demonstrating himself to be a worthy teacher for Theaetetus. She sees Socrates as attempting to win over Theaetetus's desire and ignite in the young Theaetetus a desire for philosophical inquiry by demonstrating Theodorus' unwillingness to engage in dialectical inquiry. Gordon points to the exchange at 162b1-c2, within which Socrates goads Theodorus into taking part in the discussion:

SOCRATES: Suppose you went to the wrestling schools at Sparta, Theodorus, and sat and watched others strip off, revealing the unimpressive muscles that some of them would have, whilst you yourself remained in your clothes, and did not show your own physique in your turn. Would that be fair?

THEODORUS: What do you think would be unfair about it, if they consented to let me watch? I think that's what I will do now: I will persuade you two to let me be a spectator, and not haul me into the ring. I am old and stiff, while Theaetetus is younger and more flexible. So grapple with him.

Gordon points to Plato's analogy between dialectical engagement and wrestling, noting the emphasis on exposing one's weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the act of philosophical discussion. For Gordon, this is analogous to the vulnerabilities one may feel in erotic relations and she likens Theodorus' reaction to the kind of erotic seduction practised by the non-lover in the *Phaedrus*, in that Theodorus seeks to engage with philosophical discussion without exposing his own vulnerabilities.³⁵

Gordon specifically links this metaphor to an erotic interplay between Socrates and Theaetetus, equating the risks and vulnerabilities associated with erotic relations with the risks of engaging in dialectic practice. Whilst we should be interested those aspects of Gordon's account of the relationship between pupil and teacher that have a direct bearing on philosophical methodology, commenting on the erotic aspects of the relationship is beyond the scope of this thesis (although they are certainly

³⁴ Gordon 'Plato's Erotic World' pp.137

³⁵ Gordon 'Plato's Erotic World' pp. 140

academically relevant). As such I will not comment on the erotic aspect of the imagery that Plato allegedly uses. Whilst Gordon makes a compelling argument for the erotic aspect of Socrates' pedagogical and matchmaking practice, I believe reading the passage too narrowly along these lines underplays the broader methodological significance of this notion of exposing one's weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the course of philosophical inquiry – and for maieutic inquiry in particular. Gordon observes that Theaetetus will see that Theodorus is unwilling to 'disrobe himself' and make himself vulnerable in philosophical engagement. This is of particular interest to me, because it helps with understanding how Socrates plays matchmaker in the *Theaetetus*, through assessing himself to be a better fit for Theaetetus as a teacher than Theodorus.

This willingness to expose oneself to the vulnerabilities and risks involved in philosophical engagement (presumably the risk of getting something wrong, or revealing that you don't know as much as you thought) underpins the other methodological principles of maieutic inquiry that we have already noted, namely the willingness to pursue the inquiry to the end, the willingness to abandon non-viable philosophical accounts along the way, and the requirement that one be honest in saying what one believes. Both require one to be aware of one's own philosophical shortcomings and to be prepared to submit oneself to the testing process and to accept being 'beaten' in dialectic. But here we see that these requirements apply equally to both inquiry leader and dialectic partner, and that they go some way towards determining whether or not a particular philosophical teacher is a good fit for a prospective student. It is not enough that the prospective student makes themselves vulnerable by submitting themselves and their ideas to elenchus: the teacher too must be willing to 'disrobe', to put themselves on the line and allow themselves to be challenged.

Although Theodorus does eventually end up engaging with Socrates (169c-d), albeit reluctantly, Socrates' point to Theaetetus has already been made. By showing himself to be unwilling to engage properly in dialectical discussion, Socrates has shown Theaetetus that Theodorus is an unsuitable teacher for the special kind of inquiry they have been embarking on and for which Theaetetus demonstrates aptitude. If this aptitude for philosophy is to be developed further Theaetetus will

need a teacher who is willing to philosophically ‘wrestle’ with him, and, to return to the farming metaphor in which Socrates frames his matchmaking motif, to provide the ‘right kind of soil’ to cultivate the desire to do philosophy into something more fruitful. And in this instance, Socrates himself fits the bill – indeed, he professes his experience in such matters by declaring that ‘ten thousand Heracleses and Theseuses have fallen on me with their mighty speeches, and given me a good pounding, and I have not desisted in the least. That is how far I am gone in my terrible passion for exercise about these questions.’ (169b5)³⁶

On what grounds then would Socrates send a prospective student to another teacher, to the likes of ‘Prodicus...and to many other distinguished savants’? Socrates doesn’t just promote himself as a teacher but also sometimes [maybe often?] recommends other teachers instead. As Chappell notes, Socrates can hardly be sincere in this mock praise of sophists such as Prodicus: Chappell suggests that his sending of ‘many phantom pregnancies’ to them is evidence that Socrates means that they trade in illusory ideas.³⁷ Burnyeat too reads the statement as unkindly ironic, suggesting that a prospective student with an empty mind and no conceptions of their own would be well suited to someone like Prodicus, whose ideas are ‘correspondingly empty and anodyne’.³⁸

However, as Donald Morrison observes, we then face the issue of just how much is ironic: Socrates’s entire claim that he sends young people to other teachers? Or only the claim that he does so to benefit them? Morrison notes that taking the first claim ironically contradicts the testimony that Socrates really did give educational advice (or so Morrison claims) whilst taking the second claim ironically paints a picture of Socrates knowingly sending prospective students to teachers that will not benefit them. The result of taking the second claim ironically is that we have a

³⁶ This corroborates my earlier explanation that Socrates has become experienced in midwifery *because* he has failed to deliver any viable philosophical thesis, and not in spite of it. Years of being bested in philosophical engagement has given him a lifetime’s worth of experience in how to test a philosophical account rigorously and detecting when it fails.

³⁷ Chappell ‘*Reading Plato’s Theaetetus*’ pp. 45 Fn. 31

³⁸ Burnyeat ‘*Examples in Epistemology*’ pp. 9

Socrates that is actively engaging in procuring students for other teachers, and not matchmaking them on the basis of any educational benefit.³⁹

Palming prospective students off to other teachers for no benefit to that student is not sufficient to explain why Plato puts such stress on the practice of matchmaking in intellectual midwifery. We require a third way out, if we are to preserve some pedagogical integrity in Socrates' practice of matchmaking and identify anything methodologically sensible. One such alternative is found in a proposal by Mintz, who considers the relational pedagogy of Socrates' practice and argues that the presence or possibility of a positive relationship between student and teacher is of vital importance to Socrates as a matchmaker.⁴⁰ In a similar way to Gordon, Mintz focuses on the idea of mutual desirability between teacher and student. The focus, however, is less on the erotic (as Gordon's was), and more on things like trust and goodwill as conditions for Socratic education. On this reading, Socrates is more concerned with the possibility of a friendship between teacher and student than an erotic relationship. If a mutually positive relationship cannot be established, then neither can the conditions for proper Socratic education, he suggests.

At this point, one might venture that Socrates determines that a prospective student is 'pregnant' through the quasi-nepotistic practice of only engaging as an intellectual midwife with those he was, or could be, friends with. The accusation then is that Socrates' practice of midwifery is for the sake of something other than the inquiry itself, diminishing the status of maieutic philosophy (or at least, Socrates' practice of it) by making it less concerned with the quality of candidates and, consequently, the execution of serious philosophical work, and more concerned with networking. Could it be that it is unimportant whether the student has anything to say (or any capacity to say anything) philosophically, so long as Socrates can strike up a friendly relationship with them? But I think is short lived and misses the point. Perhaps it is precisely because the student has philosophical inclinations or ability (and therefore a shared intellectual interest or way of characterizing things) that Socrates can strike up an educational friendship with them. Presumably, if the student

³⁹ Donald Morrison, 'Xenophon's Socrates as Teacher', in *The Socratic Movement* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). p.201

⁴⁰ Mintz 'Midwife as Matchmaker', p.93-94

lacks any ability to think in a philosophical way, they would not respond to or benefit from an educational relationship with Socrates – they would find his inquiries, his style of questioning and his general philosophical method frustrating and foreign to them. Indeed, this is exactly what Socrates reports from many of his interactions with other, non-philosophical experts. Socrates can't effectively teach those who do not see the value of his philosophical inquiry – the nature of their educational relationship would be strained. That is why they would perhaps be better suited with some other teacher, specialising in some other kind of inquiry for which they do have a capacity (even if Socrates is perhaps unsympathetic to those forms of inquiry).

From the above, we can surmise the following methodological points for maieutic inquiry: that the teacher must be as willing as the student to engage in philosophical inquiry honestly, and be open to being challenged, and that there must be a positive relationship built around trust and a mutual desire and value for philosophical inquiry for an educational relationship to blossom. If we as teachers are not willing to expose our vulnerabilities and be willing to be engaged with and challenged, in much the same way as we expect our students to, then we must relinquish that prospective student to someone who is better suited to their educational needs.

The Intellectual Midwife has Expertise in Inducing Labour, Alleviating the Symptoms, and Terminating Unsuccessful Offspring

The remaining characteristics of intellectual midwifery that Socrates identifies can be dealt with concurrently, as they all work together during the process of the inquiry. The actual practice of intellectual midwifery, within the inquiry proper, bears a strong resemblance to the *elenchus* style examinations of the so-called Socratic dialogues. Here, as there, a definition is first proposed by the interlocutor (here, Theaetetus) and then, through a process of cross-examination, Socrates reveals that the proposed definition is incoherent, self-refuting, or inadequate for the task at hand. Yet beyond that superficial similarity, there are also some important differences which we shall now investigate.

Let us begin by setting out more fully what a classic elenchus looks like. For the sake of simplicity, let us start from the characterisation of a typical elenchus set out by Gregory Vlastos:

1. The Interlocutor, 'saying what he believes', asserts p , which Socrates considers false, and targets for refutation.
2. Socrates obtains agreements to further premises, q and r , which are logically independent of p . The agreement is *ad hoc*: Socrates does not argue for q and r .
3. Socrates argues, and the interlocutor agrees, that q and r entail *not- p*
4. Thereupon Socrates claims p has been proved false, *not- p* true.⁴¹

When we turn to the *Theaetetus*, we find marked differences, particularly with regards to steps 2 and 3. The elenchus as described by Vlastos appears to be purely destructive, in that its task from the onset is to eliminate p . By contrast, as has been observed by Rowett, in the midwifery sequence in the *Theaetetus*, there is a distinct constructive phase during the cross-examination process. Socrates deviates from step 2 of Vlastos' summary of the elenchus and instead of acquiring *ad hoc* agreement to further premises that are logically independent from the initial proposal p , he puts forward further premises on which p would be contingent, to see whether they can be endorsed. Returning to the childbirth metaphor, Rowett identifies this procedure as a stage when Socrates comes to the rescue of the infant idea through the use of supporting mechanisms, to see if the intellectual offspring can be sustained. Once these auxiliary devices are in place, Socrates then proceeds with testing the infant idea to see if it is viable, and if it turns out to be unsustainable or the philosophical cost of sustaining it is too high, then the idea is terminated.⁴²

This structure is recurrent throughout the *Theaetetus*. When Theaetetus suggests that knowledge is perception, Socrates immediately comes to the offspring's aid by invoking two accounts that seemingly establish that perceiving something counts as knowing it – the relativist Protagorean thesis that 'man is the measure of all things' (152a3) and the Heraclitean thesis that the ontological nature of reality is in a state of constant flux (152d5-e6). These are not further premises that are logically independent of p , but are formulations of the kind of world that would be necessary

⁴¹ Gregory Vlastos, 'The Socratic Elenchus', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 79.11 (1982), 711–14 (712)

⁴² Rowett 'Knowledge and Truth' pp.171

for *p* to be viable. Furthermore, they are not straw-man arguments, philosophical cannon fodder that Socrates sets up to expedite the process of establishing *not-p*, but are the best arguments Socrates can muster for *p*. They are positions endorsed by reputable thinkers, and Socrates, in both the constructive and destructive phase of the inquiry, does his best to defend them for the sake of defending *p*. They do not collapse to the first objections brought about them, but are defended to such a point where they either result in a self-refutation (as is the case with the Protagorean ‘man is the measure of all things’ argument) or they fail once it is demonstrated that the philosophical cost of defending such a thesis is too high (such is the case with the Heraclitean flux thesis, where the result would be no possibility of stable concepts or even intelligent language and conversation).

Socrates then applies the same method to Theaetetus’ further attempts at defining knowledge – that knowledge is true belief (*doxa*) (187b 5-7), and that knowledge is true *doxa* plus a *logos* (206b 3-6).⁴³ In a similar fashion, both these offspring fail to thrive, even with the aid of the auxiliary devices implemented by Socrates. In each case, Socrates follows the same routine: he encourages Theaetetus to formulate an account by saying what he believes knowledge to be (thus inducing the ‘labour’), he then comes to that account’s aid by invoking the best arguments he can find that, if viable, validate Theaetetus’s proposed accounts of knowledge, and then proceeds to expose that account and its supporting arguments to the rigours of cross examination (Socrates’ ceremony of testing the birth for viability). Socrates’ process of intellectual midwifery finds each of Theaetetus’ intellectual offspring to be non-viable and they are subsequently to be ‘terminated’ or discarded by their progenitor.

Thus, the art of inducing labour for Socrates seems to depend on encouraging his interlocutor to articulate an account in response to the philosophical problem at hand based on what they believe (thus inducing the process of intellectual labour by getting his interlocutor to think on the matter and form ideas that are to be presented and tested). Socrates’ skill at exacerbating and alleviating the pains of labour are a

⁴³ Although the nature of the auxiliary devices changes somewhat in these instances. Instead of invoking pre-existing philosophical arguments, Socrates employs a number of models and analogies to help visualize what Theaetetus’s propositions would look like if such a case were to be true, such as the imagining the mind to be a wax tablet (191a-196c) or an aviary (196c-200d).

little more complicated. Once labour has been induced and the nature of the potential offspring is identified (the initial proposition voiced by the interlocutor), Socrates then seeks to expedite the labour by assisting his interlocutor in teasing out a potentially workable account from the initial proposition offered. This includes the aforementioned construction of auxiliary devices to help bring the account from a nascent idea to something fully formed and ready for testing, which Socrates likens to the conventional midwives' practice of singing incantations and prescribing drugs:

SOCRATES:...I'm practicing midwifery on you, and that's why I'm singing incantations and offering you bits to taste from the productions of each group of wise men, until I can help to bring what you think out to light. Once it has been brought out, that will be the time for me to look and see if it turns out to be the result of a false pregnancy or genuine. (157c9-d5)

Once the initial proposition (such as 'knowledge is perception') has been teased into something that at least appears to be a fully working account through the invocation of supporting philosophical arguments, the 'birthing process' is complete. The intellectual offspring, now fully formed, is ready to be exposed to the inspection ceremony (the destructive application of the *elenchus*) in order to be tested for its viability.

Socrates offers no clear criterion for deciding when an account is formed enough that the intellectual birthing process is to be considered complete. Here are a few possibilities we might consider: first, that the experienced intellectual midwife judges when an account is fully formed and ready for testing, based on intuition or experience in philosophical inquiry. However, this does not square exactly with the analogy with conventional midwifery. The conventional midwife does not hazard a guess or follow a hunch as to when the birth is complete. The birth is complete when the child has fully emerged from the mother. Perhaps we are running up against the boundaries of the analogy here and risk stretching it too far, but Socrates never professes an expertise in judging when a birth is complete – only in diagnosing labour, inducing labour and testing the offspring for its viability. If it is down to the talent of the individual intellectual midwife to determine when a birthing is complete, then there is no fixed measure of determining whether an account is formed enough to be

subjected for testing. The method devolves into the individual talents of the intellectual midwives themselves, and the results may vary wildly from one intellectual midwife to another.

The second possibility is that the birthing process is complete when both the leader and the interlocutor have reached a mutual understanding about what, exactly, is being proposed.⁴⁴ The midwife needs to understand exactly what the parent has produced: what he means by a proposition *p*, in order to be able to test it fairly. Similarly the parent must recognise and acknowledge the child they have produced, if they are to understand the grounds on which it is being tested, and where and why it fails. Part of this process, then, is the midwife drawing upon his knowledge of similar philosophical accounts ('offering you bits to taste from the productions of each group of wise men' 157c10-d1) in order to tease out the what the interlocutor means by *p* ('until I can help to bring what you think out to light' 157d). As we've seen, this may be done through the construction of various auxiliary devices that aid and embellish the initial proposal by demonstrating what would have to be the case if the initial proposal was valid, or through the use of various pictures, analogies or metaphors that assist in mentally building a model of the proposal. Once the account has been brought to light, in that both inquiry leader and interlocutor have reached a mutual agreement in understanding about what exactly is being proposed, the testing proper can begin.

Presumably, the 'soothing' element of Socrates's practice then comes in the form of being able to assist the interlocutor in being able to understand what it is they are trying to say and overcome perplexity through being able to formulate an account – even if that account does turn out to be non-viable. The perplexity of being seemingly unable to grasp an ordinarily available concept is temporarily alleviated by at least being able to formulate some kind of account of that concept. Whether that account is successful or not is a different story, as the inquiry isn't just concerned with alleviating the perplexity of the interlocutor (as some kind of therapy) but is also

⁴⁴ The emphasis on mutual understanding in Socrates's philosophical process is noted by Sebastian Grève, but he sees this as a more general feature across the 'Socratic dialogues', following John Cooper's characterisation of Socrates and the Socratic dialogues. See Sebastian Sunday Grève, 'The Importance of Understanding Each Other in Philosophy', *Philosophy*, 90.2 (2015), 213–39 (p. 218). See also John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson, *Plato: Complete Works* (Hackett Publishing Company, 1997) pp. xv for more on Cooper's classification of the Socratic dialogues.

concerned with getting to the truth of the matter at hand: in Theaetetus's case, getting a grasp of what knowledge is. Thus the alleviation of labour pain is only temporary – as soon as the account has been found to be non-viable and is discarded, the whole process begins again with a new labour and a new account to bring to light.

How often must this process be repeated? Short of unearthing a satisfactory account of a concept, what other conditions could mark the end of an inquiry, successful or otherwise? As I have mentioned in the previous section, an interlocutor must have the desire to see the inquiry through if any benefit is to be gleaned from it. In the dialogue itself, Socrates does not give the impression that the inquiry has ended prematurely, despite the apparent failure to reach a definitional account of knowledge. The inquiry is drawn to a close with the following:

SOCRATES: Well now, are we still pregnant and in labour with anything about knowledge, or have we given birth to everything?

THEAETETUS: Yes, indeed, Socrates; actually you've got me to say more than I had in me.

SOCRATES: And my art of midwifery tells us that they're all the results of false pregnancies, and not worth bringing up?

THEAETETUS: Yes, definitely.

SOCRATES: Well then, if you try, later on, to conceive anything else, and do so, what you're pregnant with will be the better for our present investigation. And if you stay barren, you'll be less burdensome to those who associate with you...because you'll have the sense not to think you know things which in fact you don't know. That much my art can do, but no more. (210b4-c6, McDowell Translation)

There are several things to unpick here regarding how Socrates (and Plato writing as Socrates) understands how and when a maieutic inquiry is to end.

The first thing to note is that the dialogue seems to end when Theaetetus has nothing else to say on the matter. Having given birth to three potential accounts of knowledge, Theaetetus declares that he has nothing else to contribute. He is no longer 'pregnant' with anything that he *believes* knowledge to be (or could be), and so the

inquiry ends. Socrates's wording suggests that if Theaetetus had more unexamined beliefs regarding knowledge to be drawn out, then the inquiry could continue. Thus, on a simplistic reading, one suggestion is that the inquiry simply ends when the dialectic partner is exhausted and has ran out of things to say.

Yet it would seem that there is more going on here than Theaetetus simply running out of things to say. Socrates states that, regardless of the outcome of *this* inquiry, should Theaetetus ever go on to conceive anything else, his future intellectual offspring will somehow be better for having completed the inquiry with Socrates. And even if he doesn't go on to conceive anything else, he will still be better off than before he undertook the inquiry as he will 'have the sense not to think [he] knows things which in fact [he] doesn't', possessing now a greater sense of epistemic self-awareness in not making conceited claims to knowledge. As the inquiry come to an end, Socrates goes on to suggest that this is all that can be done with his art. How serious Socrates is in making this claim is open to debate – and as we shall see throughout the rest of this thesis, whether or not Socrates *is* being serious is almost irrelevant, as it will become evident that the art of maieutic midwifery can (and even in this dialogue, does) achieve much more.

So it's not just that Theaetetus has nothing else within him to present for examination. He has also accrued some kind of benefit from taking part in the inquiry and examining what was within him with Socrates. It's tempting to assume that this benefit is simply knowledge of his own ignorance and nothing more. But I think this would be a misreading of what is actually being said in this final section of the *Theaetetus*. Certainly there is an increase in epistemic self-awareness on Theaetetus' part. But I would argue that, despite not arriving at a definitional account of knowledge, Theaetetus' *grasp* of what knowledge is has also improved. He may not be able to offer a viable definition of knowledge, but that doesn't imply that he hasn't learnt anything *about* knowledge. That Theaetetus feels this way is demonstrable – after all, he exclaims to Socrates that he has managed to say more than he initially had in him, something that is easily explainable by Theaetetus coming to have a better grasp of what knowledge is.

This reading would also explain what Socrates means when he tells Theaetetus that any future offspring he may bear will be better because of their shared inquiry. If

Theaetetus is ever to conceive again, then presumably whatever intellectual offspring he gives birth to will be more rigorous and finer tuned than those from his first inquiry with Socrates, by virtue of Theaetetus having a greater grasp of what knowledge is or isn't. This isn't to say that there is a guarantee or even a good chance that Theaetetus might, eventually, come to birth a successful and viable definitional account of knowledge (if such an account is even possible), but that his future offspring might come to resemble knowledge more. It is likely that any such potential offspring would ultimately fail to survive the test of the *elenchus*, but perhaps each successive generation would be able weather Socrates' tests a little better.

So, the inquiry ultimately ends when our dialectic partner has exhausted the supply of their beliefs about a particular philosophical issue or concept. But it is not that they have merely run out of things to say in relation to the object of investigation: in doing so, they have reached an improved grasp of the said object of investigation, supplemented by an increase in epistemic self-awareness.

1.3 Summary of Socratic Maieutic Methodology and Concluding Remarks

Having examined Socrates's method in the *Theaetetus* through the analogy of the midwife, it seems as if we are now in a position to create a general methodological outline for the purposes of building a sensible maieutic philosophical method of inquiry, as depicted in the *Theaetetus*:

1. Maieutic inquiry is concerned with the drawing out of latent knowledge.
2. In order to facilitate this, the midwife should adopt a doctrine-less stance throughout the inquiry, so as not to (consciously or otherwise) force any positive theses on their interlocutor.
3. The beginning of a philosophical inquiry can be characterised as the moment when the interlocutor finds herself unable to provide an account of an ordinarily employable/graspable concept.
4. The interlocutor must be willing to pursue the inquiry to the end if he or she is to derive any benefit from it and must be willing to drop invalid philosophical accounts for the sake of progressing the inquiry forward.

5. Similarly, the midwife must be willing to engage philosophically with the dialectic partner. They must be equally willing to expose their vulnerabilities and allow themselves to be challenged, for the sake of the inquiry.
6. The interlocutor puts forward a proposed definition of a concept.
7. Both midwife and interlocutor must then work to come to a mutual understanding about what exactly is being proposed by the interlocutor, before fair testing can begin.
8. The midwife must then test the proposed account for viability.
9. This process is repeated until either a successful account is discovered, or the interlocutor is unable to come up with any further accounts that match their beliefs.
10. Even if it is unsuccessful, the inquiry can lead to a greater grasp of what a concept is, as well as greater self-awareness about the limits of one's own epistemic state.

These will be the basis for the main points of comparison between the methodologies of the late Wittgenstein and Socrates for the rest of this thesis. Although it may be the case that there are further maieutic points of contact between the two outside of the depiction of Socrates as midwife in the *Theaetetus*, my attention will primarily be on observing methodological parallels within the context of the *Theaetetus*, as the primary source material for Socrates's maieutic method.

With the above outline of Socratic Midwifery in hand, this thesis will now turn to exploring Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy and philosophical method, before embarking on the process of comparing the two. Once an account of Wittgenstein's later philosophy has been established, we will begin to see the parallels between the two accounts, and, perhaps more interestingly, areas of significant difference in which I argue Wittgenstein goes further than Socrates in his execution of maieutic method.

Chapter Two: Wittgenstein's Conception of Philosophy

2.1 Introduction

Having given an account of Socratic Midwifery and the general principles of maieutic philosophy in Chapter One, I shall now give an account of our object of comparison, the philosophical methodology of the later Wittgenstein. To do so, I will focus on exploring Wittgenstein's philosophical methodology through the lens of his (various) conception(s) of philosophical problems, with my long-term aim being to demonstrate, in later chapters, that there are significant similarities (and some interesting and illuminating differences) between Wittgenstein and the Socratic Midwife's conception of philosophical problems, which result in further similarities in how both methodologies anticipate dealing with said problems.

Why start with philosophical problems? It seems to me fair to say that philosophy is a practice of dealing with what it takes to be 'philosophical problems', and indeed a large part of the tradition of philosophy has been devoted to recognising and trying to solve "problems". Consequently, insofar as I am comparing the Socratic and Wittgensteinian methods of doing philosophy, it seems worthwhile to start the comparison by comparing how these two philosophers, and their respective methodologies, actually conceive of the thing that they are (allegedly) trying to solve. I shall try to show that the Socratic intellectual midwife, on the one hand, and the later Wittgenstein, on the other, conceive of philosophical problems in rather similar ways, sufficiently similar to warrant comparative investigation in their methods of dealing with the problems that tracks these similarities and, where there are differences, explores why those differences occur.

Before turning to my main target, which is the section of Wittgenstein's *Investigations* known as the 'philosophy chapter' (PI §89-133),⁴⁵ I shall first consider the background from which Wittgenstein's conception of philosophical problems

⁴⁵ Although note that I do not limit myself to this narrow band of remarks, since I would not claim that Wittgenstein's later conception of philosophical problems is exhausted by these remarks alone. Rather I shall use them as a kind of 'core canon' against which and through which other meta-philosophical remarks may be compared and explained.

grew—namely Wittgenstein’s earlier work, and especially his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Then, in 2.3, I examine how his later conception of philosophical problems, in the ‘philosophy chapter’ of the *Investigations*, might be understood as a response to that earlier Tractarian conception of philosophy.⁴⁶ After noticing both the differences and also some important continuities concerning philosophical problems between the two works, I then proceed in 2.4 to examine what Wittgenstein means by noticing a risk of “unfairness” or “vacuity” in this context. I argue that Wittgenstein understands unfairness and vacuity in philosophy as having less to do with the cognitive difficulty of the problem itself, and more to do with one’s will and character – a notion which may seem nebulous at this stage, but we shall come to define it more precisely over the course of this thesis. I also examine Wittgenstein’s notion of being in the grip of a philosophical problem, before concluding with a summary of the features that are pertinent for the rest of my thesis.

Wittgenstein and Theory: Some Caveats

Before embarking on the constructive work in this chapter, I need to get some housekeeping out of the way, and (briefly) address the perennial problem of whether or not Wittgenstein himself put forward theories. When I speak of the later Wittgenstein’s ‘characterisation of philosophical problems’, I do not mean to suggest that Wittgenstein was advancing a thesis about philosophical problems. When I discuss ‘Wittgenstein’s characterisation of philosophical problems’, I do so with the understanding that Wittgenstein also leaves room for alternative conceptions of philosophical problems, and that he is focusing merely on one kind of philosophical problem that he takes to be quite common. This does not rule out the possibility of alternative kinds of a philosophical problem, or indeed alternative applications of his method. He does not specifically limit his method to a particular kind of philosophical

⁴⁶ Of course, the ‘early’ and ‘late’ Wittgenstein division might not be so clear cut as this implies. However, for simplicity’s sake, I am using the ‘early/late Wittgenstein’ formula as shorthand for the author of the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* respectively, while any time in between would constitute a ‘transitional’ period.

For more on the various ways one could split Wittgenstein’s career up, see James Conant ‘Wittgenstein’s methods’ In Oskari Kuusela & Marie McGinn (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein* (Oxford University Press, 2011). For the alternative view that we should not be bothering with this kind of thing in the first place, see David G. Stern ‘How Many Wittgensteins?’ In Alois Pichler & Simo Säätelä (eds.), *Wittgenstein: The Philosopher and His Works*. (Ontos Verlag, 2006).

problem. He seems to mean that his method in the *Philosophical Investigations* is a response to a particular kind or kinds of philosophical problems, and it is that kind of problem that I shall characterise in what follows. Importantly, this characterisation of Wittgenstein does not extend to the earlier Wittgenstein, the author of the *Tractatus*. As we shall see, the earlier Wittgenstein can be seen to (inadvertently or otherwise) create a thesis about philosophical problems in the *Tractatus*, and in doing so, seems to envisage himself dealing with philosophical problems in general, as if there are no other kinds.

We might also notice that Wittgenstein cycles through several different expressions for what I am calling ‘philosophical problems’, such as ‘philosophical questions’, ‘philosophical puzzles’, ‘confusions’, ‘difficulties’, ‘grammatical problems’. I think it is uncontroversial to suppose that these expressions are interchangeable—or are modes of expressing a puzzle about a philosophical problem.

Finally, I should try to place my reading of Wittgenstein within the broader corpus of Wittgenstein interpretation. There is, I feel, a tendency within Wittgensteinian literature to get bogged down in debates between rival approaches to reading Wittgenstein. Whilst these debates can contribute something useful, they can also make it difficult and laborious to make any new contributions, because of the need for constant justifications in defence of a recognised outlook or school of thought. I wish to sidestep this as much as possible, to allow enough time and space to offer something original, and to avoid writing yet another diatribe that merely re-hashes the merits and flaws of choosing one pre-established convention of reading Wittgenstein over another.

To this end, I simply flag here that my understanding of Wittgenstein is substantially indebted to the work of Oskari Kuusela. In particular, two things I find especially fruitful are, first, Kuusela’s proposal that a key methodological innovation in the later Wittgenstein was the idea that philosophical models can serve as *objects of comparison*, not as assertions of what reality must be like, and, secondly, the idea that the later Wittgenstein characterised the struggle with philosophical problems as ‘a struggle against dogmatism’. I shall introduce and examine each of these claims at appropriate points: they will feature prominently across this thesis. Whilst I will offer some analysis of pertinent parts of Kuusela’s exegesis of Wittgenstein, as and when

they become relevant to the discussion (to avoid presupposing specialist knowledge), I will not seek to defend it anew, but will rather refer the reader to Kuusela's own defence(s) of his position(s).⁴⁷

2.2 The 'Grave Mistakes' of the *Tractatus*

As I noted in 2.1, *Philosophical Investigations* §89-133 (generally known as the 'philosophy' chapter) effectively summarises the later Wittgenstein's meta-philosophical outlook. Whilst Wittgenstein weaves discussions of meta-philosophy, method and practice throughout his later works, and this particular passage is by no means the whole of it, still this extended section of remarks stands out: indeed it remains remarkably stable through the many iterations of preliminary drafts of what would eventually become the *Investigations*, and it is also probably one of the most cohesive stretches of remarks to be found there, in a book that is otherwise notorious for its less-than-straightforward format. Put simply, in this passage Wittgenstein reflects on issues to do with what he perceives as being the traditional practice of western philosophy, of which he takes the *Tractatus* to be a part. So to get to grips effectively with this 'philosophy chapter' of the *Investigations*, we should first (briefly) explore its context, including the *Tractatus*.

Of course, the shadow of the *Tractatus* clearly hangs over the *Investigations* in its entirety, not just §89-133. So one could say that one of the purposes of the *Investigations* is to serve as a response to the kind of philosophical thinking that is pervasive in the *Tractatus*. In the preface, Wittgenstein comments on how he returned to philosophical thinking when he began to recognise 'grave mistakes' in his former work. Consequently, he says, it seemed to him that he should 'publish those old ideas and the new ones together: that the latter could be seen in the right light only by contrast with and against the background of [his] older way of thinking'.⁴⁸ Although the *Investigations* did not end up being published alongside the *Tractatus* it is still

⁴⁷ Oskari Kuusela *The Struggle Against Dogmatism: Wittgenstein and the Concept of Philosophy*. (Harvard University Press, 2008) and *Wittgenstein on Logic as the Method of Philosophy: Re-Examining the Roots and Development of Analytic Philosophy*. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2019)

⁴⁸ PI preface, p. XXXI

evidently written with the *Tractatus* in mind, containing passages such as the so-called ‘philosophy chapter’ of §89-133 which make explicit reference to its ideas (and the ‘grave mistakes’ to which Wittgenstein alludes).

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein had characterised philosophical problems as linguistic and/or logical confusions of some kind. In the preface to the *Tractatus*, he had written ‘The book deals with the problems of philosophy and shows... that the way these problems are posed rests on misunderstanding the logic of our language.’⁴⁹ Similarly, throughout the *Tractatus* itself he had attributed the ‘questions’ and ‘confusions’ of philosophy to linguistic confusions.⁵⁰ A particular concern had been the ambiguity of particular words or linguistic expressions:

In everyday language it frequently happens that the same word has different modes of signification—and therefore belongs to different symbols—or that two words that have different modes of signification are employed in propositions in what is superficially the same way. Thus the word “is” appears as the copula, as the sign of equality, and as the expression of existence; “to exist” as an intransitive verb like “to go”; “identical” as an adjective; we speak of something but also of the fact of something happening. (In the proposition “Green is green”—where the first word is a proper name and the last an adjective—these words have not merely different meanings but are different symbols.)

In this way the most fundamental confusions are easily produced (the whole of philosophy is full of them) (*TLP* 3.323-3.324)

To understand these remarks, we must clarify how Wittgenstein is using the term ‘symbol’. In his examination of ‘Green is green’, he describes the words as having not only different meanings but ‘different symbols’, so evidently ‘symbol’ does not refer to the word ‘Green’ itself, but to what might be called the ‘logical category’ in which the word is operating. Thus, even though the noun ‘Green’ (as in, ‘Mr. Green’) and the adjective ‘green’ (as in, the colour ‘green’) superficially look identical, they can be understood by Wittgenstein as operating as different symbols entirely – the first being in the category of proper names (or substantives), the second being in the category of colour (or adjectives). Conversely, words that appear different can serve as the same

⁴⁹ TLP 27

⁵⁰ TLP 4.003

symbol, by operating within the same logical category: for example 'blue' and 'green' can be said to superficially look different, but can also be said to operate within the same logical category 'colour', and consequently can be said to refer to the same logical symbol.

As a consequence, and as Wittgenstein observes, it is not always immediately obvious which 'mode of signification' (a term that appears to be synonymous, or at least interchangeable, with 'symbol') is being employed when a word is being used, because there are often multiple modes of signification available. Wittgenstein understands this ambiguity between the modes of signification (or logical symbols) as being one of the principal causes of philosophical confusions, because it allows the philosopher to slip into making propositions that traduce the logical grammar. We end up misusing logical symbols in such a way that we fail to realise when are conflating multiple symbols together.

What solution does Wittgenstein then propose in the *Tractatus*? To understand his solution, we must first understand that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein conceives of logic as an *a priori* investigation into logical principles that are somehow separate (or 'pure') from anything empirical.⁵¹ This means that the study of these logical principles is not an empirical study of thought and language, but a study of something epistemologically prior to and unsullied by actual usage. The issue for Wittgenstein seems to relate to a confusion between internal and external properties. For Wittgenstein, an 'internal' property are properties that one could not conceive the object under investigation as not having, and so the confusion between internal and merely external properties is a confusion between the contingent features of an object under investigation and its essential properties. Importantly, Wittgenstein suggests that confusion between internal and external relations is 'very widespread among philosophers' (TLP 4.122).

The problem for Wittgenstein is that these internal or 'essential' properties cannot be stated by means of a proposition. This is down to what has come to be known as the early Wittgenstein's 'picture theory of language'. For the early Wittgenstein, propositions are 'pictures' of reality, and as such are either in agreement

⁵¹ This is to be contrasted with his later view of logic, as we shall see.

or disagreement with reality (TLP 2.21). They cannot be the object of true/false statements, and so cannot be adequately described by empirical language.

Consequently, when the metaphysician attempts to make a statement about the necessities of an object of investigation, they are falling into nonsense and failing to say anything, as by stating necessities in the form of propositions they are using a medium that cannot take as its object these internal/essential properties. For the early Wittgenstein, these properties must then be clarified by some alternative means, one which examines the *internal* features of propositions which capture the essential properties underpinning them.

Wittgenstein's reason for what he later calls the 'sublimation of logic' in the *Tractatus* is that the study of the *empirical* phenomena of thought and language (i.e, the scientific study of psychology, the study of the history of language, etc.) takes as its object things which already presuppose these logical principles.⁵² If the study of logico-philosophy is the study of these principles, it is a study that must go beyond the ken of the empirical sciences and into the foundations of what is possible and what is not – that is, the essential and necessary characteristics of reality.⁵³ Its task is to reveal the essential characteristics that underpin all *possible* languages, rather than the particular characteristics of any specific physical language(s). This task is a matter of *clarifying* the logical principles that govern (all) language use and thus reflect these essential and necessary characteristics (TLP 4.112).⁵⁴ However, the author of the *Tractatus* does not see the end result of this process as a set of empirical, factual statements regarding the essence of language, but (and as we shall see) the clarification and clear rendering of these logical principles, through the establishment of a logical language in which ambiguity is impossible (the so-called 'concept script').

The early Wittgenstein's notion of the concept script then provides just such an alternative method for expressing the internal properties of objects under investigation. The idea is that the translation of logical principles into a 'perfect'

⁵² As we shall see, the description of the author of the *Tractatus* as sublimating logic is a description made by Wittgenstein himself, in the *Philosophical Investigations*.

⁵³ Cf. MS 108, 217/TS 210, 50 See also MS 107, 234/TS 209

⁵⁴ See also TLP 3.34, 3.341, 3.3421 for comments on how the essential characteristics of the concept under investigation can be gleaned from the accidental features of expressions.

logical notation reflects these internal/essential properties in the structure of the notation itself, in a way that renders them clear. In doing so, one has the tools for analysing propositions so that the contingent external relations of the object under investigation are disambiguated from the object's internal, necessary ones. In performing such an analysis, one is able to avoid the 'cardinal problem' of philosophy of confusing internal and external relations.

Setting out the terms of the concept script, and through it the foundations for logical inquiry, is what the early Wittgenstein saw as his *whole* task and the whole task of the *Tractatus*. In that work, having proposed what he felt to be the method for approaching all philosophical problems, Wittgenstein declared that he had solved all of philosophy's problems 'in essentials', for if philosophical problems are constituted by linguistic confusions that trade on various ambiguities and unclarities present in the surface of our language(s), then removing the ambiguity in expressions by replacing them with a clear logical calculus provides a means for solving all such philosophical problems – all that is left is simply to construct such a calculus and apply the method to the said problems. Consequently, one could say that, for the early Wittgenstein, the establishment of *the* method of philosophy was *the* fundamental problem in philosophy, in that proposing a logical notation that deals with the 'cardinal' problem gives one the tools to, in effect, solve all the problems of philosophy.

How does the Tractarian conception of philosophical problems then shape this conception of philosophical method? If philosophers are so often getting into trouble by linguistic confusions and the vagueness of our language, as Wittgenstein suggests, then the method by which this vagueness is lifted and the confusions resolved consequently becomes of the utmost importance. If one can determine the method by which the essential and necessary characteristics of language are clarified and separated from the merely contingent (through unveiling the nature of the proposition) then on the assumption that the author of the *Tractatus*' diagnosis is correct, one has, in effect, undermined the stopping power of most (if not all) philosophical problems before they have even started.

However, whilst the *Tractatus* advocates for the clarification and analysis of logical principles, it does not itself offer any particular analysis of any specific

philosophical problem or set of problems, but rather offers what he takes to be the *conditions* of analysis (namely, the purity of logic and its independence from empirical phenomena) intended as the means by which logical analysis can occur, through the suggestion of *the* method of philosophy and the establishment of the so-called ‘concept script. The aim of the *Tractatus* is then to set out the terms of a method of clarification by which such linguistic confusions can be dissolved, and not to dissolve any specific confusions.⁵⁵

Through suggesting in the *Tractatus* that all philosophical problems can be dissolved by application of its method, Wittgenstein can be understood as suggesting that all philosophical problems share a common form, as a confusion between internal and external relations – which, according to the earlier Wittgenstein, is only now (dis)solvable once the foundations of philosophical inquiry have been established (that is, by the method presupposed by the analysis of the *Tractatus*). The shift from Wittgenstein’s earlier thinking to his later thinking is occasionally characterised in the literature as a shift from approaching philosophy ‘wholesale’, by solving one fundamental problem, toward a more ‘piecemeal’ approach, tackling separately many smaller, not necessarily related, problems. I find these terms (‘wholesale’ and ‘piecemeal’) to be useful in visualising the methodological changes between the *Tractatus* and *Investigations*, notwithstanding some objections in the existing literature. So I will continue to use them in a non-committal way here, without wading into that debate.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ That Wittgenstein is not concerned with dissolving specific confusions but dealing with the fundamental issue of method is further reinforced in the *Notebooks*, where Wittgenstein describes himself as dealing with ‘the foundations of logic’. See *Notebooks* 79

⁵⁶ Cora Diamond coined the specific use of the terms ‘wholesale’ and ‘piecemeal’ in relation to the question of a methodological shift between the *Tractatus* and *Investigations*. Whilst she does raise some legitimate objections against characterising the shift in Wittgenstein’s philosophical method in this way, her objections do not directly bear on this thesis. Consequently, any discussion of this would take us too far off course, so I simply flag her work here as further reading. See Cora Diamond ‘Criss-Cross Philosophy’ in Ammereller, Erich & Fischer, Eugen (eds.) *Wittgenstein at Work: Method in the Philosophical Investigations*. (Routledge, 2004); see also Warren Goldfarb ‘Metaphysics and Nonsense: On Cora Diamond’s *The Realistic Spirit*’, *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 22 (1997), 57-73 and James Conant ‘Wittgenstein’s Methods’ in Oskari Kuusela & Marie McGinn. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*, (Oxford University Press, 2011)

2.3 Wittgenstein's Response to the *Tractatus* in the *Investigations*

Sections §89-133 of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* offer the clearest critique of the views set forth in the *Tractatus*, and whilst Wittgenstein only briefly mentions the *Tractatus* in passing, one can nevertheless infer that the whole section more or less is a critique of the *Tractatus*, based on these remarks and various comments from Wittgenstein himself. *PI* §89-92 diagnoses how the 'sublimation of logic' falsely attributes a universal significance to logic, which misleadingly directs logical investigation towards an imagined 'essence of all things' (*PI* §89). Here, it seems clear that Wittgenstein is problematising the Tractarian notion sketched above, that the study of logic is unconcerned with empirical facts, its object of study being some abstract and *a priori* principles that supposedly (on the Tractarian view) govern what is thinkable.

The problem that Wittgenstein now sees, with such a sublimation of logic, is that elevating propositions into abstract, ideal entities, divorced from any empirical manifestation, eliminates their capacity to clarify any empirical manifestations in actual thought or language. The Tractarian abstraction from the empirical is sometimes characterised as Wittgenstein's 'turning away from concrete cases', 'where concrete cases' refers to the particular instances and examples of a concept in use.⁵⁷ In this sense, the actual empirical practice of language, those conversations and examples of language that one is able to point to in a spatial/temporal sense, are the 'concrete cases' which the *Tractatus*' idealised vision of language ignores.

As a point of interest for our comparison, we might see that these so-called 'concrete cases' are roughly analogous with the examples and particular instances that Socrates so often dismisses throughout the 'elenctic' dialogues. It also bears some resemblance to Socrates' dismissal of Theaetetus' initial attempts to answer the question 'what is knowledge?' by pointing to individual *kinds* of knowledge (146c7-147c10). Theaetetus first tries listing 'the things one might learn from Theodorus', including subjects like 'geometry' and the various arts of craftsmen. Socrates rejects these in favour of pursuing a definition of knowledge, rather than individual examples.

⁵⁷ Kuusela, *Logic as the Method of Philosophy*, 115
See also Ms 183, 164/PPO, 173

What's interesting is that Socrates seems to guide his interlocutor *away* from concrete cases, whereas the later Wittgenstein is encouraging his interlocutor *towards* them, marking what appears to be a significant dissimilarity in method. In fact, the Tractarian view seems closer to the demand made by the Socrates who looks for a single common definition rather than a list of examples. We will examine this apparent dissimilarity in greater detail at a later point.

Both the earlier and the later Wittgenstein can be said to understand the task of the philosopher as clarifying language in some way. The later Wittgenstein does indeed still recognise confusions and misleading forms of expression as being a contributing factor to philosophical problems, and so there is certainly some continuity, from the earlier to the later period, in his understanding of the aim of philosophy as resolving such confusion. For example:

Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. Such an investigation sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away. Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, caused, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language (PI §90)

However, the later Wittgenstein seeks to reconceive the notion of the 'ideal' that had been promoted in the *Tractatus* for clearing such misunderstandings away. Where the 'ideal' in the *Tractatus* might be said to be some kind of postulated extraordinary entity, in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein makes the move towards recognising the ideal as a *particular* mode of representation, and not something that reality must correspond to. He now recognises the 'spatial and temporal' phenomenon of language, rather than some 'non-temporal, non-spatial phantasm' (PI §108), as the target of philosophical investigation. In his later work, Wittgenstein comes to see that his quarry, which is still, in a certain sense, the *essence* of language, is the actual, physical day-to-day language in use.

Does the later Wittgenstein understand philosophical problems as merely empirical problems, solved simply by looking to empirical instances of how language is used? I don't think so. In PI §109, Wittgenstein insists that he was right to say, in the *Tractatus*, that the considerations of philosophy weren't scientific (that is, that they are not factual problems of the kind encountered in scientific study), and that

philosophical problems are consequently not empirical problems. Furthermore, he still reckons that the purpose of the philosopher's investigations is to try to 'understand the essence of language, its function, its structure' (PI §92). It's just that asking about the essence of language or of some other concept seems to predispose the philosopher towards assuming that such an essence would be something epistemologically prior to the empirical instances of the concept. He writes:

This finds expression in questions as to the essence of language, of propositions, of thought. —For if we too in these investigations are trying to understand the essence of language—its function, its structure,—yet this is not what those questions have in view. For they see in the essence, not something that already lies open to view and that becomes surveyable by a rearrangement, but something that lies beneath the surface. Something that lies within, which we see when we look into the thing, and which an analysis digs out. (PI §92)

The contrast between 'something lying beneath the surface' and 'something that already lies open to view' is important for the later Wittgenstein. By 'lying beneath the surface', he means that the object of our investigations is something as yet undiscovered and unknown to us. It presupposes that in these instances what we need to do is to discover some novel information or facts, to deepen or remedy an insufficient or deficient grasp of the topic of inquiry.

In contrast, when he speaks of something that 'lies open to view' he means that the target of inquiry is something that we already know about that object but (for some reason) have difficulty *calling to mind*. Wittgenstein offers an example of this at PI §89, with reference to Augustine's reflections on the question "What is time?" in the *Confessions*. Augustine asks there: 'What then is time? If no one asks me, I know, if I want to explain it to someone who asks, I do not know'.⁵⁸ Wittgenstein comments:

Something that we know when no one asks us, but no longer know when we are supposed to give an account of it, is something that we need to remind ourselves

⁵⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*. (Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), XI.XIV

of. (And it is obviously something of which for some reason it is difficult to remind oneself.) (PI §89)

This backs up Wittgenstein's earlier proclamation in the same remark that we do not seek to learn anything new with our (philosophical) investigations, but instead want to 'understand something that is already in plain view'.

I have described this complex relation between Wittgenstein's approach to philosophical problems in his earlier and later work, because the idea (characteristic of the later work) that the interesting philosophical problems are those that concern concepts that are ordinarily quite familiar to us will be the mainstay of my later comparison between Socrates and Wittgenstein. By concepts that are 'familiar', I mean concepts that an individual regularly uses, without necessarily being able to define the said concept when prompted. So 'familiar' does not equate to 'non-specialist': I do not mean that the philosophical problems relate only to concepts that are universally familiar to all language users, although many may be about 'mundane' concepts with broad applicability, or concepts with which a great many people might be familiar (such as good, beauty, truth, meaning etc). What I mean is that, for Wittgenstein, an 'ordinarily familiar concept' of the kind that generates a philosophical problem will be a concept with which the individual herself is familiar, and which she can correctly deploy. Technical concepts belonging to specialist fields (e.g. maths or science) can still count as 'ordinarily familiar concepts', if the philosophical puzzle strikes someone who is familiar with that concept.

To continue the current discussion, it follows from the above description that the later Wittgenstein is still trying to understand what we might call the *essence* of the object of investigation, only now as a mode of representation rather than a postulated part of reality. He is not merely describing empirical facts or contingencies of that object. What is different in the later work is that now he understands the essence to be something that is 'hidden in plain view'; something discoverable from attention to actual instances and uses of the chosen concept, not something epistemologically prior to the concrete, individuated cases of concept use. This change of focus does not come at the expense of any clarity or rigour of logic. Despite his confession that he previously misunderstood the role of the ideal in logic,

Wittgenstein insists that he still wants to say that there cannot be any *vagueness* in logic.⁵⁹

How, then, does Wittgenstein avoid relapsing into the sublimation of logic? His solution, I think, is to change the role of the ideal in our philosophical investigations, in a way that Kuusela helpfully explains in some key works on this issue.⁶⁰ This change in role, as alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, is occasionally seen as the key methodological principle in his later philosophical career. Whereas the *Tractatus* took the 'ideal' to be some kind of *a priori* requirement to which reality had to conform, in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein finds the proper role of the ideal in its employment as an 'object of comparison' positioned alongside reality, rather than being super-imposed on top of it (PI §131). We might call the Tractarian position a *metaphysical thesis*, where 'metaphysical' refers to a tradition of making statements about the *necessities and impossibilities* of phenomena. For Wittgenstein, one ought not to reject the notion of the ideal, but rather, to reconceive it for what it is: a mode of representation that looks for structures that are really there in language, rather than postulating them metaphysically.

The *Tractatus* put forward theses of that kind in two related ways: firstly, in its assertions about what the structure of language *must* be like, prior to and independently of any actual use of language, and secondly in its claims about the fundamental method of philosophy (and about the fundamental nature of philosophical problems). In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein is perhaps more concerned with the former theses (about the structure of language); my interest here is the latter concern (about the fundamental problems of philosophy). Whereas in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein had put forward a metaphysical thesis, that the one and only fundamental form of a philosophical problem is the confusion between internal and external relations, so that one can tackle *all* philosophical problems 'in essentials' by way of a method of clarification, in the *Investigations* he takes a more pluralistic approach to the *kinds* of philosophical problems and their solutions. Although he

⁵⁹ Of course, there is some discussion about what constitutes clarity and rigour in logic, but for brevity's sake I simply refer to these terms in the most basic sense, pertaining to the simplicity and exactness of the structure of logic.

⁶⁰ See Kuusela 'Struggle against Dogmatism' and 'Logic as the Method of Philosophy' for a full account of this kind of reading of Wittgenstein's methodological shift

doesn't explicitly state in the *Investigations* that many different kinds of philosophical problem exist, we can nevertheless infer that this is what he would say based on his comments on philosophical method.

Wittgenstein comments on the pluralistic nature of philosophical method in the *Investigations*. Whereas in the *Tractatus* he was confident of having established *the* philosophical method, on the basis of his diagnosis of *the* 'cardinal problem in philosophy', in the *Investigations* he seems to move to a position of methodological pluralism. On the back of remark §133, (concluding the 'philosophy' section of the *Investigations*) Wittgenstein says:

'There is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies' (PI §133).

A monistic conception of *the* fundamental method of clarification fitted the *Tractatus* because that work took itself to be concerned with *the* fundamental philosophical problem. However, Wittgenstein moves from a single method in the *Tractatus* to a plurality of methods in the *Investigations*, drawing an analogy between philosophical method(s) and 'different therapies'.⁶¹ Such a change occurs because of the shift in view from there being a fundamental problem in philosophy (concerning method) to understanding that philosophical problems can be solved piece-meal. For the later Wittgenstein, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to philosophical problems 'in essentials'. The later Wittgenstein recognises that language is so varied in its use and function that any one form of notation would fail to do justice to it and capture its manifoldness. The variety and complexity of language means that it makes no sense to talk of *the* method of philosophy, for it gives rise to a variety and complexity of linguistic confusions underpinning philosophical problems, in turn requiring different methods for solving them.

In either case, Wittgenstein now thinks that putting forward an assertion as a statement of metaphysical necessity results in the sublimation of the object that statement is attempting to describe. This is problematic as by putting forward such a statement, one establishes the statement as a necessity, independent of any actual

⁶¹ cf. PI §133

empirical experience of the subject of the statement or its particulars, one is claiming that this is what reality *must* be like while being unable to use this thing to describe reality, or even clarify it. This is what Wittgenstein recognises in PI §89-133 as the ‘grave mistake’ of the *Tractatus*, and, as I have argued, his proposed solution is to offer philosophical models, which he advocates using as comparative instruments to juxtapose with our objects of investigation, rather than seeing them as requirements for what reality *must* be like.

2.4 The Effects of Philosophical Problems

In his later period, Wittgenstein was also interested in the effects that philosophical problems (and the attempt to solve them) *can* have on the person in the grip of the philosophical problem, and their future attempts at doing philosophy. As I shall show in this section of the chapter, his thoughts in this area bear upon his views about the goal of philosophical inquiry, and about the notion of progress in philosophy. Additionally, and I will argue in chapters three and four, the ideas explored in this section about the effects of philosophical problems will have an impact on how Wittgenstein conceives of the method or methods of dealing with said philosophical problems.

Wittgenstein has strong views on what we need to avoid with our philosophical accounts. As I have argued, in PI §131 he recommends treating philosophical accounts as ‘objects of comparison’ and not as preconceived notions to which reality *must* correspond, in order to avoid ‘unfairness and vacuity’ in our statements, and ‘the *dogmatism* that we fall into so easily when doing philosophy’ (PI §131, emphasis added). By ‘unfairness’ and ‘vacuity’ he seems to mean what he takes to be wrong with his approach in the *Tractatus* (particularly, making a metaphysical requirement out of one’s philosophical accounts), and he seems to understand these as components (and thus emblematic) of the larger problem of ‘dogmatism’ in philosophy. Evidently, his philosophical practice in the *Investigations* is designed, at least partly, to avoid ‘vacuity and unfairness’, and dogmatism more generally. But to what exactly do these terms refer?

One aspect of ‘vacuity’ is surely the (in)ability of sublimated ideal cases to clarify and describe actual empirical phenomena. I suggested in 2.3 that statements that only apply at an ‘ideal’ level (wholly detached from empirical manifestations) fail to make any real distinction and turn out to be vacuous or empty. On the other hand, ‘unfairness’ (or ‘injustice’, as it is sometimes translated) is something else. Making *a priori* assertions about a concept’s essential characteristics, irrespective of any practical instances, runs into a double problem. Firstly, as I argued in 2.3, it makes an assumption regarding the structure of the concept under investigation. If in reality the actual structure of the concept proves not to be so, but to be (perhaps) more complex than we originally thought it might be (e.g, through possessing, say, a kind of family-resemblance structure), then insisting on such a definitional account represents a gross oversimplification of the conceptual phenomenon at hand. This would then amount to an ‘unfairness/injustice’ of sorts towards the conceptual phenomenon by misrepresenting it. Or, as Kuusela puts it: unfairness would be

The failure... to capture the manifoldness of phenomena they seek to describe, or the tendency of philosophers’ descriptions (definitions and so on) to misleadingly simplify the concepts they are meant to clarify.⁶²

Secondly, holding on to such an *a priori* assertion would then involve either (a) discounting any future experiences that do not fit, or (b) forcing those experiences to ‘fit’ the model, or (c) admitting that the model fails to accommodate those experiences. Of these three alternatives, the first two plausibly seem ‘unfair’ in various ways: either in ‘failing to capture the manifoldness of phenomena’ again (by ignoring legitimate experiences of the concept under investigation that *should* be factored into our investigations), or by misrepresenting those experiences so as to make them fit the schema.

One might think that option (c) looks like a positive step forward. However, admitting that the model was a failure in the first place does not escape the problem,

⁶² Kuusela ‘*Struggle Against Dogmatism*’, pp. 12. Kuusela goes on to argue that such an act would also represent an injustice towards those to whom the philosopher is attempting to clarify the conceptual phenomena at hand.

since it does not address the root of the problem (that we have created a metaphysical statement of necessity) and we might then be tempted simply to replace the failed account with another that is again intended to detail the essential and necessary characteristics of the object it is meant to be describing. A further problem is that rejecting a philosophical model outright, because it cannot accommodate all the cases that fall under the concept, immediately discredits all the philosophical work conducted on the basis of the original model.

This last problem is one that bears some resemblance to a problem highlighted by Oskari Kuusela concerning hierarchy in philosophy. According to Kuusela, Wittgenstein understands that the characterisation of philosophical problems as demanding ‘once-and-for-all’ answers, (or what Kuusela calls ‘great answers to great questions’) seems to invite a hierarchical structure in philosophy.⁶³ The establishment of *the* method of a philosophy places philosophy on precarious ground. If the method is found to be problematic, then any work done on the foundation of that method is at risk of collapsing with it. We might describe this hierarchical arrangement as a ‘house of cards’ scenario, in the sense that philosophical work rests on precarious foundations. How this understanding of the problem of hierarchy in philosophy both relates to and helps inform our understanding of our current problem is that it can also be used to describe what lays at the foundation of the problem, to do with a common structure of philosophical problems.

To elaborate: one form that philosophical questions often take, the “What is F” format (such as ‘what is a proposition?’ or ‘what is language?’), seems often (at least in the construction and presentation of such questions) to presuppose that there is a once-and-for-all answer that can be given in response to the question (usually in the form of a definitional account of F’s essential characteristics). Wittgenstein’s expectation is that, on the ‘traditional’ way of doing philosophy, a successful answer to the ‘what is F’ question must be able to accommodate all cases falling under F with no counter examples, and it must identify the essential characteristics of Fs. This problematic tendency in philosophy has been described elsewhere by Kuusela as the assumption of a ‘simple conceptual unity’, where one assumes that concepts and their

⁶³ Kuusela ‘*Struggle Against Dogmatism*’ pp. 49

particulars are always related by virtue of a single defining feature or ‘essence’ (the ‘F’). Just like with the problem of hierarchy in relation to the method of philosophy, however, the assumption of a simple conceptual unity leaves one on precarious ground. If we attempt to answer the ‘What is F’ question by determining the essence of F, and then later our definition of F is shown to be unviable, all further philosophical work that we have carried out on the basis of our original assertion of F must also be thrown out.

The result is then that all the solutions to all the dependent problems are in jeopardy, if the ‘fundamental’ problem is unsolved or its solution turns out to be problematic. Kuusela illustrates his point with reference to the following remark from *The Big Typescript* and other revised manuscripts of the *Investigations*:

Disquietude in philosophy might be said to arise from looking at philosophy wrongly, seeing it wrong, namely as if it were divided into (infinite) longitudinal strips instead of into (finite) cross strips. This inversion in our conception produces the greatest difficulty. So we try as it were to grasp the unlimited strips and complain that it cannot be done piecemeal. To be sure it cannot, if by a piece one means an infinite longitudinal strip. But it may well be done, if one means a cross strip.—But in that case we never get to the end of our work!—Of course not, for it has no end.⁶⁴

The attempt to grasp infinite longitudinal strips is analogous with philosophy’s attempt to determine the essence of its object of investigation through obtaining once-and-for-all answers. On the other hand, the notion of philosophy being a process of grasping at limited cross-strips is analogous with the characterisation of philosophy as a business of dealing with particular problems, that are to be solved piece-meal (rather than all at once). For Kuusela, the above remark demonstrates that Wittgenstein understands that disquietude in philosophy can be said to arise from seeing philosophy as a business of the former, rather than the latter.⁶⁵

Importantly, one need not consciously feel as if one is trying to solve all of philosophy ‘in essentials’ in order to fall victim to this. For the hierarchical model, within which some problems are dependent on solving more fundamental problems,

⁶⁴ TS213, 431, 432

⁶⁵ Kuusela *Struggle Against Dogmatism* pp.48-49

is implicit whenever one gives the necessary and essential characteristics of a concept, in response to a philosophical problem— if not for *all* of philosophy (as was the case in the *Tractatus*' attempt at dealing with *the* fundamental problem in philosophy) then at least for the (individuated) philosophical problem at hand and the concept under investigation in relation to it. For example, if the concept we were investigating were knowledge, and we asserted that 'knowledge is a justified, true belief' gives the essential characteristics of knowledge, we would then bring that account of the essence of knowledge to all subsequent philosophical problems regarding knowledge. If the JTB model turns out to be problematic, then all our subsequent solutions that presupposed it will also be problematic, and we go back to square one.

Kuusela also suggests that Wittgenstein's shift in characterising philosophical problems in this way leads to a shift in perception of the goals of philosophical inquiry and what one can hope to achieve with the method(s) of the *Investigations*. He supports this claim with this passage from the *Investigations*:

The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.—The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring itself in question.—Instead, we now demonstrate a method, by examples; and the series of examples can be broken off.—Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a single problem.
(PI § 133)

It is not straightforwardly clear what Wittgenstein means in that passage, but we can begin to make sense of it in the context of our current discussion. Someone who approaches philosophy in the hierarchical way just described can never be at peace – for there is always the risk of the foundations of their work becoming unstable, of the need to start again: 'questions which bring [themselves] in question'. One can never, it would seem, put a philosophical problem to bed – for there is always the same risk that the solution will be found to be problematic, and the problem revisited.

Wittgenstein identifies his 'real discovery' as a new conception of philosophy, which allows one to stop when one wants, allowing for peaceful progress in philosophy by solving problems piece-meal, not all at once. This correlates with the shift we saw

from his conception (in the *Tractatus*) of a single great problem (and method) in philosophy to the many methods of the *Investigations*. Peaceful progress in philosophy depends on approaching philosophy in this non-hierarchical fashion, as a piecemeal series of problems that can be picked up and left off at one's leisure. I shall explore what this means exactly in subsequent chapters, when I examine Wittgenstein's approach to solving philosophical problems and compare it to the Socratic "midwifery" approach.

So by 'dogmatism', Wittgenstein refers to the way in which philosophers shoehorn themselves into a commitment by making their philosophical accounts into metaphysical doctrines, and rejecting alternatives. Consequently, Wittgenstein, in his later period, considers that dealing with philosophical problems involves dealing with or avoiding dogmatism and its two horns. He seems to see a 'vacuity' problem in the *Tractatus*' inability to clarify anything about empirical language, and an 'injustice' problem in the way that the picture of language use in the *Tractatus* fails to capture the manifoldness of language. Thus the problem of dogmatism is undoubtedly a central concern of the *Investigations*. But the question remains – why then is this so difficult, given that the answer (or, at least, the answer I am proposing) is nothing more complicated than the use of philosophical models as objects of comparison?

The difficulty may be explicable if we look at the kind of difficulty that using models in this way poses. In particular it has to do with issues relating to one's attitude and character, I shall suggest. Interestingly, some remarks in Wittgenstein's later writings suggest that he thought of the solution to the problem of dogmatism as distinct from the cognitive task of solving a philosophical problem itself, or at the very least, as something that requires something other than *just* the cognitive solution of the problem at hand. Already in *the Big Typescript* we find him suggesting that philosophical work involves something more than the application of intellect. There he speaks of the difficulty of philosophy as 'not the intellectual difficulty of the sciences, but the difficulty of a change of attitude', and observes that a 'resistance of the will *must* be overcome'.⁶⁶ Similarly, in another (earlier) manuscript, Wittgenstein describes working in philosophy as being equivalent to 'working on oneself. On one's

⁶⁶ BT 86

own understanding. On the way one sees things. (And what one demands of them.)’ (BT 407).⁶⁷ These remarks suggest that part of the difficulty of philosophy lies in how one desires to see things, and overcoming that desire – characterised here as a ‘change of attitude’, a ‘working on one’s self’ and a ‘resistance of the will’ that ‘must be overcome’. Whereas a ‘scientific problem’ might be characterised in terms of its intellectual difficulty (i.e, in how difficult it is to uncover, understand or otherwise make sense of some new factual piece of information), the difficulty of philosophy is described in terms of *willpower*, that is, in being willing and able to consider things in a different light and view things from a different perspective.

Evidence of this diagnosis of the difficulty is abundant in the *Investigations*. There, in the course of many of his grammatical investigations, Wittgenstein speaks of the *desire* to take particular points of view, in response to some situation at hand. He frequently uses phrases such as ‘I/we’ll be inclined to say’ (§PI 20, 24, 27, 73, 217, etc.) and ‘one is tempted/we are tempted to say’ (PI §39, 143, 159, 182, 254, 277, 334, 402, 588 etc.). This kind of talk usually preambles some kind of philosophically intuitive response to the issue under investigation. These ‘philosophically intuitive’ responses are typically the kinds of answers traditionally offered by philosophers (typically, Wittgenstein implies, metaphysical responses). Often he presents the inclination/temptation to say something as a tendency antagonistic to the eventual progress of the grammatical investigation— something that needs to be exorcised first, before Wittgenstein can proceed.

This has led many commentators to find in Wittgenstein’s *Investigations* at least two different ‘voices’ at play. For our current discussion, Stanley Cavell’s interpretation is especially relevant. His view is that the *Investigations* dramatises two voices, the ‘voice of temptation’ and the ‘voice of correction’.⁶⁸ The voice of temptation is effectively the voice of *theoretical temptation*: it presents the typical philosophical responses to the problem at hand; it places philosophical inquiry squarely in the ideal, by stepping outside the object of investigation, to describe it from an idealised view from nowhere (cf OC §554). The voice of correction, on the

⁶⁷ Cf. Ms 112 46: 14.10.1931

⁶⁸ S. Cavell, “The Availability of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy,” in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp.71

other hand, seeks to undermine the metaphysical inclination of the voice of temptation by redirecting the inquiry back towards concrete, everyday examples. Whereas the voice of temptation wants to step outside of language in order to describe it, the voice of correction operates within, and points to, 'ordinary' language, by making use of examples of actual language use. Thus the voice of correction is meant to undermine the allure of metaphysics. I shall explore this in greater detail in chapter three.

The 'voice of temptation' is not just a philosophical desire for metaphysical answers but also an inclination to close off the possibility of alternative ways of picturing the object of investigation. To deal with such a desire it is no good following its inclination and trying to solve the philosophical problem in that way, because the issue lies within the person under the grip of the philosophical problem themselves, in the way they see things and the cognitive (or even, philosophical) biases that they have. To pick up the language from Ms 112, which I quoted above, the person runs into a problem that is in their 'own understanding, their way of seeing things (and what they demand of them)', and consequently any solution to be found is, according to Wittgenstein, to be found precisely in their 'way of seeing things'. This, I take it, is the 'difficulty of the will' that must be overcome for Wittgenstein, if one is to engage with philosophical problems without falling into the trap of dogmatism. I shall argue in the rest of this thesis (by way of a comparison with Socratic Midwifery), that part of the aim of Wittgenstein's philosophical methodology is precisely to overcome this kind of difficulty.

That philosophical problems have this extra level of difficulty, that roughly corresponds with something like 'the will', resonates with one final feature of Wittgenstein's descriptions of philosophical problems that will be pertinent to our comparison. This is the language that Wittgenstein occasionally uses to describe being under the grip of a problem: for instance, he frequently uses words like 'anxieties', 'disquietudes', 'mental cramps', and other words invoking pain/discomfort.⁶⁹ The repeated use of these kinds of words by Wittgenstein to describe philosophical problems, alongside his descriptions of confronting philosophical problems as

⁶⁹ See, for example, PI §111, Z § 452, BB 26

confronting these kinds of issues suggests that Wittgenstein thinks of philosophical problems as distressing for those encountering them, and potentially suggests that he conceives of philosophical problems as having some kind of emotive or psychological impact on the person(s) encountering them. When we couple this notion of philosophical problems evoking distressing feelings with Wittgenstein's notion that the goal of philosophy is 'peace', we can begin to see that Wittgenstein is characterising the task of philosophy as (at least partially) resolving these kinds of feelings.

One must be wary here, for we may be tempted to read Wittgenstein as suggesting that philosophy aims merely to quell such feelings. If philosophical problems cause 'deep disquietudes', and the goal of philosophy is 'peace', then perhaps the success criteria for a philosophical method would be its capacity to dispel such feelings. This can lead to the idea that Wittgenstein's later philosophy is intended to be 'therapeutic', by virtue of 'dissolving' philosophy's distressing problems and neutralising their effects; or the idea that philosophy offers nothing 'positive' or productive (in the sense that it actually provides constructive solutions to philosophical problems), but merely removes one's philosophical delusions and ailments, by working through them.⁷⁰

Some aspects of my response to these thoughts will require us to attend to the practicalities of Wittgenstein's method, and these will be my topic in chapters 3 to 4 of this thesis. But first, in this chapter, I shall briefly flag a general response to this kind of reading of Wittgenstein's work. If we were to entertain this kind of thinking and take Wittgenstein's philosophical methodology to be *exclusively* therapeutic (a view which I will challenge in more detail in chapter 3), then we would need to suppose that, for Wittgenstein, the most pressing problem presented in a "philosophical problem" was the problematic effect that it induces (e.g. anxiety, disquietude etc), and not any problem of a philosophical nature that needed to be solved in itself. If we are to understand Wittgenstein's goal of 'philosophical peace' along these therapeutic

⁷⁰ See Alain Badiou. *Wittgenstein's Anti-philosophy*. Verso (2011) for an example of a reading of Wittgenstein's philosophy as being 'anti-philosophical' and not productive in a positive sense. See also Gordon Baker *Wittgenstein's Method: Neglected Aspects: Essays on Wittgenstein*. (Blackwell, 2004) and Alice Crary and Rupert Read (eds.) *The New Wittgenstein*. (Routledge, 2000) for examples of therapeutic interpretations of Wittgenstein

lines, then the need to resolve philosophical problems becomes second place to the desire to liberate oneself from the distressing effects of philosophical problems.

If we were to follow this line of thinking, then we would have to allow room for a reading of Wittgenstein that is *purely therapeutic*, one that espouses a view in which philosophy would then lack any proper motivation to actually clarify the concepts under investigation (and thus contribute to a progressive understanding of those concepts), since the ‘problems’ are in effect non-problems, being merely manifestations of confusions characterised by ‘bad feelings’. On this (faulty) reading of Wittgenstein, successfully dealing with a philosophical problem could be as simple as manipulating the philosopher’s feelings: for if the only goal of Wittgenstein’s philosophical method is the dispelling of these kinds of feelings, then the method by which it does that is irrelevant. Working through the problem philosophically to reach a solution is not necessary; and perhaps one could just as easily (if not more easily) dispel such feelings by, for example, ignoring or dismissing the problem or otherwise artificially altering the feelings of those who had been perturbed by the problem, without bothering to uncover the source of their trouble, nor actively clarifying the concept or reaching any philosophical insight. Such a psychological treatment seems quite out of keeping with Wittgenstein’s avowals that the task of philosophy is the clarification and/or elucidation of its object of investigation, and *not* (just) the dispelling of feelings of mental cramp and philosophical confusion.

It seems preferable to suppose that philosophy seeks actively to clarify its objects of investigation; to make positive progress, not least because this seems more in accordance with what we have seen from Wittgenstein’s method thus far (that it hopes to actively clarify the concepts under its investigation). However, this isn’t to say that the dissolution of these feelings isn’t still an important aim for Wittgenstein—only that we aren’t to read Wittgenstein as pursuing a method of doing philosophy that is exhaustively ‘therapeutic’ in this way.⁷¹ Based on this reasoning, I shall be treating these ‘therapeutic’ aims (which are avowedly there in some of the things that Wittgenstein says about his methods and goals), as having considerable overlap with his primary aim, which is actually to solve or dissolve some philosophical problems. I

⁷¹ This might be a point of contention vis a vis certain readings of Wittgenstein that depict Wittgenstein as suggesting that the aim of Wittgenstein’s method is to dispel confusions, and nothing more.

will argue that these therapeutic aims are accomplished as a part of the successful resolution of philosophical problems and puzzles. As we shall see over the course of the next two chapters, these distressing effects of philosophical problems and their resolution can and will be linked to the task of tackling the ‘non-cognitive’ task of philosophical problems outlined earlier in this chapter.

If I am right, then, for Wittgenstein, dealing with philosophical problems does not just consist of the ‘intellectual’ task of solving or dissolving the problem at hand. It also entails dealing with one’s will and adjusting one’s outlook. Or we might say it involves undertaking both ‘cognitive’ and ‘non-cognitive’ tasks. But what do I mean by ‘cognitive’ and ‘non-cognitive’? I am not the first to use terms like these to describe elements of Wittgenstein’s philosophical method. Joel Backström employs similar terms to characterise a tension in Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy.⁷² Backström diagnoses this tension by examining a certain ambiguity in ‘therapeutic’ readings of philosophical clarification, between ‘seeing philosophical difficulties as primarily intellectual fixations and confusions, or, on the other hand, as having their root in a (broadly speaking) moral-existential unwillingness to understand ourselves aright in philosophy’.⁷³ To unpack this contrast, Backström defines an ‘intellectual fixation/confusion’ (or more simply, an ‘intellectual problem’) as a ‘problem untouched by any resistance on the part of the person facing it’. So an ‘intellectual problem’ is one where the person is truly not bothered either way about what the solution turns out to be. By contrast, ‘non-cognitive’ or ‘personal’ problems are those that involve a struggle with the self, with how one’s self sees things, and how one’s self might be resistant to adapt (for example, unwilling to accept the outcome of a particular investigation or the solution to a particular problem). Backström notes that a particular feature of these kinds of ‘personal’ problems is that the person in the grip of them typically shies away from the problem, refusing to acknowledge its difficulty

⁷² As does Peter Hacker. See G. P Baker & P.M.S Hacker *An Analytical Commentary on Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*. (Wiley-Blackwell, 1983)

⁷³ Joel Backström, ‘Wittgenstein and the Moral Dimension of Philosophical Problems’. In Marie McGinn & Oskari Kuusela (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*. (Oxford University Press, 2011).

or presenting it in such a light that the difficulty is (seemingly) a non-issue, or someone else's difficulty.⁷⁴

These two kinds of problem are not mutually exclusive, of course. Whilst Backström's wording here might imply that an intellectual problem cannot be a personal problem, since he describes an intellectual problem as 'a problem *untouched by any resistance on the part of the person facing it*', this does not mean that a (general) problem cannot pose both *an* intellectual problem and *a* personal problem. For overcoming one's resistance toward (for instance) properly acknowledging a problem and its difficulty would be solving the personal problem but that has not yet *solved* the underlying (intellectual) problem — it merely opens the way to begin to address the intellectual problem. By describing intellectual problems in this way, Backström seems to be suggesting that the demands of the intellectual problem are not subject to whatever personal problem one may have when approaching it. That is to say, one cannot be truly said to be engaging with the 'intellectual' problem unless one has first ensured that the said problem is 'untouched' by their own resistances.

Characterising 'personal' problems as having to do with the will, in terms of both acknowledging and taking responsibility for the difficulty of the problem at hand, seems consistent with various statements Wittgenstein makes regarding difficulties encountered when doing philosophy, most notably his pronouncement that, when doing philosophy, one ought to 'go the bloody hard way'. However, it is not limited to just acknowledging whatever personal difficulties may bar our way -- one must also be willing to work on whatever it is that is interfering with one's ability to properly engage with the intellectual problem. As I suggested earlier in this section, this may involve changing one's perspective on a particular issue or acknowledging one's biases towards a particular subject matter. In short, there is no definitive criterion for what constitutes the 'personal' aspect of a philosophical problem, outside of the fact that it

⁷⁴ It's interesting to note here that this kind of thing is often said to be the driving force behind Wittgenstein's dissatisfaction with Russell (as is observed by James Conant). Russell circumvents the need to address the problem of the unity of the proposition by relegating the problem to 'the logicians, with [an] indication of [the] difficulty'. Here, Russell clearly refuses to take responsibility for a central difficulty in his *Principles of Mathematics* -- something about which he worries Wittgenstein will label him a 'dishonest scoundrel' over. See James Conant 'On Going the Bloody Hard Way in Philosophy', in John Whittaker (ed.) *The Possibilities of Sense: Essays in Honour of D.Z Phillips*, (Palgrave, 2002) and Bertrand Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics*, (New York: Norton, 1903) 52

originates *within* the person in the grip of the original problem and impedes their ability to approach the problem impartially. I will explore some examples of what this ‘personal’ task entails and how the difficulties involved interfere with impartial progress in philosophy in chapter 4.4, where I shall consider various environmental and contextual factors that may interfere with someone’s philosophical thinking (such as the desire for career success, or the desire to hold onto a particular philosophical position for the sake of holding on to that position).

This way of understanding ‘intellectual’ and ‘personal’ problems brings with it some interesting consequences for reading Wittgenstein. Firstly, it addresses the issue raised above in this section regarding whether or not the task of philosophy is just the manipulation of feelings. For now we can see that, contrary to an exhaustively therapeutic way of reading Wittgenstein, addressing ‘personal’ aspects of a general philosophical problem does little to resolve underlying intellectual problems.⁷⁵ Rather, resolving personal issues seems to be a prerequisite for engaging with the intellectual problem, if we are to have any hope of leaving the problem ‘untouched by any resistance’ on our part. Secondly (and relatedly), it offers a way of understanding how, for Wittgenstein, addressing a philosophical problem can be both ‘person-relative’ (in the sense that it requires working *with* someone to dispel *their* confusions), whilst at the same time working towards some positive, philosophical insight. For (as I shall suggest in chapters 3 and 4), Wittgenstein’s method requires that one understands one’s interlocutor, so the philosopher may be able to work with their interlocutor through their confusions. So it is easy to slip into thinking that Wittgenstein subscribes to a kind of relativism regarding both philosophical problems and insights. These points will be a recurring theme in my thesis.

For now, we can say that, for Wittgenstein, philosophical problems have both an ‘intellectual’ or ‘cognitive’ dimension to them and a non-cognitive or ‘personal’ dimension to them. Henceforth I shall refer to this non-cognitive/personal dimension as the ‘ethical’ task, in keeping with a tradition within Wittgenstein literature to label in this way certain relevant remarks that Wittgenstein makes *about* things like

⁷⁵ Peter Hacker makes a similar criticism of Gordon Baker. See his paper ‘Gordon Baker’s Late Interpretation of Wittgenstein’ in *Wittgenstein and His Interpreters: Essays in Memory of Gordon Baker*, G. Kahane, E. Kanterian, and O. Kuusela eds. (Blackwell, Oxford, 2007), pp. 88-122

overcoming one's will, prejudices and biases, and how this relates to an individual's outlook, character, and the actions they take.⁷⁶ Consequently, one can expect that Wittgenstein's methods have a way of dealing with this ethical task. I shall examine in greater detail how Wittgenstein intends to address these difficulties, and his intended solutions to philosophical problems, in the subsequent chapters. There I will compare them with the Socratic Midwife's intended solutions. But for now, I have tried to show, in this section, that dealing with philosophical problems, for Wittgenstein, may involve dealing with a wider set of subsidiary problems and effects that can make solving the initial problem more difficult. In particular, we've seen how, for Wittgenstein an assumed hierarchical arrangement of concepts and the assumption of a 'simple conceptual unity' can result in a situation where the philosopher must 'throw out their work' and start again if their foundational thesis is found to be defective in some way. We've also seen how, for Wittgenstein, philosophical problems do not just involve just a cognitive/conceptual problem-solving task. There is also the task of dealing with the effects that philosophical problems can have on the person encountering them, which are much less 'cognitively' orientated (in the sense that they require an application of intellect to overcome them), and much more orientated towards nebulous things like a person's character, their philosophical aspirations, their ideas about the goals of philosophical inquiry, and how they see things. As we have seen, these aspects of a person's outlook make a real difference to whether a solution to someone's problem will be effective. For example, philosophical dogmatism, vacuity, unfairness, and the problems we have just considered that arise from commitment to a hierarchical conception of philosophy and of philosophical problems all flow from the individual outlook and approach of the thinker whose difficulties are to be resolved.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

⁷⁶ For example, see Gabriel Citron 'Honesty, Humility, Courage, & Strength: Later Wittgenstein on the Difficulties of Philosophy and the Philosophical Virtues' *Philosophers' Imprint* vol.19. no. 25 (2019) pp. 1-24 and James Conant 'On Going the Bloody Hard Way'

In this chapter I have tried to make sense of the later Wittgenstein's understanding of philosophical problems, by exploring his account of philosophy in §89-133 of the *Investigations*, reading it as a response to his earlier account of philosophy and philosophical problems in the *Tractatus*. I have suggested that Wittgenstein saw 'grave mistakes' in the *Tractatus* and took those mistakes as emblematic of a wider western philosophical tradition. The focus is one kind of philosophical problem which Wittgenstein took to be a fairly common kind, but we should not take him to be making claims about essential defining features common to *all* philosophical problems. Rather he is observing something that he considers to be a frequent problem for philosophers.

We are now well placed to summarise the significant features of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophical problems, significant both in terms of their impact on his overall philosophical outlook and in terms of their pertinence to our comparative project:

- 1) Linguistic confusions contribute to philosophical problems, in the sense that 'confusions in our language' (such as misleading forms of expression, confusing analogies etc.) contribute to confusions surrounding/between the necessary and contingent properties of a concept.
- 2) Problems typically involve concepts that are ordinarily familiar to the person encountering them, but which seem 'unfamiliar' when that person is pressed to describe them.⁷⁷
- 3) Problems often take the form of 'what is F' style questions, prompting a definitional answer in response.
- 4) Giving a definitional answer in response can further compound our problems, by (inadvertently or otherwise) creating a metaphysical thesis about the essential and necessary features of the concept under investigation.
- 5) Dealing with a philosophical problem may be inhibited by a wider set of problems that are nothing to do with the philosophical problem itself, but

⁷⁷ Even if those concepts are fairly 'specialist' concepts (such as the kinds of concepts involved in science or maths)

relate to the character and attitudes of the person in the grip of the philosophical problem, and the way they desire to see things.

These are the main aspects of Wittgenstein's account of philosophical problems that I will call on in making my comparison between his approach and Socratic Midwifery. Other features may also turn out to be relevant. I do not intend this as an exhaustive account of Wittgenstein's thoughts on philosophical problems.

My next task is to show that these features can more-or-less be matched with features of the Socratic Midwife's conception of philosophical problems, and to explore whether or not we should attribute these similarities to a shared maieutic nature. If the two methodologies share some of their conception of philosophical problems, that will also provide a good grounding for my later comparison of the mechanics of their methods — that is, how each methodology conceives of the business of dealing with philosophical problems and how they go about actually doing it.

Chapter Three: The Conceptual Task of Philosophy

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I proposed a meta-philosophical account of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, by charting the evolution of his conception of philosophical problems from the earlier part of his career to the later. I suggested that the kinds of philosophical problems with which Wittgenstein was concerned have a set of very distinctive features (summarised in 2.5), including their relation to 'ordinarily familiar' concepts, and their 'what-is-F' structure, amongst other features. I also argued that Wittgenstein thought that to deal with philosophical problems one must also deal with a further set of problems that have more to do with one's outlook – one's character, way of seeing things, and what one desires from the inquiry. Consequently, I suggested that addressing *this* task involves something other than intellect, and that Wittgenstein's philosophical practice aims at solving not only the philosophical problems (i.e. the cognitive issues), but also the issues concerning the attitude of the enquirer.

I shall treat these two tasks separately to start with before bringing them together in a later chapter. First, in this chapter, I will deal with what I call the 'cognitive' task. That is, the intellectual task of approaching and attempting to solve a philosophical problem. I will argue that we can find something analogous to this in the Socratic Midwife's conception of philosophical problems, as depicted in Plato's *Theaetetus*. I will examine the key similarities and differences between Wittgenstein and Socrates and suggest that their shared maieutic outlook might explain the similarities. I will also explore how these similarities can inform our picture of maieutic inquiry more generally.

3.2 The Introduction of the Problem and the Method

Before I get into the particulars of how Wittgenstein and the Socratic Midwife address the so-called ‘cognitive’ task of philosophy, I must first address the similarities and dissimilarities in how both thinkers introduce the philosophical problem to their respective interlocutors, how they ‘pitch’ the process of philosophical inquiry to those they are interacting with, and how this generally frames their investigations and their respective notions of method. Not only will these observations aid us in grounding our comparison, they are also particularly pertinent for our investigation into maieutic methods of inquiry; if we are to take the maieutic philosopher seriously at their word that they do not force any kind of thesis onto their interlocutor, then we must pay careful attention to how they present the very idea of philosophical inquiry to them.

How does each philosopher then introduce the notion of philosophical inquiry to their interlocutors? In the case of the *Theaetetus*, philosophical inquiry is repeatedly introduced on the basis of need. Initially, Socrates introduces philosophical inquiry on the basis that Theaetetus and Socrates ought to investigate Theodorus’ claim that they are alike in ‘virtue and wisdom’ (145b). After a brief attempt at philosophical inquiry, in which Theaetetus attempts to answer Socrates’ question of ‘what is knowledge’ by pointing to kinds of knowledge, Theaetetus complains to Socrates of the discomfort at being unable to formulate the kind of account that Socrates’ questions seem to demand, and (as we’ve seen in chapter one) Socrates then re-introduces philosophical inquiry with a view to dispelling Theaetetus’ unease and inducing him into ‘intellectual labour’. In each instance, philosophical inquiry is introduced as a tool to accomplish some kind of task outside of the dissolution of the problem itself. Indeed, the problem is introduced *after* the need for the inquiry has been established. Socrates draws Theaetetus into an elenctic-style inquiry before the question of ‘what is knowledge’ is even raised, with a flurry of questions aimed at determining whether or not Theodorus was right to compare the two (144e-145e). Socrates then finally introduces the question of ‘what is knowledge’ in 146a, which elicits a cold response from Theodorus (‘I am not used to this kind of discussion, and I’m not the right age to get used to it either’, 146b) and confusion from Theaetetus (148e).

What is interesting here is that, in the case of the Socratic Midwife (at least, in the *Theaetetus*), the interlocutor does not come to the philosopher with a problem

which the philosopher then sets about solving. Rather, what we see is Socrates *induce* confusion into Theaetetus by presenting the problem ('what is knowledge') and then disbaring his attempt to answer the problem by pointing to the various kinds of knowledge and knowledge-holder. In a sense, Theaetetus is (at least, initially) worse-off for having encountered Socrates, going from being a promising student with a good grip on things to being utterly confused in a short period of time. Whilst Socrates presents intellectual midwifery as a service, it would seem that the services rendered are in response to a problem that he is responsible for in the first place. However, by the end of the dialogue, Theaetetus is demonstrably better off for having undergone his inquiries with Socrates. Not only is the 'pain' of his 'intellectual labour' seemingly relieved, he is also said to be 'gentler' and better disposed for future philosophical inquiry. So the alleviation of the confusion at hand does not seem to be the only thing gleaned from the midwife's services, if Theaetetus is to be used as a paradigmatic example of a patient, for Theaetetus is supposedly better equipped to deal with future philosophical inquiries by the end of the dialogue.

How does this compare to Wittgenstein's introduction of philosophical problems (and the investigations needed to resolve them) in the *Philosophical Investigations*? Where the *Theaetetus* is written as a straightforward dialogue, it is easy to tell who the interlocutor is and consequently who it is that Socrates is trying to pitch philosophical inquiry to. It is less straightforward in the *Investigations*: as shall be discussed in chapters five and six, the *Investigations* can be argued as having many different hidden interlocutors all throughout the text. However, given the idiosyncratic 'I-you' style that Wittgenstein writes in, we can assume that the primary interlocutor (at least for the purposes of discerning who it is that Wittgenstein is pitching to) is 'us', the reader-interlocutor.⁷⁸ After all, it is us as readers that Wittgenstein is trying to inform when it comes to demonstrating his various methods.

The *Investigations* starts with a quoted passage from Augustine's *Confessions*, out of which Wittgenstein interprets a particular picture of the essence of language (that words name objects and sentences are combinations of names). From here,

⁷⁸ See Rupert Read *Wittgenstein's Liberatory Philosophy* for more on the relevance and import of Wittgenstein's 'second personal' writing style. Rupert J. Read *Wittgenstein's Liberatory Philosophy: Thinking Through His Philosophical Investigations*. (Routledge, 2020)

Wittgenstein goes on to diagnose a philosophical confusion at the heart of the Augustinian picture, one which Wittgenstein argues is a prevalent kind of philosophical confusion that is operating behind many philosophical problems and introduces a ‘method demonstrated by examples’ with the aim of dissolving the confusion, by clarifying the pertinent concepts operating underneath the confusion at hand.

As is the case with the Socratic Midwife, Wittgenstein introduces his method(s) of inquiry in response to what he identifies as a philosophical confusion. The ‘method’ is offered to us, the interlocutors, as a means of overcoming this kind of confusion.⁷⁹ However, it is less clear that Wittgenstein is responsible for inducing the confusion in his interlocutors (in this case, us), or at the very least, in the same way that Socrates is responsible for inducing confusion into Theaetetus.⁸⁰ Through examining the so called ‘Augustinian’ picture of language use, Wittgenstein is highlighting what he takes to be a common and pervasive problem underpinning many philosophical confusions - and consequently can be said to be dealing with a problem that is *already* confusing his interlocutors, whether they are aware of it or not. The implied question that is raised by Wittgenstein’s analysis of Augustine, ‘what is the essence of language?’, doesn’t even turn out to be the cause of confusion for his interlocutor, rather, it is the product of an underlying confusion that the interlocutor is under the grip of, which is simple conceptual unity.⁸¹ By contrast, Theaetetus’ confusion is derived from the question itself and his inability to answer it.⁸² He specifically cites the kinds of questions that Socrates asks and his inability to formulate an account as a source of consternation. It

⁷⁹ I use ‘method’ here, but I acknowledge that Wittgenstein claims not to have a singular ‘method’, but rather, a number of different ‘methods’/‘therapies’. By ‘method’ I refer to the overall methodological framework that Wittgenstein is promoting, within which all these various ‘methods/therapies’ reside.

⁸⁰ We might say that both ‘reveal’ confusions to their interlocutors. But in the case of *Theaetetus*, Socrates moves Theaetetus to confusion by getting him to engage with the question ‘what is knowledge’ in a philosophical way. Hence accusations from Socrates’ other interlocutors that he is a stingray that numbs everyone he comes in to contact with. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, seems to be operating as if his ‘interlocutors’ have come to him already (knowingly) confused.

⁸¹ Oskari Kuusela *The Struggle Against Dogmatism: Wittgenstein and the Concept of Philosophy*. (Harvard University Press, 2008), Ch. 1

⁸² By ‘the question itself’, I refer to the specific kind of question that Socrates is asking Theaetetus (the ‘what is F’ style question, that presumes a simple conceptual unity). This is one of the ways in which Socrates can be said to induce a confusion in his interlocutor, rather than simply reveal them.

is then that Socrates reveals the doctrine of midwifery, and the process of midwifery can 'properly' be said to begin.

That Socrates and Wittgenstein identify the point of confusion in different areas is of little concern, as both can be said to see the confusion as something that is *implicit* within the interlocutor, and consequently, can be understood as framing philosophical inquiry (or at least, their philosophical inquiries) as answering the need to resolve something within the interlocutor. Furthermore, both can be seen to hold that philosophical problems concern something that is *familiar* to the interlocutor. One of the key features of Socratic Midwifery is that it is concerned with extracting an interlocutor's 'implicit knowledge' regarding the object of investigation. Wittgenstein expresses a similar idea when considering his methodology:

After all, in the end I cannot say more than everyone knows. I can only point out what everyone knows, i.e., what everyone will immediately admit as true.

(The Socratic recollection of truth) (Ms 110, 131-2)

Although he is perhaps specifically referencing here the notion of recollection in the *Meno*, whereby Socrates describes how one 'recalls' knowledge known by their immortal soul (80d-86e), this quote from Wittgenstein is nevertheless pertinent to us in demonstrating that Wittgenstein understands his methods of inquiry to relate to something that is implicit and needs recalling, highlighting a significant similarity with the practice of Socratic midwifery on maieutic grounds.

We have seen in the previous chapter how Wittgenstein understands philosophical problems as being problems that relate to what I labelled 'ordinarily familiar concepts'. That Socrates' treatment of Theaetetus can also be said to be over an 'ordinarily familiar concept' for Theaetetus is evident, given that Theaetetus feels he ought to be able to give an account of knowledge in response to Socrates' questioning, and is troubled by the fact that he can't. Just as Augustine describes when talking about the difficulty of giving a definition to 'time', Theaetetus feels as if he knows knowledge when he is not prompted to describe it (or else he would not be comfortable answering questions about his education from Theodorus and Theodorus' own knowledge) but is unable to call to mind what knowledge is when prompted. The

seemingly familiar concept of knowledge then becomes strange and unfamiliar to Theaetetus, who, only moments beforehand, was comfortable in describing to Socrates what kind of knowledge Theodorus had and what kind of knowledge he receives from Theodorus' education.

Here, we stumble upon what may be a key difference in how Wittgenstein and Socrates-as-midwife pitch their services: Socrates can be seen to pitch his service in order to aid Theaetetus in being able to articulate the kind of account that Socrates' philosophical question demands (thereby resolving the confusion), Wittgenstein seemingly pitches the methodologies he explores in the *Investigations* as a way of clarifying aspects of the object under investigation that are themselves confusing. Consequently, whilst we can say that both Wittgenstein and Socrates understand that the confusion of the philosophical problem is related to something that is *familiar* within the interlocutor, we can *also* say that what they offer their interlocutors differs somewhat, in the sense that Socrates is responding to his interlocutor's inability to adequately formulate an account in response to the philosophical problem whereas Wittgenstein's interlocutor seems to have no such problem.⁸³

What I mean by this, and why this might be, requires some further clarification. Theaetetus' initial attempts at answering the problem 'what is knowledge' (listing several examples of *kinds* of knowledge) are dismissed out of hand by Socrates in a way that is reminiscent of his notorious dismissals of non-definitional accounts in other dialogues (the dismissals that give rise to the so-called 'priority of definition' aspect of 'Socratic' dialogues).⁸⁴ Although it is not clear if Socrates is demanding the exact same kind of definitional account from Theaetetus as he does from his other interlocutors (something that Catherine Rowett has recently argued for), he nevertheless demands a particular kind of account, one that hunts for the essential features of the concept under investigation and one which Theaetetus is unable to

⁸³ Cf. Wittgenstein's comments on 'making things easier for ourselves' in philosophy (pg 120-121). It could be the case that Wittgenstein's interlocutor has no difficulty in articulating such an account because no particular form of an account is forced onto them (i.e a definitional account). With Wittgenstein, we make philosophy 'easier for ourselves' because we are not forced into articulating an account in a form which may be impossible to give.

⁸⁴ See Hugh G. Benson, 'The Priority of Definition and the Socratic Elenchus' *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (1990) 8:19 for a summary of the priority of definition at work in the Socratic dialogues.

articulate.⁸⁵ Socrates then introduces the concept of midwifery, claiming to be able to aid Theaetetus by inducing him into ‘intellectual labour’ and aiding him in articulating just such an account (whether or not the account itself will be found to be valid is another question). As we saw in chapter one, one of the few (obvious) tangible benefits that Theaetetus derives from having undergone Socrates’ treatment is that he had been able to say more than he thought he had in him, and would be better prepared for future inquiries. Consequently, we are to understand that Socrates’ services (at the very least, partially) have the intended effect of aiding his interlocutor in articulating the ‘right kind’ of account in response to a philosophical problem.

Wittgenstein, on the other hand, makes no such demands. Indeed, he even admonishes Socrates’ “contemptuous attitude towards the particular case”, where ‘particular case’ refers to something like the interlocutor’s attempt to answer Socrates’ questions by looking for some essential characteristics of the concept under investigation (be that a definitional account or a decompositional analysis of what is common to all particular instances of said concept). Furthermore, there is at least one occasion where Wittgenstein robustly distances himself from Socrates over this disagreement on the role of the particular case in philosophy. In a dictation to Waismann in the early 1930s, he exclaims:

I can characterize my standpoint no better than by saying that it is the antithetical standpoint to the one occupied by Socrates in the Platonic dialogues. For if I were asked what knowledge is, I would enumerate instances of knowledge and add the words ‘and similar things’. (VW 33)

The *Investigations* are replete with examples of Wittgenstein urging his interlocutor to look at cases of particular instances of the concept under investigation in order to clarify what is meant by the concept and how it is that we operate with it.⁸⁶ We’ve seen in chapter two how Wittgenstein introduces the notion of family resemblance in order to highlight that alternative ways of characterising concepts outside of the

⁸⁵ Catherine Rowett has recently provided a convincing argument that, in a break from his ‘typical’ practice, Socrates does not insist on a definitional account from Theaetetus, rather, he is engaging in a form of ‘compositional analysis’. See chapter one of this thesis.

⁸⁶ For example, Wittgenstein gives an example list demonstrating the wide variety of ways in which we use sentences in response to the Augustinian pictures, in PI §23.

structure of ‘simple conceptual unity’ (where all instances of a concept are related by virtue of a single shared characteristic) exists. This isn’t to say that we are to read Wittgenstein as disbarring the possibility of answering philosophical questions in the form of accounts of the essential characteristics of the object under investigation, for to do so would amount to reading Wittgenstein as putting forward the very kind of thesis he is attempting to resist.⁸⁷

Wittgenstein’s in-text interlocutor has no trouble articulating an account, and nor does he write in such a way that he expects his reader-interlocutor to have any trouble being able to offer their own account in response to the philosophical problems posed. Consequently, his inquiries aren’t aimed at being able to get the interlocutor to overcome a *perceived* inability to articulate an account in response to a philosophical problem. Rather, and as witnessed in chapter two, it is aimed at getting the interlocutor to examine their own accounts *and themselves*, in order to get the interlocutor to see what biases, desires, and confusions are underlying their accounts and are causing issues for them. This is because, unlike Socrates, Wittgenstein does not force the inquiry down any particular lines. There is an argument to be made here that the only reason Theaetetus has trouble articulating an account is because of the limits that Socrates puts on the inquiry, in insisting on a particular kind of account of the necessary and essential characteristics of the object under investigation and a general analysis of the object of investigation (over analysis of particulars).

The result is what I have suggested earlier in this passage of the chapter, in that the practice of *Socratic* midwifery seems more geared towards getting the interlocutor to submit something for inspection, with an understanding that the problem lay in getting the interlocutor to be able to articulate an account in the first place. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, seeks to address confusions underlying his interlocutor’s accounts, that aren’t limited to the accounts themselves but may be confusions within the interlocutor themselves (such as the misapprehension that all concepts must have simple conceptual unity). In each instance, the introduction of the

⁸⁷ Through the articulation of the exceptionless essential and necessary characteristics of the object under investigation, in this case, that concepts and their particulars must be related by sharing a single, defining characteristic.

philosophical problem also highlights the need for the maieutic philosopher to do some other work with the interlocutor.

Is this apparent difference problematic for our comparison? Not necessarily. We've seen that, similarly to the Socratic Midwife, Wittgenstein also envisages a philosophical method without theses being forced on his interlocutors – for turning a philosophical account into a thesis leaves one open to the threat of dogmatism, and the subsequent threats of vacuity and/or injustice.⁸⁸ Furthermore, Wittgenstein expresses his intent at the beginning of the *Investigations* to not 'spare his reader the trouble of thinking' but to spur them on to thoughts of their own, expressing a similar maieutic concern over guiding his interlocutor towards expressing their implicit knowledge rather than instructing them in anything explicit.⁸⁹ The difference, however, is that the Socratic Midwife never thinks to question the form in which the inquiry is framed, where Wittgenstein recognises the implicit thesis built into the search for essentialist definitions. As we've seen, the assumption of exceptionless simple conceptual unity behind the essentialist search for definitions is identified by Wittgenstein as a thesis of the kind which ought to be avoided in philosophical thinking.

Both Wittgenstein and Socrates express similar concerns over putting forward theses to one's interlocutors, grounded in similarly maieutic concerns, consequently we can see that the divergence in opinion over the role of essentialist definitions is not troubling to the process of comparing the two methodologies on maieutic grounds. In fact, one could say that this difference of opinion can even further the depth of the comparison by adding an evaluative perspective. If one were assessing both Wittgenstein's practice and Socratic Midwifery (as practised by Socrates) on how well they accomplish the maieutic aim of rendering one's interlocutor's implicit knowledge explicit, the Socratic insistence on essentialist definitional accounts can be seen as a failure of one of the key principles of maieutic inquiry (the adoption of a doctrine-less stance with one's interlocutor). Subsequently, Wittgenstein's practice could then be seen as an improvement on Socratic Midwifery in this aspect. When read in this way, one can see that such a methodological divergence does not mark Wittgenstein's

⁸⁸ In this instance in particular, injustice against one's interlocutors.

⁸⁹ PI preface, p. X

practice as a departure from maieutic philosophy, but instead might be seen as a fuller realisation of one of its core principles.

Accordingly, despite apparent differences in the way that Wittgenstein and Socrates introduce their philosophical problems to their interlocutors and consequently how they then ‘pitch’ their services in response, these differences are reconcilable when we consider that both thinkers can be shown to stick to key maieutic principles in their diagnosis of confusion. Although there are some minor divergences as we’ve just seen, there nevertheless exists a consistent similarity between the two in understanding philosophical problems to be relating to ordinarily familiar phenomena, and that therefore the method of dealing with philosophical problems involves examining one’s implicit knowledge in relation to the object under investigation. These differences are further reconciled when we read Wittgenstein’s resistance to the Socratic way of doing things (such as his ‘contemptuous attitude for the particular case’) as being motivated by the very same maieutic principles that guide Socrates’ practice, as I have demonstrated in chapter one. Understanding how both thinkers introduce philosophical problems to their interlocutors and consequently introduce their methodology leaves us in better stead to understand how it is they address this so-called ‘conceptual’ aspect of philosophical problems; Where philosophical problems are characterised by one finding ordinarily familiar conceptual phenomena unfamiliar, which in turn brings about problematic philosophical accounts in response, the task of the philosopher somehow is to render the unfamiliar back into familiarity.⁹⁰ We shall now explore how both Socratic Midwifery and Wittgenstein’s practice go about achieving this.

3.3 Addressing the Conceptual Task of Philosophical Problems – the Socratic Approach

⁹⁰ Cf. PI 116: ‘What we do is bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.’ Kuusela takes PI 116 as a call to return to familiarity in adopting more humble and non-metaphysical uses of clarificatory concepts. He characterises Wittgenstein’s later method as “being designed to enable one to find one’s way back to the everyday” (Kuusela, *Struggle Against Dogmatism* pp.281-283).

Whilst the Socratic Midwife's approach to philosophical problems can be said to have a number of similarities with the Wittgensteinian approach, there is clearly one area in which the resemblance is greatest – and subsequently most important for our comparative project. The idea that philosophical problems relate to concepts that are ordinarily familiar to the person that is under the grip of the problem carries with it implicit repercussions for the meta-philosophical framework that such an idea is operating in. For instance, philosophical problems can then be said to be related to one's implicit resources, in that it makes what is ordinarily familiar (and known to some extent) by that person unfamiliar, and thus the task is then presumably to bring the unfamiliar back into the realms of familiarity. Subsequently, we should now turn our attention away from examining Socrates' and Wittgenstein's respective conceptions of philosophical problems, towards examining their respective methods. I anticipate that philosophical practices that operate under the kind of conception of philosophical problems laid out in 3.2 are not interested in unearthing new and hitherto unknown information about the object under investigation for the purposes of solving the philosophical problem at hand, and that their methods are then fine-tuned towards the task of rendering implicit knowledge (either one's interlocutor's or one's own) explicit.

From the general outline of Socratic Midwifery given in chapter one, we can already see how philosophical methods that are geared towards leading one's interlocutor towards the re-discovery or re-evaluation of 'familiar' concepts are easily identifiable as being maieutic in nature – in that the focus of the inquiry becomes the facilitation of something that the person under the grip of the philosophical problem implicitly has. Subsequently, we should expect that both methodologies have particular tools and mechanisms in place to ensure such a facilitation. As we saw in chapter one, for such a procedure to be genuinely maieutic in nature, provision must also be put in place to ensure that no explicit theses are forced onto the interlocutor, and that the product of the inquiry (whatever that may be) is genuinely the product of the interlocutor.

We have already had a very general look at what some of these methods might look for the Socratic Midwife in chapter one. In particular, we saw that in order to help ensure the maieutic focus of the inquiry, the Socratic Midwife adopts a doctrine-

less stance (so as to not force a thesis onto their interlocutor), encourages the interlocutor towards submitting what they really feel might be the case with regards to whatever the philosophical problem at hand is, and ensures that whatever it is that the interlocutor is putting forward is understood (by both the philosopher and the interlocutor themselves, as may be the case). However, we still don't really have a handle on the actual mechanics of these points, and how they might contribute toward the solution or dissolution of the conceptual aspect of philosophical problems. Accordingly, I will begin here, before looking to see if analogous practices can be found in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. To help fine tune my examination, and to avoid potentially repeating any of the material of the first chapter, I will be doing so this time through the lens of the methodological goal of turning the unfamiliar back into the familiar.

There isn't much more to say about the Socratic Midwife's allegedly doctrineless position (referred to as his 'barrenness' by Socrates), for as I established in chapter one, its role and function is a key characteristic of the maieutic method and the imagery of 'barrenness' likewise is central to the analogy of midwifery generally. Whilst it wasn't clear how successful (or even sincere) Socrates is in maintaining a doctrine-less stance, we nevertheless saw in chapter one that Socrates' 'barrenness' is at least intended to serve as a means of getting his interlocutor to submit their *genuine* beliefs, rather than to simply parrot the beliefs of Socrates or to say what they think will be convincing. After putting aside the question as to whether or not Socrates was successful in accomplishing this in his own practice, it was established in chapter one that the general methodological principle behind 'barrenness' in Socratic Midwifery was that it helped to preserve the authenticity of the interlocutor's account – which was shown to be critical for a successful maieutic inquiry. If the Socratic Midwife is to lead their interlocutor from an unfamiliar view of their concepts back to a familiar one, they must first ascertain that whatever their interlocutor is submitting is genuinely how what they believe and think at the time, and not some fabricated ad-hoc account for the sake of some other purpose outside of the clarification of the object under investigation (e.g. for the sake of winning an argument against Socrates, or for the sake of merely looking correct). If the interlocutor's proposed account is not how it genuinely appears to them at the time, then the subject of the inquiry is no

longer something implicit in that interlocutor (as it is not their genuinely held belief but rather, something they have constructed artificially for the purposes of excelling at the inquiry), and therefore does little to address the confusions that gave rise to the philosophical problem in the first place.

The question then rises: what is the Socratic Midwife's role in soliciting such honesty from their interlocutors? Does the Socratic Midwife have tools at hand for determining whether or not their interlocutor is being honest, or should they just take their interlocutors at their word?⁹¹ One potential solution is that honesty is simply a prerequisite for doing philosophy with Socrates/the Socratic Midwife, and not something that the method of the midwife has to instil in its interlocutors. The idea that there are certain prerequisites for doing philosophy is certainly mirrored in the text, where Socrates refers to those with whom his 'divine sign' forbids him from associating, and when he similarly refers to those who go away before his work with them is done — indicating a failure of character on their part. On the assumption that what Socrates refers to in these instances is his interlocutor's honesty (an assumption which I shall argue for in the next chapter), it is clear that the midwife's role is not to facilitate or instil honesty within their interlocutors, and thus we should not expect to find any mechanism within the midwife's methodology for instilling it.

One could argue then that, if honesty is a prerequisite for doing philosophy with Socrates (and by extension, the Socratic Midwife), the method of Socratic Midwifery does not *need* a mechanism for determining the honesty of its candidates, since those who do not submit themselves with honesty to the midwife's ministrations will simply be unable to sustain any philosophical dialectic with the midwife, or otherwise be unable to derive any benefit from it. Under this view, those who are unsuited to maieutic philosophy are simply weeded out during the process of philosophical inquiry. However, it might seem that this is not the most economical use of the Socratic Midwife's time, and that the midwife would need some way of selecting prospective candidates with the requisite honest attitude (even if sometimes they still did not turn out to be successful). Again, this doesn't seem to echo Socrates'

⁹¹ Honesty also plays an important role in the next chapter, on confronting the other task posed by philosophical problems. I flag this here, to show how both the 'cognitive' and 'ethical' tasks are understood to be interrelated.

suggestion that he has some kind of forewarning against associating with those that are unsuitable for philosophical inquiry,

Furthermore, relying on the process of philosophical inquiry to weed out those that are unsuitable doesn't sit squarely with Socrates' professed ability to 'match-make' students to appropriate teachers. As was established in chapter one, the Socratic Midwife is shown to have some skill in selecting prospective candidates and matching the appropriate teacher to the appropriate student. We saw how this notion of match-making might inform some of Socrates' interactions with Theodorus and Theaetetus, with Socrates showing Theodorus to be an unsuitable teacher for Theaetetus by getting the older man to demonstrate his unwillingness to engage in philosophical inquiry. However (and as I shall argue for more in the next chapter), this works both ways. Socrates' skill as a matchmaker isn't limited to assessing the qualities of prospective teachers; part of this process must also involve assessing the qualities of the potential student, including (but not limited to) their character and the honesty of their contributions.

Some of this spills over into what I propose is the second task involved in dealing with philosophical problems – the task to do with one's character and willpower – and so we'll simply flag how this relates to the conceptual task here and move on under the assumption that the Socratic Midwife does have tools available for determining the character of a prospective candidate (as will be shown in the next chapter). However, determining the honesty of what one's interlocutor is submitting is only the first step. The Socratic Midwife must then seek to ensure and demonstrate that they understand what it is that their interlocutor is submitting, without adding anything of their own invention into the mix by re-interpreting the interlocutor's account in accordance with their own biases. One has to achieve a mutual understanding with their interlocutor, if the maieutic philosophical inquiry is to be fruitful.

The next step, then, is to show how the Socratic Midwife achieves mutual understanding with their interlocutor over what is being submitted for philosophical testing. Arguably, this is one of the most important processes in the Socratic Midwife's treatment of the so-called 'conceptual' task of philosophical problems, as having an understanding of an interlocutor's account that doesn't re-interpret the interlocutor's

original account or add anything novel into the mix is evidently crucial in the process of bringing an interlocutor back into ‘familiarity’ with their own implicit knowledge regarding the object under investigation.

A general overview of how Socrates achieves mutual understanding with his interlocutors across the whole of the Platonic dialogues has already been given by Sebastian Grève.⁹² However, his treatment of Socrates’ search for mutual understanding doesn’t fully explore the maieutic function that mutual understanding plays in the philosophical process, and so I shall endeavour to expand on his work here, and with a specific focus on how Socrates facilitates mutual understanding in the *Theaetetus*. This being said, there are some features of Grève’s analysis that will be useful for my own. Grève suggests that Socrates’ practice of the elenchus is often motivated by a focus on the concerns of his particular interlocutor, and not simply the motivation to move them into self-refutation.⁹³ He identifies what he labels as ‘overlooked’ instances of this aspect of Socrates’ practice, which include (amongst other things) Socrates’ interest in his interlocutor’s concerns (rather than, say, whatever is on Socrates’ mind), the fact that Socrates takes his interlocutors seriously as individuals, and Socrates’ particular use of questions.

That Socrates has an interest in his interlocutor’s concerns above his own, and that he takes his interlocutors seriously as individuals are both characteristics that we have already seen in the analogy of the midwife (as exemplified in the maieutic reasons behind his professed ‘barrenness’). However, Socrates’ use of questions in the *Theaetetus* warrants particular attention. Of Socrates’ general use of questions across the dialogue, Grève observes that Socrates doesn’t just ask the typical questions one would expect from a cross-examination; he also repeatedly asks questions that clarify what his interlocutor means by something, and questions surrounding whether or not his interlocutor *understands* Socrates, whether or not they agree with Socrates. As Grève argues in his paper, these kinds of questions are not just niceties from Socrates, or dramatic filler. Rather, they serve a specific methodological purpose, in ascertaining mutual understanding between interlocutor and philosopher.

⁹² Sebastian Sunday Grève, ‘The Importance of Understanding Each Other in Philosophy’, *Philosophy*, 90.2 (2015), 213–39 (p.218)

⁹³ Grève ‘The Importance of Understanding’ pp. 215

Questions as Methodological Tools

We can see similar patterns of questioning in the *Theaetetus*. Socrates' actual questioning of Theaetetus begins before the object of investigation, knowledge, is even set. Upon Theodorus introducing Theaetetus to him, Socrates barrages the young Theaetetus with a slew of questions, in order to "start a discussion, and [to] get to be on friendly and sociable terms with one another" (146a). There are some 19 questions in this section, ranging from questions about Theaetetus' opinion of Theodorus' claim that Socrates and Theaetetus' share certain similarities, to questions about any potential expertise Theodorus might have in determining the likeness between people, and finally a preamble on the main topic of the dialogue - questions about the relationship between wisdom and knowledge.

It would be easy to write off the importance of these opening questions as just a prelude to the main philosophical event, being situated as they are in the dialogue before the philosophical problem is properly expressed. But as we've seen in chapter one (and as Socrates goes on to tell Theaetetus), part of the skill of the intellectual midwife is to be found in 'match-making' and determining the validity and viability of the student teacher relationship (and of the prospective candidate for philosophical inquiry in the first place). That this initial bombardment of questions is meant to vet the viability of Theaetetus as a potential philosophical partner and, in turn, justify the need for philosophical examination in the first place is apparent in the following:

SOCRATES: So if he says we're alike in some part of our bodies, whether praising us for it in some way or criticising us, it isn't really worth paying attention to him.

THEAETETUS: I suppose not

SOCRATES: But what if he praised the mind of either of us for virtue or wisdom? Wouldn't it be worthwhile for one of us, when he heard that, *to do his best to inspect the one who'd been praised*, and for the other to do his best to show himself off?

THEAETETUS: Definitely, Socrates. (145a-b, emphasis added)

The above exchange is important for several reasons. Firstly, it shows Socrates determining the viability of Theaetetus as a potential candidate for philosophical inquiry, in ascertaining whether or not Theaetetus sees the value of introspection for the purposes of virtue and wisdom. What this means is that Socrates must first determine whether or not Theaetetus even sees the value in submitting and examining knowledge implicit within him, through the use of questions. Secondly, it sets up the conditions by which Socrates then secures consent for inspecting Theaetetus' implicit knowledge in the first place:

SOCRATES: Well then Theaetetus, now is the time for you to show yourself off, and for me to look on...

THEAETETUS: That would be good Socrates (145b)

Having established both of these things, not only has Socrates then set up the conditions for philosophical inquiry, but has in the same move set up the justification for the insistence of honesty and openness from Theaetetus. For if Theaetetus is sincere in his agreement with Socrates that, in search of virtue and wisdom, one who is praised for such things must be inspected, Theaetetus then acknowledges the importance of opening himself up to Socrates and doing so with honesty.

So in using questions (and not merely instructing Theaetetus on the purpose of maieutic inquiry and the importance of opening up and being honest about it), Socrates has already made the first significant move in acquiring genuine accounts of implicit knowledge by getting his interlocutor to acknowledge and understand the need for doing so in his interlocutor's own terms. This also has the added benefit of making the maieutic process less alien to Theaetetus when he describes it through the analogy of the midwife, as Theaetetus by that point is already familiar with the style and structure of the question-and-answer inquiry. Thus before the process of intellectual birthing begins, Socrates as intellectual midwife makes use of questions as part of both his diagnostic and therapeutic toolkits, in both determining viability of his candidate for maieutic testing and acclimating that candidate to said testing.

Following on from Theaetetus' first 'proper' attempt at answering Socrates' question, we face another barrage of questions -- this time following on from Theaetetus' answer that 'knowledge is a kind of perception'. Whereas the questions before served the purpose of determining that Theaetetus valued introspection and self-reflection and was therefore a good fit for maieutic testing, these questions take a much more different function in the maieutic process, in ascertaining mutual understanding of what, exactly, is being proposed by the interlocutor. We move from a position of the questions looking to secure agreement from the interlocutor about something being posed to them (in asking whether or not it is worthwhile to cross examine the mind of someone who is said to be wise or virtuous), to a position of securing agreement from the interlocutor that a) what is being proposed is understood by the midwife and b) that the further premises that the midwife derives from the original premise is understood by the interlocutor as a fair consequence of the initial premise. Accordingly, Socrates' first few questions to Theaetetus reflect a), in the capacity of representing Theaetetus' thesis:

SOCRATES: ...You say knowledge is perception? (151e)

And in the capacity of making sure that Socrates is correct in understanding it in terms of an analogous theory put forward by Protagoras as the *homo mensura* argument:

SOCRATES: Well it looks as though what you've said about Protagoras is no ordinary theory, but the one that Protagoras, too, used to state.... You've read that, I take it? (152a)

Importantly, Theaetetus answers that last question in the affirmative, without objecting to Socrates presenting Theaetetus' thesis in those terms. In the case that Theaetetus disagreed that the *homo mensura* was a fair analogy to his original thesis, or had he not read or understood Protagoras' *homo mensura*, Socrates's question gives Theaetetus an opportunity to voice these concerns and ensure that his thesis isn't being misrepresented, or that it is being re-iterated in terms he doesn't at least principally understand.

Once what is initially being proposed has been clarified, the Socrates then proceeds to b), in asking questions that explore what is entailed by the mutually agreed upon account, for a variety of purposes. It is these kinds of questions that are typically associated with the general philosophical character of Socrates across the dialogues, as represented by Vlastos' formulation of the elenchus explored in chapter one. In the general account of Socrates' method, such questions are understood as being employed with the broader goal of moving his interlocutor into a position of self-refutation, in what is recognised as being a classic feature of elenctic inquiry. In the *Theaetetus* however, it seems as if they play a slightly different role, in that instead of operating in the (purely) negative role of moving someone to self-refutation, they instead first elaborate and expand on what is being suggested. As we saw in the first chapter, this move has been characterised elsewhere as the construction of auxiliary devices, in order to determine the viability of the intellectual offspring by determining what the ontological cost of such an account would be.⁹⁴

However, what we didn't fully explore and expand upon is how this more constructive strategy from Socrates might aid in the procurement of implicit knowledge from our interlocutors, and thus come to be a tool of midwifery more generally. The most obvious answer is that, upon truthfully answering questions about whether or not some extension to or consequence of the original account is agreeable, yet more of the interlocutor's unexamined assumptions are brought to light, through then having to confront a wider set of assumptions about ontological costing and the more readily established and clarified practises which the 'novel' account would have to synergise with. This would mean that the 'constructed auxiliary devices' don't *just* have the function of the 'testing' of the idea, but that they are also used by the midwife to procure further information about their interlocutor's conceptual understanding, by getting a feel for the wider terrain of their concept use. This is further evidenced by the fact that the auxiliary devices are only implemented on Theaetetus' say-so. Socrates continually seeks to ensure that Theaetetus both understands and agrees that what is saying is either naturally derived from the account being examined (in this

⁹⁴ Catherine Rowett, *Knowledge and Truth in Plato: Stepping Past the Shadow of Socrates* (Oxford University Press, 2018) p. 171

case, that knowledge is perception) or from another set of premises that are shown to have bearing on the account being put forward.

Auxiliary Devices as a Methodological Tool

Subsequently, we can see the transition from one of the midwife's maieutic tools, the methodological use of questions, to the slightly separate yet related use of these so-called auxiliary devices. We've seen how questions lead to the construction of such auxiliary devices, through ascertaining what the interlocutor understands their original philosophical account entails (and thus coming to a greater understanding of the interlocutor's grasp of their conceptual phenomena in the process). As we saw in chapter one, the negative role of Socrates' auxiliary devices is to demonstrate to the interlocutor, in terms that they understand, the ontological cost of holding onto such an account. We saw that, for the account that 'knowledge is perception', Socrates invokes the auxiliary devices of 'man is the measure of all things' and 'nature is flux' to create a world view that could accommodate for an epistemological account like 'knowledge is perception', before showing that ultimately the ontological cost of such a world-view was too much to bear when compared with actual practice in the everyday, and that the account must then be deemed to be non-viable and discarded.

The ontological cost of such an account is arrived at by comparing the account with the world around them, in order to see how well it matches up with reality. In the case of 'knowledge is perception', it's found that holding onto the view that knowledge indeed is a kind of perception, and the accompanying world-view that 'man is the measure of all things' and 'nature is flux', results in the situation where ordinarily stable things like language become impossible. Yet again, this is all done on the interlocutor's say-so. Socrates does not force any of this onto Theaetetus – Theaetetus must first agree that the world-view he and the midwife have arrived at does not seem to match reality, and that consequently the ontological cost of holding onto such a viewpoint is too high.

The important point here is that Theaetetus (and by extension, any interlocutor of the midwife) is invited to compare his philosophical account with the world around him and in doing so is led back from the now recognisably unfamiliar world-view

underpinning the notion that ‘knowledge is a kind of perception’ to the more familiar view of the world where one may act as though there were stable concepts of which knowledge doesn’t appear to be relative. Although Theaetetus must now try again to answer Socrates’ challenge, and in some ways is no closer to directly answering the question ‘what is knowledge’, he presumably does so with the feeling that his quarry is nevertheless less mysterious now for having undergone Socrates’ test. Where Theaetetus struggled at first to articulate an account in response to the question what is knowledge, he has no problem in articulating further accounts. As we’ve seen, at the end of the inquiry he even comments to Socrates that he had said more than he thought he had within him, and seems content in being able to do so (210b4-c6). This practice fits in with the narrative that Socrates as midwife leads his interlocutor from unfamiliar territory back to familiar territory, and how such a practice helps to address the conceptual aspect of philosophical problems laid out in the beginning of this chapter.

So we’ve seen how the Socratic Midwife seeks to address the conceptual aspect of philosophical problems. The midwife must encourage trust and mutual understanding between interlocutor and philosopher, so that the interlocutor submits their genuine accounts of the concept under investigation and understands it themselves.⁹⁵ They are then invited to see how unfamiliar the world would become if it were to accommodate such a view by looking at the world around them and seeing what the ontological cost of their proposed account would bring to it. In doing so, the

⁹⁵ This is reminiscent of a scene in the *Meno*, within which Socrates outlines to Meno that the ‘dialectical approach’ is to proceed ‘through things that the person questioned first agrees he knows’ (75c8-d7). There is some disagreement over how to take this. Dominic Scott argues that this represents a firm ‘dialectical requirement’ for Socrates. Gail Fine goes a step further, and argues that this actually represents a requirement for knowledge over a requirement for dialectic. Rowett, on the other hand, contends that Socrates is just making a ‘pointless concession’ to Meno for the sake of friendly discussion, holding that for Socrates the success criteria of stating the truth has nothing to do with an interlocutor’s acceptance or understanding. It is not my place to fall down on either side of the debate (of how to understand this notion *specifically* in the *Meno*) here. However, given Socrates’ continued practice of getting an interlocutor to both understand and agree on what is being said, and given how instrumental mutual understanding appears to be to the maieutic practice of philosophy, I will observe that something like Scott’s view is consistent with the practice of the Socrates of the *Theaetetus* (although this isn’t to say that Scott is correct about the *Meno*, as it may turn out they are different Socrates’ altogether. See chapter one for more information).

See Dominic Scott, *Plato’s Meno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 35-6, Gail Fine, ‘Knowledge and logos in the Theaetetus’, *Philosophical Review*, 88 (1979), 366-97 (Reprinted in Fine, Gail *Plato on Knowledge and the Forms* (2003) 225-51, 226, and Rowett ‘Knowledge and Truth’ pp. 54

interlocutor is brought back into contact with familiar aspects of the concept under investigation, through the reminder of the ways in which that concept is manifested in day-to-day life. We've seen that the midwife achieves this through a variety of means, including a specialised use of questions, the construction of auxiliary devices, and direct comparisons with the real world. It is now time to see whether anything similar can be seen in the Wittgensteinian account.

3.4 Addressing the Conceptual Task of Philosophical Problems – the Wittgensteinian Approach

Following on from the previous section of this chapter, it appears that there are several potentially fruitful places with which we might look for potential overlap between the processes of Socratic Midwifery and Wittgenstein's later practice. The aim of this section is to not only show that they overlap in these areas, but that there is also significant overlap in their motivation behind these processes. We must show that Wittgenstein is also interested in establishing mutual understanding and trust between interlocutor and philosopher, which is similarly aimed at getting the interlocutor to submit their genuine beliefs about the concept under investigation, and thus come to better understand their implicit knowledge regarding the concept at hand.

We've already briefly spoken about Wittgenstein's rejection of theses in philosophical inquiry, and whilst it would be easy to directly compare this to Socrates' professed barrenness and the doctrineless stance of the Socratic Midwife, this wouldn't be an entirely fair comparison – even if they both inadvertently end up accomplishing the same goal of not forcing anything explicit on the interlocutor. For Wittgenstein, the rejection of theses seems to have much more to do with specifically avoiding the problematic practice of sublimating philosophical accounts and making exceptionless metaphysical statements of necessity. That being said, given that one of Wittgenstein's explicit aims of the *Investigations* was not to 'spare his reader the trouble of thinking' but to instead spur them onto thoughts of their own, we can see that Wittgenstein at least had similar concerns over ensuring that he wasn't forcing positions onto his reader-interlocutor.

This concern is evident again in remarks that Wittgenstein makes surrounding ‘agreement’ between him and his interlocutors in philosophical inquiry, and so it might be better to look here for something analogous with the Socratic Midwife’s doctrine-less positioning. There’s one remark of particular interest here, in which Wittgenstein specifically addresses the issue of forcing a position onto his interlocutor. He writes ‘I won’t say anything that anyone can dispute. Or if anyone does dispute it, I will let that point drop and pass on to say something else’ (LFM 22). What Wittgenstein means here isn’t particularly straightforward. Approaching this from outside of the maieutic context, surely we wouldn’t seriously think that a philosopher would drop any point that his interlocutor doesn’t agree with? But read against the backdrop of Wittgenstein’s desire not to think for his readers, we might begin to understand what Wittgenstein means here – and how it accords with the Socratic Midwife’s maieutic practice.

However, to really understand what Wittgenstein means by this notion of agreement between himself and his interlocutors, we will have to delve a little deeper into the mechanics of how such an agreement is arrived at, and for what purposes. Surely Wittgenstein isn’t saying that philosophy is just a business of saying whatever is pleasing to one’s interlocutors, or that he isn’t trying to test their interlocutors in some way – even if the result is that the interlocutor’s voice isn’t drowned out by the philosopher forcing their own view onto the inquiry. But are we then to understand Wittgenstein as suggesting a relativist approach to dealing with philosophical problems? For either of these to not be the case, such an agreement must be found to serve a different methodological purpose than simply avoiding conflict with one’s interlocutors, or allowing for a relativist conception of philosophical problems and their solutions.

The answer can be found by looking at the task of the philosopher in Wittgenstein’s account, which as we’ve seen in the previous chapters is the clarification of our concepts in response to philosophical problems. As Wittgenstein comments himself, such clarifications are only useful insofar as they actually clarify something for someone: ‘An explanation of words has clarificatory value for the person to whom it clarifies something, upon whom it has a clarifying effect. Independently of

that it is not an explanation.’ (MS 123, 18r; 1940)⁹⁶. What Wittgenstein seems to be saying here is that clarifications don’t exist as explanations in the abstract, or independently from the context in which they are offered. I cannot simply trust that a description which clarified some philosophical issue for me personally will universally work for any interlocutor. Neither can I assume that an interlocutor can be forced to understand such a clarification, by means of argument or coercion.

This seems consistent with the view of philosophical problems expressed over the last few chapters, in which philosophical problems relate to something that is ordinarily familiar to the person in its grip. As we’ve seen, Wittgenstein understands philosophical problems to be concerned with things that one ordinarily knows and has to recall to mind, rather than things that one doesn’t already know and has to discover. Thus we know already that the solution involves looking to one’s existing understanding rather than anything external, and so it makes sense then that a clarification is to be rooted in one’s own understanding rather than the external understanding of another. If the problem lies in one’s own understanding of the object of investigation, then so too does the solution. If an attempt at clarification doesn’t work for an interlocutor, then one must make like Wittgenstein and drop that attempt in favour of another that is more amenable to the interlocutor’s understanding.

Like the Socratic Midwife, the Wittgensteinian must then make an effort to get to know and understand their interlocutor if they are to hold any hope of bringing clarity to the philosophical issue at hand. That Wittgenstein’s philosophy seeks to preserve the ‘individuality of philosophical understanding’ is argued on similar grounds by Grève, who points to several examples where Wittgenstein shows concern over the varying understandings of different individuals and interlocutors. In particular, Grève points to the following notable episode as an example of this in action:

Imagine a child, learning that the earth is round, asking why then people in Australia don’t fall off. I suppose one natural response would be to start to explain about gravity. Wittgenstein, instead, [presumably being somewhere in

⁹⁶ As translated in Kuusela ‘*Struggle Against Dogmatism*’ pp. 247

Europe] would draw a circle with a stick figure atop it, turn it upside down, and say “Now we fall into space.”⁹⁷

As both Grève and Goldfarb point out in their analyses of this anecdote, the explanation that one would naturally lean towards in this circumstance might involve some kind of scientific explanation about the mechanics of gravity, treating the confusion expressed by the child as a call for some specialised information that the child lacks about the world.⁹⁸ However, Wittgenstein instead approaches this as a problem pertaining to knowledge that the child already possesses. Sure, an appeal to the scientific principles operating in the background of this problem might help render the problem solvable for some interlocutors, but Wittgenstein here is sensitive to the conceptual grasp of his child interlocutor. Thus, he offers a solution that is more perspicuous for the child.

As Goldfarb observes, given the concepts that the child is operating with, the scientific explanation is more likely to mislead and cause further confusion than it is to address the issue. For the child may then reason that the people in Australia are still objectively upside down, only now they have some special force that stops them from falling into space. The problem, as Wittgenstein diagnoses it, isn't in some lack of (external) scientific knowledge on the child's part, but instead in their understanding of the familiar notions of 'up' and 'down'. Although the child's question about why the people in Australia don't fall into space may have been answered, the implicit conceptual confusion around the relativity of concepts like 'up' and 'down' goes unanswered. Wittgenstein's response is successful precisely because it diagnoses where the problem lay in his interlocutor's understanding, and thus offers a solution that is tailored to that understanding. In short, he makes an effort to *know* his interlocutor, what their understanding is like, and to then put things in terms that they themselves understand.

⁹⁷ Extract taken from Grève 'The Importance of Understanding' who cites George Kreisel as the original source. See Georg Kreisel, 'Wittgenstein's Theory and Practice of Philosophy', *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 11 (43) 1

⁹⁸ Grève 'The Importance of Understanding' p.224
Warren Goldfarb, 'Wittgenstein on Understanding', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 17 (1) (1992), 109-122, 111.

Grève illustrates this characteristic of Wittgenstein's philosophy perfectly by pointing to Wittgenstein's aim of 'showing the fly the way out of the fly bottle' (PI § 309), and observing that doing so requires that the fly actually understands what is being shown to it specifically, as an individual with its own capacities and confusions.⁹⁹ As Grève comments (and as is reflected in the above example), an explanation that clarifies the problem for one fly might just further confuse another fly, and as such there is no one size fits all approach to showing flies the way out of fly bottles, or philosophers the way out of philosophical problems. Knowing one's interlocutor, their individual circumstances and abilities, is then just as important for Wittgenstein's method as it is for the Socratic intellectual midwife to ensure that they are understood by their interlocutor, on their interlocutor's terms. One can only unearth the confusions in their interlocutor's implicit understanding in terms that the interlocutor themselves understands.

But now it looks as if philosophical problems are entirely relative to the person encountering them, and that no meaningful collaboration can happen on philosophical problems. It would appear that the role of the philosopher is just to facilitate their interlocutor's own private epiphanies, with no real progress being made on philosophical knowledge. Can this be the case? It would be useful here to bear in mind the distinction that Kuusela makes between grammatical statements and grammatical truths, where grammatical statements refers to the devices that one uses to clarify something (and which might be used as objects of comparison) and grammatical truth refers to the truth which the grammatical statement is trying to get at.¹⁰⁰ Kuusela argues that whilst the perspective that one approaches a philosophical problem in part determines the kind of response one gives to that problem, this does not mean that there are no 'facts of reality' that one is still trying to get at. He uses the example of language, explaining that it may be useful for someone to think about language as being used according to a specific set of rules in one context, but it might not be very helpful if one is interested in poetic language use specifically.¹⁰¹ The model

⁹⁹ Grève 'The Importance of Understanding' p.224-225

¹⁰⁰ Oskari Kuusela 'The Problem of Domination by Reason and Its Non-relativistic Solution' *Nordic Wittgenstein Review* (2019) pp. 23-42

¹⁰¹ Kuusela 'The Problem of Domination' pp. 37

that language is used according to a very specific set of rules is useful for illuminating the ‘facts of reality’ around language in some specific contexts, but less useful in others, and so one might have to move between models for describing language use in order to clarify different aspects of the same thing. Consequently, one can have pluralism when it comes to methods of clarification without necessitating a relativist conception of the knowledge one is trying to clarify.

But the question remains: how does Wittgenstein secure this kind of mutual understanding with his interlocutor(s)? It is more evident how such an understanding is achieved in the Socratic Midwife’s case, given that the *Theaetetus* is written as a straightforward dialogue between philosopher and interlocutor and that we can see ‘live’ how philosopher and interlocutor interact. Although (and as the above attests to) Wittgenstein’s concern over understanding his interlocutor and how he makes use of such understanding in philosophical clarification is clear, it is still not clear how Wittgenstein intends to arrive at such a mutual understanding in the first place.

Firstly, we must clarify who exactly Wittgenstein’s interlocutor or interlocutors may be. There are two ways of going about this. One is, quite obviously, to see ourselves (that is, the reader of the *Investigations*) as being the interlocutor. The idea here is that the text somehow enters into a dialogue with us, the reader, and that subsequently it is our philosophical problems that are tended to by Wittgenstein’s philosophical practice. For this to be the case, one would have to postulate how exactly the text (or Wittgenstein writing through the text) achieves mutual understanding with us. The other approach is to try and find an exchange or exchanges between interlocutors within the text itself, in order to see how it is that Wittgenstein suggests we get to know our interlocutors and thus be able to lead them back from conceptual unfamiliarity to conceptual familiarity. It is worth noting here that these two approaches need not be mutually exclusive – indeed, and as I shall argue, it may be the case that Wittgenstein uses dialogue between fictional interlocutors in order to strike up a dialogue with us, the reader-interlocutor, by proxy.

Although this may not be the best example, as it is sometimes very useful to think of poetic language use in terms of rules (sonnets abiding to a particular structure and rhyming scheme, for instance). But I think the gist of what Kuusela is trying to say is there.

The idea that there are multiple interlocutors within the *Investigations* is not a novel one, and forms the basis of many different ‘dialogical’ readings of the *Investigations*. These kinds of reading argue that within the *Investigations* there are multiple extended passages where it seems as if there are discussions taking place with multiple interlocutors, and indeed some have commented that there appear to be several distinctive voices throughout the book. It might be interjected here that this is a common writing technique, a rhetorical device used for consideration of potential alternative points of view. But this isn’t a technique that Wittgenstein uses -- or makes as much of a sustained use of -- outside of the *Investigations*. As such, its purpose warrants further investigation.

Whilst it is easy to see the dynamics of this kind of in text philosopher-interlocutor relationship in the *Theaetetus*, in part down to its dialogue format, the dynamics of any supposed philosopher-interlocutor relationship in the *Investigations* is less clear. Unlike Plato’s dramatic dialogue, which not only has consistent interlocutors but also clearly indicates when they are speaking and in what order, in the *Investigations* it isn’t clear who is speaking and when. Some interlocutors are more obvious than others, by virtue of the context of the discussion in which the particular passage of dialogue is taking place (for example, voices corresponding to Frege and Russell both make appearances as imagined interlocutors). But largely these interlocutors are anonymised, with no clear indication of when one voice takes over from another. If there is a dialogue within the *Investigations*, then it is often left up to the reader to work out who is speaking when, and for what purpose.

Stanley Cavell offers one such analysis of the interlocutors within the *Investigations*. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Cavell argues that there are (at least) two distinct voices to be found throughout the *Investigations* which can be seen to be in conversation with one another – the so-called voices of ‘temptation’ and ‘correction’. Cavell describes the first of these voices as playing variously different antagonistic roles throughout the text – such as the sceptical interlocutor, the voice of those that succumb to various theoretical temptations, or the voice of the metaphysician. The other, according to Cavell, is the voice of correction which seeks to undermine the theoretical temptations of the other voice, and subsequently lead

them away from statements of metaphysical necessity and back towards more 'ordinary' uses of language.¹⁰²

But it's not clear how one voice is meant to get to know the other, or is shown to establish the kind of mutual understanding that we are looking for. Perhaps one answer is to be found in the ways in which the supposedly corrective voice guides the antagonistic voice away from making problematic philosophical theses. Broadly speaking, these can be understood as the methods that the *Investigations* employs throughout the course of its grammatical investigations: the use of language-games, objects-of-comparison, and the like. But given that the success of these as clarificatory devices hinges on mutual understanding between interlocutors, and Wittgenstein's notion of agreement, they are perhaps not what we are looking for in order to determine how it is that Wittgenstein proposes such agreement is reached in the first place. Furthermore, it's not entirely clear whether these voices are to be truly taken as distinctive personalities or as different aspects of the same personality (i.e, the author of the *Investigations*). Subsequently, they may not be the best place to look for examples of *how* Wittgenstein's method intends to establish mutual understanding and agreement between philosopher and interlocutor, given that much of their discussion seems to operate as if mutual understanding had already been achieved. We must look elsewhere.

But what about the view that Wittgenstein's interlocutor is whoever the reader of the *Investigations* is? If it us as readers who are truly being tended to by Wittgenstein's philosophical practice, then it is us with whom he must struck up an accord if he is to be successful in clarifying our issues and dispelling our philosophical problems. This, of course, raises some interesting questions about how something static like a text can engage in reflexive dialogue with its 'live' reader. Thankfully, this issue is ably tackled by Jane Heal, who in her own analysis of Wittgenstein's use of

¹⁰² cf. Cavell 'The Claim of Reason' p. 21 e 120, see also Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism: The Carus Lectures, 1988* (University of Chicago Press, 1988).

dialogue in the *Investigations* comes to the conclusion that Wittgenstein's interlocutor is indeed the reader.¹⁰³

Heal looks at how Wittgenstein manages to invoke the immediacy of philosophical problems through the course of his writing. She likens the difference between presenting philosophical problems as 'immediate' and 'non-immediate' to the difference between the realisation of the abstracted notion: 'all humans are mortal' and the immediate, personal realisation 'I, like everyone else, am mortal'. Heal points to one of the main themes of the *Investigations*, meaning, as evidence of her claim. She argues that, through Wittgenstein's use of dialogue, the question of meaning is not presented to the reader as the impersonal question 'what is involved in meaning', but is instead presented more directly to the reader as 'what is it for me and for you to mean?', through the framework of multiple unnamed interlocutors talking in the first person about meaning and its consequences for them.

The recognition of this 'dialogical' aspect of Wittgenstein's writing can also be seen in what Rupert Read has more recently described as the '2nd personal' aspect of Wittgenstein's writing. According to Read, traditional philosophy almost exclusively characterises itself in terms of 'subjective vs objective', or what Read alternatively describes as '1st person vs 3rd person'. To illustrate these notions, he points to examples of both '1st person' and '3rd person' philosophy, both in the Cartesian quest to secure some kind of firm foundation for objective knowledge from the first-person subjective experience (1st person), and in what he describes as the 'scientistic' attempt to eliminate everything *but* the objective with certain kinds of metaphysics (3rd person). In contrast, Read identifies the later Wittgenstein as adopting a '2nd person' approach to doing/writing philosophy, which he describes as being 'about being with each other, being *addressed* by one another's presence or existence. Helping each other in our sufferings'.¹⁰⁴ This manifests itself in the way that Wittgenstein writes: in his dialogical use of 'I' and 'you', his direct addressal of both his reader-interlocutors *and* his in text interlocutors, and his repeated use of the pronoun 'we' when describing

¹⁰³ Jane Heal 'Wittgenstein and dialogue'. In *Philosophical Dialogues: Plato, Hume, Wittgenstein* (1995). pp. 63-83.

¹⁰⁴ Rupert Read 'Wittgenstein's Liberatory Philosophy' pp. 14

the collective effort between the reader and the author to overcome a particular philosophical problem together.

Evidence of Wittgenstein framing philosophical inquiries in the *Investigations* in this personal, immediate way is abundant. As we saw in chapter two, Wittgenstein frequently comments on the temptation ‘we’ feel to put things in a certain way, or to approach things from a certain angle. The use of such language is often in conjunction with demonstrations of what the consequences of a particular philosophical picture would be for our language use, should that particular picture really be the case. An example of this can be found at the beginning of the *Investigations*, wherein Wittgenstein entertains the Augustinian conception of language where individual words name to objects and sentences are just combinations of names. Wittgenstein of course cycles through a variety of language-games constructed on the above kind of view of language, such as the primitive tribe of builders in PI §2. In this language-game the limits of the Augustinian picture of language are demonstrated, by exploring examples of language use that it does cover against examples of language use that it fails to accommodate for. The point is that Wittgenstein doesn’t move to undo the Augustinian conception of language through argument and refutation, but instead by showing the consequences of that conception would be for both himself and his interlocutor.¹⁰⁵

What’s interesting here is the possibility that Wittgenstein doesn’t actively seek to secure mutual understanding with his interlocutor through the employment of particular devices – instead, it may be the case that he presents his philosophy in such a way that the interlocutor is invited to find themselves represented within his work, thus establishing mutual understanding with the text in this way. This would certainly explain the lack of named interlocutors and ordered structure with regards to who is speaking, for one would then be free to identify themselves with any number of interlocutors they themselves find in the text. This kind of reading also has the benefit of squaring with Wittgenstein’s intention to not spare his reader the trouble of thinking, for the interlocutor must then work to find their own view expressed within

¹⁰⁵ This comparison will be extensively explored in chapter six.

the text, rather than being allowed to simply follow along with the express views of a specific character or characters.

We can also see how something like the Cavellian interpretation of dialogue within the *Investigations* can be used to re-enforce this. The use of un-named interlocutors forces the reader to find voices within the text with which they identify, in turn placing themselves within the dialogue of the text. Subsequently, the reader then takes the role of the 'voice of temptation' when they find a particular theoretical temptation that they themselves are under the grip of, or find alluring, and consequently directly allow themselves to be tended to by the so-called 'voice of correction'.

There are some outstanding issues with this reading that need to be addressed before we continue. Firstly, what if the reader doesn't 'find' their voice within the text? I think there are two kinds of responses one could make to this kind of claim. Firstly, one could simply point to the limitations of the written word as a reflexive maieutic partner. Even with a variety of unnamed interlocutors expressing a myriad of opinions on a wide range of philosophical problems, it is unrealistic that one could expect the *Investigations* to encompass every position one could take in response to a philosophical problem. In this respect, we must assume that the text mirrors Wittgenstein's promise to drop whatever his interlocutor disagrees and move on, even if 'moving on in this instance' would involve closing down the philosophical dialogue altogether. Afterall, the *Investigations* can't be useful for everyone.

The second response that one could take is the view that it doesn't matter terribly if one doesn't find their voice within the text. Even if we don't find a consistent position that we can identify as being analogous to that of our own in the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein's particular use of dialogue emphasises the immediacy of the philosophical problem and thus brings us in as interlocutors in the sense that whatever is being discussed is relevant to us, and has consequences for us. Whether or not it is our thoughts written on the page, we are still invited to reflect on and consider the actual ways in which we make use of our concepts and thus are still brought into the discussion as active participants, reflecting on our own implicit knowledge. As such, the dialogue format adopted by Wittgenstein has a demonstrable maieutic function in getting it's reader-interlocutor to consider the unexamined

assumptions and accounts of concept use that one has and philosophically testing them, by prompting them to think about what implicit accounts they hold

Now that mutual understanding of a kind has been achieved between Wittgenstein and his interlocutor, we must now turn our attention to examining how Wittgenstein then facilitates guiding his interlocutor back from the position of unfamiliarity that, as we've seen, is characteristic of the maieutic conception of philosophical problems. Incidentally, Wittgenstein's methods for establishing trust and mutual understanding with his interlocutors has given some insight into how this works, as Wittgenstein's establishment of the immediacy of philosophical problems and the consequences of philosophical accounts in response involves the construction of objects of comparison and comparing them with reality. The unviability' of a proposed philosophical account is then demonstrated via the comparison with 'familiar' reality.

Wittgenstein's philosophical interest in returning to the 'familiar', or what might otherwise be termed as the 'everyday', can be highlighted in the following remark from the *Investigations*:

“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 home ground?

What we do is to lead the words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.” (PI §116)

Here, Wittgenstein explicitly highlights the practice that we are engaged in (that is, ourselves as reader-interlocutors and Wittgenstein/ the *Investigations* as our maieutic partner) is the practice of leading our words back from the 'metaphysical' to the 'everyday'. The contrast here is interesting because it suggests that, whatever Wittgenstein means by 'everyday', 'metaphysical/metaphysics' is intended to be seen and taken as being its opposite.

That PI §116 is to be understood as a strong statement of methodological or meta-philosophical intent is not controversial. However, understanding what Wittgenstein means exactly by ‘bringing our words back to the everyday’ has proven controversial in the literature. For example, Baker and Hacker’s commentary on the *Investigations* would see remark PI §116 as corroborating their view that the ‘ordinary’ language of everyday use can be appealed to as some kind of standard by which we can arbitrate philosophical disputes.¹⁰⁶ Following this account, the notion of the ‘everyday’ is something that is (in theory) clearly defined and used to make sense of the metaphysical. Conversely, the later Baker argues that ‘everyday’ simply refers to ‘non-metaphysical’, and that it is actually the notion of metaphysics that is clearly defined and doing the heavy work out of the two.¹⁰⁷ More recently, Kuusela argues against the Baker/Hacker interpretation, in favour of viewing PI §116 as a statement that urges the exclusion of ‘metaphysical’ uses of words that assume a simple conceptual unity.¹⁰⁸

However, if the view that I have begun to sketch out in this chapter is correct, we can begin to see the maieutic concerns underpinning remarks like §116 that make a statement of intent outlining Wittgenstein’s intention to move from conceptual ‘unfamiliarity’ back to familiarity, as I will explain. As we saw in the previous chapter, Wittgenstein understands a source of philosophical problems to be linguistic confusions, and in particular, as arising from confusions surrounding the supposed essential and necessary features of the concept under investigation. The assumption that concepts under investigation share in a common essence forces the philosopher to respond in kind with a philosophical statement describing these essential features, and turns the philosopher’s attention away from the potential cases of that concept that occur in everyday life and that do not match the criteria outlined in said statement. If we are to follow Baker in identifying ‘metaphysical’ as being a term consistently employed by Wittgenstein in relation to statements regarding the essential necessities of concepts, then Wittgenstein’s proclamation that we ‘lead’

¹⁰⁶ G.P Baker & P.M.S Hacker, *An Analytical Commentary on Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 1983). p. 254

¹⁰⁷ Gordon Baker, “Wittgenstein on Metaphysical/Everyday Use.” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 208 (2002) see also Gordon Baker, *Wittgenstein's Method: Neglected Aspects: Essays on Wittgenstein*. (Blackwell, 2004)

¹⁰⁸ Kuusela ‘Struggle Against Dogmatism’ pp. 281

words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use can be characterised as a signal to lead ourselves back to our everyday practice with these concepts, and consequently, back to familiarity (the ‘home ground’ Wittgenstein refers to in the first paragraph of PI §116).

Further evidence for reading PI §116 in this way can be found by looking at further comments that Wittgenstein makes throughout the course of his *Nachlass*. In particular, Wittgenstein habitually refers to the ‘humble’ use that words have, and similarly, the need for ‘homespun’ solutions to philosophical problems.¹⁰⁹ The language in both these instances reflects Wittgenstein’s focus on the need to turn towards our ordinary, everyday use and experience of concepts under our investigation, rather than looking for something ‘deeper’ and hitherto undiscovered in the form of a metaphysical account of how our concepts operate.

How does Wittgenstein, as a maieutic instructor, encourage his interlocutor to then look toward the everyday? In the previous chapter, we saw how Wittgenstein moved from the Tractarian position of methodological monism (to be found in the idea of philosophical clarification as analysis in terms of a ‘concept script’) towards methodological pluralism in the *Investigations*. Accordingly, we shouldn’t expect to find any single fixed method for leading one’s interlocutor back to examining their familiar experience of concepts, but instead a wide variety of different methods, like ‘different therapies’ (cf. PI 133).¹¹⁰ However, whilst Wittgenstein certainly leaves room for different philosophical methods (resolving difficulties encountered in the *Tractatus* with *the* philosophical method), he can nevertheless be seen to particularly advocate certain methods in the *Investigations*, most notably his use of philosophical models as objects of comparison and his use invented examples and fictitious cases as a means of comparing said philosophical models with the reality they purport to describe (cf PI §131).¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ PI §97, see also Ms142, 83, 84; Ms157a, 63r, 63v; cf. Ms110, 34; Ts211, 155; Ts213, 412; Ts220, 90; Ts239, 80; PI §§94, 97

¹¹⁰ It is important to note here that Wittgenstein’s analogy with therapy is drawn here specifically on the grounds that therapy is methodologically pluralistic. PI §133 is sometimes quoted in support of reading Wittgenstein’s therapy as being analogous with Freudian psychoanalysis, and is thus mis-appropriated. For examples, see Brand, Roy, ‘Philosophical Therapy: Wittgenstein and Freud’, *International Studies in Philosophy*, 32.1 (2000), 1–22. John Heaton, *Wittgenstein and Psychoanalysis* (Icon Books, 2000).

¹¹¹ Wittgenstein writes ‘a method is now demonstrated by examples’ (PI §133, emphasis added). What’s interesting here is the use of the indefinite article ‘a’, as opposed to either *the* method or multiple

As we saw in the previous chapter, Wittgenstein advocates the use of philosophical models as objects of comparison over employing them as ‘preconceived idea[s] to which reality *must* correspond (PI §131). But what are they being compared against? Or rather, how is it that they are compared against the reality which they are intended to describe? Here, we enter one of Wittgenstein’s most used devices, in the form of his invented examples. Throughout the course of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein introduces hypothetical scenarios with the aim of using them as objects of comparison in order to clarify some feature of the philosophical model under discussion. Whilst the content of these scenarios differ wildly, and vary depending on the context of the problem which they are employed in response to, they can all broadly be said to share a similarity in that they tend to be made up of mundane, everyday activities. Unlike other thought experiments and intuition pumps employed in philosophy, which may involve imagining strange ‘p-zombies’, parallel worlds, splitting the mind in two and other fantastical things,¹¹² Wittgenstein’s invented examples tend to focus on things that are non-fantastical and rooted in the everyday. The observation of some ordinary practice typically makes up the focus of such examples, be it playing a game, giving orders, reading signposts, uttering phrases like ‘I am in pain’ and so on and so forth. In other words, the examples of the *Investigations* tend to focus on practises which we, as competent language users, may find ourselves making use of in our day-to-day lives.

The way that Wittgenstein makes use of these examples varies. Sometimes, these examples are used in order to see what a world in which the proposed philosophical model is correct would look like (for example, the ‘builder tribe’ scenario that Wittgenstein offers in response to Augustine’s picture of language use), or else they are used to provide a counter picture to whatever the philosophical model under scrutiny is putting forward. Regardless of how such examples are used, the point is that they re-orient our (or the interlocutor’s view) away from conceptual unfamiliarity

methods. What I believe this indicates is that, whilst Wittgenstein leaves the door open for a multiplicity of methods, in the *Investigations* he is primarily interested in demonstrating a specific method or cluster of methods.

¹¹² For example, see David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), and Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*. (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1974)

(in the form of these strange metaphysical accounts) towards how it is that we actually make use of these concepts in our lives. In doing so, the allure of the philosophical model under scrutiny is undermined. Or, in the words of the later Gordon Baker, we ‘refrain from affirming an apparent set of necessities and impossibilities by acknowledging a wider range of possibilities’, where the former refers to the metaphysical statements we can make whilst doing philosophy, and the latter refers to the process of looking to and acknowledging the wide variety of ways that concepts can -- and are -- used in our everyday life.¹¹³

It’s worth briefly noting here that this bears some striking similarities to the Socratic employment of auxiliary devices in that the midwife has been shown to also make use of invented devices that the interlocutor is encouraged to compare with their own philosophical model and the wider world around them, in order to see how they fit together. Both can be said to be used towards the demonstrably maieutic aim of getting the interlocutor to turn ‘inward’ to their own practice of concept use and thus engage with and clarify their own implicit knowledge on whatever the subject under investigation is. However, as an in depth analysis of the parallels between Socratic auxiliary devices and Wittgensteinian invented cases is offered in chapter six, it will be enough merely to flag these similarities on the superficial level here.

To summarise this section then, Wittgenstein’s proposed method of tackling the conceptual aspect of philosophical problems can be seen to be demonstrably maieutic, bearing many similarities with the Socratic method of tackling this very same aspect. Wittgenstein is demonstrably sensitive to his interlocutor and, more importantly, his interlocutor’s implicit conceptual knowledge. Not just this, but Wittgenstein’s proposed way of tackling the conceptual philosophical problems has been shown to involve re-orientating his interlocutor towards that which they already know, in order to overcome the apparent ‘unfamiliarity’ that a concept takes on when one is under the grip of a philosophical problem.

3.5 Concluding Remarks

¹¹³ Gordon Baker ‘Wittgenstein on Metaphysical/Everyday Use’ pp. 300

This chapter has demonstrated that there are significant similarities in how both the Socratic Midwife and the later Wittgenstein both characterise and seek to overcome this so-called ‘conceptual’ aspect to philosophical problems. Both methodologies have, in their own way, been shown to demonstrate a concern over getting to know one’s interlocutor, achieving mutual understanding over what exactly is being proposed by the interlocutor, and then assisting the interlocutor using said mutual understanding to re-orient their attention back to examining their everyday uses of the concept in question, and thus in doing so getting the interlocutor to re-evaluate and clarify the implicit knowledge the interlocutor possesses regarding the concept in question in their role as a competent language user.

Does overcoming philosophical problems then just become a process of recanting the features of our language? Left here, it would seem that both the Socratic Midwife and Wittgenstein envision a philosophical approach where one merely has to list the various features of language to overcome a philosophical problem and make some kind of progress. That, just by thinking about how it is we operate with concepts in our day to day lives, the philosophical problem somehow goes away. Whilst Wittgenstein at times certainly does characterise philosophy as an act of ‘remembering’ in some way, I think it would be a gross oversimplification to suggest that this is all he (and the Socratic Midwife) takes philosophy to be, for two reasons.¹⁴ Firstly, it seems to ignore that, once we have recalled some feature of how it is we use our concepts in the everyday, we must then put that recollection to use in the comparative process. Secondly, it ignores that, for maieutic philosophers, the conceptual aspect of philosophical problems, is only *one* aspect of philosophical problems. Whilst addressing the conceptual aspect may indeed involve acts of ‘mere’ remembrance, the problem isn’t resolved until the so-called ethical aspect of philosophical problems has also been addressed. It is to the matter of addressing the ethical aspect of philosophical problems which this thesis will now turn to.

¹⁴ Cf. Ms 110, 131-132 (‘Socratic remembering of the truth’) and PI §§ 89, 109,

Chapter Four: The Ethical Task

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored the maieutic mechanisms common to both the Socratic intellectual midwifery and the Wittgensteinian philosophical methodologies. We saw that they use them to deal with what was identified as the ‘conceptual’ task of philosophical problems. Where philosophical problems relate to concepts that are ordinarily familiar to us, the maieutic philosopher has several strategies and techniques available whereby they can coax their interlocutor into forming an honest account of how they believe they operate with these familiar concepts, for the purposes of clarifying said concepts and rendering what has become strange and unfamiliar back to being familiar. We found some differences between the Socratic intellectual midwife and Wittgenstein in terms of what kind of account each of them is seeking (Socrates is looking for definitional accounts of concepts, while Wittgenstein’s encourages that one also looks at particular instances), but nevertheless we saw that there are some broad similarities between the two in that they are both primarily interested in their respective interlocutor’s implicit accounts regarding the concept under investigation.

Were we to stop at this point, we might be tempted to conclude that the Wittgensteinian maieutic philosopher is only interested in getting their interlocutor to describe their language use in some way, in order to deal with the conceptual aspect of philosophical problems. Is this all that is needed to deal with philosophical problems? Whilst giving descriptions of our language use may be useful for certain philosophical exercises and problems, I believe it would be a mistake to say that this is all that the Wittgensteinian maieutic philosopher is aiming to achieve with their interlocutor. Indeed, and as we’ve seen in chapter two, this conceptual task of philosophical problems is only one dimension of their difficulty. There exists a further related set of difficulties in dealing with philosophical problems that more to do with one’s willpower or character, that underpin the task of describing one’s language use.

In this chapter, I examine how this ethical task is characterised both by the Socratic midwife and the later Ludwig Wittgenstein, and how their respective

methodologies address it. The ethical task (or ‘demand’ as we shall see) in the face of philosophical problems poses several challenges to maieutic practice. I shall consider how both Socrates and Wittgenstein respond to these challenges without violating any of the principles of maieutic philosophy that I sketched in chapter one. I begin in 4.2 by briefly recapping the nature of this ethical task. In 4.3, I examine the Socratic midwife’s proposed response to this aspect of philosophical problems, which I argue is an insistence on particular traits of character for doing philosophy. In 4.4. I then examine what have come to be known as Wittgenstein’s ‘ethical’ remarks, and I argue that Wittgenstein similarly sees particular traits of character or ‘philosophical virtues’ as being conducive for philosophical thinking and accomplishing the ethical task that is seemingly a part of dealing with philosophical problems. I conclude in 4.5.

4.2 Understanding the Ethical Task

Firstly, let us briefly recap the key features of the ethical task that is a part of dealing with philosophical problems, as laid out in chapter two. The main point was that, for both Wittgenstein and the Socratic midwife, dealing with philosophical problems also involves engaging in an ethical task that involves a challenge of character in some way, in the form of some kind of struggle against a ‘difficulty of the will’. For the Socratic midwife, this was exemplified primarily in the case where an interlocutor is unwilling to terminate their intellectual offspring and thus ‘give up’ on the philosophical account they were presenting (151c-d), and for Wittgenstein this was to be found in various notions of being unable or unwilling to acknowledge a different perspective to a problem, or where one is dogmatic in the position that one holds.

If what I have been suggesting in this thesis is correct, and there really is a shared maieutic practice between the Socratic midwife and the later Wittgenstein, then any suggested strategy for dealing with the ethical aspect of philosophical problems needs to meet some basic criteria. Most notably, a maieutic attempt to overcome the ethical aspect of philosophical problems (either for oneself or for one’s interlocutor) should not involve the creation of a thesis on ethics, which would violate the principles of maieutic inquiry laid out in chapter one. The maieutic approach utilises one’s implicit knowledge in dealing with philosophical problems – so assuming

a particular thesis about ethics risks jeopardising this. It is difficult to see how one can be instructed in an ethical thesis without also being instructed metaphysics that underpin that thesis.

With this in mind, and on the assumption that both Wittgenstein and the Socratic midwife are consistent in their maieutic practice, we can expect that no matter what their respective approaches are to approaching this ethical task, the approach will not involve the education or instruction of their interlocutors into a thesis about ethics. How then does the maieutic philosopher overcome (or encourage others to overcome) these difficulties when philosophising?

4.3 The Socratic Midwife's Response

How does the Socratic Midwife characterise the ethical task of philosophical problems? As we have discussed at several points during this thesis, the *Theaetetus* places a particular emphasis on the importance of one's character and how certain features of one's character can be conducive in philosophical dialectic. We discussed a similar idea throughout chapter one, around Theaetetus' willingness to engage in philosophical inquiry, which might, I suggested, indicate that he is a candidate who is well fitted for philosophical inquiry. However, we are now in a position to explore this idea a little further and see that the character requirements for actually doing philosophy with a Socratic Midwife in an effective way are much harder to meet.

It is when Socrates describes his practice of midwifery to Theaetetus that we get the clearest indication that he means that aptitude for philosophy is rather rare. There, Socrates explains to Theaetetus that some people have no need of his maieutic services, because they are not intellectually pregnant and therefore there is nothing for them to bring to 'birth' (151b). Furthermore, there are others who seemingly start off well, as if they were capable of intellectual pregnancy, but they then stray from the midwife's guidance in some way. Socrates finds that his 'divine sign' forbids him from further associating with these people (150e-151a). From this, we can identify that there are at least two categories of failed candidates: those that are incapable of intellectual pregnancy from the very beginning, and those that at first seem capable but then leave

the midwife's care too early.¹¹⁵ These classes of potential and failed candidates suggest that qualifying as a serious candidate with a genuine chance of bringing something to birth is unusual and demanding.

However, I do not think that we should read this passage as if Socrates meant that the qualities required for an intellectual pregnancy are merely intellectual or cognitive abilities. Some of the candidates who have no pregnancy to deliver, may still get some help from Socrates, who tells Theaetetus that he also serves a role as “match-maker”. He describes how he sends these candidates to ‘Prodicus...and other wise and gifted gentlemen’ so that they might benefit from their teachings (151b). Perhaps the candidates in this category are not lacking in intelligence, if they are deemed able to at least receive and understand the education of others.¹¹⁶ But even if this was meant to be indicative of the interlocutor's intellectual acumen, one only needs to look to the next category to understand that intellectual acumen is not the only thing relevant to success in philosophical inquiry. Importantly, even those who are capable of intellectual pregnancy may still be problematic in some way and unable to benefit from Socrates' services as a midwife, being unable to separate themselves from their offspring, or having left Socrates' services sooner than they should have —or, in other words, having some kind of deficiency of character.

The important point I take from this is that undergoing the process of intellectual midwifery as a patient is difficult, and that particular traits of character are required if one is to stand a good chance of seeing the process through. Furthermore, it is through the application of particular traits of character that the ethical aspect of philosophical problems specifically is overcome -- that is, the development of particular traits allows one to deal with the ethical difficulties that philosophical problems pose. This isn't to say that the right candidate will, by their own natural

¹¹⁵ It's possible that these categories of failed candidates are an allusion by Plato to those youths that Socrates allegedly corrupted, according to the Athenian Jury. Narratively, the dialogue takes place shortly before Socrates' trial (which Socrates mentions at the end of the dialogue), and so one should be sensitive to what impact that has on Plato's writing of the dialogue. By mentioning those that have gone away too soon and implying that it was to do with a failure of character or suitability to philosophical inquiry, Plato might be seen here to be attempting to absolve Socrates of the responsibility of those failures (youths such as Alcibiades, Charmides, and others that went on to do terrible things after their time with Socrates) ahead of the trial.

¹¹⁶ Of course, it is entirely possible that this is a slight to the teachings of Prodicus and others, i.e., amounting to a claim that you can teach their work to literally anyone because it is without substance.

resources, sail through philosophical inquiry, or is guaranteed a ‘successful’ inquiry (whatever metric of ‘success’ one is using). It may still be the case that even with the right temperament, the prospective candidate still requires the encouragement and guidance of a skilled midwife.

However, we are still not clear on what this character requirement looks like exactly, and how it is that these traits of character allow one to deal with these issues. What virtues or traits of characters are required for continued productive engagement with the Socratic midwife? The following sub sections deal with character traits that I have identified as being important to the Socratic Midwife for the purposes of doing philosophy. I have organised them in pairs as it seems to me that, whilst it can be said that there is overlap in *all* of the character traits desirable by the midwife, there is significant overlap between the paired traits in particular.

Courage & Humility

We are introduced to this idea of what makes the character of a philosopher very early on in the dialogue, when Socrates asks Theodorus if there are any students out of the ‘large numbers’ that gather to him that are particularly worth talking about. Of course, Theodorus responds by suggesting that Socrates talk to his student Theaetetus, but it is Theodorus’s (and Plato as the author’s) description of Theaetetus that we should find interesting. Theodorus doesn’t just boast about Theaetetus’ intellectual gifts: ‘I’ve never met anyone with such extraordinary natural gifts’ (144a), but he also lauds Theaetetus’ temperament and character as well. He proclaims that Theaetetus has ‘courage beyond equal’, something that Theodorus proclaims to be unusual in other quick-witted boys who are usually ‘easily overbalanced into losing their tempers’ (144a-b). That Theaetetus has intellectual gifts is one thing, but what makes him truly unique for Theodorus (indeed, he comments that he ‘wouldn’t have thought [it] could happen’), is that his intellect is matched with *courage*, and an exceptional quality of character (whatever that might turn out to be).

Why does Plato go to great pains to emphasise Theaetetus’ courage and character here? if all Plato was trying to do was progress the narrative of the dialogue forward, surely it would have been enough to say that Theaetetus is an incredibly

gifted maths student. Why does Plato also highlight his virtues, these claims that Theaetetus is courageous, humble, and has an overall good character? Socrates himself did not say that he was particularly looking for young men of excellent character, only those that 'are thought likely to turn out well' and are 'worth talking about'. If Theaetetus' character wasn't significant in some way to the rest of the dialogue, then it's hard to see why Plato would have Theodorus make such a fuss over it in the first place.

Of course, Theaetetus' character doesn't come up again in the dialogue, save for a brief discussion at the end about the potential benefits Theaetetus has accrued by subjecting himself to the maieutic process (which I discussed in some length in chapter one). Yet despite this, I believe that Theaetetus' courage and character is much more crucial to the dialogue than it might appear at first glance. After all, Theodorus has other intellectually gifted students whom he could have presented to Socrates. However, for the sake of the progression of the narrative of the dialogue, any student that Theodorus places in front of Socrates must be able to engage with Socrates in philosophical inquiry and see the value in doing so. Consequently, I argue, Theodorus' emphasis on the 'unique' combination of intellect with character in Theaetetus is a sign from Plato that Theaetetus is a suitable candidate for philosophical education, in a way that is perhaps unusual and rare among Socrates' interlocutors.

Looking at the nature of the difficulty of maieutic philosophy might help here. As we've seen in 1.2, one difficulty that can arise in the maieutic process is when an interlocutor lacks the strength of character to sever the parental bond they feel and take the decision to abandon their intellectual offspring. Socrates impresses on Theaetetus the importance of not getting angry with Socrates should Theaetetus' intellectual offspring be found to be unviable. It was previously suggested that submitting one's offspring willingly to the midwife was related to showing humility, and not insisting on a particular philosophical position for the sake of something other than the truth (for example, one's ego). However, this can also be understood as an example of Theaetetus' *courage*, particularly when one compares Theaetetus' willingness to engage with Socrates to Theodorus' unwillingness to do the same thing.

Socrates spends a good part of the dialogue attempting to goad Theodorus into taking part in the philosophical discussion, who resists and attempts to redirect Socrates' attentions to Theaetetus as he is 'younger' and it will be 'less unseemly' if he slips. As examined in the first chapter, Socrates uses a recurring image of wrestling and a willingness to expose oneself to the rigorous of philosophical exchange, at the potential risk of public intellectual humiliation (169a-c). Indeed, it was proposed in that first chapter that it was precisely this reason that Theodorus was unwilling to step into the ring with Socrates, valuing his own intellectual prestige too much to risk being made to look like a fool. Accordingly, it was further suggested that this was in part down to his role as match-maker, in attempting to show Theaetetus that Theodorus was an unsuitable teacher for someone who showed his kind of philosophical promise.¹¹⁷ But now we can see that this passage is also feeding into the establishment of the view that a particular kind of character -- namely, the courage, humility and willingness to prioritise the finding the truth over your own interests (and perhaps even wellbeing) -- is essential to being able to meaningfully engage in maieutic philosophical inquiry.

That Theaetetus' character is applauded shortly before Socrates reveals that some people fail at philosophical inquiry precisely because they lack a particular strength of character is surely deliberate on Plato's part. Accordingly, we are to focus not just on Theaetetus' intellect, but also on his courage and humility, measured in terms of his willingness to engage with Socrates and subject himself and his philosophical accounts to the full force of the midwife's scrutiny. Arguably it is on these measures above all that Socrates is testing Theaetetus. It turns out to be relatively unimportant whether or not his proposals are successful, as I argued in chapter one. What matters more is the character and attitude of Theaetetus himself, and this is flagged up in the way that Theodorus introduces him as a youth of exceptional character.

¹¹⁷ This is, perhaps, unfair to Theodorus. Whilst he is evidently unsuitable as a teacher of philosophical dialectic, it may be the case that he is meant to be portrayed as a suitable teacher for teaching the kinds of mathematics that are conducive to developing the faculties for philosophical dialectic, as is explored in the *Republic*. His tutelage of Theaetetus, and his teaching style of getting the boys to solve the problems themselves (which could be seen as a kind of midwifery), are evidence of this. However, considering this in any depth would take us too far off course.

Perseverance & Honesty

The nature of the character requirement for philosophy that the *Theaetetus* proposes is further clarified by the peculiar passage that occurs after the first proper account of knowledge has been scrutinised, known as ‘The Digression’ (172c-177c). The Digression begins at around 172c, where, having been shown a number of criticisms of the Protagorean *homo mensura* doctrine by Socrates, Theodorus proposes that he and Socrates take time to explore an apparently new and ‘bigger’ argument that has emerged from their previous discussion.¹¹⁸ Having briefly touched on how a *homo mensura* doctrine concerns matters of the state and justice, Socrates takes a moment to consider how ridiculous philosophers must appear when their presence is required in the court of law to give speeches (172c). This begins an extended passage comparing the natures of orators and philosophers, and consequently rhetoric and philosophy respectively (172c-175e), before the final section of the Digression within which Socrates advances the view that man should move towards being like God as much as possible (what has come to be known as the *homoiôsis theôti* section) (176a-177c).

What makes the Digression so peculiar in comparison to the rest of the *Theaetetus* is its distinct shift in style and tone from the rigorous logical arguments that make up the rest of the dialogue. Instead of dealing with arguments, premises, and conclusions, Socrates instead embarks on an impassioned speech in order to describe the nature and character of philosophy and the philosopher. However, when compared to the rest of the dialogue and its (apparent) epistemological focus, uncritical readers may get the feeling that the contents of the Digression have very little bearing on the philosophical import of the dialogue at large, despite taking up five Stephanus pages. This certainly seems to be the prevailing view amongst notable 20th century Plato scholars.¹¹⁹ More recently, scholars have been re-evaluating the

¹¹⁸ The *Homo Mensura* doctrine being the Protagorean notion that ‘man is the measure of all things’, as surveyed in chapter one

¹¹⁹ Gilbert Ryle describes the Digression as being ‘philosophically quite pointless (Gilbert Ryle, *Plato’s Progress* (Cambridge University Press, 1966) pp. 158.)

importance of the Digression.¹²⁰ The peculiarity of the Digression, its style and its placement within the dialogue as a whole has given rise to fierce interpretative debates over its function and import, not only as a component of the *Theaetetus*, but as a key passage of the Platonic dialogues generally.

Traditionally, the focus of interpretive debates surrounding the Digression has centred on the concluding *homoiôsis theôî* section of the Digression. The notion of ‘godlikeness’ is an important one in Plato’s dialogues, having been understood by ancient scholars as being vital to the ethical aims of Platonic philosophy more generally.¹²¹ Consequently, the importance of the Digression in its explicit statement that the human goal ought to be to become as much like God as possible is often read in this tradition, and taken to be the vital part of the Digression.¹²² Whilst there has been some analysis of the preceding discussion on the nature of lawyers and orators, its importance is usually overshadowed by the *homoiôsis theôî* section. Most of the critical discussion of this first section of the Digression has been confined to what the relationship between the philosopher described during this discussion (the ‘ideal’ philosopher) and Socrates is, and whether or not the picture of the ‘ideal’ philosopher is compatible with Plato’s presented picture of Socrates as a philosopher.¹²³

Whilst the *homoiôsis theôî* is certainly of fundamental significance, and it certainly isn’t my intention to argue otherwise, I advance here a reading of the preceding section of the Digression on philosophers and orators which sees that section as being particularly significant in expounding further on some of the methodological features of intellectual midwifery and for exploring the attitudinal and character requirements for philosophising with the Socratic Midwife.

Similarly, Robin Waterfield describes the Digression as being nothing more than “a pause from hard argument” with its “merits on the surface” and requiring “little commentary” (Robin Waterfield, *Theaetetus*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1987) pp. 177-178)

In his book *Plato’s Analytic Method*, Kenneth Sayre outright ignores the Digression (save for one citation in his chapter on the Sophist). See Kenneth M. Sayre, *Plato’s Analytic Method* (University of Chicago Press, 1969)

¹²⁰ Jens Kristian Larsen ‘Measuring Humans Against Gods: On the Digression in Plato’s *Theaetetus*’ *Apeiron* Vol. 44 (2) (2019)

¹²¹ For example, Alcinous (ed.), *Alcinous: The Handbook of Platonism*. (Oxford University Press UK, 1995), ch. 2 and 28, and Plotinus *The Enneads*, (Penguin UK, 1983) I.2.1. i

¹²² See Larsen ‘Measuring Humans Against Gods’

¹²³ For example, Rachel Rue. “The Philosopher in Flight: The Digression in Plato’s *Theaetetus*.” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 11, (1993) 71–100

Let us recap the particulars of the first section of the Digression. First, Socrates contrasts philosophers, on the one hand, with orators, rhetoricians and sophists, on the other. By reflecting on how out of place the philosopher must appear in the law court, he quickly moves the conversation to an examination of the crucial differences between philosophers and ‘lawyer-orators’, and how those differences, in turn, affect their ability to achieve anything in their respective spheres of activity, and in each other’s. Socrates suggests that the difference lies in how philosophers and orators are ‘brought up’ (that is, trained), and what they consequently value in their inquiries. He likens the difference between the two to the difference between slaves and freemen, in that the philosopher is free to take as much time as they wish to pursue a topic of inquiry, where the orators are ‘always short of time’ and ‘hurried by the clock’, lacking the freedom to pursue topics and arguments at their leisure due to the constraints of the court (172e1-2). Within the courtroom procedures, the lawyer-orators are hard pressed by the opposing counsel and the dictates of the legal proceedings. Whereas the philosopher is free to pursue discussion for its own sake, in the law courts, orators are usually motivated by concern for themselves, because they typically need to defend their own interests in some way, either as counsel for the defendant or plaintiff (172e3-7). For this reason, Socrates describes their growth as being stunted: they learn to deploy flattery and deception instead of appealing to justice and truthfulness, all the while believing that they have grown clever and wise in their ability to employ rhetoric and manipulate judges and juries for their own gains (173a-b).

What emerges from this passage is a picture in which the environment of one’s intellectual upbringing has a direct bearing on one’s character, which in turn determines one’s suitability for philosophical inquiry. Being brought up in ‘freedom’ encourages a person to value truth, and to want to pursue inquiries for their own sake (that is, for the sake of coming to the truth of the matter), rather than for some exterior motive or goal. Free from external constraints and the desire for personal gain, the philosophers can conduct their inquiries at their leisure, motivated by a desire for truth. In contrast, someone brought up in line with some external constraint or motivated by a value other than truth (such as some kind of personal gain), will

develop a corresponding character and values.¹²⁴ They will not value truth, and neither will they value conducting the inquiry for the sake of truth, instead being motivated by some other value. This, I suggest, is supposed to remind us of, and contrast with, the maieutic philosopher's insistence on honesty in the philosophical process—as I sketched it above (cross reference needed). One of the things that Socrates was concerned to identify in his potentially pregnant companion was a commitment to the value of truth. Someone who does not value the truth, and only values doing things insofar as they benefit their own standing in some way would be much more likely to produce an artificially constructed account that is designed for its appeal rather than producing what they think might be true about the object of investigation for the purposes of philosophical testing. Furthermore, they would find it much more difficult to engage with the Socratic midwife, who demands that their interlocutors submit what they think might be true about the object under investigation, and that their interlocutors are willing to disregard their accounts when they are shown to be unviable. Given that the lawyer-orator's account is created for the pursuit of personal gain, it stands to reason that they would be unwilling to let go of said account, and the perceived self-gain that comes with it.

Not only does this clash with the maieutic principle of honesty, but it also marks an impediment to the idea that I defended in chapter one, about the Socratic midwife insisting that any prospective philosophical candidate be willing to see the inquiry through to the end, for the sake of truth, no matter what the consequences of that inquiry may be. When conceptual inquiry is motivated by some other end than truth, then the willingness to pursue that inquiry is contingent on this external goal. If that is removed, or threatened, then the willingness to continue with the inquiry will obviously be diminished, for someone who does not have the characteristic of valuing truth, and the inquiry itself as a means of attaining the truth. We have already seen a possible example of this, when Socrates talked about those who lack the strength of character to relinquish a failed philosophical account after bringing it to birth. Those

¹²⁴ I use 'inquiries' as a loose term here. Whilst the lawyer-orator is not embarked on a philosophical inquiry as Socrates would understand it, they may nevertheless see themselves as embarking on some kind of inquiry when giving a speech to the court (the inquiry as to whether or not a person is guilty or innocent, for example).

who are unwilling to relinquish their accounts might be better understood as not valuing truth for the sake of truth, rather than as having a personal investment in the outcome of the inquiry, which they are unwilling or unable to relinquish (such as an intellectual reputation to uphold, for example). It is not that they are intellectually unable to engage in philosophical inquiry nor that they cannot keep up with the Socratic midwife on a cognitive level — indeed, their accounts might be quite sophisticated in their design. It is just that they are unwilling or unable to prioritise the outcome of the philosophical inquiry over their own concerns, which are in turn informed by various kinds of environmental, social or contextual constraints.

I would argue, then, that this passage of the Digression provides some useful clarification concerning the character requirements for doing philosophy, by situating this topic within a narrative of educational development. For someone to be truly capable of engaging with Socratic midwifery, one must have been ‘brought up in freedom’ like the philosopher of the Digression: one must learn to apply one’s intellectual and cognitive skills for the sake of attaining truth and not as a slavish means to some other perceived good (such as wealth or prestige). Or, to put another way, one must have the perseverance to pursue the inquiry for the sake of truth and submit themselves *honestly* to the process of midwifery. The Digression draws a contrast between those that grow up in this kind of freedom (and thus develop the kind of perseverance required for doing philosophy), and those that don’t.

Does Theaetetus himself give any indication that he has been brought up in this kind of freedom? If what I am saying is true, then we should see some evidence of precisely this kind of development within Theaetetus, in his role as the dialogue’s paradigmatic example of one who is suitable for maieutic philosophical inquiry. We have already seen in the previous chapter that Socrates vets Theaetetus by presenting him with an initial barrage of questions designed to test his character, and to see whether he values truth and wisdom (a test which Theaetetus evidently passes by agreeing to Socrates’ sentiments). The greatest indicator of Theaetetus’ educational development and character is then found in his actual practice throughout the dialogue. As we’ve seen, Theaetetus repeatedly applies himself to Socrates’ process and indeed does not get angry when the various accounts he proposes are found not to be viable. He is willing to carry on, despite the repeated failures of his accounts. Perhaps

then a further part of the reason why the dialogue doesn't feel like a failure is precisely because of this attitude Theaetetus takes -- he isn't dissatisfied with Socrates' services, not finding a reason to rush off red-faced and embarrassed in light of his failure to produce anything worthwhile. So why should we?

One might object to my reading here that Theaetetus is clearly presented as a youth that *isn't* yet ready to enter into the philosophical dialectic, on account of his inexperience. Catherine Rowett argues that, whilst Theaetetus is a promising candidate for philosophical dialectic, his failure in the dialogues to understand why some of his proposed accounts fail indicate that he has not yet progressed far enough in his studies to advance to philosophical dialectic.¹²⁵ Rowett uses the educational model that Plato expounds in the *Republic* and the numerous references to Theaetetus' geometrical training in the *Theaetetus* to evidence her point. As Rowett points out, geometry in the *Republic* is one of the many sciences that is useful in training one's mind towards dealing with abstract knowledge. In the *Republic*, one must first progress in the study of various kinds of arithmetic, geometry, and harmonics, developing one's faculties towards dealing with abstract concepts, before embarking on the study of philosophy. Accordingly, Plato estimates in the *Republic* that it is only from the age of thirty that one is ready for the study of dialectic and philosophy, having first undergone many years of mathematical training.¹²⁶

Rowett makes two observations on how it is that Plato is indicating to the reader that Theaetetus is not yet ready for philosophical dialectic before the inquiry begins. Firstly, and most simply, Rowett points out that, by the *Republic's* measure, Theaetetus is simply too young to have undergone the necessary amount of training. Secondly, Rowett observes that where Theaetetus is in his current studies with Theodorus can be exactly pinpointed on the *Republic's* curriculum, and thus is indicative of his unreadiness for philosophical inquiry. When asked, Theaetetus

¹²⁵ Rowett here is responding to her perception that many interpreters seem to think that Theaetetus is already meant to be engaging in dialectic, or that Socrates in this dialogue has gone back to the view that boys can do philosophy. She cites Polansky, *Philosophy and Knowledge: a commentary on Plato's Theaetetus*, 39 and Matthews, *Socratic Perplexity and the Nature of Philosophy*, 93-95 as examples of this. Catherine Rowett, *Knowledge and Truth in Plato: Stepping Past the Shadow of Socrates* (Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 252

¹²⁶ Plato, Sir Henry Desmond Pritchard Lee (trans.) *The Republic*. (Penguin Books, 2003) See *Republic* 527c-531d

reveals that he is learning geometry from Theodorus, but has not yet started on astronomy and harmonics (145d1-5). As Rowett highlights, this puts Theaetetus at a preliminary stage in the study of mathematics, at “the stage where scientists use posits of which they cannot give a *logos*”.¹²⁷ Not only does this indicate that Theaetetus is not ready to enter into philosophical dialectic according to the educational program outlined in the *Republic*, but, according to Rowett, it is also indicative that Theaetetus is unable to provide what Socrates is looking for: a *logos*. For Rowett, the preliminary discussions in the *Theaetetus* demonstrate that whilst Theaetetus shows promise and potential, he is not yet ready to enter into the study of philosophical dialectic.

Yet our readings do not have to be at odds with one another. I am not claiming that Theaetetus, by virtue of his character, is proficient at philosophical dialectic. He is by no means to be read as being ready to be a Socratic midwife himself, or otherwise ready to be trained as one. Rather, my claim is that Theaetetus’s character is indicative of his suitability as a candidate for embarking on the lengthy process of training towards a mastery of philosophical dialectic. His character alone is not enough to guarantee his proficiency for philosophical inquiry with Socrates. The boy is demonstrably too inexperienced (in matters to do with what I have identified as the ‘conceptual aspect’ of philosophical problems) to truly keep up with Socrates, as is evidenced by his difficulty in initially understanding why his second account isn’t viable. Yet he shows potential, in a way that marks him out from Socrates’ other interlocutors. Hence Socrates’ prediction, which is mentioned by Euclides and Terpsion in the dialogue’s frame, that Theaetetus was bound to become famous should he reach his prime (142d), and Socrates’ positive attitude at the conclusion of the dialogue, despite the inquiry ending in failure.

Courage, Humility, Perseverance, & Honesty

What I have suggested in this section of the chapter is that certain character traits (which Theaetetus is shown to have a natural aptitude towards) are desirable for the Socratic Midwife, in overcoming the ethical aspect of philosophical problems. In

¹²⁷ Rowett, *Knowledge and Truth* pp. 252

particular, the traits of ‘courage’, ‘humility’, ‘perseverance’ and ‘honesty’ were highlighted as being particularly desirable and conducive for overcoming the problems of the will highlighted in 4.2, and present in the youth Theaetetus.

However, one last issue needs to be addressed, regarding how it is that one comes to acquire the kind of character that is conducive for philosophy and overcoming the ethical aspect of philosophical problems. The issue arises thusly: Theaetetus was shown to have a natural inclination towards these traits. He is described as already possessing these ‘virtues’, and thus is naturally suited towards philosophical inquiry. Furthermore, the depiction of the upbringing of philosophers in the Digression seems to suggest that having the appropriate character for philosophy is a matter of circumstance regarding one’s birth and upbringing. Both of these points seem to suggest the idea that the ‘appropriate’ character for philosophy is something that is exclusive, owing to one’s upbringing, or some inherent trait of character.

Whilst the issue of the ‘exclusivity’ of philosophy for Socrates and Plato is an interesting discussion, wading into it would take us too far of course. And whilst there are certainly themes of exclusivity that run through Plato’s dialogues (for example, the discussion of the philosopher kings in the *Republic*), we need not read Plato and Socrates as advocating for such an elitism in the *Theaetetus*, in order to make sense of how certain character traits are useful in overcoming the ethical aspect of philosophical problems.

Firstly, although Theaetetus is depicted as naturally having these kinds of character traits, this does not necessarily mean that one cannot come to acquire these traits later on in life. Indeed, in describing Theaetetus to Socrates, Theodorus observes that it is unusual to see such gifts in *someone so young* (XXX). The suggestion here is that, although Theaetetus is exceptional as a youth for having these character traits, it is nevertheless not impossible (and is actually more usual) that someone comes to acquire these traits when they are older. Indeed, Socrates suggests that Theaetetus’ already excellent character has improved by the time the dialogue ends, having been made gentler for working with Socrates. This certainly seems to resonate with the view of philosophical and educational development in the *Republic* (which has many parallels with the picture of educational development established in the *Theaetetus*), in which one is only ready to embark on the study of philosophical dialectic when they

are older and have completed other forms of education first. The exceptional nature of Theaetetus' character *at his age* should not lead us to believe that such a character is 'exceptional' in the sense that it is rare or impossible to acquire at any point in one's life, although it may certainly be difficult.¹²⁸

But what of the view suggested by Plato in the Digression, in which one's upbringing seems to be instrumental in deciding whether one is capable of being a philosopher? There is no evidence in the Digression that Plato forbids those that have not 'grown up in freedom' from being able to engage with the philosopher. Rather, he describes in the Digression how it is that philosophers may 'drag up' those that have otherwise been stunted in their development and have not grown up to value leisure and freedom. The only issue in doing so is that, just as the philosopher looks silly and out of place in the law court, those that are dragged up by the philosopher equally look silly and are left 'dizzy' for having undergone the treatment.¹²⁹

The suggestion here is that those that have had the 'wrong' kind of upbringing can nevertheless through great effort (and perhaps unpleasantness) engage in philosophy, acquiring the particular kinds of character that are useful or conducive in overcoming the ethical aspect of philosophical problems. Indeed, it is perhaps the unpleasantness of engaging in philosophical thinking that is useful for developing these character traits in the first place. If we consider that the ethical aspect of philosophical problems are related to problems to do with the will, then struggling directly against our will (that is to say, struggling against the desire to see things in a particular way, or to pursue an inquiry for some sake other than truth) may develop within us those particular traits of character that are useful for overcoming them more easily in the future.

¹²⁸ Additionally, Plato does not seem to give any indication in the *Theaetetus* of how one comes about developing or acquiring such a character.

¹²⁹ One is reminded here of Plato's allegory of the cave, in which a prisoner of the cave escapes and, after great difficulty, climbs up to the cave mouth. There, the blinding light of the sun leaves the prisoner feeling dizzy, but eventually, he adapts to the conditions and comes to appreciate the beauty of the 'true' world. What's significant is that the prisoner manages to do this *despite* his upbringing. See *Republic* (514a-520a)

4.4 The Ethical Demand of Wittgenstein's Writings

I now propose that, like the Socratic Midwife, Wittgenstein too finds particular traits of character conducive for overcoming the proposed ethical aspect to philosophical problems. In order to demonstrate this, I turn to an intermittent series of remarks that are embedded within Wittgenstein's philosophical investigations throughout the corpus of his writings, within which an interest in character and its relation to philosophical thinking is expressed. Consequently, to understand how Wittgenstein envisions the task of dealing the ethical aspect of philosophical problems, we should clarify the nature of these remarks and how they might inform our understanding of Wittgenstein's philosophical practice. If there is an ethical pedagogical dimension to Wittgenstein's philosophical practice, it would make sense that it would find expression in these remarks, in which he specifically refers to the importance and impact of character in philosophical thinking.

In identifying a species of remarks within Wittgenstein's writings that deal with this relationship between character and philosophical work, I follow James Conant who, in his paper 'On Going the Bloody Hard Way in Philosophy', identifies what he calls Wittgenstein's 'ethical' remarks. One feature of these remarks is that they do not occur in close proximity to one another but are found scattered throughout the *Nachlass* of Wittgenstein's writings, despite the consistency of their tone. As individual remarks, they are to be found sporadically embedded in philosophical discussions within which they seemingly have little relevance. Conant observes that they often have the effect of striking the reader as being somewhat of a *non-sequitur*, having seemingly little relevance to the particular philosophical investigation in which they occur.¹³⁰ Following Stanley Cavell, Conant argues that such remarks are representative of an ethical demand that Wittgenstein finds in the task of doing philosophy and tries to answer, and that they are much more pervasive throughout the entirety of his writing than they first appear.¹³¹ These *non-sequiturs* then mark moments when Wittgenstein takes a step back from the investigation to comment on

¹³⁰ James Conant, 'On Going the Bloody Hard Way in Philosophy', in *The Possibilities of Sense*, ed. John H. Whittake (Houndmills, Palgrave, 2002) pp.85-129) p.86

¹³¹ Stanley Cavell, *The New yet Unapproachable America*, (Albuquerque, Living Batch Press, 1989), p.40

the difficulty of meeting the ethical demand that he recognises in the philosophical problem.¹³²

However, I must note that I am not making the definitive claim that there is a definitive sub-category of remarks that can be readily distinguished from non-ethical remarks. Sure, some remarks are overtly ethical in their subject matter. But there is no clear border between these remarks and others that have no ethical content. So when I refer to Wittgenstein's 'ethical remarks', I am not referring to a definitive and clear list of remarks identified as such by Wittgenstein, but a broader, more vaguely defined set of remarks that relate to the idea of character, the difficulty of doing philosophy, and the relationship between working on oneself and working in philosophy.

Nevertheless, it is possible to provide a sample list of some remarks that are representative of this broad, vaguely defined category. Such a list is provided by Conant, who identifies the following five remarks as being good examples of what he (and by extension, we) takes Wittgenstein's ethical remarks to be.¹³³

1. You cannot write anything about yourself that is more truthful than you yourself are (CV 33)
2. Nothing is so difficult as not deceiving oneself (CV 34)
3. If anyone is unwilling to descend into himself...he will remain superficial in his writing¹³⁴
4. Working in philosophy...is really more a working on oneself (CV 16)
5. That man will be revolutionary who can revolutionise himself (CV 45)¹³⁵

Even from this sample list, there are several noteworthy things to point out. Firstly (and perhaps least controversially) they all emphasise the importance of truth and honesty, which resonates with some of the maieutic values canvassed throughout this

¹³² The *non-sequitur* nature of these remarks is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's remarks on the nature of philosophy. One wonders if this similarity is indicative that the 'ethical' remarks are supposed to fulfil a similar function, reminding us of the nature of the philosophical task at hand.

¹³³ Conant, 'On Going the Bloody Hard Way' pp. 86

¹³⁴ Rush Rhees, ed. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections* (Blackwell, 1981) p.193

¹³⁵ As Conant notes, whilst someone may object that these are all from the same collection that is devoted explicitly to ethics (and so cannot be said to be representative of a broader interest in ethics), the *Culture and Value* collection is a posthumously arranged collection from all over Wittgenstein's *Nachlass*.

thesis. Secondly, they all highlight the importance of self-honesty generally, and the reciprocal relationship this has with one's philosophical work. The above remarks are all consistent in suggesting that there is a strong resemblance and positive correlation between working on being more honest about oneself and philosophical thinking. Wittgenstein's focus in these remarks doesn't primarily seem to be on one's outward behaviour and character in dealing *with others*, but instead seems to be on one's internal character in one's dealings with oneself (for example, how honest one is with oneself and how willing one is to work on oneself even if that task is unpleasant).

For Conant, this kind of difficulty (and the ethical demand found in philosophical problems that Wittgenstein expresses to himself and, by extension, to his readers) can be summarised by looking at Wittgenstein's injunctions to Rush Rhees to 'go the bloody hard way'. As Rhees reflects, the demand to 'go the bloody hard way' for Wittgenstein is as much to do with how one lives one's life as it is to do approaching a philosophical task, marking a sort of criterion for a worthwhile life.¹³⁶ This is consistent with the characteristics observed in our sample list of ethical remarks. Although Wittgenstein may be acting the midwife to Rhees when he tells him to 'go the bloody hard way', it is clear that Wittgenstein doesn't see himself as the originator of the demand, rather, he is merely giving voice to a demand that he sees as being a part of the task of doing philosophy (and consequently a demand that he must answer to in his own work). Given that the exemplary remarks that Conant picks out relate to both honesty, and the 'difficulty of not deceiving oneself', we may surmise that for Conant the difficulty of 'going the bloody hard way' refers to the difficulty of not deceiving and being honest with oneself. Although the midwife may urge their interlocutors to be honest, the demand for honesty is something that is to be found within the task of doing philosophy itself. Further evidence of this can be found in Wittgenstein's estimations of Frege and Russell, as we shall now see.

How does one satisfy the ethical demand of 'being honest with oneself'? Conant looks to Wittgenstein's criticisms of Bertrand Russell and admiration of Gottlob Frege to further illustrate his conception of the ethical demand that Wittgenstein identifies as being a part of the task of doing philosophy. He notes that Wittgenstein's attitude

¹³⁶ Rush Rhees, 'The Study of Philosophy' in *Without Answers*, ed. D.Z Phillips (London: Routledge, 1969), reprinted 2005, pp. 169

towards both thinkers hinged on his perception of the honesty (or lack of it) that characterised their work: in particular, in how Frege and Russell respectively treated the problems they encountered in their philosophical inquiry. Russell's indirectness in dealing with the problem of the unity of the proposition that plagued his work (by not addressing it directly and leaving it for another area of philosophy to solve) drew Wittgenstein's ire, whereas Frege's upfront honesty in directly acknowledging similar difficulties in his own philosophical work was something to be applauded.¹³⁷

Consequently, and in accordance with the injunction to 'go the bloody hard way', Conant determines that the ethical demand for honesty expressed in Wittgenstein's writings is something along these lines, in that it is a demand that one who philosophises be willing to take responsibility for one's philosophical thinking and directly address the difficulties and problems that may arise.¹³⁸

The shape of this demand can be said to resemble similar demands made by the Socratic midwife of their interlocutor, in urging them to directly acknowledge and take responsibility for their intellectual offspring's failures. In this sense, Wittgenstein and the Socratic Midwife can be said to both impress the importance of honesty as a character trait on their interlocutors, seeing it as a conducive trait towards philosophical thinking. But what of the other character traits insisted by the Socratic Midwife? Does Wittgenstein also insist on courage, humility, and perseverance, or their equivalents? That Wittgenstein holds that particular traits of characters (or intellectual 'virtues') are conducive to philosophical thinking is the line taken by Gabriel Citron, whose work this chapter will now survey.

Philosophical Virtues in Wittgenstein's Writings

I argue that Wittgenstein does hold that certain traits of character are conducive to philosophical thinking and may aid us in satisfying the ethical demand of philosophy.

¹³⁷ On the problem of the unity of the proposition, Russell writes: "The nature of truth...belongs no more to the principles of mathematics than to the principles of everything else. I therefore leave this question to the logicians with the above brief indication of a difficulty." As Conant observes, Russell seems to excuse himself from the problem on the basis that it is not a problem specific to the philosophy of mathematics, but one that is 'inherent in the very nature of truth and falsehood'. See Bertrand Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics*, (New York: Norton, 1903) §52, quoted in Conant, (2002) pp.100

¹³⁸ Conant 'On Going the Bloody Hard Way' pp. 95-100

To do so, I will draw on Gabriel Citron's work in identifying particular 'philosophical virtues' that Citron believes Wittgenstein to have advocated for.¹³⁹ Additionally, Citron proposes that we are supposed to take Wittgenstein's investigations into these philosophical virtues as a practical guide towards being a better philosopher, and a better person more generally, not only for himself but for his students and all 'would-be philosophers'.¹⁴⁰ Thus, for Citron, an essential part of Wittgenstein's pedagogical approach is educating his reader-interlocutor in a particular kind of character and ethical approach.

Citron also recognises the existence of an ethical task in thinking philosophically, and (as I indicated in chapter three) he identifies this difficulty of this task with the 'difficulties of the will' that of which Wittgenstein speaks in BT 86 I suggested above that these difficulties of the will are related to contextual reasons and preoccupations on the part of the person coming to the problem - for instance, how one wants to be perceived, one's desire to be seen as having solved the problem, the desire to take a deliberately controversial position, or refusing to even acknowledge the consequences of a problem because to do so would mean that you would have to start again from scratch on something you've been working on for a long time.¹⁴¹ Similarly, the difficulties of the will can also pertain to the desire to answer philosophical problems in a particular way: for example, the 'attraction' of there being neat, clear ways of defining concepts and the so called 'carving of nature at its joints', to borrow from Platonic terminology, can contribute to the compulsion to insist on definitional accounts of concepts.¹⁴² The desire for neat and simple ways of categorising and defining things can also make one reluctant to change one's

¹³⁹ Gabriel Citron, 'Honesty, Humility, Courage, & Strength: Later Wittgenstein on the Difficulties of Philosophy and the Philosophical Virtues', *Philosophers' Imprint*, 19.25 (2019)

¹⁴⁰ Citron 'Honesty, Humility' pp.3

¹⁴¹ I anticipate the following objection: 'But then these difficulties of the will aren't an aspect of the philosophical problem itself but is an issue with the person encountering them' - however, what this objection fails to take into account is that the kinds of solutions those philosophical problems elicit present themselves as having no other alternatives, in being expressed as all-or-nothing 'what is F' style questions. Whilst some of the wider contextual reasons that *may* be part of the difficulty of the will are in no way caused by the philosophical problem (a stubborn and career minded academic was just that before they ever encountered said problem), the philosophical problem presents options that play directly into these contextual features and is made harder by them. Subsequently, dealing with philosophical problems may indeed involve dealing with this wider set of contextual features, even if the two are seemingly unrelated in origin.

¹⁴² *Phaedrus* 265e

philosophical position, in spite of that position being undermined by the revelation that said position is unviable.¹⁴³

For Wittgenstein, there are a myriad of underlying desires and distorting influences, both internally and externally, that can impact our ability to engage in philosophical thinking in an unbiased manner. Furthermore, these desires and influences are, for Citron, correlated with the so-called “difficulties of the will”. Consequently, as Citron interprets Wittgenstein, the process of dealing with these ‘difficulties of the will’ has two parts: first discovering the distorting influences on one’s philosophical thinking (both environmental/external and internal), and second, actually overcoming them.¹⁴⁴

What makes overcoming the difficulties of the will particularly difficult, for Wittgenstein, seems to be that addressing them is a thoroughly unpleasant task. We’ve already seen Wittgenstein describe the ‘difficulty’ of not deceiving oneself. But this difficulty itself seems to be a particularly unpleasant and gruelling task. Wittgenstein variously describes how “To know oneself is horrible, because one simultaneously recognizes the living demand &, that one does not satisfy it” (D:221) and that “thinking about these things is ... often downright nasty. And when it’s nasty then it’s most important” (WC:370).¹⁴⁵ Here, Wittgenstein highlights the nastiness of doing the kind of work that he sees as being important and conducive to philosophical thinking, in coming to terms and overcoming the difficulties of the will.

Hence Citron proposes that the role of these so-called philosophical virtues is to both help identify and overcome these ‘difficulties of the will’ and so as to facilitate genuine philosophical inquiry that is free from these distorting influences, and to endure the unpleasantness that dealing with them entails. Citron implies that these philosophical virtues are necessary conditions for philosophical thinking, since without these virtues one is powerless to overcome (or even identify) the difficulties of the will that are involved in philosophical thinking. Our next task is to investigate what these philosophical virtues are exactly. It’s no surprise that Citron lists honesty

¹⁴³ Although this is not necessarily an issue to do with one’s character. One can also insist on this out of a belief that philosophy necessarily requires this kind of approach.

¹⁴⁴ Citron ‘Honesty, Humility’ pp.10

¹⁴⁵ As quoted in Citron ‘Honesty, Humility’ pp.11

first and foremost, given the evident importance Wittgenstein placed on it. However, Citron argues that honesty is just one of a number of philosophical virtues for Wittgenstein. He finds several other qualities of character in Wittgenstein's writings all of which play complementary roles in the struggle against the various 'difficulties of the will'. including humility, courage, strength, and seriousness.

Citron loosely categorises these virtues in to two camps. Firstly, you have the virtues that are related to knowing oneself, which he lists as honesty, humility, courage and strength. The second camp is what Citron dubs the 'endurance' virtues, related to the difficulty in knowing the self and the *willingness* to suffer in order to obtain this kind of self-knowledge. These virtues include: courage (again), strength, and seriousness.

We have already examined how it is that Wittgenstein sees honesty as being important in philosophical thinking, and how this bears some similarity to Socrates' own views, so we will move on to humility, courage, and strength. According to Citron, courage and humility for Wittgenstein go hand in hand. Citron points to the following remarks, where Wittgenstein reflects on the need to go through such unpleasantness when thinking philosophically:

To know oneself is horrible, because one simultaneously recognises the living demand, &, that one does not satisfy it. But there is no better means to get to know oneself than seeing the perfect one. Thus the perfect one must arouse in people a storm of outrage; unless they want to humiliate themselves through & through. (D: 221)

Without a little courage one can't even write a sensible remark about oneself (D: 9)

For Citron, this is evidence that Wittgenstein insists that humility and courage in particular are necessary for knowing oneself and identifying the 'difficulties of the will' that may be plaguing one's philosophical thinking. Firstly, one must be humble, for otherwise we will get frustrated when we are confronted with our own shortcomings.

Not only does humility take the sting out of reflecting on one's weaknesses and flaws, but it gives us the proper mindset for recognising the flaws in the first place.

However, Citron is not able to locate an instance where Wittgenstein explicitly refers to 'humility', and the remarks that Citron does point to does not necessarily describe humility. Rather, what they seem to indicate is an *absence of pride*. On this reading, knowing oneself does not seem to require that one must be humble, but rather, that one must not be too proud to do such work in the first place. One may think of Theodorus here, who is too proud to subject himself to Socrates' examinations, as he is worried that it will be 'unseemly' if he 'slips'. Similarly, we may recall Wittgenstein's remark that the 'edifice of one's pride must be dismantled', which again, suggests that part of the ethical task of doing philosophy is removing from oneself pride that may be inimical to philosophical thinking.

Secondly, courage is useful in mustering the will to deal with such an unpleasant task in the first place. One must be courageous in wanting to be honest about oneself and not deceiving oneself, otherwise, one will be cowed into inaction. Citron alternatively labels this as the *willingness* to endure suffering.¹⁴⁶ Already, we can see a clear parallel with the Socratic Midwife. We have seen how Socrates impresses the importance for courage from his interlocutor, and how this translates to a need for one to be *willing* to subject themselves to the midwife's examination. However, a significant difference also emerges. The Socratic account as it is presented in the *Theaetetus* seems to suggest that the ethical task of philosophy is something that is accomplished prior to or separate from philosophy. We have seen how Theaetetus seems to already possess the qualities necessary for undergoing the midwife's examination. Yet, in Wittgenstein's account, the ethical task seems to be part and parcel with the actual task of doing philosophy. That is to say, it seems to be by engaging with philosophical problems, examining oneself for preconceptions and removing one's distortions and biases that one comes to develop the desired philosophical virtues.

Willingness, however, is only one part of the problem of dealing with these difficulties of the will and their unpleasantness. One must also have the fortitude to

¹⁴⁶ Citron 'Honesty, Humility' pp.13

deal with their unpleasantness. This, Citron argues, is where the so-called ‘endurance virtues’ come in to play. Once again, the role of the virtue of ‘courage’ seems to relate to mustering the will for dealing with such difficulties, and, for Citron, has significant overlap with the virtue of ‘strength’. Citron points to the fact that Wittgenstein often speaks about courage and strength ‘in the same breath’:

“I have neither the courage nor the strength ... to look the facts of my life straight in the face” (MS133:7r47)¹⁴⁷

Citron outlines that strength for Wittgenstein seems to refer to a capacity for dealing with and overcoming suffering, specifically, the suffering induced by self-examination and dealing with uncomfortable truths. Just as one must be willing (through courage) to face such truths, one must also have the strength or resolve to see them through.

Finally, we come to seriousness. To explain seriousness and how it functions as a virtue for Wittgenstein, Citron points to a number of remarks that Wittgenstein makes where ‘seriousness’ is employed in conjunction with the quality of one’s philosophical work or thinking. For example, Wittgenstein describes to O.K Bouwsma a serious thinker as “a man who endured conflict and struggle, who came back again and again to these matters. He wrestles” (F:IV:116). Furthermore, Wittgenstein laments that his own work “is ... lacking in seriousness & love of truth” (PPO 153). And we have already seen how Wittgenstein perceives a ‘greater seriousness’ in his work after embarking on a series of confession, in the opening section of 4.4. For Citron, this also evidences the idea that Wittgenstein perceived seriousness as a virtue that relates to knowing when it is appropriate to subject oneself to the rigours of self-examination. For example, Citron draws a distinction between ‘exposing’ oneself for the ‘thrill’ of it, or to impress someone else, and ‘exposing’ oneself for the sake of truth.

Citron’s analysis of these so-called ‘philosophical virtues’ in Wittgenstein’s philosophical work certainly seems consistent with remarks made by Wittgenstein, and the general sentiment expressed throughout his work that philosophical thinking comes with some kind of cost, or otherwise requires something to distinguish it from

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Citron ‘Honesty, Humility’ pp. 12

mere 'clever thinking'. For example, Wittgenstein specifically frames courage as a means by which one can pay the 'cost' for thoughts:

You could attach prices to thoughts. Some cost a lot, some a little. And how does one pay for thought? I believe: with courage. (CV 52)

Additionally, Wittgenstein uses 'courage' to distinguish between philosophical thinking:

I believe what is essential is for the activity of clarification to be carried out with courage; without this it becomes a mere clever game.¹⁴⁸

What is particularly interesting about these remarks is that they bring to mind some of the discussion in the Digression, mainly, where Socrates draws a distinction between philosophers on the one hand and sophists and orators on the other. As we saw, their respective upbringing has a direct impact on their characters, and subsequently, the nature of their inquiries: the philosophers are able to think deeply about the nature of things in themselves, whereas the sophists and orators are described as being stunted in development, and only being able to employ trickery and flattery. Or, to put it in Wittgenstein's own terms, the difference seems to be that the philosophers are able to do *philosophy* by virtue of their character, whereas the lawyer-orators (lacking the requisite character due to their own upbringing) are only able to play a *clever game*. Although Wittgenstein doesn't seem to indicate that this is something that is limited to one's upbringing, there nevertheless exists the similarity that, for both, conceptual thinking without some kind of requisite character or virtue is simply a 'clever' game.

Similarly, Citron's reading resonates with the remarks that Conant identifies as presenting an 'ethical demand' in Wittgenstein's philosophy: namely, that the task of doing philosophy simultaneously involves doing work on oneself, 'on one's way of seeing things'. Is this the case in the *Theaetetus*? Whilst the youth does seem to come

¹⁴⁸ MS 154, 16v/ CV 16. Quoted from Kuusela 'Struggle Against Dogmatism' pp.286

to Socrates already having the right kind of character, the conclusion of the dialogue seems to indicate that Theaetetus's character has undergone further improvement for having gone through the process of philosophical inquiry with Socrates. Socrates tells Theaetetus that he will now be 'gentler' in future philosophical inquiries for having undergone the midwife's examination. Although the *Theaetetus* seems to suggest that character is a prerequisite for doing philosophy, we nevertheless find some evidence that one can work on themselves and their 'way of seeing things', in the way that Wittgenstein seems to suggest with his remarks.

If this ethical demand is something that is part and parcel of actually doing philosophy, then one can surmise that, for both thinkers, this is a demand that can never be satisfied in a once-and-for-all fashion. There is evidence for this in both thinkers' accounts: as we have seen, Socrates describes those that 'go away from him' too soon and revert back to the kind of character that is inimical to philosophy. Similarly, Wittgenstein's remarks do not indicate that the ethical demand can ever be satisfied, but rather, that it is an ongoing process. The presence of these kinds of remarks throughout his philosophical works is indicative that, from his point of view, the struggle to fulfil the ethical demand is an ongoing one.

4.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has outlined the similarities and differences between the Socratic midwife and the later Wittgenstein towards the maieutic task of overcoming the ethical aspect of philosophical problems, as identified in chapter two. By now, the parallels between Socrates and Wittgenstein on the nature of the character requirement for doing philosophy in response to an ethical task that is a part of doing philosophy. Both can be seen to recommend particular traits of character such as 'courage', 'humility', and willingness/perseverance, in that they seem to prepare or guide the person through the difficult process self-examination. The difficulty of that self-examination, and how it is expressed, varies: for example, the Socratic idea that one must make the painful decision to abort an unviable account, versus the

Wittgensteinian idea that looking for and confronting your own biases is difficult. However, both can largely be said to refer to the same thing, in that one must *confront* one's attitudes and predispositions towards the object under investigation, which may distort our thinking and make us form and/or hold onto unviable philosophical accounts, and remove them, no matter how painful it is.

What this has revealed is that, for both the Socratic Midwife and Wittgenstein, dealing with this ethical demand encountered in the face of philosophical problems is something that is part and parcel of doing philosophy. Or, as Kuusela puts it, "Ethics...emerges here not as a branch of philosophy, but as a dimension that pervades it entirely"¹⁴⁹. For Kuusela, this ethical dimension to philosophy is motivated by the goal of justice to one's concepts and to the concepts of others, expressed in terms of removing one's preconceptions and biases surrounding the topic under investigation and not imposing preconceptions and biases onto others (the 'struggle against dogmatism' from which Kuusela's book derives its name). We have seen in this chapter how this ethical dimension manifests, and how one acquires the resources for actually dealing with them.

In tracking both similarities and dissimilarities in how the Socratic midwife and Wittgenstein conceive of philosophical problems, and the various tasks involved in approaching them, I have brought out the maieutic nature of Wittgenstein's philosophical approach. Having established the maieutic framework underpinning his conception of philosophical problems through comparison with the Socratic Midwife, and the parts of his methodology devoted to dealing with both the conceptual and ethical tasks in doing philosophy, I now turn to investigating how my maieutic reading affects our view of certain controversial issues in Wittgenstein's later philosophical work. In the next chapter I shall attempt to show how such a reading can bring clarity to some key ideas in the *Investigations* that shape the overall meta-philosophical tone of the work. This is the topic for Chapter 5.

¹⁴⁹ Kuusela 'Struggle Against Dogmatism' pp. 286

Chapter Five: A Maieutic Reading of *übersichtliche Darstellung*

5.1 Introduction

It is now time to look beyond those areas of Wittgenstein's philosophy that have the most direct parallels with Socratic Midwifery to other important parts of Wittgenstein's later philosophical outlook that we have not yet explored. In particular, in this chapter I have chosen to explore one particularly fraught issue, Wittgenstein's notion of *übersichtliche Darstellung* (variously translated as perspicuous representation or 'presentation', surveyable representation, overview or even 'bird's eye view'). Wittgenstein describes this idea as being of 'fundamental significance' to his later method (PI § 122). As such, it is crucial that it turns out to be consistent with the maieutic reading established throughout this thesis. Accordingly, I will critically examine some of the current leading interpretations of the role of *übersichtliche Darstellung* in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, before showing how the maieutic reading can account for some of the gaps left by these readings, and significantly improve upon them with a new and enlightening explanation of what Wittgenstein might have meant.

Throughout this chapter, I will be using several terms to refer to the notion of *übersichtliche Darstellung* -- or rather, to refer to different interpretations of the same notion. This is intended to make it easier to track which interpretation I am talking about at any given time and will be useful for maintaining clarity when comparing different interpretations side by side. Firstly, I will hereafter refer to a 'neutral' understanding of the concept of *übersichtliche Darstellung* as 'üD' for brevity's sake. This will refer to the general concept of üD without invoking any particular interpretation of what it means. By 'surveyable representation', I specifically refer to the understanding of üD put forward by Peter Hacker and the early Gordon Baker in what has come to be known as the 'elucidatory reading'. By 'perspicuous presentation'

or ‘representation’, I specifically refer to the understanding of üD put forward by various so-called ‘therapeutic’ interpreters of Wittgenstein’s work.

I begin in 5.2 by introducing the notion of surveyable representation and examining it through the lens of what has come to be known as the ‘elucidatory’ reading, spearheaded by PMS Hacker. I go on to explore what is known as the ‘therapeutic’ response to Hacker’s reading, its criticisms of the elucidatory reading, and its alternative take on what an üD or ‘perspicuous presentation’ is. In particular, I explore Gordon Baker’s critique of surveyable representations, and contemporary extensions of this reading by Phil Hutchinson and Rupert Read, and offer an analysis of the therapeutic understanding of üD. In 5.3, I then offer a reading in which üD is analogous to the state of clarity that the Socratic Midwife leads their interlocutor to through the use of ‘maieutic auxiliary devices’ (which I sketched out in chapter one). In 5.4, I then provide a reading of Wittgenstein’s treatment of ‘private language’, in which I argue that Wittgenstein makes use of these kinds of auxiliary devices and brings about a similar kind of clarity in an interlocutor that is committed to the notion of private language. I conclude with some observations about the effects that my new maieutic understanding of üD have on our understanding of the philosophical methodologies presented in the *Investigations*.

5.2 Interpreting übersichtliche Darstellung

The issue of how to interpret Wittgenstein’s notion of üD has been the flashpoint for many disagreements over how to read the spirit of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy as a whole. It is introduced in the *Investigations* in the following remark:

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 just this sort of perspicuity [*übersichtlichkeit*]. A perspicuous representation [*übersichtliche Darstellung*] produces just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connections’. 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)

There are several things to note. Firstly, it is clear that Wittgenstein attaches great importance to the notion of üD when he says that it has “fundamental significance” and that it shapes “the way we look at things”. Secondly, Wittgenstein directly links the need for üD with the lack of clarity in our language. So whatever üD is, its perspicuity stands directly in contrast with the conceptual unclarity that gives rise to philosophical problems. Thirdly, despite saying that the üD is of ‘fundamental significance’, Wittgenstein very rarely employs the term, and the sole explicit example of an üD that he gives is the colour octahedron in *Philosophical Remarks* (PR 51-52).¹⁵⁰ Fourthly, Wittgenstein highlights that üD ‘earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things’. By this, I take Wittgenstein to mean that üD is a goal that we ought to aspire to with our presentations of things, for the purposes of clarification. Finally, Wittgenstein asks whether or not the notion is a *Weltanschauung*, roughly translated as ‘world-view’. The notion of a world-view seemingly comes from Oswald Spengler, and is often interpreted accordingly, as meaning ‘the defining idea of a time’ – although whether or not Wittgenstein means it in this sense is also up for debate.¹⁵¹

So in effect, and ironically, what Wittgenstein means by üD is itself far from perspicuous, surveyable, clear, or any other of the various adjectives *übersichtliche* is often translated into. It has been the cause of much of the division in Wittgenstein literature over the last few decades. Broadly speaking, the debate is between two camps: the ‘elucidatory’ reading which is taken up by (amongst others) Anthony Kenny, P.M.S Hacker, Hans-Johann Glock and Severin Schroeder, and the ‘therapeutic’ reading, which includes, in this context, the later Gordon Baker, Rupert Read, and Phil Hutchinson.¹⁵² The differences between these two camps boil down to a disagreement

¹⁵⁰ As should become apparent throughout this chapter, this may be because they are, in actual fact, all over the *Philosophical Investigations*

¹⁵¹ Oswald Spengler & Charles F. Atkinson *The Decline of the West* New York: Knopf (1932)

¹⁵² I note that many other interpreters of Wittgenstein could be included in the ‘therapeutic’ or ‘New Wittgensteinian’ tradition: for instance, Alice Crary, Stephen Mulhall, Rupert Read, Phil Hutchinson etc. However, since there is no unitary therapeutic interpretation, I shall confine my attention for the present purpose to those who made direct interventions concerning the meaning of perspicuous

over whether philosophy (as practised by Wittgenstein) has any positive or productive function, or whether it is purely ‘negative’ in its aims: such that its only function is to destroy philosophical illusions but build nothing in their place. I shall explore each of these in turn.

The Elucidatory Reading

The ‘elucidatory’ reading is the view defended by P.M.S Hacker and the early Gordon Baker in their commentary on the *Investigations*.¹⁵³ Whereas Anscombe had translated the term *üD* as ‘perspicuous representation’,¹⁵⁴ Hacker prefers ‘surveyable representation’, in his edition of the *Philosophical Investigations*¹⁵⁵ and the revised editions of his *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning (Parts I and II)*.¹⁵⁶ In effect he understands ‘our failure to understand’ not as an issue about clarity, on a scale of opaqueness and transparency, (as is implied by Anscombe’s term ‘perspicuity’), but as an issue to do with obtaining the right perspective from which to view and describe grammar. His point is that addressing philosophical confusion should be seen as a matter of finding the right ‘overview’ of the grammar of our language (from which one can ‘see connections’).

Hacker’s reason for translating *übersichtlich* as ‘surveyable’ seems to be partly to pick up a superficial resemblance to the conception of ‘the correct logical point of view’ in the *Tractatus* (TLP 4.1213) and to capture the visual and geographical metaphors that Wittgenstein frequently employs in the 1930s when contrasting his

presentation. See Alice Crary & Rupert Read (eds.) *The New Wittgenstein*. Routledge (2008) for a general overview of the therapeutic camp.

It should also be noted that Rupert Read appears more recently to have distanced himself from the therapeutic view, with his new ‘liberatory’ reading of Wittgenstein. Whether Read’s liberatory reading of Wittgenstein is very different from previous therapeutic readings is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss. As Read’s previous work has been instrumental in shaping the therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein, I will continue to refer to Read as a therapeutic reader of Wittgenstein (and by contrast, I will explicitly highlight when I am referring to Read as a ‘liberatory’ reader). See Read, R. *Wittgenstein’s Liberatory Philosophy: Thinking Through His Philosophical Investigations*. Routledge (2020)

¹⁵³ Gordon Baker later came to distance himself from these views, expressing what Hacker calls ‘grave doubts and misgivings’ about his former position. For this reason, and for simplicity, I will simply refer to this reading as “Hacker’s reading”.

¹⁵⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, trans. G.E Anscombe, *Philosophical Investigations 3rd Edition*, Macmillan, (1968)

¹⁵⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, trans. G.E Anscombe, P.M.S Hacker, Joachim Schulte, *Philosophical Investigations 4th Edition*, Wiley-Blackwell (2009)

¹⁵⁶ P.M.S Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning*, Blackwell (2009)

then new philosophical work with the earlier work of the *Tractatus*. However, while the correct logical point of view of the *Tractatus* could be said to be a ‘geological’ view (insofar as it seeks to discover the logical forms of language beneath its surface), Hacker argues that the *Investigations* by contrast takes a ‘topographical’ approach, seeking to ‘survey the linguistic environs of a problematic expression.’¹⁵⁷ The difference is that the *Investigations*, according to Hacker, seeks to provide an overview of the problematic concept at hand so that one can see where one has gone wrong and ‘specify connections, exclusions, analogies and disanalogies that make it possible to dissolve and resolve philosophical problems’, rather than explore the deep structures of language that are supposedly hidden beneath language’s surface and require excavation by analysis.¹⁵⁸

Hacker points to the following remarks (amongst others) as evidence of Wittgenstein’s supposed turn towards a topographical investigation:

‘My aim is to teach you the geography of a labyrinth, so that you know your way about it perfectly’ (MS 162b, 6v).

The philosopher...does not have to erect new buildings, or construct new bridges, but to describe the geography *as it now is* (MS 127, 199)

The philosopher wants to master the geography of concepts (MS 137, 63a).

This idea, of course, fits well with remarks that Wittgenstein makes in the *Investigations* about the form of philosophical problems being ‘not knowing one’s way about’ (PI §123). If philosophical issues are characterised as both problems to do with not being clear on one’s concept use, *and* as problems to do with not being able to orient oneself around language, then it would (seemingly) make sense to view the process of getting clear about one’s situation (that is, the process of putting together a surveyable representation) as a process of getting the ‘lie of the land’, so to speak, by establishing the geography of one’s conceptual terrains, in the way that Hacker suggests.

On this basis, Hacker describes what he terms a “surveyable representation” or “overview” as:

¹⁵⁷ Hacker, *Understanding and Meaning*, pp. 309

¹⁵⁸ Hacker, ‘*Understanding and Meaning*’, pp. 309

Something one has when one can see across a landscape from on high – or across a wide field of concepts and their connections. When one has an overview, one can say how the things that are in view stand in relation to one another.¹⁵⁹

And he explains the effect of achieving that kind of surveyable representation as follows:

When one has a clear grasp of the terrain, one can represent what is then in view in the form of a map -- or, less metaphorically, in the form of a description of the salient grammatical features of the problematic expression or segment of language.¹⁶⁰

According to Hacker, then, a ‘surveyable representation’ or ‘overview’ is a point of view from which one can take in the conceptual terrain of the language surrounding an expression and form a synopsis of the grammatical rules that govern its use. The result is that a surveyable representation can, in the Hackerian sense, be understood as something of a map that has been drawn from a birds-eye vantage point, with which one might navigate one’s conceptual surrounds and chart one’s course to conceptual clarity.

In justifying this approach, Hacker links the notion of surveyable representation in PI§ 122 with remarks Wittgenstein makes in the *Big Typescript*, in which Wittgenstein describes how ‘a proposition is completely logically analysed when its grammar is laid out completely clearly’ (BT 417) in response to the issue faced by Wittgenstein of our grammar lacking surveyability.¹⁶¹ Hacker’s suggestion, based on his reading of this remark, is that the grammar of a concept can be laid out *in entirety*, and that consequently a surveyable representation is just the kind of representation where the grammar of a concept is fully analysed and its rules are ‘tabulated’. In a sense then, grammar for Hacker can be understood as the target, and not the means of description. Thus if we follow Hacker’s approach, we reach a normative view of Wittgenstein’s descriptive practice, in the sense that we are pursuing the rules by which the correct usage of our language is determined and by which we can then

¹⁵⁹ Hacker ‘*Understanding and Meaning*’ pp. 309-310

¹⁶⁰ Hacker ‘*Understanding and Meaning*’ pp. 310

¹⁶¹ Of course, Wittgenstein goes on to problematize this very notion of completeness in PI §132, which is problematic for Hacker’s position here.

avoid the problematic expressions that are prone to giving rise to philosophical confusion. As Hacker writes: ‘We must remind ourselves how we use the problematic expressions...so we are in effect stating rules (or fragments of rules)’.¹⁶²

We can now summarise surveyable representations as follows: a surveyable representation is an ordered representation of the rules of grammar. Like a map, it shows the landscape of our grammar, and the grammar of a particular expression or proposition can be compared with it in order to render clear the grammar of the words in the said proposition (thus avoiding the pitfalls of philosophical confusion). Thus, on Hacker’s view, Wittgenstein’s philosophical practice has both a negative function, in dispelling the source of philosophical confusion, and a positive function, in the construction of these grammatical maps. As the readers in the therapeutic camp have not failed to point out, there are several further consequences of this kind of elucidatory reading for understanding what is meant by a perspicuous representation, including (for example) the observation that, on Hacker’s view, these surveyable representations are ‘roughly additive’, in that they can be put together ‘piece by piece’ to make ever more comprehensive overviews of our grammar, and the observation that (for Hacker) one surveyable representation cannot be any more or less surveyable (or ‘perspicuous’) than another—much as one axiom of geometry cannot be more or less self-evident than another.¹⁶³

The Therapeutic Response:

What follows is a description of the so-called ‘therapeutic’ reading of Wittgenstein, with specific regards to the notion of üD. A critical response to the ideas outlined below will be offered in 5.3. What has come to be known as the ‘therapeutic’ reading finds its roots in a series of essays on the *Investigations* published by Gordon Baker. Within these essays, Baker (having formerly collaborated with Hacker) came to distance himself from Hacker’s reading of Wittgenstein, particularly on the place and role of üD. In his essay *Philosophical Investigations §122: Neglected Aspects*, Baker

¹⁶² Hacker ‘*Understanding and Meaning*’, pp.291

¹⁶³ Phil Hutchinson & Rupert Read ‘Toward a Perspicuous Presentation of “Perspicuous Presentation”’ *Philosophical Investigations* 31 (2):141–160. (2008) pp. 151

makes several criticisms concerning how badly the elucidatory reading matches up with the rest of the *Investigations*.¹⁶⁴ In particular, Baker takes issue with a number of ideas implicit within the elucidatory reading that seem to conflict with what Wittgenstein actually says, such as the idea that a perspicuous presentation is distinguishable from the task of dissolving a particular philosophical problem, and the related idea that there is *the* order to our concepts in which philosophical problems disappear (as opposed to *particular* orders for *particular* problems).¹⁶⁵ Both of these ideas, Baker suggests, are irreconcilable with remarks made by Wittgenstein surrounding the structure and function of orders in our language.

Let us now get into specifics. If perspicuous presentation *is* distinguishable from the task of dissolving philosophical problems, then this implies that these representations exist *outside* the task of dissolving philosophical problems, which runs counter to Wittgenstein's pronouncements that descriptions get their light and purpose from philosophical problems (PI §109), or that 'an explanation of words has clarificatory value for the person to whom it clarifies something, upon whom it has a clarifying effect. Independently of *that* it is not an explanation.' (MS 123, 18r; 1940). On the therapeutic view, perspicuous presentation cannot be independent from the task of dissolving philosophical problems as Wittgenstein explicitly states that they get their *purpose* from the philosophical problem they are trying to render clear.

On the back of this, we can also see how the idea implied by the elucidatory reading's geographical metaphor, that there *is* a fixed definitive ordering to our concepts, is also difficult to reconcile with Wittgenstein's wider philosophical practice. It once again seems to run directly counter to the pronouncement made by Wittgenstein that 'we want to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order with a particular end in view, one out of many possible orders; not *the* order' (PI §132). Baker understands these remarks as referring to the potential for a multiplicity of orderings in our language – something which seems once again

¹⁶⁴ Gordon Baker 'Philosophical Investigations §122: Neglected Aspects' in G.P Baker & Katherine Morris (ed.) *Wittgenstein's Method: Neglected Aspects: Essays on Wittgenstein*, Blackwell, 22-46 (2004)

¹⁶⁵ There are of course many more subtle differences between Hacker's elucidatory reading and Baker's therapeutic reading of perspicuous/surveyable representations. However, I highlight these in particular as I feel they are the most salient differences and the most pertinent for the discussion of this chapter. For a full list of differences (as Gordon Baker sees it), see Baker 'Philosophical Investigations §122' pp.42-44

irreconcilable with the view that elucidatory readers hold that the grammatical rules of language can definitively be mapped out.

The elucidatory reader might respond here with the claim that there are different kinds of maps, and that whilst a particular map might be *relevant* for dealing with one kind of case, it may not be particularly helpful for dealing with another kind of case (in the same way that a map of the London tube network, whilst useful for navigating one's way around the London Underground, is not very useful for navigating the streets of London). In this sense, a map that is drawn and used to help render the grammar around a philosophical problem clear is a relevant map, given the task of resolving the philosophical problem, but isn't the only ordering. This brings the elucidatory reader into closer contact with Wittgenstein's pronouncements. Indeed, in interpreting PI §132, Hacker puts forward the view that, by 'different orders', Wittgenstein is not talking about different *philosophical* orders, but rather is comparing a philosophical ordering of language with various non-philosophical orders. Furthermore, Hacker's interpretation suggests that the philosophical ordering of language is guided by the task of resolving philosophical problems. Consequently, such orders can be said to 'get their light' from philosophical problems, which perhaps problematises this aspect of the therapeutic critique.

However, as Kuusela observes, the elucidatory reader's claim (or specifically for Kuusela, the early Baker and Hacker's claim) that a philosophical order exists to resolve philosophical problem implies the claim that there exists a certain order of language within which all philosophical problems are resolved, which is reminiscent of the concept script that Wittgenstein himself had proposed in the *Tractatus*.¹⁶⁶ Kuusela points to a remark made by Wittgenstein in the 1930s to further illustrate the problem with ascribing this view to the later Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein writes:

"Was it not a mistake from me (for that is how it seems to me now) to assume that anyone who uses language plays always a definite game? For was that not the meaning of my remark that everything in a proposition 'is in order'— however casually it is expressed? . . . But there is nothing either in order or

¹⁶⁶ Oskari Kuusela, *The Struggle Against Dogmatism: Wittgenstein and the Concept of Philosophy* (Harvard University Press, 2008) pp. 91

disorder in that—it would be in order if one could say: this person too plays a game according to a definite fixed set of rules”¹⁶⁷

As Kuusela then explains, given that there’s no definite set of philosophical problems, it is not possible to say when the surveyable representation has been achieved and the task completed. Consequently, as there is no criterion of completeness for the description of grammar *the* philosophical ordering of grammar is called into question.¹⁶⁸

Let us return to the therapeutic response to the elucidatory reading. The therapeutic interpreter’s concerns seem to relate to the fact that the elucidatory reading implies that philosophy has a positive role, which is to establish representations that have intrinsic value in and of themselves, by correctly and definitively describing the rules of grammar, thereby establishing the ‘limits’ of grammar. This is why this kind of reading has come to be known as ‘therapeutic’ – for, in contrast to the elucidatory reading, it sees the task of describing one’s grammar as being a task that occurs in response to specific philosophical problems that currently have a grip on one. For these therapeutic readers, the task of philosophical description is merely to dispel the philosophical problem, rather than arrive at any positive, independent universal philosophical insight.

Phil Hutchinson and Rupert Read develop these critiques of the elucidatory reading further in their own paper, ‘Toward a Perspicuous Presentation of Perspicuous Presentation’. In this paper, Hutchinson and Read seek to offer a clarified view of the therapeutic reading and its critique of the Hackerian reading of PI §122.¹⁶⁹ Whereas Baker’s paper simply expresses misgivings about Hacker’s interpretation of PI §122, Hutchinson and Read’s paper goes on an all-out offensive. Hutchinson and Read provide a number of reasons, in the vein of Baker’s interpretation, for why they find the elucidatory understanding of perspicuous presentation unsatisfactory, chiefly:

- 1) That it ignores Wittgenstein’s own words;
- 2) The talk of ‘surveying the rules of grammar’ suggests that this has intrinsic worth and is not purpose relative;

¹⁶⁷ Ts213, 253r; see Ms112, 95r; 211, 491; 212, 728

¹⁶⁸ Kuusela ‘*Struggle Against Dogmatism*’ pp.91

¹⁶⁹ Hutchinson & Read ‘Perspicuous Presentation’

- 3) It implies the ability to stand *outside* of language and comment on it (what John McDowell calls the ability to “view language from sideways on”);¹⁷⁰
- 4) It implies that there are definitive rules to grammar, and consequently, a definitive structure and ordering to language;
- 5) (And in summary), it commits Wittgenstein to some controversial philosophical theses (of the kind which Wittgenstein himself problematises).

All of these points, they argue, pose serious challenges to the elucidatory reading, in terms of both its internal consistency and its coherence with the meta-philosophical assumptions and commitments that seem to underpin Wittgenstein’s later works.

We have already seen ample evidence of 1) and 2) in Baker’s account, and so for the sake of expediency we shall move directly to 3). Hutchinson and Read argue that the ability to view language from a vantage point from which one might (synoptically) survey their conceptual surrounds implies that one can take a step back from language and view it from an insulated standpoint.¹⁷¹ Obviously (as Read and Hutchinson observe) such a thing is hard to conceptualise – what does it mean to ‘observe language’, particularly from a position that is itself separate from language? Hutchinson and Read compare the possibility of viewing language in this way to the possibility of viewing a city from a vantage point, noting that to do the latter would require one to first exit the city in order to be able to see the whole of it. It certainly makes sense to talk of exiting a city so as to look down at it, and we have a reasonably clear idea of what we expect to achieve from doing so, or rather, what viewing a whole city might look like. However, it is less clear what ‘viewing a whole language’ might look like, or whether or not it even makes sense to talk about language in this way.

Whilst Hacker and other elucidatory readers do not explicitly claim that it is possible to step out of language in this way, it is nevertheless suggested by Hutchinson and Read that the claim to be able to ‘map’ our language implies just such an ability, as well as implying a ‘deep’ background knowledge of the nature of language.¹⁷² They

¹⁷⁰ Hutchinson & Read ‘Perspicuous Presentation’ pp. 155-157, see also J. McDowell “Values and Secondary Qualities.” In J. McDowell (ed.), *Mind, Value and Reality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard, pp. 131-150 (1998)

¹⁷¹ Hutchinson & Read ‘Perspicuous Presentation’ pp. 144

¹⁷² Hutchinson and Read ‘Perspicuous Presentation’ pp. 145.

diagnose the difficulty as lying in the fact that the analogy the elucidatory reading draws with 'mapping' is limited to a conception of mapping as stereotyped by the cartographical practice of mapping one's terrain. For instance, and according to Hutchinson and Read, a cartographical map can be used predictively (i.e. in anticipating a particular landmark) whereas a map of language could not be used in such a way by virtue of poetic and metaphorical invention in language. That is to say, their suggestion seems to be that the inventiveness of language and the emergence of new forms of communicating with language seem to make a once and for all ordering of language impossible (cf. OC §96-99). In short, they suggest that the open-endedness of language makes it such that it is impossible to exhaustively map language in the way that the elucidatory reading suggests, much less step outside of it.

This leads us to 4). The idea that language can be definitively mapped, has an objective form (in the tabulation of the grammatical rules of use of particular words and/or concepts), and that these tabulations have inherent and objective value in their ability to clarify philosophical problems *irrespective* of who is under the grip of said problem, implies then that there are definitive rules of grammar and that language has a definitive structure. Consequently, the elucidatory reading can be understood as characterising the task of philosophy as establishing a definitive ordering to our concepts, in line with said grammatical rules, which will dissolve our philosophical problems, which Read and Hutchinson see as clearly conflicting with PI §132.¹⁷³ This idea, that the philosopher is supposed to create definitively 'correct' maps, creates a situation whereby philosophers could be considered a kind of 'grammar-police', whose task (outside of creating maps) is to use these maps of the grammar of philosophical concepts as fixed points of reference for determining the correct usage of words, enforcing the bounds of sense with the now clearly tabulated rules of grammar. Of course, there is nothing problematic with this in and of itself, but from the therapeutic perspective, it commits the elucidatory reader once again to several theses about

¹⁷³ 'We want to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order with a particular end in view, one out of many possible orders; not *the* order' (PI §133)

Note: As we have seen previously in this chapter, Hacker states that the 'other orders' mentioned in PI §132 are non-philosophical. This may provide Hacker and the elucidatory reading with an out with regards to this criticism.

language and its use, which the elucidatory reader makes use of in order to police the bounds of sense.

The result then, is 5) – that the elucidatory reading commits Wittgenstein to the kind of metaphysical theses that (apparently) Wittgenstein was seeking to avoid. We have already extensively covered the reasons why Wittgenstein finds such theses problematic, and so it is easy to see how Hutchinson and Read arrive at such a conclusion. Their characterisation of the elucidatory reading’s ‘surveyable representations’ attributes several hefty metaphysical theses to those readers, around the form and nature of language. According to Hutchinson and Read the elucidatory readers commit Wittgenstein to the view that there is a definitive, logical structure to language that can be programmatically captured by philosophical analysis. Consequently, their Wittgenstein seems to relapse into the metaphysical theses in the *Investigations*, in the same way that Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* did.

Before evaluating the strength of these claims, we must first turn to examine what therapeutic readings in Baker’s tradition offer in place of ‘surveyable representations’.¹⁷⁴ Baker offers an itemised list of what he takes to be the features of perspicuous representations although for brevity’s sake, I will home in on those features that are most salient and stand out most in comparison to Hacker’s reading:

- 1) Perspicuous representations (even those of the grammar of our language) need not be “descriptions of the employment of the symbols of ‘our language.’”. Rather, they can also be descriptions of language games that can be used as objects of comparison (even if they have an absurd appearance) or other such ‘centres of variation’. Contra Hacker, a perspicuous representation need not be a tabulation of the possible uses of particular words or phrases, but can instead be represented (and consequently understood) more abstractly, either through general descriptions, the use of analogies or metaphors, and so on. They do not need to be neatly organised tabulations of the rules of grammar.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Note here that Baker uses the term ‘perspicuous representation’, and not ‘perspicious presentation’, as the therapeutic readers that follow after him do.

¹⁷⁵ Or as Hutchinson and Read put it: ‘They may in fact be highly various, non linguistic, etc’. Hutchinson & Read ‘Perspicuous Presentation’ pp. 151

- 2) The use of the adjective ‘perspicuous’ should not be taken attributively, as perspicuity is not an intrinsic feature of a representation. Rather, what determines whether or not a representation is perspicuous is its function, and whether or not it makes perspicuous whatever it is representing to the person concerned.
- 3) Perspicuous representations are to be judged successful in so far as they eliminate a particular person’s philosophical problem. Thus, a perspicuous representation cannot be faulted for not giving a description that accommodates every use of the concept(s) that it represents. Indeed, it is doubtful that it even makes sense to talk about a perspicuous representation of “*all aspects* of ‘the use of our words’”.
- 4) Perspicuous representations are not additive, in the sense that they cannot be combined together to help clarify/dissolve further philosophical problems.
- 5) The criteria of success in giving perspicuous presentations are relative to particular situations, people, etc – and a presentation counts as successful insofar as it actually clarifies something.

The resulting view is that perspicuous representations and their success criteria are far more relative to the individual under the grip of a particular philosophical problem than they appear to be in the elucidatory reading. Where the elucidatory reading takes üDs to be fairly static tools for objectively clarifying by virtue of the form they take (thus severely limiting the scope of potential forms that a perspicuous representation can take), Baker thinks of them as more flexible and relative to the person for whom it is meant to clarify the concept under investigation.

It follows that the task of philosophy is to rid oneself or one’s interlocutors of the various misleading pictures and confusions that underlie philosophical problems, without leaving anything in their place. Thus in the therapeutic tradition philosophical problems are not *solved*, but ‘*dissolved*’ – that is, no answer is given to the question they pose because the question itself has been shown to be the result of a confusion. A perspicuous representation is a representation that makes the confusion visible and consequently disarms it – it offers nothing else of value outside of this. Conceived this way, philosophy does not answer philosophical questions – it merely shows that the questions themselves are confused, thereby those under their grip. By

contrast, on the elucidatory reading, surveyable representations were the product of a positive philosophical task, in the sense that they stand (metaphorically) in the place where one previously held onto a philosophical confusion as a point of reference. Leaning on the elucidatory reading's use of geographical analogies, we could perhaps conceptualise this as something like erecting a useful signpost at a crossroads where we once got confused.

Assessing the Therapeutic Notion of 'Perspicuous Presentation'

The main criticism raised by therapeutic readers in response to 'surveyable representation' seems to be that large parts of Hacker's elucidatory reading and his notion of 'surveyable representation' are irreconcilable (or at least, imply things that are irreconcilable) with meta-philosophical statements in the *Investigations* and other parts of Wittgenstein's later works. The idea that the clarificatory task of philosophy hinges on the tabulation of rules of grammar of the kind that they suggest certainly seems inconsistent with my account of Wittgenstein's philosophy that I have been defending throughout this thesis—not least the notion that the aim of the *Investigations* is to spur the reader on to thoughts of their own. If surveyable representations had inherent value as static descriptions of the actual rules of grammar (or could be used going forward, for one's future philosophical work) this would apparently leave open the possibility that no one would need to 'think for themselves' when reading the *Investigations*; the representations would supposedly have clarificatory value in and of themselves and so could presumably be used as a reference point and deployed in solving all future problems, without going through any further process of the kind that was initially required to arrive at the relevant surveyable representations. Here at least I think we should agree with the therapeutic readers' criticisms of the faults in the elucidatory reading.

The alternative offered by the therapeutic reading does appear to be somewhat Socratic in its flavour, in the sense that the 'midwife' or 'therapist' works with the patient, presenting them with various pictures and devices in order to release them from the grip of a particular picture that has been troubling them and hindering their philosophical progress. In this respect, I find my reading more aligned with the

therapeutic understanding of ‘perspicuous presentation’ than the elucidatory understanding of ‘surveyable representations’.

Furthermore, the criteria for üD offered by therapeutic readers seem to better describe similar such devices that Socrates presents to his interlocutors throughout the *Theaetetus*. As we have seen, Socrates does not present Theaetetus with anything resembling ‘neatly tabulated rules’, but rather, his devices take on a variety of forms for a variety of purposes. Over the course of the *Theaetetus*, Socrates variously makes use of dreams, analogies, pictures, and other kinds of models in order to render some aspect of Theaetetus’ proposed account clear to him.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, and as we have seen, Socrates at least principally seems committed to the notion of dropping a particular picture or model if the interlocutor is not happy with it, or it does not seem useful or clarificatory to the interlocutor (as demonstrated by Socrates’ insistence on mutual understanding, see chapters one and five).

The question, however, is how well the therapeutic reading captures what Wittgenstein intended by üD. The therapeutic understanding of perspicuous presentation/ representation comes at quite a cost. Firstly, it seems to rule out the possibility of any positive progress in philosophy. That is problems are never actively solved. Seemingly, all we can hope for is to be cured of our individual ‘delusions’ that are keeping us in the grip of a philosophical problem. Whilst we may find ourselves cured of particular delusions and freed from the grip of certain philosophical pictures, we are left with nothing in their place, and no alternative ways of thinking about things. Although our understanding may ‘progress’ in the sense that we are liberated from our confusions and that nonsense is revealed to be nonsense, we do not gain any more ‘positive’ insight into philosophical matters in the form of more accurate philosophical models. This bleak reading of Wittgenstein has given rise to the accusation that Wittgenstein’s philosophy is ‘anti-philosophy’ or ‘the end of philosophy’.¹⁷⁷ Perhaps this is just a consequence of reading Wittgenstein ‘properly’. Perhaps this is a bullet that one must simply bite in order to get a coherent

¹⁷⁶ Socrates makes use of a dream (201d-202c), an analogy comparing the mind to a wax tablet (190e5-196c5), an analogy comparing the mind to an aviary (196d1 - 200d4) in order to clarify aspects of the account that Theaetetus is putting forward, amongst other devices.

¹⁷⁷ Alain Badiou, *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy*. Verso (2011)

philosophical narrative from the *Investigations*.¹⁷⁸ No matter how desirable it seems that philosophy should have a productive function (and I do think it is), we cannot just assume that it does, or appeal to this as a rebuttal of the therapeutic account. Rather we need to consider whether there are other reasons to reject that account.

It could also be pointed out that the therapeutic readers' view of *üD* seem to be committed to the same (or at least similar) kind of linguistic thesis that the elucidatory readers are committed to. The view that creating an exhaustive mapping of language and its rules is impossible is just as much a linguistic thesis about the nature and structure of language as the elucidatory reader's claim that language *can* be definitively mapped out in this way (for it states an impossibility regarding language, which amounts to a metaphysical thesis). As we have already seen, a more nuanced critique of the elucidatory reading that avoids creating a thesis about language is offered by Kuusela, argues that there is no definitive order of language because there are no criteria for completeness for such an order, as new problems about the allegedly mapped concepts can be raised (and if there is no criterion for completing the order, then the task is impossible to complete).

Similarly, the therapeutic criticism of the elucidatory reading's view on the basis of the new forms of language can also be seen as making a claim about language and, as such, a thesis, in the sense that they are making a definitive claim about the essential nature of language (that it is open ended, unmappable, etc.). Whilst their accusation that the elucidatory reading relapses into theses is correct, it seems that their view also relapses into theses, in a way that is problematic for Wittgensteinian philosophy.

Yet despite the inadvertent commitment to theses about language, and the apparent view that productive progress in philosophy is not possible, the notion of 'perspicuous presentation' does seem to highlight a therapeutic dimension that exists within Wittgenstein's philosophy. We have already noted Wittgenstein's concern over his interlocutor, the desire to clarify his interlocutor's implicit knowledge, and his aim to free his interlocutor from dogmatic tendencies of thought (see chapters three and four). But it seems to me that those useful aspects of the therapeutic notion of

¹⁷⁸ It's not, as I hope to show.

‘perspicuous presentation’ can be rehabilitated into a more Socratic understanding of the notion of *üD*, whilst avoiding its various pitfalls. After all, despite whether or not Socrates really does come to some kind of productive philosophical insight during the course of his inquiries, it is apparent that he believes that such insight is *possible*. Not only this, but as has been noted several times throughout this thesis, Socrates certainly seems to believe that Theaetetus has achieved some kind of productive philosophical insight by the end of the inquiry, being better equipped for future philosophical inquiries. Socrates also talks of the ‘remarkable progress’ that others have made underneath him and the many ‘fine and admirable things’ that his students have discovered within themselves, which again suggests that philosophy for Socrates is something that can be positively progressed in, and not just a matter of curing delusions.

As opposed to the therapeutic model, the Socratic model operates by offering a full diagnosis to one’s interlocutor regarding what the world would have to be like if the way in which we were tempted to view the world were true. Although the interlocutor’s proposed account is most likely to be found unviable and terminated, the interlocutor can still be said to come to some kind of positive insight by realising that their proposed definition works better as a model (rather than as a claim of metaphysical necessity/ a metaphysical thesis about the object of investigation), *why* their proposed model failed as a thesis and *why* it was gripping.

Consequently, I now put forward a more Socratic or maieutic understanding of the notion of *üD*, one that I believe follows the therapeutic understanding of ‘perspicuous presentation’ in highlighting important aspects of Wittgenstein’s philosophical approach but avoids the relapse into linguistic theses and results in a situation whereby *üD* can still contribute towards making positive progress in philosophy.

5.3 Re-interpreting *übersichtliche Darstellung*

On the assumption that Wittgenstein’s notion of *üD* is coherent, both internally and with the rest of his philosophical practice, it would appear that any attempt to bring clarity to the notion of *üD* would have to fulfil certain requirements – both those

observed by the therapeutic reading's critique of the elucidatory reading, and those observed by our own analysis of the therapeutic reading. Chiefly, an understanding of üD would need to: 1) be able to explain how üD or devices that provide an üD can render the grammar of our language clear, 2) be useful for solving or dissolving philosophical problems, and 3) achieve both 1) and 2) without producing a thesis about language as the elucidatory and therapeutic readings seem to do. On the other hand, an üD should leave in its place new and useful ways of thinking about the conceptual phenomena under investigation, rather than just dissolving the source of confusion.

How then might a maieutic reading of the *Philosophical Investigations* help us to understand the notion of üD? Given that the focus of the reading that I have been developing in this thesis is on extrapolating and clarifying one's implicit knowledge in response to philosophical problems, one would expect that the maieutic reading would yield something similar to the therapeutic reading, in insisting that perspicuous presentations are relative to the interlocutor's understanding of the philosophical problem. However, where the therapeutic reading of PI §133 emphasises the *negative* aspect of Wittgenstein's philosophical practice, at the expense of a positive one, I hope to show that a maieutic reading will yield a view of üD that facilitates positive philosophical insights, as well as being sensitive to the interlocutor's implicit knowledge.

My proposal, then, is that üD is analogous to the state of clarity that maieutic auxiliary devices bring about in the Socratic Midwife's interlocutors. That is to say, it is not only an awareness of how one came under the grip of a particular confusion, which is arrived at by charting similarities and dissimilarities between the interlocutor's proposed account and how it is we seem to actually make use of those concepts. It can also be a positive awareness of the limits of such accounts (which were previously metaphysical claims but are, post inquiry, useful as objects of comparison) which is arrived at by a constructive unpacking of the interlocutor's proposed account before the negative task of demonstrating how the interlocutor's proposed account is problematic, as we shall see below.

As I have argued, a maieutic reading of Wittgenstein's philosophical practice suggests that the task of getting clear on one's own grammar is of 'fundamental

significance' to the task of philosophy, given that the philosopher's task is to guide either their interlocutor (or themselves) to some kind of clarity regarding the grammatically induced philosophical confusion that they are under (Cf. PI 122). In Chapter three I outlined some of the ways in which Wittgenstein's practice addresses this, by exploring how it maieutically addresses the so-called 'conceptual aspect' of philosophical problems. Understanding Wittgenstein's notion of üD through the lens of a maieutic reading requires a clear understanding of how the mechanisms for dealing with this conceptual aspect work.

The first thing to consider is where üDs might fit into the general schema of maieutic philosophical inquiry. Where in the process of maieusis might an interlocutor be said to arrive at an üD, and what role might it theoretically play in bringing about the maieutic aims of philosophy? On the assumption that üD is something that the philosopher leads their interlocutor to, the first of these questions should be relatively easy to answer given that the maieutic philosopher is meant to present very little to their interlocutor.¹⁷⁹ As we've seen, part of the maieutic treatment involves the midwife presenting to their interlocutor a number of devices that are auxiliaries to the initially proposed account. Based on observations from both Socratic Midwifery and Wittgenstein's own practice, these devices have been shown to have a variety of potential uses; they can be used to reveal what the world would have to be like for an interlocutor's proposed philosophical account to be correct, or to explore unforeseen consequences that holding onto such an account might have, or as objects of comparison with which the interlocutor's proposed philosophical account is compared. Each of these uses of auxiliary devices can be shown to have a broadly similar function, in that they are employed to clarify the interlocutor's account of the the concept under investigation in some way.

In the *Theaetetus*, after Socrates employs these devices Theaetetus is invited to reappraise the validity of his proposed philosophical account. If the aim of üD is to induce or present a clear view of one's concept use, then one might conclude that these Socratic auxiliary devices were fulfilling precisely this role and thus seem to be the means towards something that is analogous to Wittgenstein's üD. However,

¹⁷⁹ In that they do not present theses to their interlocutors

Socrates' auxiliary devices do not immediately dispel Theaetetus's philosophical confusion. If an analogy is to be drawn between the clarity that maieutic auxiliary devices bring and üD, one then has to ask whether something counts as an üD only if it *successfully* dispels the philosophical confusion.

On the assumption that Wittgensteinian clarificatory statements are designed to bring about üD, this seems relatively straightforward to answer — given the remarks made by Wittgenstein that clarificatory statements only count as clarificatory insofar as they successfully clarify something for someone. If this is the case, then it isn't a stretch to say that a üD only counts as such if it successfully dispels the philosophical confusion one is in. However, this relies on a rather simplistic view of philosophical problems and the concepts they relate to, whereas Wittgenstein demonstrably sees them as being quite complex. It suggests a rather monogamous relationship between üDs and philosophical problems, in that it presents philosophical problems as only requiring one particular üD in order to be dissolved—a fault it shares, arguably, with the Therapeutic readings. But as we've seen, Wittgenstein often implies that approaching one philosophical problem involves dealing with many other related philosophical problems, and so in turn it may require several different üDs relating to different features of the object under investigation. If solving a philosophical problem involves solving many other related philosophical problems, then it may also be the case that an üD isn't necessarily a singular thing, but is in actual fact the clarified picture of the concept built up from many different clarified representations of the many different relevant features of the object under investigation that are required for solving a particular philosophical problem.

Consequently, whilst the status of a clarificatory representation hinges on whether or not that statement actually clarifies something, the clarification of one specific point doesn't automatically solve or dissolve the philosophical problem as a whole. How then do we know whether a representation is clarificatory, and consequently, provides an üD, if it is not simply about whether it has successfully solved the philosophical problem? Or perhaps, what other benefits might accrue from clarifying features of our concept use, besides solving or dissolving a particular philosophical problem?

If we pursue my proposed analogy between the devices that Wittgenstein uses to establish an üD and Socratic auxiliary devices, it will follow that we have a successful üD whenever it achieves the same kind of ends that Socratic auxiliary devices achieve, within the broad task of putting a philosophical problem to rest. For example, this could be addressing a specific confusion (such as a misleading analogy between phrases), or dislodging a dogmatic way of characterising the concept under investigation. We have seen how Socrates uses auxiliary devices to achieve both of these ends: for example, to show Theaetetus that ‘knowledge is perception’ is problematic, Socrates uses auxiliary devices such as ‘everything is in flux’ and ‘man is the measure of all things’ to show what the world would have to be like, if ‘knowledge is perception’ to be true – and how inconsistent that world is with the world as it currently appears to us.¹⁸⁰ In Wittgensteinian grammatical terms, we can recognise this exchange as a demonstration that Theaetetus’s account relies on several grammatical confusions that conflict with how it is that we appear to use certain concepts relevant to the investigation, such as the notion that perception is fallible and that knowledge is stable and incorrigible along with the terms in which it is expressed. Such auxiliary devices do not in themselves dispel the philosophical problem that Theaetetus finds himself in the grip of; after all, Theaetetus is still vexed by the philosophical question ‘what is knowledge’, even after the brainchild is found to be problematic and is terminated. Rather, they are used in this instance to free Theaetetus from a restrictive way of thinking about knowledge by clarifying aspects of the grammar around what it means to know various things, such as language itself. From this position, Theaetetus is able to continue working through his confusions which prevent him from being able to explain ‘what knowledge is’ by exploring alternative ways of thinking about knowledge.

Analogously, in the case of Wittgenstein, we can see üD as achieving a variety of goals towards clarification or the conditions for clarification (such as the rejection of a particular thesis, in the example above). This broadens the scope for what might count as an üD or contributing to an üD within the *Investigations* and the canon of

¹⁸⁰ You will recall (from earlier discussions in this thesis) that this is achieved by demonstrating that ‘knowledge is perception’ requires either a Heraclitean flux doctrine and/or Protagorean relativism, which seems incompatible with demonstrable truths such as the stability of language. See chapter 1.

Wittgenstein's philosophical writings more generally. Even if Wittgenstein very rarely explicitly describes something as an üD, we can nevertheless infer that something is conducive towards establishing an üD based on the function it plays in the investigation. Accordingly, the *Investigations* turns out to be replete with classic examples of üDs, and the devices that are used to lead one towards them. All the various analogies, stories, intermediate cases and fictitious examples that Wittgenstein uses to cast light on how we operate with concepts potentially give rise to üD, in that they seek to clarify some aspect of the grammar of the subject of investigation by means of re-representing it in a myriad ways (for example the new and interesting language games, fictitious histories of language development, and various metaphors that Wittgenstein employs throughout the *Investigations*).

Accordingly, we can now say that devices that strive towards an üD are a) a representation of some kind, b) have the intended function of clarifying some aspect of the concept under investigation (e.g., by exploring the grammar of parallel concepts or grammatical confusions underlying related philosophical problems) and c) are successful in doing so. As we've seen, its success isn't necessarily measured in whether or not the philosophical confusion is dispelled in its entirety – for an üD may come about via the additive assembly of various different representations of our concept use in response to a philosophical problem, and one philosophical problem may require getting clear on the features of many different concepts that overlap with the object under investigation.

The question that now remains is *how* does (or can) achieving üD help us in clarifying our concept use? What is the nature of the perspective that üD take, and how does a maieutic perspective help clarify this? Recall that, for the maieutic Wittgenstein, an important part of the philosophical exchange is to get to know one's interlocutor, how they think, and how they think about the concepts under investigation. Wittgenstein's view of the task of philosophy can be characterised as leading one's interlocutor from a position of conceptual unfamiliarity (regarding concepts that we are ordinarily familiar with) *back* to conceptual familiarity, something that is made difficult by the fact that we are already supposed to be familiar with said concepts. A representation that seeks to clarify the relevant features of concept use must be expressed in terms that the interlocutor understands, if it is to be

successful Chapter 3.4 has already highlighted some of the ways that Wittgenstein (and through him, the text of the *Investigations* itself), seeks to achieve some kind of mutual understanding with his interlocutor, and how the various devices that Wittgenstein employs can be seen to be shaped by this mutual understanding.

The best way of understanding this is to see it in practice. What remains for us now, therefore, is to examine a few examples of Wittgenstein making use of these devices and consider how they fit the maieutic interpretation of üDs that I have developed in this chapter, and how they would clarify an interlocutor's grammar. Before we start, however, I should explain that I shall postpone to chapter six my detailed discussion of what I take to be the most obvious — and consistent — example of Wittgenstein using such devices with an interlocutor, namely Wittgenstein's exchange with the Augustinian interlocutor in the opening section of the *Investigations*. That exchange is, I suggest, my prime example for demonstrating how my maieutic reading of üDs can impact our reading of the text. In Chapter 6 I use it as my case study for applying the maieutic reading to the *Investigations*. In this chapter, therefore, I will merely mention the Augustinian exchange only briefly, as one among many others which will be the primary focus of my discussion in this chapter.

5.4 Maieutic Devices in the 'Private Language Argument'

Besides the preliminary exchange with the Augustinian interlocutor which I shall discuss in detail in Chapter 5, we often find Wittgenstein using devices of the kind we have been describing, within the *Investigations*. They are most recognisable in passages where Wittgenstein is responding to a 'common' problem or position, often put forward by an unnamed interlocutor who is the "voice of temptation". One such example can be found in Wittgenstein's discussion of the idea of a 'private language'— a hypothetical notion entertained during his discussions on the philosophy of psychology and the relationship between 'private and 'internal' experiences and the 'external' world in which they are embedded.

Although Wittgenstein returns to issues of this kind throughout the *Investigations*, his main discussion on private language occurs around PI 243-75. There

is some dispute as to how, exactly, one should characterise this discussion: some see it as a decisive (argumentative) refutation of Descartes and Cartesian dualism; others insist that there is *no* argument to be found there at all (noting that Wittgenstein himself never refers to any ‘private language argument’).¹⁸¹ It is important to understand this because the idea of a ‘private language’ is often taken to be the target of Wittgenstein’s attack itself, rather than the means of attack, the latter of which I shall demonstrate below.

Quite simply, what I am proposing is that the private language argument follows this general schema (which I will argue for below), one that is consistent with the way in which maieutic auxiliary devices are used:

- 1) Wittgenstein is responding to an unnamed interlocutor, one who holds the view that mental events are private and internal, and consequently holds that the idea of a ‘private language’ is possible.
- 2) As midwife, Wittgenstein puts forward several devices (which I take to be the equivalent of maieutic auxiliary devices) for clarifying features of concepts that seem relevant to the notion of a private language: for example, Wittgenstein puts forward the notion of a ‘genius child’ and of using a diary to to associate a symbol with a sensation (both of which are explained below) to clarify the role and function of names. I argue that these maieutic devices are a means to üD regarding the relevant concepts.
- 3) Wittgenstein adapts these devices as he introduces them, to constructively develop the notion of a private language in response to some general problems raised in discussion.
- 4) We arrive at an üD regarding private language. The interlocutor’s (now clarified) account of private language is shown to be nonsense, and so is disregarded, but we are left with alternative ways of thinking about how it is that expressions are related to sensations.

¹⁸¹ See David Pears ‘Wittgenstein’s Criticism of Cartesianism.’ *Synthese*, vol. 106, no. 1, (1996), pp. 49–55 for the argument that the private language argument is a decisive refutation of Cartesianism. See Marie McGinn (2013). *The Routledge Guidebook to Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*. New York: Routledge (2013) pp. 137-138 for the opposite view.

I will demonstrate how Wittgenstein's treatment of private language fits the above schema. However, first we should attempt to pin down who Wittgenstein's 'interlocutor' is in this scenario. We should note that Wittgenstein's discussions of issues in the philosophy of psychology often seem to be responses to a popular picture of mental events (such as sensations) as private, 'internal' mental states or events. In particular, throughout the *Investigations* Wittgenstein works on showing how this kind of picture leads to problematic misunderstandings of the relationship between psychological concepts or terms and physical behaviours (such as crying, laughing, etc.). Various passages of the *Investigations* deal with this issue in relation to intentional concepts such as thinking, believing, intending, expecting and the like.

I argue that one of Wittgenstein's 'interlocutors' is someone who entertains that problematic picture of the privacy of mind/mental phenomena. If I am correct, we can then see Wittgenstein's discussion in PI §243-275 as an engagement with this kind of interlocutor (one of several throughout the *Investigations*) concerning one particular consequence that arises from that picture. Indeed, the topic of PI 243-275 revolves around a particular scenario, out of which emerges a philosophical question regarding how physical and mental things become related.

In PI 243, the target notion of a private language is explained in an exchange between Wittgenstein and an unnamed interlocutor who thinks mental events are private and internal:

But is it also conceivable that there be a language in which a person could write down or give voice to his inner experiences -- his feelings, moods, and so on -- for his own use? --- Well, can't we do so in our ordinary language? -- But that is not what I mean. The words of this language are to refer to what only the speaker can know -- to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language. (PI 243, emphasis added)

Here, I have used italics to distinguish between what I believe to be two voices at work: an unnamed interlocutor introducing the notion of private language as a language that, in contrast to 'normal' everyday language, is internalised and only understandable by the person in possession of it (in italics), and Wittgenstein's voice

which seeks to clarify what the first voice is saying. There are several things to note about Wittgenstein's description of such a language. The fragmented writing in this remark matches the reflexive dialogical writing I have commented on, elsewhere in this thesis. It implies one or more imagined interlocutor(s). Wittgenstein asks the question 'Well, can't we do so in our own language?' before the unnamed interlocutor explains that is not what they meant, and that they were referring to a language which only the speaker can know. This matches the conversational pattern we find over and over in the *Investigations*.

As I understand it, Wittgenstein then begins to unpack the interlocutor's notion of 'private language' via a series of imaginary scenarios and devices. That is to say, he offers various tools and devices to think about the implications of the interlocutor's idea, a way similar to the way in which Socrates, as Midwife, introduces auxiliary devices to explore the implications for Theaetetus's brainchild. As in the *Theaetetus*, Wittgenstein builds on the interlocutor's proposal, that mental phenomena are something 'internal' and conceptually distinct from 'external' behaviour, and allows us to investigate a world made like that. Just as Socrates does not immediately reject Theaetetus's accounts of knowledge, so also Wittgenstein does not simply deny or reject the inner mental events hypothesis but explores the implications, suggesting that it means we could construct an inner language that is private. It is only by discovering how problematic that is, that we learn to refuse the idea of the privacy of the mind. This is parallel to the way in which Socrates reveals the problems with "Knowledge is Perception" by investigating the problems with a Protagorean account of truth, or a Heraclitean situation in language. So also when Wittgenstein introduces his invented scenarios (which we will survey below) in response to the concept of a private language he is not immediately rejecting the mistaken idea of the mind, but rather, is first exploring its implications, before rejecting it as nonsense.

Like Socrates, Wittgenstein then goes through a constructive/deconstructive process of comparing the notion of private language to the world as we know it, problematising the account, and then developing the account to better support the interlocutor's original thesis before problematizing it again. Wittgenstein contrasts 'private language' with everyday language, by exploring how it is that words refer to

sensations when we normally use language. One possibility that Wittgenstein floats is that linguistic expressions come to replace primitive expressions of pain (such as crying). He describes a scenario (which he describes as ‘one possibility’) in which a child has hurt themselves and cries. In this scenario, adults talk to the child and teach the child sentences and exclamations that allow the child to express pain in ways other than crying, or as Wittgenstein puts it, ‘they teach the child new pain-behaviour’ (PI §244). That Wittgenstein describes this as ‘one possibility’ is important, as it highlights the scenarios intended use as a comparative object rather than a thesis about how it is that we come to associate words with sensations.

Wittgenstein then proceeds to clarify what the interlocutor means by ‘private’. In PI 246, the question is raised: ‘in what sense are my sensations private?’. The answer is a radical kind of privacy, in which “only I can know whether I am really in pain, others can only surmise it”. Wittgenstein suggests that this is “in one sense false, and another senseless”, given that we are using the concept ‘to know’ in an ordinary way. What Wittgenstein means by this, is that it makes sense for others to ‘know’ that I am in pain, whereas it does not make sense for me to say that I know I am in pain, if this does not mean anything different from saying that I *am* in pain. What Wittgenstein is attempting to illustrate is that one does not learn of their pains, they simply have them, and accordingly, it makes sense for others to be able to doubt that I am in pain, but it does not make sense for me to doubt that I am in pain. The purpose of this, for Wittgenstein, is to highlight the radical sense of privacy which the interlocutor seems to be committed to in their notion of private language. The interlocutor’s view seems to imply that they want to be able to make statements such as ‘only I know my pain’, given their commitment to the inaccessibility of private sensations. Consequently, this can be seen as resembling part of the ‘constructive’ employment of auxiliary devices that we see in Socrates’ treatment of Theaetetus: Wittgenstein unpacks his interlocutors notion by examining what exactly the interlocutor means by ‘private’, and what we would be able to do or say if such privacy was the case (that is, we would be able to make statements such as ‘only I know my pain’).

With this clarified notion of privacy in hand, Wittgenstein develops the scenario of expressing pain towards a more ‘destructive’ phase, and turns to consider

how it is that language can describe these inner, private experiences, and how it is that words come to signify sensations. In PI §256, Wittgenstein writes:

Now, what about the language which describes my inner experiences and which only I myself can understand? How do I use words to signify my sensations? –As we ordinarily do? Then are my words for sensations tied up with my natural expressions of sensation? In that case my language is not a ‘private’ one.

Someone else might understand it as well as I. –But suppose I didn’t have any natural expression of sensation, but only had sensations? And now I simply associate names with sensations, and use these names in descriptions.

Here, Wittgenstein suggests that, in a private language, if expressions are related to the natural expressions of behaviour (i.e, the statement ‘I am in pain’ is related to the natural expression of crying in pain), then its expressions are not ‘private’ in the radical sense that the private language interlocutor seems to desire. Wittgenstein then proceeds in an identifiably maieutic fashion, by exploring the possibility that one associates names with private sensations and then uses these names in the description of those sensation. Or, as we have seen with Socrates, he adapts his original interlocutor’s account in a constructive move in order to survive the initial objection.

In what we can now see is a typically maieutic development, Wittgenstein, in partnership with his imagined interlocutor, then problematises this idea by developing it through the use of two examples (which I take to be the maieutic devices in this instance). Again this is very comparable to the work that Socrates and Theaetetus do in exploring the implications of the Protagorean and Heraclitean theses in the first part of the *Theaetetus*. First, Wittgenstein considers a world in which introspection and association are the *only* conceivable way of coming to define a sensation (at least, with regards to pain): he invents a world in which human beings are unable to ‘manifest their pains’ via groans, grimaces, and other expressive behaviour (PI §257). Wittgenstein puts quotation marks round the first two sentences (a question, “What would it be like...?” and a reply that it would be impossible to teach...). As some scholars have suggested, it makes sense to see the quotations marks on the opening dialogue in §257 to indicate that Wittgenstein is not speaking in propria persona, as the therapeutic/corrective voice of the *Investigations*, but that these words belong to

the interlocutor who is holding fast to the thesis that inner states are conceptually independent from expressive behaviours.¹⁸² The reply, ““Then it would be impossible to teach a child the use of the word ‘toothache’””, is taken to be the interlocutor’s attempt to demonstrate that, even without the external expressive behaviours, the notion of a ‘toothache’ still makes sense (and is therefore conceptually independent from its expressive behaviour), only in such circumstances it is impossible to teach children the words for their inner experiences.

This situation leads Wittgenstein’s interlocutor to develop the scenario further, by imagining a ‘genius’ child who invents a name for the sensation by himself (as opposed to being taught to associate a word with pain-behaviour by adults, as was suggested in PI §244). Wittgenstein asks how it is that this child can be said to have ‘named’ the sensations, and whether or not this child understands the name, without being able to explain its meaning to anyone (as is demanded by radical sense of privacy that the private language interlocutor seems to demand). Wittgenstein observes that a ‘great deal of stage setting’ in language is required if the act of naming something is to make sense. What he means by this, is that the act of naming something presupposes that the role of names and naming is understood. He writes:

When one says "He gave a name to his sensation" one forgets that a great deal of stage -- setting in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense. And when we speak of someone's having given a name to pain, what is presupposed is the existence of the grammar of the word "pain"; it shows the post where the new word is stationed. (PI §244)

The concept of ‘naming’ already belongs to public language. They have criteria for their correct use. What the private language interlocutor is suggesting is that the genius child comes up with a name, which as Wittgenstein points out has no criteria for correct use, and given that ‘names’ have this role in public language, what the genius child does cannot in effect be called ‘naming’. Consequently, Wittgenstein can be seen to introduce a scenario that is meant to represent what it is the private language interlocutor is claiming (that private names are possible), and by comparing

¹⁸² McGinn ‘*Routledge Guidebook*’ pp. 153

it with how it is that we really operate with names, he is showing that such a scenario ends up, once again, being a nonsense.

This leads Wittgenstein to what is arguably the most important move, which again I would suggest is a kind of auxiliary device of the kind we are looking for. In yet another constructive phase of the maieutic device process, Wittgenstein comes up with another scenario on behalf of his interlocutor, which can be seen as a superficial attempt to resolve the previous problem. PI §258 Wittgenstein invents a scenario in which someone comes to associate the sign 'S' with a particular sensation so as to be able to keep a diary. Wittgenstein writes: '[this] is done precisely by the concentrating of my attention; for in this way I commit to memory the connection between the sign and the sensation.' However in response he objects to the private language interlocutor:

But "I commit it to memory" can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connection correctly in the future. But in the present case, I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem correct to me is correct. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'correct' (PI §258)

Here, Wittgenstein exposes the fatal flaw in the private language interlocutor's introspective model of associating signs with sensations, and with it, problematises the underlying notion of the internal/external distinction held by this interlocutor. Here, Wittgenstein highlights that, if 'S' is associated with a particular sensation at a given time, and is only attributed to future sensations based on the memory of the original sensation, then given that the original sensation is no longer available when attributing 'S' to a sensation, then there can be no criterion of correctness for determining whether or not 'S' has correctly referred to the same sensation. Thus, Wittgenstein brings out an incoherence that reveals that the apparently plausible notion of a private language is actually a muddle and they have not succeeded in thinking of a scenario in which it makes sense.

It is far beyond the scope of this chapter to wade too far into the extensive and complex debate around interpreting Wittgenstein's views on private language. Instead, I wanted simply to demonstrate how, in his exploration of 'private language',

we can read Wittgenstein as variously making use of clarifying devices in both a constructive and destructive manner, by unpacking what it is that his interlocutor means when they propose a private language, then problematising it, then adapting the devices to answer some of those problems, before finally problematising it again and demonstrating, through use of these devices, that the interlocutor's view is a nonsense. These devices are first intended to clarify and then eventually overthrow in interlocutor's position regarding mental privacy, and that they turn out to be functioning as maieutic auxiliary devices for examining whether the notion of private names without public referents and without public criteria is coherent.

The üD that is achieved is consequently an overview of how it is that the interlocutor's proposed account gets them in to a confusion, and furnishes the interlocutor with more useful models for thinking about the relationship between language and 'sensations'. By entertaining the notion of a private language, by seeing how it would work in practice when it comes to associating signs with supposedly private sensations, we come to see that features of the supposed divide between 'internal' sensations and 'external' expressions cannot work like that, and this is a way of clarifying or resolving a tempting misunderstanding of the relationship between them. Thus, just as Theaetetus was shown that the thesis 'knowledge is perception' would result in the collapse of stable concepts such as language, Wittgenstein's interlocutor is shown that entertaining the conceptual independence of internal 'private' sensations and external public expressions results in the collapse of the criterion of correctness for words that refer to sensations.

By demonstrating that maintaining such a divide would entail the possibility of something like a private language, Wittgenstein shows the interlocutor that, by their own understanding, the notion of private language is a nonsense. Not only do Wittgenstein's maieutic devices and scenarios disabuse the private language interlocutor of particular confusions surrounding the 'privacy' of mental phenomena such as sensations, they also offer positive, alternative models for thinking about the object of investigation, without introducing them as theses. All of this is accomplished by engaging the interlocutor's own understanding of concepts relevant to the object of investigation, such the notion that if something is a 'name' then it has a specific and non-random use, by expanding and exploring what the interlocutor proposed and

supplementing it with devices. Consequently, I hope I have convincingly shown that there is an analogue between the devices that Wittgenstein uses in order to arrive at an üD regarding the concepts relevant to the notion of a private language, and that they serve a maieutic role.

Reading it in this way, we can now see how a maieutic reading of üD goes beyond the therapeutic notion of ‘perspicuous presentation’; it does not just release the interlocutor from the problematic view that there can be private names, and consequently, a private language in which we use such names, it explores the problematic view and finds various things to learn from it. Not only do we learn why it is we are inclined to think that a private language is possible, but we learn why it does not work, we consider that aspects of our language (such as naming) requires public criteria for correctness, and we come away with different useful models for talking about the association between expressions and sensations.

5.5 Concluding Remarks:

This chapter has explored a maieutic reading of the contentious notion of üDs in Wittgenstein’s later philosophical work. In doing so, not only have we brought clarity to a disputed area of Wittgenstein study that is integral to his philosophical methodology, but we have also seen how various aspects of the maieutic method that I have described throughout this thesis come together, by exploring how Wittgenstein creates devices that facilitate coming to an üD t and how the üD can be said to clarify conceptual phenomena for the interlocutor under the grip of said problem.

With this complete, we now have all of the tools at our disposal to undertake a complete and detailed case study of the maieutic method at work in the *Investigations*. By exploring the complete treatment of a particular philosophical problem in the *Investigations* and seeing how well it matches up with the picture of maieutic practice established throughout this thesis, I will be able to demonstrate the efficacy and value of a maieutic reading of Wittgenstein, and indeed, the maieutic method of doing philosophy more generally. Accordingly, I will now turn to exploring the presence of maieutic methodology in the opening sections of the *Investigations*, by looking at Wittgenstein’s examination of the so-called Augustinian picture of language.

Chapter Six: The Maieutic Method: A Case Study

6.1 Introduction

By this point in the thesis, we have a reasonably good understanding of the principles and mechanics of the maieutic method, as practised by both the Socratic midwife and Wittgenstein. All that remains now is to show the maieutic method 'live' and in action as it occurs in the *Philosophical Investigations*, and how Wittgenstein applies the method to one of the problems that occur within the *Investigations* itself.

Consequently, this final chapter will serve as a case study demonstrating an application of the maieutic method in the *Investigations* from beginning to end, in order to see how all of the disparate elements of the maieutic method discussed throughout this thesis come together in a coherent and consistent narrative of a philosophical method being applied to a philosophical problem.

To do this I will explore his response to the Augustinian picture of language in the opening sections of the book. Within this passage, Wittgenstein responds to what he takes to be a common and pervasive picture of language acquisition and operation - the notion that names refer to objects and that sentences are consequently just a combination of names -- by subjecting it to his philosophical method. Here, we see Wittgenstein introduce and make use of a wide variety of the methodological devices that I have identified and discussed in this thesis, in his treatment of the problem. I take these to be the most concrete and forensically complete examples of his method in action.

I will conduct this case study by demonstrating, step by step, how Wittgenstein's treatment of the Augustinian picture of language squares with the process of maieutic philosophy that I have described in this thesis. I begin, in 6.2, by establishing who, exactly, Wittgenstein's interlocutor is and how the role and presence of Wittgenstein's interlocutor both parallels and differs from the role and presence of interlocutors in Socratic maieutic exchanges. In 6.3, and following on from the work done in the previous chapter, I examine Wittgenstein's use of üDs within the opening passages of the *Investigations*, and explore how they can be seen to have the same

maieutic function as Socratic auxiliary devices. In particular, I explore how Wittgenstein's use of these devices matches the Socratic use of auxiliary devices in the sense that they are both employed with the initial aim of being constructive and developing the interlocutor's original thesis. In 6.4, I then turn to exploring how Wittgenstein, like the Socratic Midwife, moves from the constructive phase of maieutic inquiry to the destructive phase, by exploring how Wittgenstein then proceeds to de-construct (or rather, leads his interlocutor to de-construct) the Augustinian picture of language. I then offer some concluding remarks in 6.5.

6.2 Wittgenstein's Interlocutor

Wittgenstein's treatment of the Augustinian picture of language (and the *Philosophical Investigations* more generally) begins with the following remark:

“When grown-ups named some object and at the same time turned towards it, I perceived this, and I grasped that the thing was signified by the sound they uttered, since they meant to point it out. This, however, I gathered from their gestures, the natural language of all peoples, the language that by means of facial expression and the play of eyes, of the movements of the limbs and the tone of voice, indicates the affections of the soul when it desires, or clings to, or rejects, or recoils from, something. In this way, little by little, I learnt to understand what things the words, which I heard uttered in their respective places in various sentences, signified. And once I got my tongue around these signs, I used them to express my wishes.” (Augustine, *Confessions*, I. 8.)¹⁸³

These words, it seems to me, give us a particular picture of the essence of human language. It is this: the individual words in language name objects—sentences are combinations of such names.—In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands. (PI §1)

¹⁸³ This passage from *Confessions* I.8 is originally given in Latin in the *Investigations*. I offer it translated in English here, for expediency's sake.

Much has been said of Wittgenstein's decision to start the *Philosophical Investigations* with Augustine, and specifically, this remark from Augustine. Wittgenstein quotes (in its original Latin) Augustine's reflections on how it is that, as a child, he came to learn language and the meaning of words. In Augustine's description, Wittgenstein finds the 'particular picture of the essence of human language' that underpins the philosophical account of language that the rest of the passage is devoted to dealing with, namely the idea that words are just the names of objects and sentences are merely combinations of such names. We might also describe this as the view that 'naming' is the foundation of all language. Wittgenstein finds a picture of language in the procedure whereby Augustine imagines how he might have come to learn words, in that Augustine's elders would point to objects and name them and that Augustine learnt to associate the sound of the name with the object.

The first thing to consider in our case study is that, in a maieutic philosophical exchange, the philosopher is typically engaging with or responding to an interlocutor. Some kind of interlocutor comes to the maieutic philosopher, either with the complaint of being unable to articulate a philosophical account (as is the case with Theaetetus) or with some kind of pre-existing philosophical account in mind, and the philosopher then proceeds to draw out the wider reaching consequences of such an account by exploring their interlocutor's grasp of the account. As we've seen, part of this involves (or rather, requires) that the philosopher reaches a level of mutual understanding with their interlocutor, so that they may discuss and understand the interlocutor's ideas without putting words in their mouth.

As I suggested earlier in chapter three, Wittgenstein makes deliberate use of unnamed interlocutors throughout the *Investigations* so that his reader-interlocutor has ample opportunities to insert themselves within the text and find a voice that best represents their views. However, that is not to say that distinctive voices cannot be discerned from time to time (for, just as Socrates discerned that Theaetetus may find his position within that of Protagoras', so too may we find our own positions within the established voices of other philosophers). As I noted in Chapter 3, the voices of both Frege and Russell (or at least, approximations of them) occasionally make an appearance in the course of the *Investigations*, as well as the voice of the author of the *Tractatus*. But whereas in these cases the identity of these voices are only implicit, in

our present example from PI §1 it would appear *prima facie* that Augustine (or at least, the Augustinian) is explicitly named as the interlocutor. But then what sense is how could this passage count as an example of maieutic practice? If it is a response to a philosopher, then surely it illustrates a more traditional method of doing philosophy. Wittgenstein is simply responding to an established philosophical thesis, not midwifing an interlocutor's proposal.

In response to this thought I suggest that we take a second look, and consider who, exactly, is Wittgenstein's interlocutor in this passage? Were we right to assume that Wittgenstein's interlocutor in the opening section of the *Investigations* is Augustine 'himself' (or the 'Augustinian' more generally)? I don't think that this is the case. To demonstrate this, we must first look to whether the theory of language-learning and of the nature of language that is put forward in this passage is really Augustine's, or is recognisably 'Augustinian'. As others have sometimes done, we should first examine the context in which the quoted passage from the *Confessions* originally occurs, in order to determine whether or not Augustine's account of language is faithfully represented within the *Philosophical Investigations*.

As has been noted Myles Burnyeat, Wittgenstein does not quote the whole passage from the *Confessions verbatim* and complete.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, the picture of language acquisition that Wittgenstein pulls out of the passage (that Augustine learnt language by grown-ups pointing to and naming objects) is a misleading misrepresentation of what Augustine's thesis *actually* was. Burnyeat rather helpfully provides a translation of the beginning of the passage that Wittgenstein omits in his quotation:

I was no longer an infant who could not speak, but already a chattering boy. This I remember, and I have since realized from what source I had learned to speak (et memini hoc, et unde loqui didiceram, post adverti). For it wasn't that my elders had been teaching me, presenting words to me in a definite order of training as they did a bit later with my letters. Rather, I had been teaching myself with the mind which you, my God, gave me, when I tried to express the

¹⁸⁴ M.F Burnyeat. "The Inaugural Address: Wittgenstein and Augustine De Magistro." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, vol. 61, 1987, pp. 1-24

feelings of my heart by cries and different sounds and all sorts of motions of my limbs (in order to get my own way) but could not manage to express everything I wished to everyone I wished. I had been taking thought with the aid of memory [here begins PI §1]¹⁸⁵

Wittgenstein presents the passage that follows this extract as if Augustine is putting forward a model of language use and acquisition. If names simply refer to objects, and sentences are just combinations of such names, then language could theoretically be taught to a child simply by pointing to objects and naming them over and over again, until the child learns to associate the sound of the name with that of the object. From Wittgenstein's version in PI§1 one gets the impression that Augustine was putting forward precisely this model of language use as his proposal about how he learned his words, by reminiscing his own memories of acquiring language in this way.

However, when we read the passage in its entirety, we get a very different picture of what Augustine's thesis is. The part of the passage that Wittgenstein omitted reveals that the purpose of this passage of the *Confessions* is not to advance the thesis that language is taught and acquired by means of what Wittgenstein calls the 'ostensive teaching of words' (PI §6). In fact, Augustine doesn't even seem to be making the claim that his elders have (or even *can*) teach him anything. Rather, the central thesis of this passage of the *Confessions* seems to be that Augustine (and by extension, humans more generally) teach themselves. This passage is Augustine's reflections on his ability to already understand and attempt to give expression to 'the feelings of [his] heart'. As far as part of the role of the *Confessions* is to give thanks to God, Augustine here is giving thanks to God for God's role in facilitating the mind's ability to teach itself.

As Burnyeat observes, Augustine does not give any justification for this thesis in the *Confessions*. Rather, it seems to be the continuation of a thesis that is already established by Augustine in his earlier work, *De Magistro*.¹⁸⁶ The *De Magistro* is a dialogue written by Augustine in the style of Plato in which Augustine and his son,

¹⁸⁵ Burnyeat 'The Inaugural Address' pp. 3

¹⁸⁶ An English translation of the *De Magistro* can be found in Augustine, Peter King *Against the Academics and the Teacher*. Hackett Publishing Company (1995)

Adeodatus, discuss what it means to teach another something. To consider the themes of the *De Magistro* in any great detail here would take us too far off course from our current discussion regarding Wittgenstein's interlocutor. However, it is worth noting the general thesis of the *De Magistro* (the one which Burnyeat argues is echoed in the quoted passage of *Confessions*), to clarify what Augustine is actually putting forward in this passage and how it differs from Wittgenstein's presentation of what I am calling "the Augustinian position". To briefly summarise Burnyeat's interpretation, the *De Magistro* expounds several theses regarding knowledge and the teaching of knowledge: firstly, an implicit thesis that it is understanding and not justification that is the 'differential ingredient' of knowledge, secondly an explicit thesis that whilst information can be transmitted from one person to another, no one can be taught how to *understand* that information, and consequently a third thesis that one person cannot transmit *knowledge* to another.

Burnyeat then suggests that echoes of the *De Magistro's* thesis are to be found in the *Confessions* I 8 13, where Augustine ruminates that (through the power of the divine) his mind is responsible for understanding things by itself, and (contrary to Wittgenstein's interpretation) is not *taught* to understand language via the ostensive method of teaching words. Naturally, this raises the question as to why Wittgenstein chooses to present Augustine's views (and consequently, the views of his interlocutor) in this way? Given that Wittgenstein held the *Confessions* in high regard and was, presumably, well versed in its contents, it cannot have escaped his attention that his representation of Augustine is at odds with the actual thesis of *Confessions* I 8 13 and, by extension, *De Magistro*.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, given that Wittgenstein took so much care over the structural and formatting choices of the *Investigations* (at least, the parts that he was alive to oversee), it is not likely that the decision to omit part of the beginning

¹⁸⁷ Maurice O'Connor Drury quotes Wittgenstein as saying that the *Confessions* is 'the most serious book ever written' See *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984)

We do not know conclusively whether Wittgenstein had ever read *De Magistro*, but it has been suggested before that Wittgenstein's skewed representation of Augustine in the opening sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* is precisely because Wittgenstein had failed to engage the wider corpus of Augustine's work (see Bearsley, P. "Augustine and Wittgenstein on Language," *Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 58(224), pp. 229–236 (1983). Similarly, Garth Hallett concludes that there is no evidence that Wittgenstein read *De Magistro*, or indeed, anything from Augustine other than the *Confessions*. See Hallett, G. *A Companion to Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*. Cornell University Press, pp. 761 (1977).

of *Confessions* I 8 was as a result of naivete, arbitrariness, or sheer coincidence. It would seem that the decision was a deliberate one.

Of course, it is possible that Wittgenstein unfairly represented Augustine or misunderstood the contents of the passage. Anthony Kenny raises this possibility in his appraisal of Wittgenstein's representation of both Augustine and Frege in the *Investigations*.¹⁸⁸ Kenny argues that Wittgenstein's and Augustine's views are, in actuality, much closer than Wittgenstein presents them as being. Kenny suggests that one of the principal similarities is evident in Wittgenstein's claims that the kind of ostensive definition that he purports to find in Augustine actually presupposes a prior mastery of language.¹⁸⁹

To get clearer on why Wittgenstein decided to portray Augustine in this way, we should, I suggest, look closely at Wittgenstein's comments on the passage. To refresh ourselves:

...These words, *it seems to me*, give us a particular picture of the essence of human language. It is this: the individual words in language name objects—sentences are combinations of such names.—In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands. (PI §1, emphasis added).

Wittgenstein's choice of wording in expounding the ideas he found in *Confessions* I.8 is interesting. We might have expected him to say that the picture he is talking about is "Augustine's account". But he does not do that. Rather, he says that *it seems to him* that the quoted passage gives a 'particular picture of the essence of human language'. He does not make a statement such as 'Augustine, the historical philosopher, indeed endorsed this picture of language use'. Instead, what Wittgenstein appears to be saying is that this passage from the *Confessions* merely gives the *impression* of, or rather, invokes in its reader, a particular picture of language. In effect, he is using Augustine's description as a way of introducing an idea of language use that he wants

¹⁸⁸ Anthony Kenny, 'The Ghost of the Tractatus' *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 7:1-13 (1973)

¹⁸⁹ Kenny 'The Ghost of the Tractatus' pg.1

to discuss and is not giving an accurate representation of Augustinian philosophy. So I am suggesting that Wittgenstein is using *Confessions* I.8 as an exemplary model, a description that on its own (carefully excerpted from its original context) brings to mind a particular picture of language. It is not actually attributing that view to Augustine himself.

Someone might object that, in the very next paragraph, Wittgenstein directly refers to Augustine:

Augustine does not mention any difference between kinds of word. *Someone* who describes the learning of language in this way is, *I believe*, thinking primarily of nouns like “table”, “chair”, “bread”, and other people’s names... (PI §1, emphasis added)

It would be a mistake to think that Wittgenstein is attributing a view of language use to Augustine here. He does not make the claim that Augustine does not see or recognise difference between kinds of words (and as has been observed in the literature, it would be quite unfair of Wittgenstein to do so).¹⁹⁰ Rather, he observes that differences between kinds of word are not mentioned specifically in this extract, and that *someone* who describes language acquisition in this way, *he believes*, is primarily thinking of a specific kind of word (nouns). Rather than claiming that Augustine is himself constructing a controversial metaphysical thesis about language, we could say that Wittgenstein is constructing a controversial metaphysical thesis *out* of Augustine’s words, for the purposes of discussion.

Warren Goldfarb argues for something similar. In his paper *I Want You To Bring Me a Slab: Remarks on the Opening Sections of the “Philosophical Investigations”*, he argues that Wittgenstein’s decision to begin the *Investigations* with this extract from Augustine was not for the purposes of attributing this metaphysical linguistic picture to Augustine.¹⁹¹ Rather, Goldfarb contends that Wittgenstein’s aim was to shock his readers, by deliberately presenting what would ordinarily be a ‘prosaic’, ‘trivial’ and ‘non-objectionable’ recollection of early language development and demonstrating that even seemingly innocent descriptions *can* be taken as expressing

¹⁹⁰ Patrick Bearsley ‘Augustine and Wittgenstein on Language’ *Philosophy* 58 (224):229 - 236 (1983)

¹⁹¹ Warren Goldfarb, ‘I Want You to Bring Me a Slab: Remarks on the Opening Sections of the Philosophical Investigations’. *Synthese* 56 (3):265 - 282 (1983)

significant philosophical theses. Wittgenstein's reason for doing this, according to Goldfarb, is to demonstrate that philosophical debate is often fuelled by what he calls the 'exploitation' of typically ordinary day-to-day notions, when such notions are used outside their everyday context, and brought in as a way to treat philosophical problems.

Goldfarb's observations here are broadly consistent with what I suggested above, namely that the wording Wittgenstein uses when introducing *Confessions* I.8 does not imply that he means to attribute this picture of language use to Augustine himself, but rather, that he is using the passage to construct an account of language use, drawing it *out of* Augustine's descriptions but not implying that Augustine endorsed it in his own voice. Consequently, we should constantly remind ourselves that the 'Augustine' that Wittgenstein refers to throughout the opening of the *Investigations* does not mean the actual historical/philosophical Augustine. It is a reconstruction of a view that Augustine describes that is furthering the purposes of his own discussion of language, even though it is not historically associated with Augustine himself. If the account that Wittgenstein thus misleadingly 'attributes' to Augustine in the opening of the *Investigations* is constructed for the purposes of Wittgenstein's own discussion, but exegetically misleading as a version of "Augustine", why did he bother with Augustine in the first place? Why not simply use a fictional narrative or imagined scenario such as the ones Wittgenstein uses so frequently elsewhere in the *Investigations*?

I think that we can defend Wittgenstein on the following lines. We have already how the use of unnamed interlocutors contributes to the maieutic function of the *Investigations* as a text, by providing a space in which the reader can insert themselves and find their own voice in the text. Similarly, I propose that Wittgenstein's use of Augustine as an interlocutor plays a similar function. Drawing on what Goldfarb has to say about Wittgenstein's desire to show how controversial philosophical theses are often extrapolated from otherwise innocuous and non-controversial descriptions of day-to-day life, I argue that Wittgenstein chose to use this 'Augustine' (with his innocuous and everyday description of language)-in order to illustrate how this 'particular picture of the essence of language' pervasive and familiar, tempting and common across history, and something to which even great

and admirable minds like ‘Augustine’ could fall foul of (even if Augustine didn’t actually hold this picture himself). We might say that the effect is that, in the words of PI §340, is that possessing this kind of metaphysical thesis about language is shown to be a mistake, but not a ‘stupid mistake’.

The decision to open with the cross examination of an interlocutor like Augustine, and demonstrating that the kinds of mistakes with which the *Philosophical Investigations* is concerned with aren’t ‘stupid mistakes’ but actually are the kinds of mistake that even great minds like Augustine can make helps, I argue, helps to foster an environment in which one feels more forthcoming about engaging with the text as an interlocutor and putting one’s own philosophical accounts up for inspection. Furthermore, by using a historical figure rather than a contemporary figure, Wittgenstein is demonstrating that the kind of philosophical pictured in the opening section of the *Investigations* isn’t one that is peculiar or unique to a particular historical, intellectual or even social context -- rather, it is a philosophical picture that, according to this fictional portrayal of Augustine, is demonstrably pervasive across the history of human thought, evidenced here by the fact that thinkers such as Augustine were (apparently) capable of conceiving it. The effect of both of these things is that the reader-interlocutor is not made to feel stupid for possessing just such a picture of language use, and is subsequently more amenable to exploring this picture, and other pictures further down the line.

This is further reinforced by a remark that Wittgenstein makes in an earlier manuscript of the *Investigations*, who describes how the opinion of someone like Augustine is important to us because he is a ‘clear thinking man’ who is outside our time and ‘circle of thinking’. Here, I take Wittgenstein to be acknowledging that the tendency to think of language in the terms in the way that ‘Augustine’ seems to (at least in Wittgenstein’s representation of him) is a widespread tendency, one that is pervasive across history and one that anyone can fall into.¹⁹²

As we’ve seen, encouragement is an important part of the maieutic process. We’ve seen how Socrates encourages Theaetetus towards offering up what he sincerely

¹⁹² ‘Und was Augustinus Augustinus, Aurelius sagt ist für uns wichtig weil es die Auffassung eines natürlich — klar denkenden Mannes ist, der von uns zeitlich weit entfernt gewiß nicht zu unserem besonderen Gedankenkreis gehört. (MS III, 15-16)

believes knowledge is (or could be), and similarly we've seen how Theaetetus is a suitable candidate for philosophical inquiry precisely because he is willing to subject his beliefs to the midwife's examination and thus make himself vulnerable. The use of a semi-fictionalised Augustine to introduce a picture of language use that Wittgenstein wants to explore (owing in part to just how widespread Wittgenstein sees the idea as being) then achieves a similar effect, by setting a precedent that allows the interlocutor to find their own voice in the text's unnamed interlocutors (and thus submit their own beliefs) without shame.

When read in this way, Wittgenstein's choice of a fictionalised version of Augustine as his interlocutor in the opening passages of the *Investigations* also ties into some of the ideas we explored in chapter four, where we saw how Wittgenstein perceived factors such as 'shame', 'pride' and other personality characteristics as potentially being contributors to philosophical dogmatism. As chapter four argues, overcoming these kinds of characteristics is an important task for Wittgenstein when doing philosophy, if one is to resist what Wittgenstein recognises as a tendency towards dogmatism when doing philosophy. With this in mind, we can see how Wittgenstein's savvy choice of interlocutor at the beginning of the *Investigations* plays into this. If, as Citron observes, Wittgenstein perceives factors such as one's pride and/or unwillingness to endure 'intellectual humiliation' as being a main driver of philosophical dogmatism (which in itself inhibits the possibility of productive philosophical thinking), then it stands to reason that one of Wittgenstein's first steps in the *Investigations* is to encourage his reader-interlocutor away from these characteristics, by means of an exemplary interlocutor.

We will explore the idea of Wittgenstein's Augustine as an 'exemplary interlocutor' a little more in the proceeding sections. For now, it is enough to conclude that Wittgenstein's deliberate choice of a fictionalised or exaggerated Augustine as his opening interlocutor in the *Investigations* both fits the profile of the maieutic philosophy and actively assists the text in achieving some of the goals of maieutic philosophy that have been established throughout this thesis. Not only does this clarify some of the reasoning behind *why* Wittgenstein chooses to portray Augustine and his ideas in the way that he does, it also helps to set the stage for and further

illuminate the maieutic themes present in this opening passage of the *Investigations*. It is these themes that we will now turn to exploring.

6.3 The Construction of Auxiliary Devices

As I have explained in chapter one of this thesis, part of the process of maieutic philosophy involves the construction of so-called ‘auxiliary devices’ (a term borrowed from Catherine Rowett) for the purposes of examining and testing the views of one’s interlocutor. Once the interlocutor has been encouraged to offer their account of the concept under investigation, the maieutic philosopher constructs a series of devices that are sensitive to their interlocutor (in that they are constructed with one’s interlocutor in mind and are themselves valid only insofar as the interlocutor agrees to their construction). For the Socratic Midwife, these devices are then used in order to first examine and clarify the aspects of the interlocutor’s proposed account, seeing how such an account both fits in with their wider concept use and/or seeing what the world would have to be like to accommodate such an account, before then being used to test the account in order to determine its viability (and consequently, terminating the account if/when it is appropriate to do so).

We have established an idea of *who* Wittgenstein’s interlocutor is (the fictionalised version of Augustine established in the first section of this chapter), and what Wittgenstein’s interlocutor’s proposed account is (the picture of language use wherein words simply name objects and sentences are combinations of such names). So how then does Wittgenstein proceed? What kinds of auxiliary device (if any) does Wittgenstein employ in his treatment of the “Augustinian” picture of language, and to what effect? And how does reading the opening sections of the *Investigations* as making use of these auxiliary devices change our understanding of its content, and of the content of the *Investigations* more generally? Approaching these issues will require the examination of the auxiliary devices that Wittgenstein employs in this section, and how these auxiliary devices are informed by the interlocutor (in accordance with the principles of maieutic inquiry established in the preceding chapters).

The opening passage of the *Investigations*, I argue, contains a series of interrelated devices aimed at achieving an *üD* to which Wittgenstein repeatedly refers back and which are developed and extended throughout the opening of the *Investigations*. Wittgenstein introduces these devices as ‘language games’ which, as we have seen throughout this thesis, are an iconic part of his method. Wittgenstein formally introduces the notion of ‘language game’ in PI §7, but as we shall see, he makes use of what can be described as language games from PI §1 onwards. I argue that these language games fulfil much the same purpose as maieutic auxiliary devices, and operate in the same way.

Indeed, one of these devices is offered immediately after the “Augustinian” account, within the very same remark. Wittgenstein asks us to imagine the following exchange:

Now think of the following use of language: I send someone shopping. I give him a slip of paper marked “five red apples”. He takes the slip to the shopkeeper, who opens the drawer marked “apples”; then he looks up the word “red” in a chart and finds a colour sample next to it; then he says the series of elementary number-words – I assume that he knows them by heart – up to the word “five”, and for each number-word he takes an apple of the same colour as the sample out of the drawer (PI §1)

The first thing to note is that this representation is not by itself self-explanatory. Out of context, this passage doesn’t seem to do much to clarify how it is we actually come to operate with language. Indeed, the events described in the passage seem bizarre when we compare them with how someone might actually go into a shop and order five red apples (after all, we wouldn’t ordinarily expect a shopkeeper to have to refer to colour charts and labels in order to understand what we are saying). But in the context of the philosophical problem that is being considered, and alongside the “Augustinian” picture of language posed by the interlocutor, this description ‘gets its light’ (PI §109) and is understandable. The scenario is exaggerating particular features of language use that seem relevant to the object of investigation, in this instance, that there are different *kinds* of words (such as adjectives, numerals, nouns, and the like).

The second thing to note is that Wittgenstein's scenario here does not make use of any ideas that are novel to or otherwise beyond the ordinary grasp of his interlocutor. It is often commented that Wittgenstein's scenarios and devices are notable for their *everyday* nature, through their making use of scenarios that are rooted in the language and practical activities of everyday life. They do not introduce any far-fetched scenarios, require the interlocutor to be educated in any particular kind of mythos (like the Socratic trans-migration of the soul) for the scenario to be understood, or otherwise demand any great suspension of disbelief from the interlocutor. Although the scenarios can sometimes be strange in that they depict ordinarily 'normal' activities in eccentric ways (as we have observed in the 'five red apples' scenario), they do not present anything controversial to the interlocutor. When we also consider Wittgenstein's notion of agreement (examined earlier on in this thesis), and the consequent idea that these scenarios too are contingent on an interlocutor agreeing to entertain them, we begin to see that these scenarios hit some important tick boxes for being considered to be 'maieutic' in nature: they do not force any new information onto the interlocutor, and they are themselves rooted in things that the interlocutor (implicitly) knows or is otherwise familiar with.

As previously mentioned, the construction of an auxiliary device is contingent on mutual agreement between the philosopher and the interlocutor, insofar as the interlocutor must agree that the auxiliary device being implemented by the maieutic philosopher is a fair representation and/or extension of the account that the interlocutor is putting forward. Consequently, any auxiliary devices that Wittgenstein employs in the opening sections of the *Investigations* will, we may assume, be informed by considerations acceptable to his chosen interlocutor. Indeed, if Wittgenstein is to obey his own principles of agreement between interlocutors and mutual understanding (as I suggested earlier in this thesis, in chapter three, then any auxiliary devices offered in the opening of the *Investigations* should be designed to elicit the agreement of the 'Augustinian' interlocutor.

Of course, whilst this process of coming to an agreement is easily represented in the dialogue format of the *Theaetetus*, where one can track whether or not Socrates' interlocutor accepts what Socrates is putting forward (and we do get many instances where Theaetetus responds explicitly in the affirmative to the various devices and

illustrations that Socrates presents to him), it is a little more difficult to discern where and how Wittgenstein secures agreement from his 'Augustinian' interlocutor.

Although we are treated to various instances where an alleged interlocutor (presumably, the 'Augustinian' interlocutor) explicitly interrupts Wittgenstein's thinking, nowhere in the opening sections of the *Investigations* does this interlocutor explicitly consent -- or reject -- anything that Wittgenstein puts forward.¹⁹³

We must bear in mind that Wittgenstein's interlocutor here is a *fictional* interlocutor, introduced by the author to fulfil a specific purpose, and that the purpose of the exchange as a whole is to present a dialectic that does not have an oppositional tone, but rather, develops a situation where the lead character (in this case, Wittgenstein) is trying to develop the opponent's position as much as possible. The process of maieutic philosophy is not intended to be confrontational, rather, the point of it is to be productive, and to develop and examine an interlocutor's account. Consequently, having a confrontational interlocutor would not be conducive to representing this process.

Returning to the 5 red apples scenario, we must ask: so how does this exchange help to render the grammar of concepts under investigation clear? It would appear that Wittgenstein employs this picture in the first instance in order to show that there exists a myriad of other ways in which one makes use of words, beyond simply pointing and naming. Although we don't typically see something like the above scene get played out every time we go to the shops, we nevertheless can entertain the idea that language can be operated in these strange ways, and so must consider alternatives to the Augustinian picture of simply pointing and naming (and stringing clumps of names together in sentences).

Does Wittgenstein then simply use the auxiliary device to terminate or otherwise highlight the non-viability of the Augustinian picture? Already, this seems rather unlike the Socratic use of such devices, where we saw that Socrates first makes use of such devices in what we identified as being a more positive and/or constructive

¹⁹³ For example, one of the purported exchanges between Wittgenstein and this interlocutor occurs in PI 1, where allegedly Wittgenstein's use of quotation marks indicates that another voice is speaking: "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'?" -- Well, I assume that he acts as I have described'

fashion that bolsters the original thesis put forward by the interlocutor (rather than positing valid alternatives, as Wittgenstein does here). Here, Wittgenstein's device might be seen as being more immediately antagonistic to the interlocutor's thesis, by undermining the interlocutor's thesis' explanatory power by demonstrating examples where other ways of operating with language can be seen to be viable.

Part of the difference between their respective opening gambits could be explainable by the different ways in which Wittgenstein and Socrates envision the structure of concepts and their phenomena. The Socratic insistence on essentialist definitions, for example, blocks the way for Socrates to consider his interlocutor's thesis alongside a number of viable alternatives and still see value in pursuing an examination into the original thesis. The insistence that concepts and their phenomena are related by virtue of sharing an essential definition result in a binary view of philosophical investigation, whereby if it's shown in the first instance that a philosophical model is unable to adequately accommodate for a given instantiation of a concept, then there is no value in pursuing that account further. Comparing the Augustinian picture of language use with evidently viable alternatives would consequently be interpreted as a destructive and antagonistic move from the Socratic perspective, but given that Wittgenstein entertains the possibility of making use of multiple philosophical models simultaneously in order to glean the characteristics of a particular concept, we need not necessarily see placing the Augustinian picture of language alongside viable competing alternatives as negative and/or antagonistic.

Furthermore, despite Wittgenstein appearing to be antagonistic in his opening moves (or at least, more antagonistic than the initial 'constructive' phase of the Socratic use of auxiliary devices), the use of the 'five red apples' device is evidently done in the spirit of being able to expand on and clarify what is being proposed, rather than just terminating it in favour of the next thesis. It is not used to prove the point that one never operates with words in the way that the Augustinian picture presents; it is instead used to show that alternatives exist alongside it in the day-to-day operation of language. Consequently, instead of just aborting the Augustinian picture outright, one has to explore it further – one has to look at what a world in which the Augustinian picture held true might look like, in order to see what features of

language use it adequately captures, and what features of language use it fails to describe. Thus, Wittgenstein uses his initial auxiliary device to set the stage for a more recognisably maieutic ‘constructive phase’ whereby the original Augustinian thesis is elaborated on and supported by further auxiliary devices.

This occurs in the very next device employed by Wittgenstein, which I argue forms the basis for the subsequent auxiliary devices Wittgenstein employs. In the very next remark, Wittgenstein introduces a fictional scenario which is intended to demonstrate a primitive world in which the description of language that the Augustinian interlocutor abides by is right (PI 2). In this scenario, Wittgenstein imagines the following language:

The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs, and beams. B has to pass him the stones and to do so in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they make use of a language consisting of the words “block”, “pillar”, “slab”, “beam”. A calls them out; B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call. --- Conceive of this as a complete primitive language. (PI §2)

Here, Wittgenstein describes a language in which (purportedly) every word functions as the name of an object, and only as a name, and so we are afforded an opportunity of seeing how a conception of language based on the Augustinian picture plays out. The language itself consists, as I said, exclusively of names referring to objects — block, pillar, etc. — and although it is a very simple language, consisting of only four words, it is nevertheless to be treated as a ‘complete’ language, in that the builders are supposed not to make use of any other words outside of these four words (forestalling any ‘what-ifs’ the interlocutor might have, such as ‘what if builder A needed more than one block, or builder B needed to use the toilet).

This scenario is developed further in PI §6, where Wittgenstein invites us to imagine that this language isn’t just the *whole* language of the builders, but the whole language of an entire tribe. Here, Wittgenstein considers what it would be like for such a tribe to train its children in this language. As he observes, an important part of this training will lie in the teacher ‘pointing to objects, directing the child’s attention

to them, and at the same time uttering a word (PI §6)', in a manner that is clearly reminiscent of Augustine's account of how he imagines one might learn one's native language. The child comes to *name* the object when uttering the word for the object that the teacher is pointing to, and consequently is said to be trained in the use of that word in some way. How, exactly, such training could work is then raised as an issue that such a theory needs to address. Wittgenstein wonders, for example, whether, when the child hears the word that it has learnt to associate with an object, a picture of that object comes to the child's mind, but he then questions whether this would amount to the child *understanding* the word, or whether the child can only be said to understand the word when it acts in such and such a way (for example, by bringing a slab when it hears the word 'slab' being called).

So far, the device that Wittgenstein is presenting is an elaboration of the account of language that his Augustinian interlocutor put forward. There is nothing inherently antagonistic towards the Augustinian picture of language, and in actual fact it appears to be offered with the view of developing the Augustinian thesis by demonstrating how such a picture of language would (or rather, could) work in practice. Just as Socrates introduces and entertains the *homo mensura* and flux doctrines in order to describe a world in which Theaetetus' 'knowledge is a kind of perception' doctrine is right, Wittgenstein introduces an auxiliary device which serves to support the original Augustinian picture of language, by creating a picture through which one can see what the Augustinian picture of language might look like in practice.

However, by explicitly highlighting just how it is that the children of this imaginary tribe are to be acculturated into this language, Wittgenstein also provides a means by which one can test the efficacy of the Augustinian picture by giving a framework through which one can explore whether or not it is possible to learn a particular word/name of an object via the method of the 'ostensive naming of objects'. With this, not only does Wittgenstein's description of what the Augustine picture of language would look like in practice deepen (by providing a more furnished and comprehensive view of how such a tribe might work in practice), but it also sets up an effective means of comparing the Augustinian builder tribe's use of language with our own. It provides the basis for exploring the similarities and differences between how

that tribe both teaches and learns that language, and how it is that we ourselves do the same with our own language. When understood this way, we can see the potential for the device to be employed in the same two phase constructive/destructive manner in which the Socratic auxiliary devices are employed in, in that it too develops the interlocutor's account before holding it to scrutiny.

We see Wittgenstein making use of these features of his device, when he expands the language of the builder tribe further, this time by incorporating some of the features of language seen in the 5 red apples scenario at the beginning of the passage. He now supposes that the tribe has words corresponding to numerals (represented in this example by the series of letters of the alphabet), a further two words to designate position in conjunction with a pointing gesture ("there" and "this"), and a 'number of colour samples' (PI 8). The result is the possibility of sentences such as 'D slab there', with the person issuing the command able to point to a colour sample to indicate which colour of slab they require. Again, Wittgenstein considers just how it is that the children of this tribe are taught how to operate with these new words. At a glance, it would appear that these words function quite differently to 'slab', 'block' etc, in that they don't seem to name any one thing in particular. One must ask (as Wittgenstein does) how does one point to and name a number, or whatever is signified by the terms 'this' and 'there'? Wittgenstein concedes that there is some room to interpret how the teaching of numeral words to the children might make use of ostensive pointing-and-naming (and consequently, conform to an Augustinian picture of language). He hypothesises that one might be able to teach the child to learn the numeral words by heart by pointing to various slabs and counting aloud 'a slab, b slabs' and so on until the child has memorised the numerals by heart (PI 9).

However, the situation is more complicated when it comes to the terms 'this' and 'there'. Wittgenstein calls into question whether or not the child can be said to adequately understand the function of words such as 'this' and 'there' if the child simply takes 'this' and 'there' to describe whatever it is that the teacher is pointing at. It seems, Wittgenstein suggests, that understanding the words 'this' and 'there' requires understanding the function that these words play in the language, that is, the *use* of such words, rather than understanding what exactly someone is pointing to

when uttering them. Here, Wittgenstein highlights some ways in which an Augustinian account of language might struggle to accommodate features of our own language when imported into the scenario. By comparing the tribe's own use of primitive language with our own, and by importing common features of our language use into the example of the builder tribe, Wittgenstein begins to show that the Augustinian picture of language is unable to accommodate for a variety of linguistic techniques, even within the relatively narrow confines of this primitive language game.

It is from this point, I argue, that Wittgenstein's employment of the builder-tribe üD moves from what has initially been a quite constructive phase (in that it develops the Augustinian thesis by placing it in a setting that is amenable to what it is suggesting) towards a de-constructive phase where the allure of the Augustinian picture is exposed and consequently undermined. As we shall see in the next section, Wittgenstein's use of the builder-tribe üD pivots from a comparison of similarities between how it is that we actually (appear to) operate with language and the Augustinian builder-tribe's own practices, towards an active comparison of the differences, with the ultimate view of demonstrating that holding onto the Augustinian picture of how language operates is untenable.

6.4 De-constructing the Augustinian Picture

The de-constructive phase of Wittgenstein's treatment of the Augustinian picture of language starts with a question (arguably on behalf of the Augustinian interlocutor) regarding what the words of language actually then signify (PI 10). As we've seen previously in this thesis, the form of a philosophical question can often impact on the form of the answer one gives, and in this case, the question presupposes that the words of language signify something in the way that the Augustinian picture suggests (that is, that they signify something by necessarily pointing to something in the world). Rather than advance a direct refutation or a counter-claim, Wittgenstein's response is to pose a question back to his imagined interlocutor, asking 'how is what they [the words of this language] signify supposed to come out other than in the kind of *use* they have? And we have already described that' (PI 10, emphasis added). The interlocutor's question can be understood as a question that is motivated by labouring under an account like the Augustinian picture of language, within which is the implicit idea that there is a definitive form of answer to that question ((what Marie McGinn refers to as a 'canonical form' for specifying the meaning of expressions)). The notion that words simply name objects and that sentences are just combinations of such names expresses an idea that the essence of language is that words *must* signify something external to themselves, that they *must* point to something external in the world. Thus the question 'what do the words of language signify' can be seen to be operating under the impression that the words of language must operate in this way.

We might understand this question as the Augustinian response to Wittgenstein's observations regarding words like 'this' and 'then', something along the lines of 'well if 'this' doesn't signify the place or thing that is being pointed to, what does it then signify?'. Wittgenstein's response, on the other hand, illustrates that implicit within the Augustinian conception is this view that words have to directly signify objects, or rather, that one can learn how a word is *used* merely by pointing to an object that it signifies, and that language then must have this essential characteristic. The second question can then be understood as Wittgenstein's attempt to undermine the temptation behind asking the first question.

Importantly, Wittgenstein's response to the Augustinian interlocutor here does not advance any kind of theory in its place. However, we might be tempted to misread Wittgenstein here as making the claim that one can classify linguistic expressions by means of their use, and that consequently one can find and apply some kind of definitive ordering or structure to language. We've already considered similar claims throughout this thesis, and we've seen how Wittgenstein cannot in the abstract be said to endorse such a project in the *Investigations*. However, it is worth highlighting the in-passage reasons why attributing such a view to Wittgenstein would be erroneous in order to see how in this specific exchange he avoids forcing a potential thesis on his interlocutor, for the sake of seeing how the employment of the *üD* continues to match up with the maieutic function of Socratic auxiliary devices.

Wittgenstein specifically addresses this issue in PI §17:

It will be possible to say: In language we have different kinds of word...But how we group words into kinds will depend on the aim of the classification,—and on our own inclination.

Think of the different points of view from which one can classify tools or chessmen. (PI §17)

Here, Wittgenstein acknowledges that, following his previous observations that there are a wide variety of kinds of words that have differing uses, one might be tempted to think then that one groups certain kinds of words together definitively, based on these uses. For example, we might say that there exists a group of words that correspond to the Augustinian picture of language, in that they are used to directly signify something in the world. Following this, we might think that Wittgenstein is presenting to the interlocutor a vision of the philosophy of language in which the primary goal is to clarify and categorise words into these groups, so that language is uniformly ordered and the meanings of concepts are clarified by doing so. However, and as is pointed out in the above remark, Wittgenstein sees the ordering of language not as some comprehensive -- and completable -- task, but rather, as a task that is determined by whatever the aims or goals of the person doing the ordering are. Consequently, the point is not to classify the words of language into some kind of definitive ordering, but

rather, to order language according to our need -- that is to say, according to the philosophical problem that we find ourselves under the grip of (cf. PI §109)

That Wittgenstein seeks to make this kind of clarification at this point of the investigation is, for our purposes, important. Within this interjection, there is a demonstrable sensitivity to his interlocutor and their particular way of thinking in predicting how the Augustinian interlocutor is likely to misunderstand the purpose/consequences of the builder-tribe *üD*. As we have seen, underlying the Augustinian picture is the temptation to view concepts in terms of a simple conceptual unity.¹⁹⁴ Consequently, the effect of being under the grip of something like the Augustinian picture of language is that different aspects of language and types of linguistic expression begin to look similar by virtue of their supposed shared essences. We have already seen some evidence of this within this very passage, when we considered that the numeral worlds of a language *could* be taught by ostensive pointing. In doing so, the numeral words are made to look similar to words that directly signify an object (such as names), that is, words whose use can more or less be learnt through the act of naming (i.e, this word refers to this object), rather than words whose use is left indeterminate by the process of naming (Cf. PI §28). In reality, these words can be shown to have a different use to the kinds of words that have been shown to fit the Augustinian schema (slab, block, etc), a use which is obscured by adopting the Augustinian picture of language and brought out again in the scenario that Wittgenstein offers.

This point is further illustrated by considering Wittgenstein's comparison with tools in a tool kit (PI §11, 17). Wittgenstein compares the variety of uses and functions to be found across the range of linguistic expressions with the variety of uses that can be found amongst tools in a tool box. As Wittgenstein observes, the only thing that ties the tools together (other than sharing a box) is that they can be used *as* tools. Or, in other words, it is their function as tools that makes them tools, not that they share some essential property or even that they share some common function (Cf. PI 15). Identifying them all as tools just because they are named 'tools' overlooks the

¹⁹⁴ A notion we have discussed previously in this thesis, see Ch 2.4 and 3.2

individual functions that each tool serves, and obscures other, potentially more useful, ways of ordering and categorising our tools.

Wittgenstein's response to the interlocutor here is not one laden with theory. Nor is it one that negates the interlocutor's view by dismissing it as being necessarily false. The interlocutor is still free to order words as they wish, and to still categorise words in terms of what they signify -- so long as they don't advance such an ordering as a metaphysical thesis describing the essential characteristics of the words of language. Rather, Wittgenstein's response seeks to work with the interlocutor's implicit understanding. As we have seen, the interlocutor has a tendency to take a highly general state of affairs (in this example, that words name objects) and mistake it as being a description of the necessary and essential features of the concept in question. Wittgenstein perceives the risk of the interlocutor doing the same with *his* examples and analogies, and so seeks to undermine the temptation to do this here as well.

In the next section of the discussion, Wittgenstein makes some illuminating observations regarding the shape and character of the üDs that he employs in dialogue with the Augustinian. Firstly, Wittgenstein's discussion turns to considering the appropriateness of using the primitive language of the builder tribe as an example through which to explore the Augustinian picture of language. Wittgenstein anticipates the objection that comparing the language of the builders with our own language is unfair, as the language of the builders is a 'primitive' and 'incomplete' one (PI §18). Wittgenstein's response is to ask his interlocutor whether or not we can say that our own language is now 'complete', or is any more complete now than it was before the advent of modern chemistry and the invention of the periodic table of elements. The question of whether our own language is complete calls into question whether or not it makes sense to talk of a 'complete language' in the first place, again undermining the allure and potency of the original question.

Next, Wittgenstein introduces the notion of a 'form of life' to describe the process of imagining a fictitious language. Wittgenstein's notion of the form of life gives an important context and understanding to the various üDs he employs throughout his exchange with the Augustinian interlocutor and across the course of the *Investigations* itself, including those üDs that function in similar ways to Socratic

auxiliary devices In particular, Wittgenstein introduces the notion of a form of life to distinguish between the practice of looking at language as something that is abstract and *his* practice of looking at language as something that is inextricably woven in with the fabric of life. That is to say, Wittgenstein's practice involves examining language in its natural habitat, interwoven with various non-linguistic activities and behaviours, and not as a logically distinct phenomenon that is somehow separate to or distinct from our lived experiences. We have already seen Wittgenstein make use of this in PI §1, where he introduces the 5 red apples scenario. There, Wittgenstein introduced a picture where language use was embedded in actions. Wittgenstein explicates this practice here, through the notion of a form of life.

The importance of this notion is two-fold. First, it lends some explanation to the content of Wittgenstein's üDs themselves. Wittgenstein's üDs do not present language as an abstract phenomenon, rather, they depict language working in and alongside everyday activities, such as going to the shop (as in the '5 Red Apples') or giving orders on a construction site. By deliberately making use of examples where linguistic activity is intermingled with non-linguistic activities, Wittgenstein draws attention to language as something that is embodied within the various activities of life, rather than something that is abstracted from the lives of its speakers. Indeed, he explains that 'to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life' (PI §19), explicitly highlighting that the activities in which these languages are embedded in are just as important as the language itself, and that one must look at them in tandem when comparing said fictional language with the concept or philosophical account under investigation. He writes: 'The term 'language-game' is used here to emphasize the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life. (PI §23)', indicating that the focus of the devices he employs is to be found precisely in the fact that they present language as something that forms part of this notion of a 'form of life', alongside all the other non-linguistic activities that make them up.

Secondly, and perhaps more pertinently to our own study, the introduction of the notion of forms of life impresses the idea that part of the solution to their philosophical problems involves looking 'inwards', towards how one comes to operate with language in their own lives, rather than 'outwards' towards language as some mysterious and external phenomena. By constructing and employing devices where

the focus is just as much on the non-linguistic activities that language is embedded in, Wittgenstein encourages his interlocutor to move away from characterising language as something that is to be studied separately from their own lived experiences of language, towards using their own lived experiences of language to characterise language. If Wittgenstein's scenarios are offered as 'objects of comparison' to be compared alongside reality (as discussed earlier in this thesis), then by offering the interlocutor these scenarios wherein language is presented as something that is embedded within lived experiences and non-linguistic activities, the interlocutor is encouraged to compare it with their own examples of the same thing.

One could interject here that this is precisely how the Augustinian interlocutor starts in the *Investigations*, by recanting their earliest memories of learning words and the physical activity that came with it (i.e, pointing and naming things). Given that the Augustinian interlocutor can be seen to start from within their own lived experience of language use, what use then does Wittgenstein's reminder here serve? And how does the Augustinian go astray in their own investigation into language? Although the Augustinian interlocutor does indeed start with an examination of their own lived experience of language, they then subsequently hyper-generalise that experience into a metaphysical account of the essential features of language use. The Augustinian interlocutor can then be said to treat this particular lived experience of language as a paradigmatic case in which the essential features of language are rendered clear, projecting it into a full blown metaphysical thesis about the essence of language. By doing so, the Augustinian ignores other lived experiences of language use, in favour of the paradigmatic case and its (supposed) explanatory power. The investigation then ceases to be an investigation into language as a form of life, as it takes language out of the wider lived experience and the other forms of life in which it is enmeshed. The result is that, despite starting from a position of considering language as something that is interwoven into a form of life, the Augustinian interlocutor abstracts language from the myriad forms of life in which it plays a part. The interlocutor no longer looks towards their own experiences of language in order to clarify its features, rather, they look to the singular paradigmatic case from which a picture of language as a separate, fixed entity has been extracted. Here, Wittgenstein's consistent reminders then serve the purpose of gently re-orientating the interlocutor back towards looking at their

lived experiences (plural) of language, in order to see how they compare with one another and what characteristics of language can be gleaned from doing so.

The idea that the interlocutor needs continual reminding to resist the urge to look for a single paradigmatic case and look towards a plurality of cases tracks with observations he makes throughout the corpus of his writings that such tendencies and temptations are difficult to resist:

But it is one of the most important facts of human life that such impressions sometimes force themselves on you (FW 12)

The reason why grammatical problems are so hard and apparently ineradicable is that they are linked with the oldest habits of thought, that is, with the oldest pictures, impressed in our language itself (Ms 213, 422-433)

The picture that Wittgenstein paints of these temptations is that they are not something that can be overcome in the first instance by simply being aware of them. Moreover, they are something that one can expect to continually encounter, and consequently, are something that needs continual work in order to overcome. The problem is that these temptations are not 'external' temptations encountered 'in the wild', in the sense that they are manifested by external catalysts. Rather, they are problems that lie within our own language and our own habits of thought. Consequently, overcoming these problems and temptations requires a continual working from the inside, rather than the discovery of some one-time external solution.

Viewing it from this way, the Augustinian picture of language isn't merely replaced from the outside by an alternative picture of language use, for this doesn't address the underlying temptations and urges that give rise to the interlocutor using the Augustinian picture of language as a paradigmatic case in the first place. Rather, Wittgenstein works from the inside to de-construct the Augustinian picture, by working with the interlocutor to aid them in overcoming the urges behind viewing the experiences that inform the Augustinian picture (such as the recollection of learning words via the ostensive method of pointing and naming) and creating paradigmatic cases. The aim isn't to present some new and hitherto undiscovered piece of information to the interlocutor. Instead, the aim is to encourage the interlocutor to look to what they already know, manifested in the plurality of experiences that the interlocutor has with the concept in question (in this case, language). Hence, when

Wittgenstein writes that 'If you do not keep the multiplicity of language-games in view you will perhaps be inclined to ask questions like: "What is a question?"' (PI §24) he is directly associating the inclination to characterise things in terms of their essential characteristics (and to consequently ask 'what is F' style questions) with the failure to acknowledge the wide plurality of *diverse* lived experiences in which the concept under investigation can be seen to be at play.

Whilst this may be at odds with Socrates' particular practice of midwifery (given his disdain for the particular case), there is still something fundamentally maieutic about Wittgenstein's practice here. In particular, the focus in attention on what the interlocutor already implicitly knows over and above new discoveries about the concept under investigation (in this case, language). Wittgenstein does not seek to replace his interlocutor's account regarding the essence of language with an alternative account of the essence of language, or some other positive thesis regarding language use. Rather, he aims to get the Augustinian interlocutor to look towards their own experiences of language, to reflect on the activities within which language is interwoven with that they are familiar with, in order to deconstruct the Augustinian picture of language themselves. The problem then is not a gap in the understanding of the interlocutor to be solved by introducing the interlocutor to some new piece of information. Rather, the problem is the interlocutor's failure to take the wide variety of *their* experiences into account when attempting to characterise language, a problem that is seemingly tackled by encouraging the interlocutor towards acknowledging these experiences and, in the process, rendering explicit what they already implicitly know in their capacity as competent users of that concept.

Wittgenstein's philosophical practice in the *Investigations* is sometimes interpreted as being negative, destructive or otherwise 'anti-philosophical' in some way. It is sometimes accused of leaving the would-be philosopher with nothing positive or insightful to say about the object under investigation, having found that their previously held philosophical accounts were as a result of some kind of temptation, tendency towards dogmatic thinking, or distorted by a particular philosophical picture. We might draw some parallels in this regard to how the ending of the *Theaetetus* is similarly interpreted. Having exhausted his previously held philosophical accounts on what knowledge is, *Theaetetus* is often said to be brought

to a state of *aporia*, seemingly unable to say anything more on the topic of knowledge. As I have argued for extensively in the first chapter, this is not the case. Whilst Theaetetus hasn't reached a definitional account of knowledge, he evidently still has a greater capacity to talk *about* knowledge -- what it's like, what it's not like, in which contexts it resembles something like perception, in which contexts it resembles a true judgement, and so on and so forth. Theaetetus' *scope* for talking about knowledge has greatly widened, despite the fact that he hasn't learnt anything 'new' about knowledge. Similarly, the Augustinian interlocutor is brought to a point where their scope for talking about the features of language is greatly increased, not reduced. Whilst they are left without a functioning account of the essential features of language, they do now have the capacity to talk about language in a wide variety of ways, and are not limited to describing language merely as a process of pointing and naming things. They are reminded by Wittgenstein to look at how it is they come to *use* language, the wide variety of ways in which linguistic expressions can be used, over and above looking for the essential features of language itself.

Wittgenstein works with his interlocutor to dismantle the Augustinian picture of language, not by showing that the picture is 'wrong' (in the sense that it is factually incorrect or indicates a gap in one's understanding), but instead by working through the various temptations and urges behind adopting such a picture -- itself rooted in what is seemingly an uncontroversial observation of how it is that we sometimes come to learn words and name things -- and showing that there (also) exists a plurality of alternative ways of conceiving of the same thing. We've seen how the 'builder tribe' scenario is initially used positively to develop the interlocutor's thesis, by demonstrating examples of situations where such an account works. What we have just seen in the preceding paragraphs is how the same scenarios are then subsequently used to de-construct the interlocutor's thesis, *without* the introduction of a counter-thesis. It is not that the Augustinian picture of language is shown to be defunct and is then replaced with an alternative view of the essence of language and what words refer to. The Augustinian is not made to drop their picture of language, they are only made to see for themselves how the Augustinian picture of language cannot cover the wide variety of linguistic expressions available in our language.

6.5 Concluding Remarks

What is gained by reading the opening sections of the *Investigations* through a maieutic lens? As we have just seen, examining how Wittgenstein's investigation with the Augustinian interlocutor compares with the practice of midwifery highlights the focus Wittgenstein places in this passage on his interlocutor (the 'Augustinian' and by extension, ourselves as readers), on building on the mutual understanding between himself and his interlocutor, and on getting the interlocutor to look away from the concept under investigation as something external and abstract, and towards their own experiences of said concept. Initially, we might be tempted to approach this passage of the *Investigations* and assess it in terms of what solutions it presents and conclusions it draws in response to a problem (as we tend to do with most other philosophical works). However, and as we have seen here, the maieutic reading invites us to instead assess the successes of the investigation in a different way, by exploring the impact it has had on Wittgenstein's interlocutor, and their way of thinking.

So what is the effect on the 'Augustinian'? And does this effect translate over to us, as reader-interlocutors (and if so, then how)? Wittgenstein's exchange with the interlocutor focuses on a particular way of thinking that the interlocutor has, in their propensity towards simple conceptual unity and characterising things in terms of essences. This finds expression in the Augustinian picture of language, with the interlocutor being impressed by what appears to be a highly general state of affairs (that words directly refer to objects) and thus being convinced that this model then accurately describes the essential feature of language use. As we've explored in previous chapters, Wittgenstein sees this way of thinking as being an extremely common dogmatic tendency in philosophy, and is consequently the subject of a number of his investigations throughout his work. Has the Augustinian's way of thinking been righted then?

To try and think of it in these terms, I think, is to understate the difficulty of overcoming such a way of thinking. The temptation to view and arrange the world this way (that is in terms of essential characteristics) is for Wittgenstein a product of language itself, being inextricably tied up with our 'oldest habits of thought'. It's not something that can simply be overcome throughout the course of one investigation

but instead is something that requires constant vigilance. As we saw in chapter four, this is as much a matter of will as it is intellect, requiring a particular kind of character and willingness to persevere. Nevertheless, I think it is possible that the Augustinian has, as Socrates describes Theaetetus, become 'gentler', 'less burdensome', and more fit for future philosophical inquiries, in the sense that they are now more aware of some of the distorting pictures that they were previously labouring under and how this might affect their philosophical thinking.

Postscript/ Conclusion

This thesis has outlined a methodological continuity between Socrates and the later Wittgenstein, along the lines of the maieutic method of doing philosophy as depicted in the *Theaetetus*. In doing so, I have put forward a reading of Wittgenstein's later methodology that I believe resolves certain interpretative puzzles that have plagued the study of his *Philosophical Investigations* for some time.

By establishing an account of 'Socratic midwifery' in chapter one, I was able to put together a core list of features for philosophical midwifery or 'maieutic philosophy', which included:

1. A picture of the philosopher as someone that is interested in drawing out an interlocutor's *implicit* knowledge regarding the subject of investigation, rather than simply instructing them/forcing onto them a novel thesis regarding that subject
2. An understanding of philosophical confusion wherein one can be said to be unable to articulate an account of a concept that is 'ordinarily familiar'
3. The construction of devices for testing an interlocutor's proposed account regarding the subject of investigation, where the function of the devices is to see what would have to be the case for the interlocutor's proposed account to be valid.
4. The use of said devices to then terminate unviable accounts, by using them as objects of comparison with reality and determining whether or not the result is incoherent or unviable by a variety of metrics (i.e, by determining whether or not the ontological cost is too high).
5. Various character requirements for engaging with maieutic philosophy, including willingness to pursue the inquiry for the sake of truth

A picture of Wittgenstein's later philosophy (and in particular, his conception of philosophical problems) was then established, within which a foundation for a comparison was established. We saw that both Wittgenstein and the Socratic Midwife conceived of philosophical problems in similar ways, in that philosophical problems (or

at least, the kinds of philosophical problems they are both concerned with) can be said to be confusions regarding concepts that are ordinarily familiar (2). Furthermore, the notion was raised that, for both Wittgenstein and the Socratic Midwife, dealing with philosophical problems involved two (inter-related) tasks: could a ‘conceptual’ task, which involved actually dealing with the conceptual puzzle posed by the philosophical problem, and an ‘ethical’ one that relates to the difficulties of the will that one might face when trying to solve philosophical problems (5).

It was found that both the Socratic Midwife and Wittgenstein both sought to deal with these twinned tasks in similar ways. In chapter three, I outlined how both Wittgenstein and the Socratic Midwife envisage the ‘conceptual’ task as involving drawing upon one’s implicit knowledge regarding the object of investigation, *recalling* to mind how it is that we ordinarily use whatever concept is under investigation (1) and how they both make use of constructed devices for the purposes of comparing and testing the accounts that one develops in response to a philosophical problem (3 and 4). In chapter four, I similarly outlined how the Socratic Midwife and Wittgenstein both see particular traits of character or ‘philosophical virtues’ as important in dealing with the ‘difficulties of the will’ that one faces when doing philosophy, by prompting self-examination and acknowledgement of underlying desires, biases, and distorting influences (5).

Finally, with the comparative element of this thesis completed, we then moved on to seeing how a maieutic understanding of Wittgenstein’s philosophy clarifies key interpretive issues in reading the *Investigations*. In chapter five I outlined a maieutic understanding of *übersichtliche Darstellung*, in which I made the argument that Wittgenstein employs devices that are similar in design and function to the auxiliary maieutic devices seen in the *Theaetetus*, for the purposes of bringing an interlocutor to an üD. Using the observations made throughout this thesis, I then surveyed a maieutic reading of the opening passages of the *Philosophical Investigations* in chapter five. I demonstrated how the opening passages of the *Investigations* and Wittgenstein’s treatment of the so-called ‘Augustinian’ picture of language use can be understood as an example of maieutic philosophy in action.

Throughout this thesis, it has emerged that there are several significant parallels in the methodologies of the Socratic Midwife and Wittgenstein. And although we have

witnessed several areas in which their specific methodologies differ greatly, we have seen that these differences are reconcilable when looked at through the lens of the core features of maieutic midwifery which we extrapolated from the *Theaetetus* in chapter one. For instance, although Socrates seems to insist on definitional accounts of concepts when attempting to explain them philosophically, and Wittgenstein doesn't disbar one from looking at particular instances of said concepts, it has been shown that this apparent difference need not be problematic for comparing the two. As it was shown in chapter 3, not only can Socrates' search for definitions be rehabilitated into Wittgenstein's methodology, but also we can read the insistence on a definitional account as an example of insisting a positive thesis onto our interlocutor, and so can read Wittgenstein as actually *improving* on the method of maieutic philosophy, by practising a form of maieutic philosophy that more faithfully adheres to its core principles of not instructing any theses onto one's interlocutor.

In this sense, Wittgenstein's philosophical methodology can still be said to be radical, as it questions a fundamental cornerstone of the Socratic tradition of philosophy (the search for definitional accounts). Although it marks a continuation of the maieutic tradition, it can be said to mark an exciting new chapter in that tradition, whereby a core assumption is unmasked and its distorting effect on philosophical thinking is counteracted.

Furthermore, I believe that the maieutic reading of Wittgenstein's later philosophy developed in this thesis goes some way in answering various challenges that have been laid down by scholars of Wittgenstein in the literature: for instance, it provides an answer Drury's complaint that interpretations of Wittgenstein fail to clarify both Wittgenstein's goal and method, by reconciling aspects of Wittgenstein's meta-philosophical approach with the outcomes produced throughout the *Investigations*.¹⁹⁵ With the maieutic reading, we can see that the *method* of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is designed in such a way to bring out a particular *goal*, in the sense that Wittgenstein's method seeks to solve one's philosophical confusions by rendering explicit their implicit knowledge regarding the subject under investigation.

¹⁹⁵ M. O'C Drury 'Some Notes on Conversations With Wittgenstein', in *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 76–96.

Similarly, the maieutic reading helps to identify what Peters and Marshall label as the ‘fundamentally pedagogical dimension of [Wittgenstein’s] philosophy’ that has often been neglected in the analysis of his work.¹⁹⁶ It is my belief that the maieutic reading clarifies the link between Wittgenstein’s actual philosophical practice, his proposed method, and his pedagogy, by revealing that certain pedagogical goals, such as stimulating his thinkers to thoughts of their own, align and explain some of the features of his methodological practice. In this sense, my project clarifies the link between two important yet superficially disparate aspects of Wittgenstein’s later method: the notion of stimulating one to think for one’s self and the rejection of theses in philosophy. In this respect, I believe this thesis also forms an effective response to Anthony Kenny’s proclamation that there is a disconnect between Wittgenstein’s theory and his practice, by demonstrating how it is that his ‘theory’ actually informs his practice.¹⁹⁷

Consequently, I believe that the maieutic reading helps to bridge some of the gap between therapeutic and non-therapeutic readings of Wittgenstein. As I hope to have demonstrated, the notion that Wittgenstein’s philosophy is ‘therapeutic’, in the sense that philosophical problems are simply misconceptions and/or delusions which need ‘curing’, can be explained by placing it in a maieutic framework. Whilst Wittgenstein does seem to put forward a model of philosophy wherein the ‘philosopher’ analyses their interlocutor’s philosophical accounts, in a manner which can be said to resemble a therapeutic relationship, the maieutic reading situates this relationship within a broader and more ‘positive’ philosophical project. By utilising maieutic auxiliary devices and ‘objects of comparison’, the interlocutor can still come to ‘positively’ learn about our concepts under investigation, allowing for the creation and application of more and more useful philosophical models with greater explanatory power. The process of maieutic philosophy helps to prepare one for not falling under the grip of a particular philosophical picture, instead, it trains the philosopher to be able to ‘terminate’ an account when it is shown to be unable to satisfactorily explain the phenomena it is intended to explain, and encourages them to develop another, more suitable model,

¹⁹⁶ M. Peters. and J. Marshall, *Wittgenstein: Philosophy, Postmodernism, Pedagogy* (London: Bergin & Garvey, 1999).

¹⁹⁷ Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008) pp. xviii-xix

with the result being that the philosopher acquires better and better philosophical models. In this way, the ‘therapeutic’ aspects of Wittgenstein’s method are adapted into a method of philosophy that can still yield positive results.

As stated in the introduction of this thesis, this is by no means an exhaustive or complete account of Wittgenstein as a maieutic philosopher. Rather, my intention in writing this thesis was for it to serve as a gateway towards further work in re-interpreting Wittgenstein as a maieutic philosopher. By demonstrating these areas of similarity between the later Wittgenstein and the Socratic Midwife, and by reading certain passages of the *Investigations* as examples of maieutic philosophy in action, I hope that I have proved that there is sufficient cause for conducting a more forensic analysis of the *Philosophical Investigations* as a maieutic text in the future.

What would be the benefit in doing so? Well, even in the small areas of the *Investigations* that we have looked at through the lens of maieutic midwifery, we have already found some illuminating insights into some of the interpretive issues surrounding Wittgenstein’s later philosophical methodology. By applying the maieutic lens to the whole text, we may yet uncover more insights and a greater understanding of the meta-philosophical themes of the *Investigations*. Doing so may in turn also help us develop our understanding of the maieutic method more generally, how to practise and apply it to philosophical problems, and what the benefits and costs of practising philosophy in this way may be.

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