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FIL217 / FIL317- *Wittgenstein studies*

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- Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*

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Today's program

- PI: an overview
 - PI and TLP (once more)
- "Grammar" and logic
- The aim and methods of philosophy
- The rule-following problematic
 - introduction

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Preliminaries

What is Wittgenstein's aim in the PI?

What kind of method does he use?

Why did he choose such a form of publication/presentation (criss-crossing remarks)?

We got a preliminary answer in PI's preface.

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Exegetical issues

- The PI consists largely of a dialog between two or more "voices"
- Can one of the voices be identified with Wittgenstein?
- Does Wittgenstein present theses or theories (about language, meaning, understanding, rules and rule-following, the impossibility of a private language, etc.)?

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Brian McGuinness (2006) on Wittgenstein's philosophical aims and the form of publication of his results:

"If the aim was to clarify by reminding the interlocutor of the obvious when that had been forgotten in the heat of the chase, then the dialogue form and a certain amount of recreating confusion in order to dispel it would be appropriate. The *Tractatus* agrees in its general aim, though it's not in dialogue form but is a parody of a mathematical treatise, and so is itself fundamentally misleading." (p. 379)

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Content of the *PI*

- § § 1-38 Language and meaning (as use)
 - The Augustinian picture
 - Language games
 - Ostensive definition
- § § 37-88 Names and the determinacy of sense
 - Family resemblance
- § § 89-133 "Chapter on Philosophy"
- § § 134-242 The rule-following considerations
- § § 243-315 "The private language argument"
- § § 316-362 Thought
- § § 363-397 Imagination
- § § 398-411 The self and self-reference

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§ § 412 – 427 Consciousness
§ § 428 – 465 Intentionality
§ § 466 – 490 Justification by experience
§ § 491 – 570 Meaning and the bounds of sense
§ § 571 – 610 Mental states and processes
§ § 611 – 628 The will
§ § 629 – 660 Intention
§ § 661 – 693 Meaning something

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Structure of PI

Joachim Schulte thinks that text-genetically the PI consists of three different parts:

I: § § 1-188
II: § § 189-421
III: § § 421-693

Of part I, Schulte (2005, 362) says
«Wittgenstein was as satisfied with this material as he ever came to feeling satisfied with anything he wrote», whereas II and especially III are much less finished.

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PI and the TLP

PI, preface:

Four years ago I had occasion to re-read my first book (the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*) and to explain its ideas to someone. It suddenly seemed to me that I should publish those old thoughts and the new ones together: **that the latter could be seen in the right light only by contrast with and against the background of my old way of thinking.**

For since beginning to occupy myself with philosophy again, sixteen years ago, I have been forced to recognize **grave mistakes in what I wrote in that first book.**

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Tractatus on philosophical problems

The book deals with the problems of philosophy and shows, as I believe, that **the method of formulating these problems rests on the misunderstanding of the logic of our language.** [I am] of the opinion that the problems have in essentials been finally solved. And if I am not mistaken in this, then the value of this work secondly consists in the fact that it shows how little has been done when these problems have been solved.

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Compare with PI § 109

[...] we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. All *explanation* must disappear, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from **the philosophical problems.** These are, of course, not empirical problems; they **are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: despite an urge to misunderstand them.** The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by assembling what we have long been familiar with. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language.

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Also compare

PI II, p. 224 (PPF § 335): **We remain unconscious of the prodigious diversity of all the everyday language-games because the clothing of our language makes everything alike.**

TLP #4.002: Language disguises the thought; so that from the external form of the clothes one cannot infer the form of thought they clothe [...]

TLP #4.0031: All philosophy is "Critique of language" [...]. Russell's merit is to have shown that the apparent logical form of the proposition need not be its real form.

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TLP on language

4. The thought is the significant proposition.

4.001 The totality of propositions is the language.

4.002 Man possesses the capacity of constructing languages, in which every sense can be expressed, without having an idea how and what each word means—just as one speaks without knowing how the single sounds are produced.

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4.002 continues...

Colloquial language is a part of the human organism and is not less complicated than it. From it it is humanly impossible to gather immediately the logic of language.

...

The silent adjustments to understand colloquial language are enormously complicated.

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Contrast with Wittgenstein's description of his aims in PI:

PI § 132. 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.** For this purpose we shall again and again *emphasize* distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook. This may make it look as if we saw it as our task to reform language.

Such a reform for particular practical purposes, an improvement in our terminology designed to prevent misunderstandings in practice, may well be possible. But these are not the cases we have to do with. The confusions which occupy us arise when language is, as it were, idling, not when it is doing work.

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Summing up: both in TLP and PI

Wittgenstein thought that philosophy is a kind of "critique of language"
Philosophical problems arise from our (mis)use of language
Wittgenstein emphasizes how little has been done when these problems are (dis)solved
Philosophy is an activity, not a body of theories or theses
Philosophy's aim is clarification, not theory construction

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Points of disagreement / different emphasis between PI and TLP

PI puts emphasis on "grammar" instead of logical syntax, and on description of everyday language instead of logic
Clarification in PI means clarification of our uses of language instead of the "logical clarification of thought"
PI emphasizes the multifarious uses of language instead on "the general form of proposition" and "*the* language"
PI rejects the truth-conditional account of meaning and instead emphasizes that "meaning is use" ¹⁷

The notion of "grammar"

In the PI a philosophical investigation is described as a "grammatical" investigation
E.g. PI § 90:
Our investigation is [...] 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.—Some of them can be removed by substituting one form of expression for another; this may be called an "analysis" of our forms of expression, for the process is sometimes like one of taking a thing apart.

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An example (PI § 35Z):

Can I say "bububu" and mean "If it doesn't rain, I shall go for a walk"?—It is only in a language that I can mean something by something. This shows clearly that the grammar of "to mean" is not like that of the expression "to imagine" and the like.

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Depth grammar vs. surface grammar

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

→cf. TLP on "logical grammar" that is hidden in "the language of everyday life" 3.323-3.325!

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665. Imagine someone pointing to his cheek with an expression of pain and saying "abracadabra!"—We ask "What do you mean?" And he answers "I meant toothache".—You at once think to yourself: How can one 'mean toothache' by that word? Or what did it *mean* to *mean* pain by that word? [...]

But—can't I say "By 'abracadabra' I mean toothache"? Of course I can; but this is a definition; not a description of what goes on in me when I utter the word.

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Grammar instead of ontology?

PI § 371: *Essence* is expressed in grammar.

PI § 373: Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar.)

PI § 383: We do not analyse a phenomenon (for example, thinking) but a concept (for example, that of thinking), and hence the application of a word.

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90. We feel as if we had to *see right into* phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not towards *phenomena*, but, as one might say, towards the '*possibilities*' of phenomena. What that means is that we call to mind the *kinds of statement* that we make about phenomena. [...] Our inquiry is therefore a grammatical one.

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The aim of philosophy?

PI § 116. 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 in which it is at home?—

What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.

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The aim is dissolution of problems, clarity (cf TLP)

PI § 133: ... For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear.

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§ 133 continues...

...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.

There is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies.

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The methods of philosophy

From method (TLP 6.53) to methods (PI § 133)?

Philosophy is 'purely descriptive' and does not advance any theories or explanations (PI § § 122-126)

Eine übersichtliche Darstellung as a methodological marker (PI § 122)

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Language becomes misleading or begins to "idle", when it is put into philosophical (metaphysical) (mis)use

The problem with this kind of use it is that it

- Understands grammatical issues as ontological
- Confuses empirical problems and conceptual problems
- Does not respect the ordinary use of words (their "grammar") but still wants to use them

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Issues of reception

Should we care about Wittgenstein's own view of philosophy and its proper *Darstellungsform*?

If not, what is worth while in the PI?

- Unsystematic remarks that can be developed into theories?
- Interesting problem formulations?

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If yes, is he successful in realizing this view?

- Is the PI really philosophy with only "trivial" theses?
- Are problems or puzzles only dissolved, or does Wittgenstein present alternative views to those criticized?
- Is the peculiar form of the PI internal to its message or does it have other explanations?

If we think the PI succeeds:

- Can Wittgenstein's methods be emulated?
 - How substantial is his notion of "grammar"?
- What is left of philosophy?
 - Does philosophy become a kind of therapy?

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The rule-following problematic
PI § § 138-242

What are rules?

- Rules are standards of correctness (prescriptive, not descriptive of behaviour)
- There is a difference between a rule and its expression (a rule is not tied to a particular formulation)
- Rules are general, often governing an unlimited multiplicity of occasion (cf. orders or commands)
- There is a difference between following a rule and believing one is following a rule
- There is a difference in following a rule and merely acting in accordance with a rule (a rule is not a cause, but a reason for acting – intentionality is involved)
- "Rule" is a family-resemblance concept?

What is problematic about rules?

- What kind of entity are they? (ontological question)
- How do we grasp them? (epistemological question)
 - How can they guide action? (normative question)

Why are rules important for Wittgenstein?

TLP: language as a calculus (logical syntax as system of rules for meaningful combination of signs)

PI:

- Language as games (involves following rules)
- Meaning as use (use has to be in some way regular)
- Conception of a philosophical investigation as a grammatical investigation (grammar is about rules of use)

PI §§ 81-85 discusses "language as calculus" vs. "language as game"

A calculus has fixed, definite rules. The temptation is to think that the calculus describes an ideal language that our languages can only approximate, "as if it took a logician to show people at last what a proper sentence looks like" (PI § 81).

But how are rules at work in ordinary use of language? Here, the analogy between language and games can throw light: games are not everywhere bounded by rules, there is, for example, no rule for how high one may throw the ball in tennis "yet tennis is a game for all that, and has rules too" (PI § 68).

Similarly, an application of a word is not everywhere bounded by rules (cf. "the disappearing chair" in § 80).

The interlocutor's worry: does this not make meaning indeterminate?

This worry seems to get even more fuel from the kind of paradox Wittgenstein introduces in PI § 82-84, and develops in § 185:

The formulation of a rule always seems to leave room for doubt about whether a person actually follows it (rules always have loop-holes).

The parable of the “aberrant child”

PI § 185:

[A]t the order "+ 1" [the pupil] writes down the series of natural numbers.—Let us suppose we have done exercises and given him tests up to 1000.

Now we get the pupil to continue a series (say + 2) beyond 1000—and he writes 1000, 1004, 1008, 1012.

We say to him: "Look what you've done!"—He doesn't understand. We say: "You were meant to add two: look how you began the series!"—He answers: "Yes, isn't it right? I thought that was how I was meant to do it."—Or suppose he pointed to the series and said: "But I went on in the same way."—It would now be no use to say: "But can't you see....?"—and repeat the old examples and explanations.—In such a case we might say, perhaps: It comes natural to this person to understand our order with our explanations as we should understand the order: "Add 2 up to 1000, 4 up to 2000, 6 up to 3000 and so on."

PI § 186:

How is it decided what is the right step to take at any particular stage?—"The right step is the one that accords with the order—as it was *meant*."—So when you gave the order +2 you meant that he was to write 1002 after 1000—and did you also mean that he should write 1868 after 1866, and 100036 after 100034, and so on—an infinite number of such propositions?—"No: what I meant was, that he should write the next but one number after every number that he wrote; and from this all those propositions follow in turn."

§ 186 continues...

—But that is just what is in question: what, at any stage, does follow from that proposition. Or, again, what, at any stage we are to call “being in accordance” with it (and with how you then *meant* it—whatever your meaning it might have consisted in). It would almost be more correct to say, not that an intuition was needed at every stage, but that a new decision was needed at every stage.

This seems to lead to a skeptical paradox:

This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. (PI § 201)
