

# TRYING TO KEEP PHILOSOPHY HONEST | LARS HERTZBERG

## I. The marginalization of Wittgenstein's philosophy

Ludwig Wittgenstein was once a towering figure in the philosophy of our time. For non-professionals with an interest in philosophy, this is still true. Among professional philosophers, however, his stature today seems radically diminished. Even though a great deal of what would appear to be original work is carried out along lines inspired by him, it is hardly noted by philosophers of a different bent of mind. Indeed one can speak of a marginalization of his influence in philosophy. I am thinking in particular of the situation in the English-speaking world and in Scandinavia, which is where Wittgenstein's thought was previously at its most influential.

One may feel inclined to seek for an explanation of this change; however, it would be hard to do so without indulging in idle speculation or venting one's prejudices. What I should like to try to do, rather, is to formulate *what* it is that the analytical world will be losing if it persists in turning its back on the approaches he advocated. In doing so, I shall inevitably be expressing my own (not necessarily original) understanding of what is distinctive and worthwhile about Wittgenstein's contribution to philosophy.

Before doing so, let me look at some testimony for the claim that Wittgenstein is being relegated to the periphery. The issue of the journal *Philosophical Investigations* for April 2001 contains brief statements by thirteen prominent philosophers for whom Wittgenstein has been important. They were asked, among other things, about their view of Wittgenstein in relation to contemporary trends in the field. One theme that seems to unite many of the contributors is the feeling that during the last two decades or

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so, philosophers in the analytic tradition have increasingly come to look upon the approaches to philosophy inspired by the later philosophy of Wittgenstein as a superseded stage in the history of the discipline.

This trend is noted in particular by Peter Hacker and Cora Diamond. Hacker says that “philosophy has turned away from Wittgenstein. A form of scientism has come to dominate philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, and to give licences to scientific metaphysics. It is not that Wittgenstein’s arguments have been refuted. Indeed, it is doubtful whether they have been understood at all by philosophers who seek to emulate the sciences” (p. 127). And Diamond writes that “Wittgenstein’s writings ... are pretty plainly taken to be largely irrelevant to most contemporary philosophical thought in the English-speaking world” (p. 110) – and, she might have added, to that in the Scandinavian-speaking world as well, with Norway as a possible exception. As evidence of Wittgenstein’s current standing, she refers to the 1996 *Supplement* to the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, which is supposed to cover developments since the appearance of the encyclopaedia in 1967. She notes that there is “nothing ... on Wittgenstein on knowledge, belief, certainty or scepticism ... no index reference to Wittgenstein on ‘Mind’ or ‘Mind-Body Problem’ or ‘Philosophy of Mind’ ... Judging again from the *Supplement*, Wittgenstein is a non-figure for post-1967 philosophy of logic” (p. 111).<sup>1</sup>

From her own experience, Cora Diamond speaks about the need “to advise students with an interest in Wittgenstein that, if it is possible for them to do so, they play down that interest when they apply for positions teaching philosophy” (p. 113). And I believe many of us have discovered that explicit

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1. Similar observations can be made about the recent, nine-volume *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Certain philosophers in the tradition from Wittgenstein, such as Rush Rhees and Cora Diamond, are almost totally neglected. The index has two references to Rhees (one for an article on John Anderson, the other for the book of recollections on Wittgenstein that he edited), and a single reference to Diamond (for her editorship of the volume honouring Elizabeth Anscombe). To judge by this encyclopaedia, neither of them has had anything noteworthy to contribute. For comparison, there are ten references to a philosopher like Christine Korsgaard. It is also interesting to note that in the article on Wittgenstein, Saul Kripke is singled out as the outstanding guide to his later thought.

references to Wittgenstein or appeals to how words are actually used are often frowned upon in philosophical debates.

The marginalization of Wittgenstein often takes the form of regarding philosophers whose work is inspired by his as forming their own enclave. In the leading journals of the field, one would rarely find a work, say, by Quine or Davidson, or a work written in their spirit, reviewed by someone from a Wittgensteinian tradition, while it is quite common for philosophers, say, of a Quinian, Davidsonian or other mainstream persuasion to review works written by philosophers influenced by Wittgenstein. The latter is of course entirely as it should be; it is the former situation that is regrettable.

Are we to think of the neglect of Wittgenstein among mainstream analytical philosophers as foreboding a breakup of the analytical tradition, an analogue of that which occurred within the once-unified European tradition in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the world of philosophy broke apart, into a predominantly German-French and a predominantly Anglo-Saxon form, that is, the predecessors of what we are used to referring to as so-called continental and so-called analytical philosophy? I do not believe that that rupture provides a model for what is happening now. Tragic as it was, the two traditions have managed to live on more or less independently of one another. They do not need one another (or at least they like to pretend that they do not). The tradition from Wittgenstein, on the other hand, simply could not exist in splendid isolation from the rest of philosophy, without losing what I would argue is its very *raison d'être*: critical reflection on the conditions and presuppositions of philosophical thought in general. The way I see it, then, critical interaction with other, more conventional ways of doing philosophy is the very life-blood of the Wittgensteinian tradition. Thus, too, the idea of limiting the teaching of philosophy at university to Wittgensteinian approaches would be logically incongruous. Because of this, it is particularly ironic that analytical philosophers should wish to relegate those working in the tradition from Wittgenstein to their own separate enclave.

Clearly, then, the Wittgensteinian tradition seems to be offering something that the other side does not want. And it cannot simply be the fact that it is criticism, since mutual criticism is the very air that philosophy breathes. What the mainstream is trying to ignore, for some reason, is this particular *form* of criticism. Evidently, it is felt that it is not getting us any-

where, that for some reason these objections are powerless, uninteresting or irrelevant.

## 2. Work on oneself

Why would it be a bad thing for analytical philosophy to disinherit itself from the Wittgensteinian influence? The suggestion I wish to make is contained in the title of this essay. Let it be noted that the word “*trying*” is all-important. I do not mean to suggest that philosophers working in a Wittgensteinian vein are more honest than others. That would give the claim an unwelcome moralistic slant – a pretension that would probably have struck Wittgenstein himself as abhorrent. The point is that for Wittgenstein honesty was *an issue* in philosophy. Wittgenstein’s conception of the difficulties of philosophy differed from that of most philosophers before him because he saw the struggle to maintain one’s intellectual honesty as *internal* to the difficulties of philosophy.

This aspect is made explicit in some of the manuscripts preparatory for *Philosophical Investigations* more clearly than it is in the *Investigations* themselves.<sup>2</sup> In *Culture and Value* we read the oft-quoted remark (*CV* p. 24, from 1931):

Work on philosophy – like work in architecture in many respects – is really more [rather] work on oneself. On one’s own conception. On how one sees things. (And what one expects from them.)

And in 1947 Wittgenstein wrote (*CV* p. 68):

In fact it is already a seed of good originality not to want to be what you are not.

In the Big Typescript from the early 30’s, there is the following chapter heading:

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2. Why is that the case? Presumably because Wittgenstein was trying to downplay the sloganeering element in his work; the effort at honesty should show itself rather than be explicitly articulated; in fact, this could be considered integral to the striving for honesty. On this, cf. the sketch for a preface to *Philosophische Bemerkungen*, *Culture and Value*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 10 f.

DIFFICULTY OF PHILOSOPHY NOT THE INTELLECTUAL DIFFICULTY OF THE SCIENCES, BUT THE DIFFICULTY OF A CHANGE OF ATTITUDE. RESISTANCES OF THE WILL MUST BE OVERCOME.<sup>3</sup>

What makes the difficulties of philosophy so intractable, Wittgenstein thought, is the fact that in grappling with them we must constantly struggle against our intellectual temptations. I shall try to bring out the nature of this concern by focusing on certain themes in Wittgenstein's later thought. What I shall have to say has the form of a meditation on three remarks by Wittgenstein. My comments on them can be seen as an attempt to come at the same theme from three slightly different directions.

### 3. Bringing words back

The first remark is *PI* § 116:

When philosophers use a word – “knowledge”, “being”, “object”, “I”, “sentence”, “name” – and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? –

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

Philosophers tend to be suspicious of the idea that they should be under an obligation to “bring words back to their everyday use”. Wittgenstein, one might think, is just arbitrarily assigning a normative or honorary status to everyday language. Are not all the specialized forms of discourse of the various academic disciplines legitimate in their own contexts? If the right to stray from ordinary usage is granted to the other disciplines, why should not the same courtesy be extended to philosophers: do not they, too, have a need for their own conceptual apparatus? Wittgenstein here seems to be indulging in an arbitrary piece of philosophical law-making, thus infringing

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3. “Philosophy”. In J. Klagge and A. Nordmann (eds.), *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), p. 161.

his own aphorism that philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language but can only describe it.

Now those who attribute this view to Wittgenstein have simply read this remark carelessly (under the influence, perhaps, of the “ordinary language” school of thought).<sup>4</sup> There is no suggestion here that anything is to be prohibited. First, Wittgenstein is recommending that we take up a certain attitude towards the philosopher who claims to be trying to grasp “the essence” of the object of his inquiry. Second, he is giving an account of his own method in philosophy: when the philosopher says something, say, about knowledge (e.g. that there can be no genuine knowledge of empirical facts, for instance, since the possibility of error can never absolutely be excluded), we should try to bring that claim into contact with the ways in which knowledge is spoken about in actual contexts.

Consider G.E. Moore as someone who was trying to make a (different) claim about the essence of knowledge. In saying things like, “I know that this is a hand”, he wanted to give an example of a knowledge-claim that no one could question. Much of Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty* is taken up with an effort to show why Moore’s attempt to refute scepticism in this way is misguided. Wittgenstein does so, in part, by reminding us that we would not claim to know the sorts of thing Moore gives as examples of knowledge, or we might do so at most in very unusual circumstances. On the other hand, Wittgenstein asks, “Why doesn’t Moore produce as one of the things that he knows, for example, that in such-and-such a part of England there is a village called so-and-so? In other words, why doesn’t he mention a fact that is known to him and not to *every one* of us?”<sup>5</sup> (*OC* § 462). The advantage of such an example would have been that it brings to life the sort of discussion in which someone might actually make a claim to know something. Here is a situation in which something may actually *depend* on how the issue is resolved, and where people have some idea of what would be relevant

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4. On this issue I largely agree with the reading of *PI* § 116 put forward by the late Gordon Baker, in “Wittgenstein on Metaphysical/Everyday Use”, *The Philosophical Quarterly* 52 (2002), pp. 289–302; however, in my opinion Baker slightly overstates the prevalence of the “ordinary language” reading of Wittgenstein that he criticizes.

5. Here is a problem in the formulation which is symptomatic of the whole of *On Certainty*.

arguments in favour of or against the claim. In such a context something will count as being justified or not justified in making the claim.<sup>6</sup>

What Moore thinks he needs in order to make his point against the sceptic is a claim that could not turn out false whatever happened. If a knowledge-claim is only conditionally (hypothetically) valid, it is not strictly speaking a knowledge-claim. It is not a counter-case to the sceptic. However, Moore appears to be confusing the requirement that a claim should be *unconditionally valid* with its *validity being independent of its context*, a confusion he shares with the sceptic. The context is not something that conditions a claim; on the contrary, it is from the context that we can understand what is involved in making some claim unconditionally. If I accept a claim as unconditionally valid *in a specific situation*, I need not worry about the fact that the same words, in a different situation, might express a claim that is unwarranted or false.

What gets scepticism going is the demand that we should find some knowledge-claim that could not be doubted regardless of context. Since we have no idea what that could be, we feel we have to concede the sceptic's case; yet at the same time, outside the seminar room, we go on using the word "knowledge" much as before. The problem of scepticism arises, and lives on, just as long as language stays on holiday. However, since Moore does not realize this, what makes these examples seem particularly powerful to him is precisely that which makes them into non-examples of knowledge-claims.

It might be thought that I have a lot riding here on the notion of a context. How can we tell whether the context is or is not the same, for instance? This question would be pertinent if it were thought to be the task of philosophical inquiry to decide which matters can be known with certainty. But that is not the point. Rather, it is simply a matter of reminding ourselves how knowledge-claims are used; that they are put forward and adjudicated in various ways by actual people in actual situations. "I know this" is one of the things we may say in the course of a conversation, but so is "No, you're wrong!", or "How can you be so certain?" The question of

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6. The point is not that "know" requires disagreement, even though cases of disagreement provide a very good illustration of the dynamics of some uses of the word.

what we do or do not have a right to say is raised and settled in those particular situations. The idea that there might be some standard for the correct use of our expressions independent of their actual use is an illusion.

The ultimate aim of the philosophical activity is to make us recognize that there was nothing there that we wanted to say.

In fact, the conventional retort to Wittgenstein's remark about metaphysical and everyday use, according to which "philosophy must have a right to its own specialized terminology" is disingenuous, since at the same time the philosophers who invoke this defence are presuming to tell us a deeper truth about what *we* understand by knowledge. In other words, the philosopher claims the right to use a word differently from others, and yet *mean* the same by it. As Wittgenstein remarks (*PI* § 117):

You say to me: "You understand this expression, don't you? Well then – I am using it in the sense you are familiar with." – As if the sense were an atmosphere accompanying the word, which it carried with it into every kind of application. If, for example, someone says that the sentence "This is here" (saying which he points to an object in front of him) makes sense to him, then he should ask himself in what special circumstances this sentence is actually used. There it does make sense.<sup>7</sup>

The problem with the sceptic's examples as well as with Moore's response is that they paralyse our imagination. Moore, it appears, is afflicted with a condition which is an occupational hazard with most analytical philosophers: what I should like to call *use-deafness*. By this I do not simply mean insensitivity to differences in nuance between various closely related expressions, but a more radical deficiency: the failure to ask oneself in what situations a certain type of utterance might actually be made, and how the sense of it depends on what the speaker is doing in making it. We test words on our tongue in the solitude of our study, and in doing so we grossly underestimate our inability to imagine the real life of the expressions we are considering. If the philosopher makes a comment, say, about knowledge, and we are

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7. "In diesen hat er *dann* Sinn." (My italics.) Cf. *CV* p. 50, where Wittgenstein has amended the second sentence in the remark as follows: "Well, the way you always understand it is the way I too am using it." This formulation seems to sharpen the paradox.



unable to imagine any actual situation that might be illuminated by the comment, it is doubtful whether the comment can be said to have clarified anything at all.

What I have called use-deafness is closely related to what Wittgenstein called a one-sided diet of examples. This brings us to our second theme.

#### 4. A one-sided diet

The second remark I wish to comment on is *PI* § 593:

A main cause of philosophical disease – a one-sided diet: one nourishes one's thinking with only one kind of example.

Most philosophers use examples to a greater or lesser extent as part of their argument or presentation. However, their attitude towards the use of examples will vary a great deal. Examples are often used for what we might call illustrative purposes. Telling a little story may be a convenient way of conveying to one's reader something that one feels one is already clear about. Here, the thinking is done, as it were, in the space *between* the examples.

A somewhat more ambitious use of examples is that of counter-examples in argument: someone puts forward a general claim or theory about the conditions for applying a certain concept, and his interlocutor tries to rebut him by proposing an instance where we would not apply the concept even though the proposed condition is fulfilled, or an instance where we would apply the concept although the condition is not fulfilled. A well-known case in point would be the so-called Gettier examples in the theory of knowledge – cases in which someone holds what might be considered a justified true belief, but still would not be said to have knowledge.<sup>8</sup> The value of this use of examples and of this whole form of argument is limited however; for in concentrating on the specific instances to which a concept purportedly applies, we neglect to ask ourselves what we *do* in applying the concept. The Gettier examples lose their puzzling aspect, I would suggest, as soon as we consider what, in a particular instance, hangs on the decision whether someone is to be said to have known or not to have known a certain thing. (Con-

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8. Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?", *Analysis* 23 (1963), pp. 121–3.

sider, say, the way the question might arise in a criminal case, in connection with a test at school, in trying to figure out one's adversary's next move in a chess game, etc.) In the interchange between theory and counter-example, our understanding of the nature of the issue is left unchallenged.

However, there is another way of using examples in which reflecting on cases becomes part of the work of clarification itself. This happens when we do not know where we are going, or when we think we know but the example takes us by surprise. I would suggest being open to this possibility is tremendously important in philosophy, since it is what enables us to make new discoveries; it is very hard too, since it means being prepared to relinquish our control over where the line of thought is taking us.

Teaching students to do philosophy is partly a matter of teaching them the patience to stop and look for examples. It is only from examples that they can find out what it is they are trying to say. But this requires fighting their impulses; having to look for examples, they feel, slows them down, does not let them get where they want to go, or only gets them there by a detour. The hardest thing is to stop worrying about how, or when, you are going to get where you are going.

I should like to suggest that in this respect there is a continuum between good philosophy and good literature. D.H. Lawrence once said, "If you try to nail anything down, in the novel, either it kills the novel, or the novel gets up and goes away with the nail."<sup>9</sup> A similar attitude is sometimes expressed by writers of fiction who insist that they cannot control or predict what their characters will do. Writers who say this are not necessarily being coy, but may be expressing an insight that is connected with the sense in which literature may help us discover things.

Wittgenstein evidently thought that something very similar was true for philosophy: in response to the idea that all games *must* have something in common he said, "Don't think, but look!". In this respect, his view of the discipline constitutes a reversal of the conventional view: philosophy, it has usually been thought, is precisely the art of nailing things down. Almost

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9. In "Morality and the Novel", *Selected Literary Criticism*, p. 110. Quoted in D.Z. Phillips, *Through a Darkening Glass: Philosophy, Literature and Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), p. 60. (I would not vouch for how well Lawrence himself lived up to this insight.)

inevitably, the received understanding of philosophy has coloured the reading of Wittgenstein himself: there have been endless arguments as to whether or not he actually *did* try to establish that there cannot be solitary speakers, that there is no such thing as private experience, that meaning is use, etc. (It must be because of the central role of examples in the *Philosophical Investigations* and their nearly total absence from the *Tractatus* that the distance between those two works has seemed to many to be so great.)

The use of examples in philosophy is sometimes misunderstood. It might be thought that their use as tools of thought must be in conflict with the understanding of philosophy as a reflective exercise rather than an empirical investigation. And there is some confusion as to what examples are supposed to prove, or in what sense anything can be *learnt* from fantastic thought experiments or from examples taken from fiction. The point, of course, is that examples are not supposed to provide new information, rather they are a method for making us face up to what we already know. (Ever since Socrates, one would like to say, philosophy has existed in the space between what we like to think we understand and what we really do understand.)

The primary function of examples in philosophy, I want to say, is to confront us with ourselves *wanting to say a certain thing*. It is not so much a matter of deciding what kinds of thing are possible in the world or in language, as of getting clear about what we might be trying to do *in* actually saying this or that. An important form of this is what has sometimes been called “Wittgensteinian irony”. This, in a sense, is the opposite of a counter-example. It is the move of responding to a general claim by offering a case where the claim does seem to fit – and then pointing out how special that case is. (The classical instance of this is the builders’ game, offered in response to Augustine’s account of language learning.)

The uses and misuses of examples by philosophers is a topic that might well be worth a study of its own. In particular, it might be interesting to compare the way examples are used by Wittgenstein and by the philosophers who have been inspired by him. Wittgenstein’s own examples are often sparse, sometimes (intentionally) quite outlandish, like the case of the shopkeeper who counts the apples up to five, then checks their colour against a colour chart, or the case of imagining turning to stone while one is in pain, or the tribe where you pay for wood by the area, not the volume. O.K. Bouwsma’s and Stanley Cavell’s examples are imaginative, while those

of Rush Rhees are usually down-to-earth, taken from everyday life, from the world around us. Jakob Meløe has continued along this path, using elaborate examples from his own life-world, examples which he leaves to speak for themselves, keeping the philosophical commentary at a minimum. Peter Winch and D.Z. Phillips tend to use stories from literature. The American philosopher Don S. Levi, inspired, I believe, by Bouwsma, grabs the philosophers' examples by the horns, showing how a position can be dissolved very effectively by taking the philosopher at his word, by imagining that he is speaking a language we can all understand rather than engaging in verbal fantasy.<sup>10</sup>

## 5. The rabbit case

To see how attitudes towards examples may differ, we might think of a case in which what is introduced for the sake of harmless illustration may itself come alive, turn into a tool for exploration. One of the best-known examples in contemporary philosophy comes from *Word and Object* by W.V.O. Quine (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1960):

A rabbit scurries by, the native says "Gavagai", and the linguist notes down the sentence "Rabbit" (or "Lo, a rabbit") as tentative translation, subject to testing in further cases. (p. 29)

Later Quine comments:

Who knows but what the objects to which this term ["gavagai"] applies are not rabbits after all, but mere stages, or brief temporal segments, of rabbits? In either event the stimulus situations that prompt assent to "Gavagai" would be the same as for "Rabbit". Or perhaps the objects to which "gavagai" applies are all and sundry undetached parts of rabbits; again, the stimulus meaning would register no difference. When from the sameness of stimulus meanings of "Gavagai" and "Rabbit" the linguist leaps to the conclusion that a gavagai is a whole enduring rabbit, he is just taking for granted that the native is enough like us to have a brief

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10. See, e.g., "The Liar Parody", *Philosophy* 63 (1988), pp. 43–62; "The Gettier Problem and the Parable of Ten Coins", *Philosophy* 70 (1995), pp. 5–25; *In Defense of Informal Logic* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000).

general term for rabbits and no brief general term for rabbit stages or parts. (pp. 51 f)

The example has a central role in Quine's argument for the indeterminacy of translation: we cannot strictly speaking know whether some morpheme of our language is a correct translation of some morpheme in an alien language, since all we have to go on, as far as the alien language is concerned, is the correlation between the natives' uttering the word and their being exposed to a certain stimulus; and any given stimulus is compatible with any number of different translations into our own language. Thus, since we cannot take it for granted that the natives are similar to us in their patterns of interest and attention, we have no logically compelling reason to assume that the word that comes the most naturally to mind when we are exposed to a certain stimulus will be the one that comes most naturally to mind when the native is.

However, when we consider this example more closely, it comes to look rather peculiar. What precisely are the linguist and his informant, let's call them Robinson and Friday, up to out there on the moor (as I imagine them)? What does Friday take himself to be doing? Is he acting the part of informant? And if he is, how does he understand his part? Does he realize that Robinson is studying his language, and is he clear what kind of activity that is? Or are we to suppose that he goes about his life as usual, addressing Robinson the way he would one of his tribesmen (as people who are unused to foreign speakers will sometimes do)? If so, what reason do we have to suppose that he is indicating the species of the animal scurrying by, let alone talking about rabbit stages or undetached rabbit parts? Are rabbits rare in those parts? Do rabbit parts have a special importance in their culture (the way rabbit paws are said to bring luck in some parts of the world)? Does the word "Gavagai!" press forth in astonishment, is it a warning, an exhortation to get the gun or the camera ready, an aesthetic response, or something else?

In short: does Friday have a life at all? The point is that it does not seem to matter. On Quine's account, the speaker can be ignored, he is transparent, a mere appendage to the language: his role is reduced to the production of sounds in the presence of a stimulus. But if his life is kept out of the picture, what we are left with is not a language, just pointless phonic responses. And hence it is not clear what light the example is supposed to throw on the

nature of reference or translation. Quine, we might say, is trying to get by on a one-sided diet of examples; or better perhaps, a one-sided *use* of examples: as it were, pussyfooting around the example in fear of getting his feet wet.

## 6. Pretensions are a mortgage

I wish to conclude by commenting on *OC* § 549:

Pretensions are a mortgage which burdens a philosopher's capacity to think.

In mortgaging your house for a loan you limit your freedom to dispose of your property according to your own judgment. Wittgenstein apparently thinks that a philosopher who sets up a goal for herself is similarly giving up the freedom to follow her thought where it takes her. For instance, she is no longer at liberty to question the terms in which she has defined her goal – since that would entail being ready, if need be, to relinquish the very idea of that goal as unintelligible.

Philosophers are all acquainted with the dreaded question: “What is it that you philosophers really do?”, and with the difficulty of coming up with an answer that will satisfy one's interlocutor concerning the *utility* of one's trade. Our reaction to this difficulty may be divided: we are perhaps embarrassed by it, feeling that we *should* be able to come up with an answer. In groping about for an answer, we realize that the formulations we may think of as ways of defining our job are formulations that make sense only from within a philosophical perspective. They will only be intelligible, or at any rate will only seem like important things to do, to someone who is already prepared to share our excitement about the activity. And so, it seems, we can only justify our preoccupations to someone who does not need to have them justified to himself. At other times, perhaps, we have felt an impulse to rise to the challenge, and to give a characterization of the sort of contribution we take ourselves to be making, in terms external to philosophy itself. Thus, philosophers from time to time will maintain that the profession derives its importance from its ability to contribute to the advancement of rational thought, or to the progress of science, or to the emancipation of mankind from certain oppressive structures, or to social or individual harmony, etc.<sup>11</sup>

However, even when philosophers do define the contribution they want to make in some such terms, one should beware of taking their declarations too literally. They are perhaps victims of the prejudice that any rational activity must have a rationale. In fact, in explaining the importance of philosophy, philosophers for the most part will not be identifying the purpose by which they themselves *actually* set their compasses. Rather, their declarations tend to be a kind of ornamental coping. This should be clear from the fact that a divergence of declared purposes does not necessarily prevent philosophers from fruitfully engaging together in discussion. Thus, it seems, regardless of their own claims, the work of philosophers usually does not get its direction from external purposes, but from inside itself. Recalling Otto Neurath's comparison of philosophers to sailors who have to rebuild their ship on the open sea without the possibility of putting it into a dry dock and taking it apart, we might say that they are even stranger sailors still, since they can go on interacting in what seems, in some sense, to be a single navigational enterprise without having agreed on where they are going.<sup>12</sup>

On Wittgenstein's conception, the wish to explain what philosophy is about is a temptation we should resist. In philosophy we are looking at the world through the eyes of bewilderment. If someone else is bewildered and you cannot experience her bewilderment, you cannot help her in philosophy. We might say: bewilderment gives philosophy its direction; or better perhaps: in philosophy there *are* no directions. Being bewildered means that you do not know where you are going. "A philosophical problem has the form: 'I don't know my way about'" (*PI* § 123). If you knew where you were going, you would no longer be bewildered, hence in that instant you would have left philosophy behind. Wishing to explain *why* certain ques-

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11. Rudolf Carnap sums up Otto Neurath's view of philosophy's task in the following, all-encompassing terms: "Philosophy leads to an improvement in scientific ways of thinking and thereby to a better understanding of all that is going on in the world, both in nature and in society; this understanding in turn serves to improve human life." Rudolf Carnap, "Autobiography", in P.A. Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*, La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Press, 1963; pp. 23 f. (Carnap himself was more modest in his philosophical pretensions.)
  12. For all this, I do not wish to deny that it is important for a philosopher to reflect on the relation of her work to the world in which she lives. I am only saying something about the conditions for such self-reflection.

tions bewilder us is already going beyond philosophy. So we could say, to want to set an agenda for your work in philosophy is to side-step philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

What must be resisted in philosophy is the urge to think that we are already clear about *the main thing*. An expression of this urge is the metaphysical must: the idea that we can tell how things are without looking: “it *must* be like this.” This goes with the idea that in matters of reflection as opposed to empirical matters we always already know the answers.

The danger of this attitude – what we might call apriorism – is that we remain locked in the cage of our preconceived notions. Wherever we look we only seem to see our own ideas confirmed. We might travesty Wittgenstein’s own words: “Not empiricism and not yet apriorism in philosophy, that is the hardest thing.” The greatest loss to analytical philosophy, if the impulses from Wittgenstein were finally silenced, would be the loss of something that can bring us out of our self-preoccupation.

Large parts of the intellectual aspect of Wittgenstein’s philosophy have been taken up into the blood-stream of analytic philosophy. However, the existential aspect of his philosophy – his attitude to philosophy and life – has been resisted by academic philosophers. Perhaps it would have been naïve to expect any different reaction. The question that remains to be asked is whether the intellectual insights have any real value if they do not get their light from something deeper, or higher. Wittgenstein himself thought they do not:

Is what I am doing in any way worth the effort? Well only, if it receives a light from above ... If the light from above is *lacking*, then I can in any case be no more than clever. (CV p. 66)<sup>14</sup>

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13. On this, cf. Rush Rhees, “The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy”, *Philosophical Investigations* 17 (1994), pp. 573–586; D.Z. Phillips, *Philosophy’s Cool Place* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), esp. chap. 3.

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