

DISENCHANTING PHILOSOPHY

WITTGENSTEIN, AUSTIN, AND THE
APPEAL TO ORDINARY LANGUAGE

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For Granma and Coof

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

– T. S. Eliot

David ... plays well with others.

– Suzanne Garvin, Kindergarten teacher

ABSTRACT

DISENCHANTING PHILOSOPHY: WITTGENSTEIN, AUSTIN, AND THE APPEAL TO ORDINARY LANGUAGE

David Egan • Oriel College • DPhil in Philosophy • Revised version 27 October 2011

This thesis examines the appeal to ordinary language as a distinctive methodological feature in the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the work of J. L. Austin. This appeal situates our language and concepts within the broader forms of life in which we use them, and seeks to ‘disenchant’ idealizations that extract our language and concepts from this broader context. A disenchanted philosophy recognizes our forms of life as manifestations of attunement: a shared common ground of understanding and behaviour that cannot itself be further explained or justified. By working through the consequences of seeing our forms of life as ultimately ungrounded in this way, the thesis illuminates the underlying importance of play to shared practices like language.

The first two chapters consider the appeal to ordinary language as it features in the work of Austin and Wittgenstein, respectively. By placing each author in turn in dialogue with Jacques Derrida, the thesis draws out the importance of seeing our attunement as ungrounded, and the difficulty of doing so. Austin’s appeal to a ‘total context’ betrays the sort of idealization Austin himself opposes, whereas Wittgenstein and Derrida must remain self-reflexively vigilant in order to avoid the same pitfall.

Chapter Three explores connections between the appeal to ordinary language and Martin Heidegger’s analysis of ‘average everydayness’ in *Being and Time*. Heidegger takes average everydayness to be a mark of inauthenticity. However, in acknowledging the ungroundedness of attunement, the appeal to ordinary language manifests a turn similar to Heidegger’s appeal to authenticity. Furthermore, Wittgenstein’s use of conceptual ‘pictures’ also allows him to avoid some of the confusions in Heidegger’s work.

Chapter Four considers the nature of our ungrounded attunement, and argues that we both discover and create this attunement through play, which is unregulated activity that itself gives rise to regularity.

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In addition, I've benefitted from feedback and helpful conversations from a number of other people. Among faculty, I thank P. M. S. Hacker, Joseph Schear, John Hyman, Edward Harcourt, Denis McManus, Anita Avramides, Lizzie Fricker, and Ronald de Sousa. And among peers, I thank Mark Thakkar, Gabriel Citron, Rob Penney, Aaron Wendland, Steve Reynolds, Damien Storey, Gail Leckie, and Cathal Ó Madagáin. Some of the work in this thesis began as papers in Master's and undergraduate courses in philosophy, and I'm grateful to Warren Goldfarb, Mark Kingwell, and Sonia Sedivy for providing those initial pushes.

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Kató Havas and Catherine Offord have seen me through the last four years with tremendous love, patience, and support. Both have been honest and thoughtful sounding boards for my ideas, and reminders of the importance of the life that extends beyond those ideas. I dedicate this thesis to them with gratitude and love.

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CONVENTIONS USED IN THIS MANUSCRIPT

I use single quotation marks for ‘scare’ quotes, where the expression within the quotation marks is used, and double quotation marks for expressions—like the word “expression” here—that are mentioned and not used. I place quotations from other authors within double quotation marks, and embedded quotation marks alternate between single and double quotation marks, regardless of whether the expression is used or mentioned.

Within quotations, I use *italics* to denote the author’s emphases and **bold** to denote my own emphases.

I use the following abbreviations to refer to some of the texts cited in this manuscript:

- | | |
|------------|--|
| <i>AWL</i> | Wittgenstein, L. (1979b). <i>Wittgenstein’s Lectures, Cambridge 1932 - 35, from the Notes of Alice Ambrose and Margaret MacDonald</i> . Alice Ambrose, Ed. Oxford: Blackwell. |
| <i>BB</i> | Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1969). <i>Preliminary Studies for the “Philosophical Investigations”</i> : Generally known as the <i>Blue and Brown Books</i> (2nd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell. |

- BT* Heidegger, Martin. (1996). *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*. Joan Stambaugh, Trans. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- CPR* Kant, Immanuel. (1997). *Critique of Pure Reason*. Paul Guyer & Allen W. Wood, Ed. & Trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- CR* Cavell, Stanley. (1979). *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- CV* Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1998). *Culture and Value* (2nd ed.). G. H. von Wright, Hekki Nyman & Alois Pichler, Eds., Peter Winch, Trans. Oxford: Blackwell.
- HDTW* Austin, J. L. (1975). *How To Do Things With Words* (2nd ed.). J. O. Urmson, & Marina Sbisa, Eds. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- LFM* Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1976). *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics: Cambridge, 1939*. Cora Diamond, Ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- LI* Derrida, Jacques. (1988c). Limited Inc a b c... . In *Limited Inc*. Samuel Weber, Trans. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 29 – 110.
- LRB* Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1966). Lectures on Religious Belief. In Ludwig Wittgenstein & Cyril Barrett (Ed.), *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*. Oxford: Blackwell, 53 – 72.
- OC* Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1975a). *On Certainty*. G. E. M. Anscombe, G. H. von Wright, Eds., & G. E. M. Anscombe, G. H. von Wright, Denis Paul, Trans. Oxford: Blackwell.
- OG* Derrida, Jacques. (1976). *Of Grammatology*. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Trans. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

- PG* Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1980c). *Philosophical Grammar*. Rush Rhees, Ed., & Anthony Kenny, Trans. Oxford: Blackwell.
- PI* Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (2009a). *Philosophical Investigations* (4th ed.). P. M. S. Hacker, Joachim Schulte, Eds., G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, & Joachim Schulte, Trans. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- PPb* Austin, J. L. (1979b). Are There A Priori Concepts? In *Philosophical Papers* (3rd ed.). J. O. Urmson, & G. J. Warnock, Eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 32 – 54.
- PPc* Austin, J. L. (1979c). The Meaning of a Word. In *Philosophical Papers* (3rd ed.). J. O. Urmson, & G. J. Warnock, Eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 55 – 75.
- PPd* Austin, J. L. (1979d). Other Minds. In *Philosophical Papers* (3rd ed.). J. O. Urmson, & G. J. Warnock, Eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 76 – 116.
- PPe* Austin, J. L. (1979e). Truth. In *Philosophical Papers* (3rd ed.). J. O. Urmson, & G. J. Warnock, Eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 117 – 133.
- PPf* Austin, J. L. (1979f). How to Talk—some simple ways. In *Philosophical Papers* (3rd ed.). J. O. Urmson, & G. J. Warnock, Eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 134 – 153.
- PPF* Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (2009b). Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment. In Wittgenstein 2009a, 182 – 243.
- PPg* Austin, J. L. (1979g). Unfair to Facts. In *Philosophical Papers* (3rd ed.). J. O. Urmson, & G. J. Warnock, Eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 154 – 174.
- PPh* Austin, J. L. (1979h). A Plea for Excuses. In *Philosophical Papers* (3rd ed.). J. O. Urmson, & G. J. Warnock, Eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 175 – 204.

- PPi* Austin, J. L. (1979i). Ifs and Cans. In *Philosophical Papers* (3rd ed.). J. O. Urmson, & G. J. Warnock, Eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 205 – 232.
- PPj* Austin, J. L. (1979j). Performative Utterances. In *Philosophical Papers* (3rd ed.). J. O. Urmson, & G. J. Warnock, Eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 233 – 252.
- PPk* Austin, J. L. (1979k). Pretending. In *Philosophical Papers* (3rd ed.). J. O. Urmson, & G. J. Warnock, Eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 253 – 271.
- PR* Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1975b). *Philosophical Remarks*. Rush Rhees, Ed., Raymond Hargreaves & Roger White, Trans. Oxford: Blackwell.
- RFM* Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1978). *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (3rd ed.). G. H. von Wright, Rush Rhees, G. E. M. Anscombe, Eds., & G. E. M. Anscombe, Trans. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sec* Derrida, Jacques. (1988b). Signature Event Context. In *Limited Inc.* Samuel Weber, Trans. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1 – 23.
- SS* Austin, J. L. (1962). *Sense and Sensibilia*. G. J. Warnock, Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- TLP* Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1974). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. D. F. Pears, & B. F. McGuinness, Trans. London: Routledge.
- WM* Derrida, Jacques. (1982). White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy. In *Margins of Philosophy*, Alan Bass, Trans. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 207 – 272.
- Z* Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1967). *Zettel*. G. E. M. Anscombe, G. H. von Wright, Eds. & G. E. M. Anscombe, Trans. Oxford: Blackwell.

INTRODUCTION

There is a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in.

– Leonard Cohen

0.1. What is ‘ordinary language’?

This thesis offers an extended discussion of the appeal to ordinary language. It features Ludwig Wittgenstein in the starring role, with J. L. Austin as the gallant but flawed co-star. Other principal characters include Jacques Derrida and Martin Heidegger, whose similar aims but different approaches bring our hero's quest into clear relief, and Stanley Cavell, whose understanding of that quest significantly shapes my own. While Wittgenstein is the hero of the piece, this thesis is only *about* Wittgenstein in the sense that a drama is *about* its protagonist. The point of a story emerges through the hero's struggle, and the instructive virtues the hero exemplifies. Similarly, the point of this thesis is to defend an approach to philosophy of which Wittgenstein is the most consistent, rigorous, and deep-thinking exemplar. In this respect, the thesis is both historical and normative: it involves frequent, and occasionally bold, exegesis with a mind to making clear not just what Wittgenstein thought, but also—with the help of Wittgenstein and others—what the appeal to ordinary language is and why it is important.

What, then, is this appeal to ordinary language?¹ We might need to ‘appeal’ to ordinary language only if we have lost sight of it, or have lost our bearings with regard to it. And the appeal to a distinctively ‘ordinary’ language suggests a contrast with some sort of ‘non-ordinary’ or ‘extra-ordinary’ language that doesn’t fall under its purview. What forms of language does this term exclude, and how, and why? And if the appeal to ordinary language places its limits around a partial domain of possible language use, do these limits also reveal limitations to the scope and depth of this approach to philosophy?

Let me first rule out two kinds of contrast that are not central to the understanding of ordinary language I develop here. The first is technical or scientific language, whose competent use requires specialized training, in contrast with the ordinary language that any competent speaker can use confidently. This contrast does not seem to concern either Wittgenstein or Austin greatly,² nor is the appeal to ordinary language confined to areas of thought where non-technical language is sufficient. Wittgenstein engages at length with the foundations of mathematics, and he does not deviate in his approach when dealing with cardinal numbers or infinite series. I also do not intend the contrast between ordinary and literary language: Wittgenstein does not dwell on it, nor does it feature in Austin’s programmatic remarks in “A Plea for Excuses”. In Chapter One, we will see that Austin creates problems for himself by occasionally adopting both of these contrasts, but these

¹ I talk about ‘the appeal to ordinary language’ rather than ‘Ordinary Language Philosophy’ because I am considering an approach to philosophy and not a distinct philosophical school. Wittgenstein had little personal contact with Oxford philosophy and equally little in common temperamentally with the Oxford dons (the latter helping to explain the former), and even within Oxford there was great diversity in approaches and points of view. Some Oxford philosophers were more influenced by Wittgenstein’s later philosophy than others, and Austin was among the less influenced (Hacker 1996, 172).

² In a number of scattered remarks (e.g. *CV*, 9, 20, 42, 46, 53, 56, 64, 69, 70, 91, as well as the foreword to *PR*) Wittgenstein shows himself to be sceptical of, if not hostile to, the scientific spirit of the age. These concerns are part of a larger worldview that finds expression in his work as a whole. However, his concerns about science and scientism do not turn on the contrast between ordinary and scientific language, nor does his interest in ordinary language dwell on this contrast.

aren't the contrasts that motivate the use of "ordinary" as a qualifier in most cases, certainly not the cases that I find most instructive.

When Wittgenstein and Austin appeal to ordinary language, the term of contrast is usually "philosophy" or "metaphysics" or the aspiration to something ideal:

[W]e are not *striving after* an **ideal**, as if our **ordinary** vague sentences had not yet got a quite unexceptionable sense, and a perfect language still had to be constructed by us. (*PI* §98)

What *we* do is to bring words back from their **metaphysical** to their **everyday** use. (*PI* §116)

My general opinion about [sense-data theory] is that it is a typically *scholastic* view, attributable, first, to an obsession with a few particular words, the uses of which are over-simplified, not really understood or carefully studied or correctly described; and second, to an obsession with a few (and nearly always the same) half-studied 'facts'. (I say "scholastic", but I might just as well have said "**philosophical**"; over-simplification, schematization, and constant obsessive repetition of the same small range of jejune 'examples' are not only peculiar to this case, but far too common to be dismissed as an occasional weakness of philosophers. (*SS*, 3)

The beginning of sense, not to say wisdom, is to realize that "doing an action", as used in **philosophy** [footnote: "This use has little to do with the more down-to-earth occurrences of 'action' in **ordinary speech**"], is a highly abstract expression—it is a stand-in used in the place of any (or almost any?) verb with a personal subject, in the same sort of way that "thing" is a stand-in for any (or when we remember, almost any) noun substantive, and "quality" a stand-in for the adjective. Nobody, to be sure, relies on such dummies quite implicitly quite indefinitely. Yet notoriously it is possible to arrive at, or to derive the idea for, an over-simplified **metaphysics** from the obsession with 'things' and their 'qualities'. (*PPb*, 178)

The use of "ordinary language" in contrast with either technical or literary language singles out a limited domain of language, where supplementary domains are

warranted by particular demands placed upon language that exceed its everyday employment. By contrast, these quotations do not set ordinary language in contrast with a distinctive kind of ‘metaphysical’ or ‘philosophical’ *language*. The appeal to ordinary language as I treat it here does not appeal to a particular domain of language as against a rival, degenerate domain of language. The ‘philosophy’ or ‘metaphysics’ of which Wittgenstein and Austin are critical is not a domain of language at all. One of the recurrent terms of criticism in the appeal to ordinary language is “nonsense”: philosophers who misuse ordinary language speak nonsense, and so, strictly speaking, are not *saying* anything.

Although technical jargon is often a sign that something fishy is going on, the appeal to ordinary language does not reject this or any other range of vocabulary. Both Austin (“performative utterance”, “illocutionary act”, “behabitive”) and Wittgenstein (“language-game”, “aspect-blindness”) have their share of coinages, though far fewer than, say, Heidegger. The words and phrases that philosophers use nonsensically are normally not philosophical jargon but those that feature unobtrusively in everyday speech.

In his attack on sense-data theory in *Sense and Sensibilia*, for instance, Austin doesn’t target a technical term like “sense-data” directly, but rather addresses the misuses of ordinary words that create the illusion of a discovery that requires technical vocabulary. Austin sees the philosophical perversion of ordinary language taking place in a two-step process. First, philosophers misuse ordinary words to articulate what they claim to be the common view, and second, they manipulate these misuses to reach a distinctively philosophical position. For instance, A. J. Ayer builds a theory of sense-data by questioning the ‘beliefs’ the ‘ordinary man’ holds about perception, using such words as “material thing”, “delusion”, “illusion”, “seems”, “appears”, “looks like”, and so on. The word “directly” comes under particular scrutiny in Lecture II of *Sense and Sensibilia*: while the ‘ordinary man’ ‘believes’ he sees material things ‘directly’, Ayer contends, philosophers know better. Note that we have already moved beyond what an ‘ordinary man’ would say: first, talk

about what we *believe* we see already prejudices us in favour of doubt (SS, 7), and second, we do not talk about seeing things *directly* if there is not some pertinent alternative of seeing things *indirectly* (SS, 15). In a typical move, Austin reminds us that the adverbs “directly” and “indirectly” cannot apply to all cases of perception: I can see enemy ships directly from the deck, or indirectly through a periscope, but it makes no sense to say that I see the periscope itself ‘directly’ unless there is some alternative, indirect point of view from which I could see it—in a mirror, for instance. Applying the adverb “indirectly” to all cases of perception, as the sense-data theorist does, involves a gross distortion of the word “indirectly”. And yet, the sense-data theorist’s argument rests on our all understanding the word “indirectly” in an undistorted sense. The plausibility of the argument rests on its being grounded in reflections on ordinary perception, but its payoff comes in the revelation that perception is far from what we ordinarily assume. Austin suggests that sense-data theory cannot have its cake and eat it too.

The appeal to ordinary language does not reject a certain kind of vocabulary or usage, but rather a confused way of employing language in general. The contrast with metaphysics is pertinent because the appeal to ordinary language rejects the common assumption—so common that philosophers as different as Bertrand Russell and Martin Heidegger make it central to their practice—that ordinary language inherently harbours metaphysical commitments. The appeal to ordinary language pushes us to look at the language we use free of metaphysical presuppositions, thereby showing how these presuppositions creep into our thought.

0.2. Metaphysical versus everyday: explanation

Let me explore the contrast between ordinary language and metaphysical misuses of language with the concrete example of explanation. The example is not chosen at random: explanation is a *leitmotiv* of the *Philosophical Investigations*. However, Wittgenstein also questions the validity of explanations in philosophy: “All *explanation* must disappear, and description alone must take its place” (PI §109).

Offering an initial exploration of the ways explanations feature in our lives—when they are called for, by what criteria we judge them successful or unsuccessful, and so on: the sort of exploration Wittgenstein calls a “grammatical investigation” (*PI* §90)—serves two purposes. It clarifies the appeal to ordinary language, and at the same time clarifies the place of explanation in the *Investigations*.

Explanation and its anxieties

G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker (2005c) remark that explanation is closely tied to teaching and understanding. Explanations are often (but not always) given in the context of teaching, and while explanations help us to gain knowledge, their primary purpose is to fill gaps in understanding. The child who asks why the sky is blue can see that the sky is blue, but doesn’t understand why it should be blue rather than red or green. The child asks for an explanation not because she doesn’t *know that* the sky is blue, but because she doesn’t *understand why* the sky is blue. Sometimes the gap is felt not by the person receiving the explanation, but by the person giving it. I can volunteer an explanation when I sense that you might benefit from it, or that you don’t realize that you don’t understand something.

The criterion for a successful explanation is that it induces understanding. Whether or not an explanation is successful is external to the explanation: it depends not only on the content of the explanation, but also on the recipient of the explanation. Some people just don’t get it sometimes, and teaching would be a much easier job than it is if some form of explanation guaranteed or compelled understanding. On the other hand, an unsuccessful explanation is no catastrophe: we can always try again with a different explanation that improves upon the previous one by learning from its failure.

Because the success of an explanation depends on the recipient, different explanations are appropriate in different circumstances. No explanation is canonical. If asked to explain the rules of chess, the explanation I give will depend on whether my interlocutor has seen the game played before, whether it’s an adult or a child, a

friend or a stranger, whether the person asks out of curiosity, is about to watch a game, about to play a game, and so on. Some explanations—the kind found in textbooks, for example—address a wide and diverse audience and treat many possible confusions or misunderstandings, but no explanation can address all possible confusions or misunderstandings, or stop up every conceivable gap in understanding. The number of possible gaps is infinite, and any actual explanation is necessarily finite.

Because explanations cannot compel understanding, we never have ironclad guarantees that our explanations will be successful. This lack of guarantee opens up two kinds of anxiety: anxiety about completeness and anxiety about understanding.

The anxiety about completeness is that the gap in understanding may never be closed entirely. Anyone who has spent much time with children—or indeed, anyone who has been a child—is familiar with the vertiginous discovery that any explanation can be met by the question “why?” Though the game of “why?” can be tiresome, it represents an important discovery on the part of the child about the nature of reason and explanation: the chain of reasons or explanations comes to an end not at some first principle, but at the point at which we agree it can come to an end. Wittgenstein explores this anxiety in dialogue with an imagined interlocutor:

“But then how does an explanation help me to understand, if, after all, it is not the final one? In that case the explanation is never completed; so I still don’t understand what he means, and never shall!”—As though an explanation, as it were, hung in the air unless supported by another one. Whereas an explanation may indeed rest on another one that has been given, but none stands in need of another—unless *we* require it to avoid a misunderstanding. One might say: an explanation serves to remove or to prevent a misunderstanding—one, that is, that would arise if not for the explanation, but not every misunderstanding that I can imagine.

It may easily look as if every doubt merely *revealed* a gap in the foundations; so that secure understanding is possible only if we first doubt everything that *can* be doubted, and then remove all these doubts. (*PI* §87)

Explanations neither can be nor need be exhaustive: they cover a particular gap in understanding, and do not aim to cover every conceivable gap. But precisely because they are not exhaustive—because any given explanation may need to be supplemented by a further explanation—they arouse the anxiety that no explanation can be complete.

The second anxiety is that our attempts at explanation may not be understood. Wittgenstein explores this anxiety with the parable of the wayward pupil in *PI* §185:

Then we get the pupil to continue one series (say “+ 2”) beyond 1000—and he writes 1000, 1004, 1008, 1012.

We say to him, “Look what you’re doing!”—He doesn’t understand. We say, “You should have added *two*: look how you began the series!”—He answers, “Yes, isn’t it right? I thought that was how I *had* to do it”.—Or suppose he pointed to the series and said, “But I did go on in the same way”.—It would now be no use to say, “But can’t you see...?”—and go over the old explanations and examples for him again.

The pupil doesn’t claim that the explanation is incomplete, for instance, by noticing two possible ways of going on and showing that we haven’t been given enough to settle which one is correct. The wayward pupil sees only one way of going on, but it’s not the way that the teacher had in mind. To understand the teaching, the pupil must share enough common ground with the teacher to take up the teacher’s instructions and explanations as the teacher expects. The second anxiety is that nothing guarantees this common ground.

Attunement and criteria

This common ground, Wittgenstein claims, is not simply a matter of agreement in opinions but in ‘form of life’ (*PI* §241). Agreeing in forms of life means sharing enough common ground that our lives are intelligible to one another, such that learning, understanding, and explanation are so much as possible between us.

That we can exchange opinions at all, whether to agree or disagree, means we already share enough in common that we recognize each other's opinions as opinions, and share a sense of what it means to have an opinion, to form one, to shift one, and so on. Cavell (*CR*, 32) calls this kind of agreement "attunement":³ what I say not only reaches you, but resonates in you. In an oft-cited passage, Cavell elaborates on this attunement as

a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humour and of significance and of fulfilment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation—all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls "forms of life". (Cavell 1976c, 52)

Cavell introduces this passage by pointing out that nothing ensures this attunement, and follows it by remarking that "[h]uman speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying" (Cavell 1976c, 52). This vision is terrifying because our attunement cannot itself be justified. That we can justify things to one another is part of what it is to be attuned: justifying attunement would be as circular as justifying justification itself. This vision is difficult because it demands a shift of aspect in our thinking, much like the aspect shift we experience when looking at the Necker Cube illusion, where background becomes foreground and vice versa. This shift of aspect reverses the expected order of explanation, showing justification to be a manifestation of attunement rather than treating attunement as itself needing to be justified.

For Cavell, attunement is a matter of sharing criteria: "what philosophically constitutes the everyday *is* 'our criteria' (and the possibility of repudiating them)" (Cavell 1989, 51). Cavell uses "criteria" in a semi-technical sense, and he distinguishes

³ The term in Wittgenstein's German is *Übereinstimmung*, which signifies a pre-established agreement, in contrast with *Einverständnis*, which is the kind of agreement people reach through debate or discussion.

three kinds of criteria: our ordinary conception of criteria, Austinian criteria, and Wittgensteinian criteria.

Criteria ordinarily determine the standards by which a group evaluates an object of assessment. For instance, the size of the splash as the diver enters the water is a criterion for judging a dive, but the colour of the diver's swimsuit isn't. Criteria in diving competitions facilitate evaluative judgments. We know what a dive is, and we have a rough sense of what a beautiful dive is, so the criteria codify evaluations we are already somewhat competent in making.

Austinian and Wittgensteinian criteria apply to words: criteria specify the circumstances in which words or phrases are used, when they are called for, when they are appropriate, what it makes sense to want to say with them, and so on. For instance, Austin (*PPh*, 191 – 193) warns us not to assume that any action can either be described in terms of one adverb (“voluntarily”) or its opposite (“involuntarily”), reminding us that both adverbs have particular, and not exactly complementary, criteria for their use. Unlike the ordinary conception of criteria, Austinian and Wittgensteinian criteria do not help us judge how well a word was used (how well a dive was performed) but rather give us the conditions under which a word is used *simpliciter*.

The difference between Austinian and Wittgensteinian criteria hinges on a distinction Cavell draws between specific and generic objects. A specific object—like a goldfinch or an elm or a Louis XV chaise—is a species of a more general type. Differentia pick out the specific object from other objects of its genus, and we can know what genus an object belongs to without knowing the criteria that distinguish it from other objects of its genus. I know that goldfinches are birds, for instance, and while I can distinguish a goldfinch from an ostrich or a crow, I lack the specialized knowledge that would distinguish a goldfinch from, say, a linnet.

Wittgensteinian criteria, by contrast, apply to generic objects—like birds or trees or chairs—where no question of specialized knowledge arises. Grasping these criteria is a prerequisite for saying or understanding anything with the word at all.

Wittgensteinian criteria tell us that birds are animals, that they have wings and feathers and lay eggs, that, as animals, they're the sorts of things that are alive and can die but can't be rebooted or asserted, that they can look at us but can't smoulder with jealousy as they do so. While Austinian criteria identify specific objects, Wittgensteinian criteria

do not relate a name to an object, but, we might say, various concepts to the concept of that object. Here the test of your possession of a concept ... would be your ability to use the concept in conjunction with other concepts, your knowledge of which concepts are relevant to the one in question and which are not; your knowledge of how various relevant concepts, used in conjunction with the concepts of different kinds of objects, require different kinds of contexts for their competent employment. (CR, 73)

Cavell elaborates on the difference between Wittgensteinian and Austinian objects:

If you do not know the (non-grammatical) criteria of an Austinian object (can't identify it, name it) then you lack a piece of information, a bit of knowledge, and you can be told its name, told what it is, told what it is (officially) called. But if you do not know the grammatical criteria of Wittgensteinian objects, then you lack, as it were, not only a piece of information or knowledge, but the possibility of acquiring any information about such objects *überhaupt*; you cannot be told the name of that object, because there is as yet no *object* of that kind for you to attach a forthcoming name to: the possibility of finding out what it is officially called is not yet open to you. (CR, 77)

Cavell's discussion of criteria helps us to see that the appeal to ordinary language involves looking at how we use words, but it does not involve looking at words *rather than* looking at the world.⁴ The appeal to ordinary language seeks to undermine precisely the distinction between learning the meanings of words and learning about the world. Cavell (1976b, 19) invites us to consider what we learn when

⁴ Austin makes similar claims at *PPc*, 58, *PPd*, 83n2, and *PPb*, 182.

we look up “umiak” in a dictionary: do we learn what “umiak” means or do we learn what an umiak is? Cavell’s answer to this question is “either”:

If this [finding out about the world by looking in a dictionary] seems surprising, perhaps it is because we forget that we learn language and learn the world *together*, that they become elaborated and distorted together, and in the same places. ... When we turned to the dictionary for “umiak” we already knew everything about the word, as it were, but its combination: we knew what a noun is and how to name an object and how to look up a word and what boats are and what an Eskimo is. We were all prepared for that umiak. What seemed like finding the world in a dictionary was really a case of bringing the world to the dictionary. ... [T]he learning is a question of aligning language with the world. What you need to learn will depend on what specifically it is you want to know; and how you can find out will depend specifically on what you already command. (Cavell 1976b, 19 – 20)

In this early essay (Cavell first presented a shorter version of it in 1957), Cavell is very much under Austin’s influence, and he illustrates his point with the example of a specific object. His answer to the question of what we learn when we learn a word—what a thing is or what a thing is called—is “either”. In *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell recognizes that the answer could just as well be “neither” (CR, 170): a dictionary helps us identify a specific object like an umiak, but if we lack the concept for a generic object, a dictionary might not help. Cavell considers the example of a chair:

There are technical handbooks which give us the features of various types and periods of furniture ... but none which teach us what a chair is and what sitting on a chair is. None, we might say, which illustrate the essence of the matter. ... [W]e are to recollect those very general facts of nature or culture which we all, all who can talk and act together, do (must) in fact be using as criteria; facts we only need to recollect, for we cannot fail to know them in the sense of having never acquired them. If someone does not have them, that is not because his studies have been neglected, but because he is for some reason incapable of (or has been given up on as a candidate for) maturing into, or initiation into, full membership in the culture. (CR, 72 – 3)

Compare the dictionary definitions of “umiak” (“A large Eskimo boat, consisting of a wooden frame with skins drawn over it, and propelled by paddles”) and “chair” (“A seat for one person (always implying more or less of comfort and ease); now the common name for the movable four-legged seat with a rest for the back, which constitutes, in many forms of rudeness or elegance, an ordinary article of household furniture, and is also used in gardens or wherever it is usual to sit”).⁵ The definition of “umiak” is clear, to the point, and tells us what we need to know. With the definition of “chair”, we feel the lexicographer floundering, offering a definition that uses a near synonym (“seat”: if you don’t know what a chair is, are you likely to know what a seat is?), draws on inessential features (not all chairs have four legs), and is more than twice as long as the definition of the less familiar word. If you don’t already know what a chair is, we can feel the lexicographer shrugging, looking it up in the dictionary isn’t going to help you.

Criteria do not fix the use of a term absolutely. Cavell imagines a tribe with a strange plank with handles that leaves us uncertain as to whether we should call it a chair (*CR*, 71), and Wittgenstein imagines a chair that vanishes and reappears seemingly at random (*PI* §80). Our criteria for using a word are no more precise or exhaustive than the contexts in which we learn the word and apply it in future cases. Criteria are not a set of fixed rules that dictate how we must go on in every conceivable case any more than an explanation closes up every conceivable gap in understanding. Sharing criteria is sharing attunement: it is a matter of sharing the whole network of concepts and the sense of their significance that allows us to make sense to one another. We agree not just in opinions, but also in form of life: we share not only a vocabulary, but also a sense of what these words are for, what sort of life these words are in service of.

⁵ Both definitions come from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

The ideal of exactness

I presented two anxieties about explanation, which highlighted the fact that our attunement is not guaranteed. Not only does nothing guarantee our attunement in theory, but attunement only takes us so far in fact. Wittgenstein's parable of the wayward pupil is an extreme case, but it points to a more general truth: we can only go so far in making ourselves clear before our attempts at explanation begin to fray. I ordinarily have little trouble explaining how I arrived at a straightforward mathematical result to another person with minimal mathematical competence, but I might struggle to explain to even a close confederate why I find a particular piece of music beautiful or a particular remark insensitive, and my attempts at explanation may fall far short of the mutual understanding I aspire to. The anxieties of completeness and understanding are not simply abstract concerns, but genuine worries.

Anxieties about completeness and understanding motivate the search for explanations that close every possible gap in understanding. Philosophy is essentially an enterprise that pushes for such complete explanations. Philosophers explore the foundations of other disciplines, identifying and resolving gaps in understanding that normally escape notice. Normally we can close gaps in understanding by making our explanations more exact, but the drive for completeness demands explanations that are exact not only for all practical purposes, but in an absolute sense. This demand of absolute exactness in turn requires concepts that are rigidly defined so as to permit no looseness or ambiguity.⁶ This ideal of exactness is rarely made explicit, but it is a *telos*, if not an explicit aim, of much philosophy: our imperfect investigations pursue such ideal explanations asymptotically.

The drive to stop up all gaps in understanding is the drive toward metaphysics. Our ordinary conception of explanation is particular, finite, and local:

⁶ Simon Glendinning (1998, 83 – 92) argues that the ideal of exactness is Wittgenstein's central target, a position he distinguishes from Baker & Hacker's (2005b) emphasis on the Augustinian picture of language.

workaday explanations close particular gaps in understanding and respond to the particular circumstances of the interlocutors. The metaphysical demand placed on explanation is that it transcend its particularity, finitude, and locality, close up every conceivable gap, and compel understanding. This metaphysical demand is not a rival conception of explanation because it isn't a conception of explanation at all. While it makes sense to push for exactness in our explanations, the ideal of absolute exactness ceases to have any use at all:

If I tell someone "Stay roughly here"—may this explanation not work perfectly? And may not any other one fail too?

"But still, isn't it an inexact explanation?"—Yes, why shouldn't one call it 'inexact'? Only let's understand what "inexact" means! For it does not mean "unusable". And let's consider what we call an 'exact' explanation in contrast to this one. Perhaps like drawing a boundary-line around a region with chalk? Here it strikes us at once that the line has breadth. So a colour edge would be more exact. But has this exactness still got a function here: isn't it running idle? (*PI* §88)

What we mean by "exact" depends on the circumstances—"Is it inexact when I don't give our distance from the sun to the nearest metre, or tell a joiner the width of a table to the nearest thousandth of a millimetre?" (*PI* §88)—so to specify an ideal of exactness that transcends all circumstances is not overly stringent but simply incoherent. The metaphysical demand that our concepts be defined in an absolutely exact sense misses the point of having and using these concepts in the first place.

If we think of understanding in terms of grasping a definite something—some sort of ideal content—then all our actual explanations, in their mundane imprecision, seem unsuited to the task of transmitting this definite something. If any explanation may be deemed incomplete or may be misunderstood, we might ask how explanation is possible at all. But this question sends us looking in the wrong place for an ideal explanation that stills our anxiety. We need not an ideal conception of explanation, but an ordinary conception of understanding. "You do not yourself understand any more of the rule than you can explain" (*RFM* VI §23): what passes between us in the

course of explanation *is* what counts as exhibiting understanding. Cora Diamond sees philosophy going astray when it takes “us to understand, or to be capable of understanding, *more* than we could in the ordinary sense explain” (Diamond 1991b, 65). The metaphysical demand portrays ‘genuine’ explanation and understanding as enchanted ideals whose exactness exceeds what we can actually explain. The appeal to ordinary language seeks to disenchant philosophy by bringing us back from the metaphysical demands we place upon our concepts to the ordinary contexts in which they find their use.

Wittgenstein accepts that philosophy aims at completeness, but shifts the weight of that claim: “the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear” (*PI* §133). But if we want to rid ourselves of philosophical problems, why does Wittgenstein say we must use only description and not explanation? If my demand for a ‘complete’ explanation is the problem, why can’t you simply explain to me that explanations cannot meet this demand for completeness, that this is not what explanations do, and so make my confusion disappear by means of an explanation? This sort of explanation would help clear up problems based on ignorance. But what happens when we have all the facts before us and still persist in our confusion? In such a case, our misunderstanding is not due to a gap that an explanation can close. Something recalcitrant in our way of looking at the facts prevents us from dissolving our problems even when all that’s required for this dissolution is before us. The metaphysical demand placed on our concept of explanation is not an error that needs to be refuted, but a temptation that needs to be resisted. That we share common ground is not a fact that needs to be asserted or argued for, since this is not a fact that the metaphysician denies. The drive toward metaphysics comes not from the assertion that we *do not* share a common ground, but from the anxiety that we *might not*. Answering a false assertion requires counter-arguments, but answering an anxiety requires therapy. This therapy comes primarily in the form of reminders: drawing our attention to the common ground upon which we rely to say anything to one another.

Explanations close gaps in our understanding, but therapy helps us recognize that there was no gap to begin with.

The ordinary as home

Let me recapitulate this diagnosis. That my explanations are understood by others requires that there be a point of common ground that we can fall back on. This requirement of a common ground raises the anxiety that this common ground might not exist, or might be rejected. And this anxiety pushes us to seek an ideal form of explanation, one that covers all possible questions and compels understanding. This ideal form of explanation aspires to bypass the need for a common ground by giving reasons that require no common ground, reasons that could compel anyone, and so establishes the fiction that common ground is a convenience for communication, but not a necessity. In short, the metaphysical demand placed on explanation denies the need for a common ground, and so effectively denies the common ground itself. The anxiety that I might not share a common ground with others feeds the denial of this common ground by demanding that our explanations not rely upon it.

This vision of philosophy is a tragic one. It tells a story of our compulsion to deny the very ground on which we stand in the quest for an apotheosis of metaphysical completeness. The appeal to ordinary language evokes a mythology of the Fall: we have fallen into metaphysics, and our goal should be not a forward progress but a return to the original home of ordinary language. The work of Austin, and especially Wittgenstein, is characterized by a sense of nostalgia—which literally means “homesickness”—a longing for a distant and fondly remembered home.⁷ Wittgenstein talks about bringing words back to their original home (*PI* §116), and frequently speaks of the inclination toward metaphysics as a temptation.⁸ Stephen

⁷ The connection between the ordinary and home is more apparent in Wittgenstein’s German, where “ordinary” is *gewöhnlich*, which has resonances of *Wohnung*, or home. Cf. Staten 1984, 76.

⁸ Cf. e.g. *PI* §§20, 39, 58, 159, 182, 254, 277, 288, 334, 345, 374, 402, 520, 588.

Mulhall explores a mythology of the Fall that he finds implicit in Wittgenstein, claiming that the metaphysical demand for a sublime form of expression “is an inflection of the prideful human craving to be God” (Mulhall 2005, 94). The myth of the Fall finds explicit expression in Austin: In “Other Minds”, he characterizes the search for certain knowledge as “perhaps the original sin (Berkeley’s apple, the tree in the quad) by which the philosopher casts himself out from the garden of the world we live in” (*PPd*, 90).

For both Austin and Mulhall, this mythology of the Fall is a mythology of a philosophical Eden. However, in many respects, the tragedy of our denial of attunement more closely resembles another biblical myth: that of Babel. In this story, human beings share a single language and a geographical location in Shinar. However, they are anxious that their shared community is precarious, and they resolve to build a city and a tower that reaches up to heaven, fearing that “otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (Genesis 11:4). However, this prideful act achieves precisely that which they had feared. To prevent them from building their tower, Yahweh “confuse[s] their language” (Genesis 11:7) and “scatter[s] them abroad from there over the face of all the earth” (Genesis 11:8).⁹ The metaphysical demand that the appeal to ordinary language resists also comes from the anxiety that our common ground is not firm enough, but in its attempt to find firmer ground, it realizes the very anxieties it hoped to stave off.

Derrida and Heidegger enter my discussion on this point. The metaphor of the ordinary as home suggests a stable base for our attunement. Austin—as well as Wittgenstein on many readings¹⁰—is satisfied with the adequacy of our attunement: what’s important on this version of the appeal to ordinary language is only that we not try to ground our concepts in anything independent of our attunement. This version sees our criteria themselves as clear and fixed (though not exhaustive), so that we can dispel confusion simply by reminding ourselves of these criteria. However,

⁹ Daniel Heller-Roazen (2005, 219 – 231) offers a rich and suggestive reading of this story.

¹⁰ The commentaries of Baker and Hacker (and later only Hacker) present the most rigorous and thorough reading of this kind.

Derrida shows that treating our criteria as fixed recapitulates the very metaphysical demand that the appeal to ordinary language seeks to overcome, and Heidegger claims that blasé confidence in our attunement is a sign of inauthenticity. Inviting these challenges to the appeal to ordinary language highlights the ungroundedness of attunement, and pushes us toward a conception of attunement not as simply given to us, but as something we actively develop through play.

Acknowledging the ungroundedness of our attunement reminds us that our concepts and our forms of life are *ours*, that they belong to us and serve us, and that coming to understand and inhabit these concepts and forms of life is a matter of coming to understand and inhabit ourselves. Just as the appeal to ordinary language doesn't examine words to the exclusion of the world, it also doesn't examine the world to the exclusion of the human subject to whom the world opens itself up. This attention to the human subject introduces an element that is foreign to much modern philosophy. While any new philosophical movement asserts its position partly through polemic, Wittgenstein's and Austin's work exhibit and inspire moral fervour to an unusual degree. Wittgenstein has very little to say about ethics and is dismissive of saying anything of much use about it, while Austin touches on ethics only glancingly and writes under the guise of the wry and sensible Englishman immune to the passions of less self-possessed mortals. Nevertheless, in reminding us of our home in attunement, both Wittgenstein and Austin respond critically not just to errors of reasoning, but to failures of self-knowledge. This sort of failing might be regarded not just as a mistake, but, recalling Austin's remark from "Other Minds" (*PPd*, 90), as a sin.

0.3. The road ahead

The appeal to ordinary language in philosophy has been mostly forgotten, or neutered and dismissed, in contemporary philosophy, and so the central purpose of this thesis is to retrieve that appeal and to argue for its continuing relevance. Doing so, as I said at the opening of this introduction, is not merely a matter of exegesis,

but also a matter of articulating how the appeal to ordinary language *should* be made. I do much of this work through critical readings of other philosophers who serve as instructive points of contrast.

Chapter One presents the appeal to ordinary language we find in Austin, in both its strengths and weaknesses. The two main figures of contrast here are Paul Grice and John Searle, the former a critic of Austin's method and the latter a presumptive inheritor of it. In engaging with Grice and Searle, I tease out the distinctive features of Austin's appeal to ordinary language while showing how easy they are to overlook. In the final section of the chapter, I confront the challenge from Derrida that Austin himself recapitulates some of the errors he criticizes in others, raising the broader question of whether the appeal to ordinary language is fatally infected with the very confusions it seeks to purge.

Chapter Two considers the distinctive style of the *Philosophical Investigations* by focusing on Wittgenstein's frequent resort to the first person plural. Wittgenstein's use of "we" opens up questions about the nature of necessity that I broached above. A critical consideration of conventionalist and transcendental readings of Wittgenstein on necessity articulates how Wittgenstein's appeal to ordinary language does philosophical work without advancing any theses of its own. I then return to Derrida's challenge, showing: first, that Wittgenstein is not vulnerable to the same criticism as Austin; second, that Derrida's vision of language is surprisingly similar to Wittgenstein's; and third, that Derrida fails to recognize the distinctiveness of the appeal to ordinary language.

Chapter Three considers the many close analogies between the appeal to ordinary language and the existential phenomenology of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. However, Heidegger associates 'average everydayness' with inauthenticity, raising the question whether the appeal to ordinary language falls under the same rubric. On the contrary, I suggest that drawing attention to the ungroundedness of our attunement reflects Heidegger's own appeal to authenticity.

In Chapter Four, I bring the resources from my discussions of Derrida and Heidegger to bear in articulating a connection between the appeal to ordinary language and play. Exploring and creating our attunement depends on our capacity to engage with one another in unregulated play, which in turn reflects the degree of play that exists in our language and concepts.

CHAPTER ONE

SERIOUS AND LITERAL: J. L. AUSTIN

AND HIS CRITICS

Words are for those with promises to keep.

– W. H. Auden

1.1. Introduction

J. L. Austin was one of the driving forces behind what came to be known as ‘Ordinary Language Philosophy’ in post-war Oxford, and his approach is in many ways the most consistently in line with the appeal to ordinary language that I outlined in my introduction. Oxford Ordinary Language Philosophy, however, has suffered the same fate as logical positivism before it: once a dominant trend in analytic philosophy, it is now regarded primarily as an historical curiosity whose lasting contributions are few and peripheral. One aim of this chapter is to argue that Austin’s relative neglect is both unjustified and unjust.

In rehabilitating Austin, I focus on the work of Paul Grice and John Searle. The former is commonly taken to have dealt a fatal blow to Ordinary Language Philosophy by distinguishing matters of conversational appropriateness from matters of truth. The latter, styling himself as Austin’s successor, adopted some aspects of

Austin's work but rejected much of what I find original to it, thereby sending the study of speech acts in the wrong direction. In their attempts to delegitimize the appeal to ordinary language, both Grice and Searle beg the question in subtle ways, and in doing so fail to articulate a coherent alternative to Austin's appeal to ordinary language. In particular, both try to isolate the literal meaning of utterances in a way that presupposes the conception of literal meaning they want to establish. I do not consider developments in the philosophy of language in the last four decades in any detail, but Grice's and Searle's work is foundational to much of what has come since, so my response to it is not merely of historical interest.

In "Signature Event Context", Jacques Derrida is admiring but critical of Austin, finding in Austin the same flawed conception of communication that I find in Grice and Searle. While I think Derrida mischaracterizes Austin's conception of communication, his criticism retains enough bite to pose a strong and serious challenge to the appeal to ordinary language.

I begin this chapter by giving a general overview of Austin's method (1.2). I then consider and respond to challenges from Grice (1.3) and Searle (1.4) before addressing Derrida's criticism (1.5). I conclude by asking how much of a danger Derrida's criticism poses to the appeal to ordinary language as a whole (1.6).

1.2. An overview of Austin's method

Austin's work is instantly recognizable, if not by the wry wordplay then by its careful attention to the minutiae of linguistic usage. Austin not only remarks upon the differences between doing something by accident and doing it by mistake (*PPb*, 185), and between doing it by mistake, owing to a mistake, mistakenly, and so on (*PPb*, 198), but also finds philosophical traction in these details that so many others pass over. Austin regards generalization and simplification as plagues upon philosophy,¹ and attention to particulars as the best antidote. These generalizations and simplifications motivate entire philosophical problematics whose nonsensicality

¹ Cf. e.g. *SS*, 3, 82; *HDTW*, 38; and *PPc*, 58.

becomes apparent under closer scrutiny. In the introductory chapter, I discussed Austin's attack on sense-data theory in *Sense and Sensibilia*, where he shows that the very idea of sense-data arises only through misuses of ordinary expressions. He also points to how our conception of meaning is distorted by asking in a general sense about "the meaning of a word" (*PPc*), how our conception of freedom is distorted by assuming we can apply the adverb "freely" or its opposite to any verb of action whatsoever (*PPb*), how the supposition that any sentence in the indicative must be either true or false blinds us to the performative aspect of language (*HDTW*), and so on.

Austin's methodology: positive and negative aspects

Austin's philosophy has both a negative, or critical, aspect, and a positive one, which I consider in turn.

I offered a few snapshots of Austin in his negative aspect above. His criticism aims not to expose errors in established positions, but rather to show that, properly considered, these positions cannot find expression at all. If the problem with a theory of sense-data is not that it falls foul of a subtle objection, or that it fails to cover all cases, but rather that the basic moves used to set up the theory rely on abuses of language, then the theory isn't wrong so much as nonsensical. In a very literal sense, philosophers who speak nonsense *cannot mean* what they think they are saying.

One of Austin's preferred terms of criticism is "serious": the philosophers he criticizes cannot be serious in what they say. To give just three examples from his attack on sense-data theory:²

... if we are to be **seriously** inclined to speak of something as being perceived indirectly... (SS, 18)

² For other references to seriousness, cf. *PPb*, 46, 48; *PPf*, 134; *PPi*, 219, 231; *PPk*, 264; *HDTW*, 66. In *How To Do Things With Words*, Austin also uses "serious" in a different way, which Derrida finds revealingly problematic. I consider this use of "serious" later in this chapter.

Does anyone suppose that if something is straight, then it jolly well has to *look* straight at all times and in all circumstances? Obviously no one **seriously** supposes this. (SS, 29)

If ... a church were cunningly camouflaged so that it looked like a barn, how could any **serious** question be raised about what we see when we look at it? We see, of course, *a church* that now *looks like a barn*. We do *not* see an immaterial barn, an immaterial church, or an immaterial anything else. And what in this case could **seriously** tempt us to say that we do? (SS, 30)

These appeals to seriousness undermine the argument for sense-data not by denying the existence of sense-data, but by questioning the very intelligibility of the notion of sense-data. Austin says, "I am *not* ... going to maintain that we ought to be 'realists', to embrace, that is, the doctrine that we *do* perceive material things (or objects). This doctrine would be no less scholastic and erroneous than its antithesis" (SS, 3 – 4). Adopting a realist thesis would mean accepting the sense-data theorist's misuses of "perceive" and "material things" in order to advance an alternative, whereas Austin wants to show that the problem lies precisely with the misuses of these words. Arguing for its opposite would give sense-data theory too much credit by implicitly accepting it as a coherent doctrine worth opposing.³ We cannot oppose an incoherent doctrine by presenting arguments to the contrary (since what are they contrary to?). Instead, Austin exposes the incoherence and then simply asks whether anyone can seriously maintain this position.

In invoking seriousness, Austin doesn't mean that his targets of criticism are only joking. Rather, he means they lack the commitment and responsibility we

³ In this respect, Austin's appeal to ordinary language is subtler than G. E. Moore's (1925) appeal to common sense. Moore takes it as commonsensical to claim that he has spent his entire life on or near the surface of the earth, but Austin refuses to be baited into some form of dogmatic realism. Austin does not insist on a simpler and more 'commonsensical' set of beliefs than those that philosophers normally play around with, but rather points to the rich diversity of our ordinary linguistic practices, which the philosophical mania for over-simplification obscures. Austin's appeal to ordinary language does not demand that philosophers see that things are less complicated than they make them out to be, but rather that philosophers acknowledge that language—and the world—is much more complicated than they generally take it to be.

accept when we undertake to treat a matter seriously. This failing is not simply one of missing the nuances that come up upon detailed investigation of linguistic practices. Rather, it is the deeper one of failing to accept our responsibility for and commitment to the words we use. If we misuse our words when we talk about objects being straight, or actions being voluntary, or promises being made, we reject the common world that our language helps us navigate. Our commitment to language commits us to norms that we share with others, which help us make sense of others and to others. Failing to take language seriously implicates us in rejecting the community with whom we share our language.

In its positive aspect, Austin provides a more careful account of the matters he feels others have unjustly neglected. This positive work includes familiar philosophical fodder, such as truth, meaning, and the problem of other minds, as well as aspects of our life with words, such as excuses and performative utterances, which have been neglected by philosophers, but which Austin uses to significant philosophical purpose.

In my introductory chapter, I argued that the appeal to ordinary language does not consider words *rather than* the world. Curiously, Austin himself seems ambivalent about the reach of his appeal to ordinary language. On one hand, he writes: “When we examine what we should say when, what words we should use in what situations, we are looking again not *merely* at words (or ‘meanings’, whatever they may be) but also at the realities we use the words to talk about” (*PPb*, 182).⁴ However, he goes on: “we are using a sharpened awareness of words to sharpen our perception of, though not as the final arbiter of, the phenomena”. A short bit earlier, he asserts that words are neither facts nor things, and that “we need therefore to prise them off the world, to hold them apart from and against it, so that we can realize their inadequacies and arbitrariness, and can re-look at the world without blinkers” (*PPb*, 182). As Austin describes it here, ordinary language provides a set of distinctions that are richer than philosophers normally suppose, and honed by

⁴ Cf. also *PPc*, 58, and *PPd*, 83n2.

centuries of practical application, but these distinctions aren't always adequate: "Certainly, then, ordinary language is *not* the last word: in principle it can everywhere be supplemented and improved upon and superseded. Only remember, it *is* the *first* word" (*PPh*, 185).⁵

Two guiding thoughts in these methodological remarks are problematic.⁶ First, Austin pictures language as a kind of laminate stretched over the world, which serves some classificatory purposes, but also risks distorting our view; and second, Austin suggests that the examination of ordinary language only offers preliminaries, which further analysis must supplement. Oswald Hanfling (2000) challenges both of these thoughts. With regard to prising words off the world, Hanfling asks, "if this is how words and world are related, why, we might wonder, should we bother about words at all? Why not look at the world directly 'without blinkers', avoiding the 'inadequacies and arbitrariness' of words?" (Hanfling 2000, 29). Maybe Austin means only that the distinctions of ordinary language may mislead us or require supplementation, but his rhetoric implies the possibility of looking at the world without any linguistic categories, a notion whose coherence he never argues for.

With regard to treating the examination of ordinary language as the first word but not the last word, Hanfling asks what further supplementation could give us insight into excuses, which is the most immediate context for Austin's remarks. In the same essay, Austin says psychological research provides insight into the nature of excuses, but as Hanfling points out, psychological research neither sheds light upon, nor prompts any revision of, such distinctions as that between "inadvertently" and "unintentionally" (Hanfling 2000, 28). If it did, ordinary language shouldn't serve as a first word, let alone as a last word. If the distinctions we find in ordinary language are subject to revision in the light of scientific research, why begin with these

⁵ Cf. also *PPc*, 69.

⁶ G. J. Warnock (1989, 5 – 6) argues that the programmatic remarks in "A Plea for Excuses" pertain only to the topic of excuses, and that Austin does not recommend a methodology for philosophy more generally. As the previous two footnotes show, however, these methodological points at least are not confined to that one paper.

distinctions at all? Presumably we should dive straight into the scientific research without allowing the distinctions of ordinary language to prejudice our investigation.

In general, Austin seems to share Locke's sense of the philosopher as the under-labourer working for the benefit of science, clearing away the linguistic rubble so that we can build a scientific edifice on solid foundations. Austin expects that a science of language will succeed where centuries of philosophy have failed, so that the philosophy of language will reach completion by our "kicking it upstairs": the only way, Austin avers, that "we ever can get rid of philosophy" (*PPi*, 232).⁷ But the appeal to ordinary language already aspires to completeness in the matters it treats. There should be nothing left over to 'kick upstairs' once the confusions have been cleared away.

We learn more from Austin's practice than his methodological statements.⁸ My criticism of these statements draws significantly on Austin's own practice. If Austin's appeal to ordinary language gives us insight not just into language but also into the things we talk about—if, indeed, examining the one is tantamount to examining the other—then there is no gap between words and the world such that we can prise the one off of the other. If looking closely at the criteria for calling something a mistake tells us *what a mistake is*, we are left with nothing to look at if we prise these criteria off the world.⁹ On Austin's own analysis, "what we say when" is both the first word and the last word.

⁷ On this point, he echoes Russell (1959, 154 – 5).

⁸ Cf. Cavell 1976d, 101: "It is a mystery to me that what a philosopher says about his methods is so commonly taken at face value."

⁹ This point might seem to carry more weight with a word like "mistake", which is subject to human-made criteria, than, say, natural kind terms. But in *Sense and Sensibilia*, where Austin addresses the more obviously natural phenomenon of perception, he considers how Ayer uses terms like "directly" or "looks like". The language we use to talk about a natural phenomenon like perception may still distort the way we think about it. As we saw in the introductory chapter, however, Austin conceives of criteria less broadly than Wittgenstein, which might explain why Austin is more inclined to think that the appeal to ordinary language needs further supplementation.

Austin's method at work: How To Do Things With Words

While Austin's negative work targets generalization, simplification, and the nonsense they produce, his positive work consists mainly of classification. He follows not the model of the physicist, who finds the general laws underlying particular cases, but that of the Linnean biologist or the anthropologist, who finds the most perspicuous classificatory rubric under which to examine a rich diversity of data (and here we should ask which subject is more closely related to the study of language: physics, or biology and anthropology). Austin's intricate categorizations are not a means to generalization, but rather arise out of dissatisfaction with generalization. Austin's categories highlight differences in language, and stand against the temptation to impose generalizations that fudge these differences.

This classificatory work may clarify particular muddles, but Austin is wryly sceptical of his ability to give a definitive classification. Witness his "motto for a sober philosophy: *Neither a be-all nor an end-all be*" (*PPk*, 271n). His most detailed, and most famous, attempt at classification is his discussion of performative utterances in *How To Do Things With Words*. This work does not represent a completed theory, and in many ways is at its most suggestive in its failures, acknowledged and unacknowledged. I consider the failures of the former kind here, and address failures of the latter kind deeper into this chapter, in my discussions of Searle and Derrida.

Austin begins with the intuitive distinction between 'performative' and 'constative' utterances, where the former "do not 'describe' or 'report' or constate anything at all, are not 'true or false'", and that "the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as, or as 'just', saying something" (*HDTW*, 5). Supposing that all sentences in the indicative are constatives commits what Austin calls the "'descriptive' fallacy" (*HDTW*, 3).¹⁰ In his first seven lectures, Austin tries to zero in on a clear criterion by which we can distinguish performative utterances, but the more he tightens his theoretical net, the more the criterion he seeks eludes him. Many of the features he initially took to be

¹⁰ Cf. also *PPd*, 103 and *PPe*, 131.

distinctive of performative utterances apply also to constatives, and conversely, performatives are in important ways beholden to the facts, giving them an aftertaste of truth-value, which was thought to be the exclusive domain of constatives. Indeed, certain utterances, like “I censure” might be either performative or constative depending on the context, so no context-independent criterion can isolate one from the other. In retrospect, he concedes, the project of singling out just those utterances that ‘do something’ was doomed from the get-go: “When we issue any utterance whatsoever, are we not ‘doing something’?” (*HDTW*, 92).

In the remaining five lectures, Austin shifts his focus to three different categories of ‘speech acts’. No speech act is purely performative or constative, but is rather composed of: the locutionary act of uttering some words with sense and reference; the illocutionary act of doing something *in* uttering those words; and the perlocutionary act of doing something *by* uttering them. For example, if a woman says to her boyfriend, “I just want to be friends”, she has performed the locutionary act of saying something about what she wants and making reference to friendship among other things; the illocutionary act of ending the relationship *in* saying these words; and the perlocutionary act of breaking her boyfriend’s heart *by* saying these words. Austin finds that these three acts are no more strictly distinguishable than performative and constative utterances, and settles on the claim that they represent three somewhat distinct aspects of a speech act, which emphasize different dimensions of assessment. To make full sense of an utterance, we must understand it in its full context: “the total speech act in the total speech situation is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating” (*HDTW*, 148). For Austin, the meaningful unit of expression is not a proposition or a sentence, but rather a total speech act, which includes a context that makes clear what illocutionary and perlocutionary acts are performed.

I will revisit the content of the previous paragraph later in this chapter: in my discussion of Searle, I interrogate more closely the role of the locutionary act, as well as the conception of illocutionary ‘forces’ that Austin resorts to, and in my discussion

of Derrida, I question the notion of a ‘total’ speech act or speech situation. For the moment, I focus on Austin’s own assessment of his achievement. In repeatedly undermining the distinctions he draws, Austin approaches his subject matter like Penelope, undoing the threads he’s woven almost as soon as he’s woven them. The ultimate positive achievement of *How To Do Things With Words* is a “general preliminary classification” of illocutionary acts, which “only give [us] a run around, or rather a flounder around” (*HDTW*, 150 – 51). Far more important, I suggest, is Austin’s determined failure to find anything more solid. Though he does the helpful work of going through the motions, he anticipates this failure from the outset. He footnotes his initial “preliminary isolation of the performative”, warning us that “everything said in these sections is provisional, and subject to revision in the light of later sections” (*HDTW*, 4n). In this respect, I think Searle is exactly wrong in taking Austin to have been in the preparatory stages of developing a general theory of speech acts, which fell to his students to complete due to his untimely death (Searle 1977, 205). Austin’s failure to find a satisfactory theory of the performative follows from the fact that theory building requires idealization. A ‘total’ elucidation would be like a map with a 1:1 scale: it would be accurate, but totally useless for any theoretical purpose. Austin is not opposed outright to sketching theoretical divisions that might help us see our way more clearly, but these divisions can only be provisional guides that will not stand close scrutiny. Despite, or rather because of, his fine-grained classifications, Austin remains a staunchly anti-theoretical philosopher.¹¹

1.3. First Objection: Grice and implicature

Austin draws heavily on the question of “what we should say when”, and attacks the sort of generalizations and over-simplifications that lead to bland dilemmas: all statements in the indicative are *either* true *or* false, all verbs of action

¹¹ Though bearing in mind his desire to kick matters upstairs, we might better regard Austin as an anti-theoretical philosopher only in the sense that he thinks it’s the business of the sciences to provide the theories, while the philosopher provides the clarity that permits this theory-building to go ahead without confusion.

can be qualified by *either* one adverb *or* its opposite (freely/not freely, voluntarily/involuntarily, etc.), and so on. In examining how “voluntarily” and “involuntarily” are used, and pointing to the asymmetries in their use, Austin speaks not just about the quirks of linguistic usage, but about *what it is* for an action to be voluntary or involuntary.

Such a method has fallen so out of fashion today that it is taken to hardly merit refutation. Timothy Williamson (2000, 93n), for instance, dismisses a line of thought he attributes to Wittgenstein in a footnote (which is where such attributions normally reside these days): “conversational inappropriateness is compatible with truth”. Contemporary philosophers of language distinguish what an utterance *literally means*—its semantic component—from its pragmatic implications: when and how it is appropriately uttered, and what further inferences hearers may draw beyond what is literally expressed. Armed with this distinction, Austin’s successors have kept some of his results while rejecting the method that inspired them, charging Austin with having failed to distinguish semantics and pragmatics.

This line of criticism begins with Paul Grice, who is generally regarded as the father of pragmatics.¹² Though Grice cannot speak for all critics of the appeal to ordinary language, confronting his challenge provides a framework for questioning the ready dismissal of the appeal to ordinary language in more contemporary work. Grice argues that we can make sense of the literal meaning of a statement independent of its use, and in particular, that we can determine the truth-conditions of the statement without considering the use or appropriateness of its utterance. Truth-conditions, he claims, pertain to *what is said*, while he dubs as *implicatures* the

¹² For claims that Grice diminished the influence of ordinary language philosophy, see, e.g. Soames (2003, 197 – 210) and Neale (2005). Korta and Perry’s (2011) general account of pragmatics begins with Austin and Grice, and credits Grice with establishing pragmatics as a distinct area of philosophical study with a rigorous methodology. The story is, of course, more complicated than this. Whether Grice intended to distinguish semantics from pragmatics is unclear, and indeed he never expressed a distinction in these terms (Szabó 2005, 3). Furthermore, how we should draw the boundary between semantics and pragmatics, and whether we can draw it at all, is a live topic of debate. My questioning of this distinction is hardly new, though I do so differently from those that want to reconcile pragmatics with formal semantics.

sorts of implications that follow from an utterance by virtue of the less rigorously defined principles of conversational appropriateness. He first advances these claims in “A Causal Theory of Perception”, and works out the mechanics of implicature in greater detail in “Logic and Conversation”. In this section, I argue that Grice’s attack mischaracterizes the appeal to ordinary language, and that furthermore, the appeal to ordinary language exposes the incoherence of his conception of implicature.

Grice’s argument

In “A Causal Theory of Perception” Grice considers statements of the form “*X* looks *p* to me”, but the guiding thought is meant to apply more generally. Such statements (Grice calls them “*L*-statements”) found philosophical currency as a form of expression that seems to give immediate and infallible sensory reports. While I may be deceived about what I see, the story goes, I cannot be deceived about how things look to me. A stock of such infallible statements is an important starting point for sense-data theory and other foundationalist projects in epistemology and the philosophy of perception.¹³ Grice considers a challenge to the universal applicability of *L*-statements. If *L*-statements cannot be used in any context, they lack the universality that a general theory of knowledge or perception requires. In particular, Grice’s imagined objector claims, one would not say, e.g. “The sky looks blue to me” rather than just “The sky is blue” unless there were some reason for doubting or denying that the sky is blue (Grice calls this the “doubt-or-denial condition”, or simply “*D-or-D* condition”). According to Grice’s objector, *L*-statements, far from being unmistakably true, are neither true nor false when used where the doubt-or-denial condition does not hold.

Grice responds by saying that utterances carry unspoken implications in a number of different ways, that in some cases utterances maintain their literal meaning without carrying the implication, and that this is true of utterances expressing *L*-statements. In particular, he distinguishes presupposition from

¹³ Cf. e. g. Russell 1993 and Carnap 2003.

implicature, claiming that what an utterance presupposes is inextricably a part of the meaning of the uttered statement, but that what is implicated is not.¹⁴

Grice's example of presupposition is "Smith has left off beating his wife". Without the presupposition that Smith used to beat his wife, this statement makes no sense, and can be neither true nor false without the presupposition.¹⁵ This statement cannot be rephrased without changing its truth-conditions, nor can the presupposition be cancelled by some sort of addendum like "...but I don't mean to imply that Smith used to beat his wife".

Conventional implicature—implicature carried across by the conventional meaning of a locution within an utterance—operates in statements such as "She was poor but she was honest", where the "but" suggests a contrast between poverty and honesty. Despite the implicated contrast, the use of "but" instead of "and" does not affect the truth-conditions of the utterance according to Grice, so the implicature can be detached by replacing the statement with its truth-functional equivalent: "She was poor and she was honest".¹⁶

Conversational implicature follows not from linguistic convention, but rather from less stringent maxims of conversation, such as "Never substitute a weaker claim for a stronger claim". "My wife is either in the kitchen or in the bedroom" implicates that I don't know which of these two rooms my wife is in: if I knew she was in the kitchen, I wouldn't add the second disjunct. We can also create an implicature by deliberately flouting a conversational maxim: a professor who writes in a recommendation letter "Egan's sentences are well-formed and his English is grammatical" implicates by his refusal to say more than this that Egan is useless in

¹⁴ I want to present Grice's position clearly, charitably, and concisely, and in doing so I often diverge from section 3 of "The Causal Theory of Perception" in favour of his more systematic account of implicature in "Logic and Conversation". For instance, he doesn't use the term "implicature" in "A Causal Theory of Perception" even if the phenomenon to which he later gives that name is in full play.

¹⁵ While nothing in my discussion hangs on this point, this claim is hardly uncontroversial. Some would say "Smith has left off beating his wife" is false rather than meaningless if Smith never beat his wife.

¹⁶ Even within mainstream pragmatics this point is controversial. Cf. Bach 1999.

philosophy. While we cannot detach conversational implicature—no rephrasing of the above example could detach the implicature that Egan is useless in philosophy—we can cancel it. It might be odd for the professor then to add, “...but I don’t mean to suggest that Egan is no good in philosophy”, but doing so would cancel the implicature of the previous utterance.

We cannot cancel or detach presuppositions without altering the truth-conditions of the uttered statement, but we can cancel conversational implicature and detach conventional implicature without affecting a statement’s truth-conditions. Grice argues that the doubt-or-denial condition attaching to *L*-statements is an implicature, so *L*-statements have truth-conditions that are not affected by the doubt-or-denial condition, and so we can talk meaningfully about how things look to us even if it sounds odd. Grice’s objector—whose insistence on dealing with “what we say when” seems at least inspired by Austin, if not modelled on him—argues that *L*-statements without the doubt-or-denial condition are neither true nor false, but Grice replies that this objector confuses implicature with presupposition.

Grice outlines a number of other claims characteristic of Ordinary Language Philosophy that are vulnerable to a similar line of reasoning:

- (1) You cannot see a *knife* as a knife, though you may see what is not a knife as a knife.
 - (2) When Moore said he *knew* that the objects before him were human hands, he was guilty of misusing the word “know”.
 - (3) For an occurrence to be properly said to have a cause, it must be something abnormal or unusual.
 - (4) For an action to be properly described as one for which the agent is responsible, it must be the sort of action for which people are condemned.
 - (5) What is actual is not also possible.
 - (6) What is known by me to be the case is not also believed by me to be the case.
- (Grice 1965, 459 – 460)

These and other similar arguments, Grice claims, fail to distinguish what is said in an utterance and what is merely implicated by the utterance. Statements uttered in contexts that violate such principles sound odd, but we can still grasp their literal meaning, and their violation of such principles does not affect their truth-value.

Grice's objector isn't Austin

I will not defend Grice's objector, and insist the doubt-or-denial condition attaches itself to *L*-statements more strongly than Grice supposes. Rather, I hope to show that Grice's objector isn't Austin, and in fact shares certain basic assumptions about language that bring the objector closer to Grice than to Austin. In particular, the objector has a weakness for generalization and a fixation on truth-value that Austin does not share. Grice never mentions Austin by name,¹⁷ but *Sense and Sensibilia* was the most prominent contemporary attack on sense-data theory, so Austin is naturally read as the prime target in this attempt to rehabilitate a causal theory of perception. Grice also criticizes Austin explicitly elsewhere, challenging the Austinian maxim of "No modification without aberration" (*PPb*, 189), which is at work in "looks to me" cases (Grice 1989b, 8).

As it happens, Austin explicitly examines statements of the form "X looks *p* to me", and he does not say that a condition of doubt or denial must always attach to them. In "Other Minds", he claims that a sentence like "Here is something that looks to me red" could be variously interpreted:

Contrast "Here is something that (definitely) *looks to me* (anyhow) red" with "Here is something that looks to me (something like) *red* (I should say)". In the former case I am quite confident that, however it may look to others, whatever it may 'really be', &c., it certainly does look red to me at the moment. In the other case I'm not confident at all: it looks reddish, but I've never seen anything quite like it before, I can't quite describe it—or, I'm not very good at recognizing colours, I never feel quite happy about them, I've constantly been caught out about them. (*PPd*, 91)

The lesson is not simply that Austin does not claim something like a doubt-or-denial condition always attaches to "looks to me" locutions. More to the point, Austin

¹⁷ Another target of Grice's criticism is Wittgenstein, whom he clearly has in mind in claims (1) and (2) presented above. Though Austin is my focus in this chapter, it should read as a defence of the appeal to ordinary language more generally, Wittgenstein included.

wants to spell out the context of an utterance before he can make sense of it. To say of a certain class of statements that a certain condition always attaches to them is as gross a generalization as the assertion that every statement has a fixed literal meaning regardless of what further implicatures might be conveyed through contextual or other cues in its utterance. If “looks to me” locutions have a variety of applications, no single form of cancellation can account for all of them, and so cancellation cannot bring Grice any closer to the general form of perceptual statements he aims for.

In a treatment that elaborates on Austin’s work in this area, P. M. S. Hacker (1987, 206 – 215) considers the diversity of expressions in which we find “looks” locutions, pointing out that “looks to me”, while sometimes used in a context of doubt or denial, is not always so used: “The exclamation, as the royal coach sweeps by, that the Queen looks regal, or that the lady in red looks beautiful in no way suggests or implies any uncertainty about the regal character of Her Majesty or the beauty of the lady” (Hacker 1987, 213).¹⁸ Grice’s objector does not represent Austin’s emphasis on the diversity of different uses we give to our expressions.¹⁹

Besides this tendency toward generalization, another point where Grice’s objector stands with Grice, and in opposition to Austin, is a conception of meaning that privileges truth-value. Grice’s objector takes the non-fulfilment of the doubt-or-denial condition as a case for a third truth-value, *N*, which attaches to statements when neither *T* nor *F* apply (Grice 1965, 455). Grice seems to read Austin’s disparagement of the “true/false fetish” (*HDTW*, 151) as an objection to the Law of the Excluded Middle, insisting that we need a third truth-value to account for

¹⁸ “The Queen looks regal to me” might be more suggestive of doubt or denial than simply “The Queen looks regal”. However, the former utterance is no more suggestive of doubt or denial than the latter if given in indignant response to someone who says, “The Queen looks a bit shabby today”.

¹⁹ This point could be extended to a criticism of Grice’s positive work in proposing a causal theory of perception. Both Hacker and John Hyman (1989, 24 – 28) argue that Grice’s theory, as well as other causal theories, motivate their arguments with systematic misuses of key expressions.

utterances where we cannot say that something either true or false has been asserted.²⁰

But Austin's concern with the 'true/false fetish' isn't that this pair of truth-values must be supplemented by a further truth-value in order to capture the semantic values of all statements. Rather, he is concerned that a too-narrow focus on truth-value risks blinding us to other ways of evaluating speech acts, which often better capture what is expressed. A promise is neither true nor false, but Austin does not claim that statements of promise thus take a third truth-value, *N*, which they share with various forms of nonsense. His point is not that there are more than two values in the domain of truth-value, but rather that there are more dimensions to meaning than the one defined by the true-false axis. Falsehood is one kind of infelicity—and truth one kind of felicity—that can befall our utterances, and *How To Do Things With Words* shows, among other things, that truth and falsity occupy only a small place in a much larger picture.

In responding to the claim that statements like “The sky looks blue to me” have invariant truth-conditions, one route we could take is to generate examples of such statements where the truth-conditions actually do turn out to vary depending on the contexts in which they are uttered.²¹ In other words, we could try to prove that Grice is wrong. Charles Travis takes this route, suggesting that it is one of two strategies one might adopt in challenging what he calls the “classical picture” of semantics: “One might try to show that the picture is senseless: that somehow or other, in stating it, we have appealed to some (putative) notion that is not, and could not be well defined. Or one might accept the picture as sensible and coherent, and

²⁰ Even defenders of Austin occasionally take this route. Charles Travis (1991) talks about a third truth-value, *N*, in his defence of Austin against Grice.

²¹ Travis is particularly creative in this regard, with sentences like “The table is covered in butter” (1991, 240) or “There's milk in the refrigerator” (1989, 19). Alice Crary also cooks up an elaborate example with “This man's children are bald” (2006, 49 – 50), though her purpose in doing so is somewhat different.

argue that it is false” (Travis 1989, 14 – 15). While Travis opts for the second strategy,²² I am more inclined to pursue the first.

An Austinian Response

One problem with ‘proving Grice wrong’, if such a thing is possible, is that it accepts implicitly a privileging of the true/false dimension of assessment: Grice’s argument consists of a series of assertions, some of these assertions are false, therefore Grice’s argument does not hold up. Just as there are more ways of appraising a sentence than just its truth or falsity, there are more ways of appraising an argument than just its soundness or unsoundness. In my introductory chapter, I claimed that the appeal to ordinary language aims not to show that a position is false, but that it fails to express what it aims to express. Instead of proving Grice wrong, I will use an Austinian term of criticism and argue that Grice cannot seriously mean what he thinks he means.

Grice claims that the cancellability of conversational implicature shows that we can separate what is said (which cannot be cancelled without altering the sentence’s truth-conditions) from what is conversationally implicated (the part that is cancelled), so that the truth-conditions of a statement rely only on the former, and the meaning of the statement does not essentially include the latter. For instance, “The sky looks blue to me” carries the implicature (according to Grice) that the speaker has some cause for doubt or denial because it violates the conversational maxim of Manner, being more prolix than the straightforward “The sky is blue”. But, says Grice, we can cancel this implicature by adding further prolixity: “The sky looks blue to me, but I don’t mean to suggest that I have any reason to doubt or deny that the sky is in fact blue”.

²² Travis has engaged with Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore on this topic, who defend a ‘semantic minimalism’ that would be more sympathetic to Grice. See Cappelen and Lepore (2005, 2006) and Travis (2006) for some of the moves in this debate.

Can Grice seriously mean this? Would hearing that last sentence really cancel any implicature of doubt or denial that a hearer might draw from “The sky looks blue to me”? If “The sky looks blue to me” carries an implicature of doubt or denial because its prolixity flouts the Gricean Maxim of Manner, this much longer sentence flouts it even more so, and its utterance must have implicatures of its own. Rather than cancelling an implicature, it more likely suggests the speaker is trying to backpedal from words she wishes she hadn’t uttered, and if anything, heighten the suspicion of doubt or denial. Compare: “I can’t believe she’s dating a black man... not that I think there’s anything wrong with that!” The latter half of that sentence, far from being accepted as a standard cancellation of the implicated racist sentiment of the first half, has become a cliché of ham-handed attempts to deny racist sentiment that instead only highlights it. Far from cancelling the first implicature, the added words simply add a further implicature. The lady doth protest too much.²³

Two separate points are at play here. The first, which I raised in the above paragraph, is that the so-called cancellation of an implicature is as much a speech act as the original utterance, and should be just as subject to implicatures and infelicities as the original utterance on a Gricean reading. The second, which I alluded to above and will argue for below, is that, if we treat cancellations as the speech acts that they must surely be, they can no longer do the work that Grice wants them to do.

Let us consider how we use utterances of the form “... but by that I don’t mean to suggest ...”, which is the form of the Gricean cancellation. We often use these clauses to clarify an utterance that might have been misunderstood. If my words could be taken in more than one way, I can clarify my meaning by denying a possible understanding that I don’t intend. To illustrate this point, we can adapt Grice’s letter of recommendation: the professor is speaking to a colleague about a student and says, “Egan is a fine thespian”. The professor says that, knowing and admiring his student’s theatrical accomplishments. But then he realizes that, in the

²³ After developing this argument, I discovered a similar line of criticism against conversational implicature in Weiner 2006.

context of this conversation, and what with Egan on the job market, his praise might be mistaken for a dismissal of the student's philosophical ability, and so hastily adds, "but I don't mean to suggest by that anything to the detriment of Egan's work in philosophy". The professor can reasonably hope to make clear that he doesn't wish to denigrate his student's philosophical abilities, but only because the original utterance could plausibly have been interpreted in the sense that the added clause later makes explicit. We do better, then, to interpret the added clause not as a 'cancellation', which simply removes something from the original speech act, but rather as a further speech act that resolves a possible misunderstanding of the original speech act.²⁴ In other words, "... but by that I don't mean to suggest ..." locutions don't deal with implicatures at all, but rather with ambiguities.

Grice considers cases where only one natural interpretation is available. His purported cancellation of the doubt-or-denial condition attaching to *L*-statements is meant to remove an implicature that he takes to be always in effect. Gricean cancellation does not try to clarify a possible misunderstanding, but rather to insist that we understand an utterance otherwise than the one way in which it is typically understood. As I suggested above, the words Grice wants to use in that role do something else. I might add that it seems highly unlikely that any words could play that role: Humpty Dumpty might claim that his utterances can be understood otherwise than the one way in which they are typically understood, but the rest of us don't have this luxury. Cancellation is not so much unsuccessful as incoherent.

Ultimately, the whole matter of cancellation merely postpones the problem it is supposed to solve. Utterances often seem to mean something more or something else than what they strictly seem to say, and conversational implicature is supposed to account for that something more or something else. It also makes room for an

²⁴ This reading helps us to imagine a felicitous utterance of "I can't believe she's dating a black man... not that I think that there's anything wrong with that". Suppose the woman in question has often made racist remarks in my hearing, or she is the daughter of a well-known segregationist. In these cases, however, the "not that I think there's anything wrong with that" clears up a possible misunderstanding, which is precisely why it's acceptable.

analysis of what utterances strictly say by isolating this something more or something else and providing means for cancelling it so that analysis can focus exclusively on what is said. Grice claims we can cancel the implicature through a further utterance, which he calls a ‘cancellation’. He analyzes the original utterance in considerable detail, but he devotes no attention to the utterance of the cancellation. He does not countenance the possibility that this utterance might also mean something more or something else than what it strictly says. Cancellation does not effect the separation of what is said from what is implicated, but rather, at best, diverts the question of their separation to a second, more elaborate utterance.

On this analysis, Grice is guilty of a subtle form of question begging. He wants to insist on the sharp separability of what is said from what is implicated by virtue of the cancellability of implicatures (in the case of conversational implicature, which is what interests us here). But the very intelligibility of the notion of cancellability already assumes this separation: we are asked to consider only the semantic impact of the cancellation without considering what implicature might attach to its utterance. In begging the question on this point, Grice blinds himself to the fact that cancellation cannot neatly isolate the semantic component of a statement.

This question begging results from supposing, as John McDowell expresses it, that we can contemplate the relation between language and reality “not only from the midst of our ... practices, but also, so to speak, from sideways on—from a standpoint independent of all the human activities and reactions that locate those practices in our ‘whirl of organism’”²⁵ (McDowell 1981, 150). Cancellation is Grice’s Archimedean point: by exempting cancellation from the appeal to ordinary language, Grice claims a position outside of ordinary language that allows him to challenge that appeal. However, cancellation must be something that can be *uttered* if it is to do the work Grice wants it to do, and in uttering it, we subject it to the same considerations as any other utterance. If we are rigorous in our appeal to ordinary language—if we do

²⁵ The “whirl of organism” in scare quotes alludes to Cavell 1976c, 52.

not exempt any feature of our language from this appeal—Grice cannot seriously advance his notion of cancellability.

1.4. Second Objection: Searle and literal meaning

Grice's attack on Austin is more insidious than a straightforward refutation: because Austin can be seen as a forebear of the semantics/pragmatics distinction, Austin comes out of his encounter with Grice seeming not so much refuted as superseded. John Searle, a student and self-styled successor of Austin's, undermines Austin even more subtly because he deliberately undertakes to complete the work of *How To Do Things With Words*, providing a general theory of speech acts where Austin acknowledges having given only "a run around, or rather a flounder around" (*HDTW*, 151). Given his respect for Austin, his criticism is all the more damning. I now consider Searle's extension of Austin, arguing that, as with Grice, Searle's encounter with Austin takes place on his own terms, which do not take fully seriously Austin's appeal to ordinary language.

Searle's theory of speech acts treats the philosophy of language as a species of the philosophy of action, and here he acknowledges his debt to Austin. For both, *saying* something is *doing* something, and they believe we can resolve many errors and confusions in the philosophy of language by considering language in terms of action. Austin, for instance, identifies the 'descriptive fallacy' of treating all sentences with verbs in the present tense indicative as descriptions of states of affairs rather than, say, as promises, wagers, contracts, and other actions; Searle identifies predication as an illocutionary act, and says that treating predication as a form of reference "is one of the most persistent mistakes in the history of Western philosophy" (Searle 1969, 122).

Searle adopts Austin's account of illocutionary acts, claiming that we cannot make full sense of the meaning of a sentence unless we consider its illocutionary force, which is distinct from its truth-conditions (Searle 1968, 416). However, Searle says this while criticizing Austin's conception of illocutionary acts, and defending a

notion of literal meaning that brings him closer to Grice. Grice simply assumes a privileged role for truth-conditions in determining meaning, but Searle actively takes Austin to task for failing to appreciate the importance of truth-conditions. Searle's Austin is far closer to the genuine article than the objector put forward by Grice, so his attack is more robust. I will argue that Searle is right to find fault with Austin's conception of the locutionary act, but his fix of positing a 'propositional act' draws exactly the wrong lesson.

Problems for the locutionary act

Searle takes a major difference between Austin's locutionary and illocutionary acts to be that a locutionary act is fixed by the words in a sentence whereas fixing an illocutionary act depends on broader contextual clues. "I'm going to do it" can be a warning, a prediction, a promise, a statement of intent, etc., and we rely on context to tell us which illocutionary act it is, but it is the same locutionary act in all of these cases (modulo indexical reference). However, in some cases a sentence wears its illocutionary force on its sleeve: Searle gives the example of "I hereby promise I'm going to do it". In this case, we hardly need a locutionary/illocutionary distinction because the illocutionary act is explicitly a part of what is said. The locutionary/illocutionary distinction comes into play, says Searle, only when the literal meaning of the sentence is force-neutral—as in "I'm going to do it"—where a particular locutionary act is ambiguous as regards its illocutionary force. However, Searle (1968, 412) argues, no sentence is entirely force-neutral: saying, telling, and stating might be less specific acts than promising, warning, and betting, but they are illocutionary acts for all that. All meaningful utterances are illocutionary acts, and in that sense, says Searle, we cannot fruitfully distinguish locutionary from illocutionary acts. This point becomes clear in the case of reported speech: there is no force-neutral way in which we can report what someone said (asserted, promised, vowed, etc.). In reporting the speech, we necessarily report it as an illocutionary act.

Thus, says Searle, locutionary and illocutionary acts collapse on to one another, a point that Austin missed because he “did not see that the supposedly locutionary verb phrases ‘tell someone to do something’, ‘say that’, ‘ask whether’ are as much illocutionary verb phrases as ‘state that’, ‘order someone to’, or ‘promise someone that’” (Searle 1968, 417). This accusation is strange for two reasons, especially coming from a close student of Austin’s. The first is that Austin does acknowledge that telling, saying, and asking are illocutionary acts. Austin classes these verbs as ‘expositives’, and explicitly lists “tell” and “ask” among his examples of expositives (*HDTW*, 162). Searle might misread Austin on this point because he thinks that accepting all verbs of utterance as illocutionary verbs is fatal to the locutionary/illocutionary distinction, and this is the second point on which Searle misreads Austin. In the second half of *How To Do Things With Words*, Austin abandons the performative/constative distinction precisely because no grammatical criterion distinguishes the one from the other. His locutionary/illocutionary/perlocutionary distinction does not separate out three different acts, but rather distinguishes three aspects of a single speech act (cf. *HDTW*, 145 – 6). That locutionary and illocutionary acts are not fully separable, far from being fatal to Austin’s distinction, is a part of his point in drawing the distinction in the first place.

Nevertheless, Searle’s attack on Austin’s locutionary act identifies a difficulty in Austin’s formulation. Austin describes the locutionary act as itself composed of three distinguishable acts: the phonetic act of uttering certain sounds, the phatic act of uttering certain vocables and words that conform to a certain vocabulary and grammar, and the rhetic act “of using those vocables with a certain more-or-less definite sense and reference” (*HDTW*, 95). Austin distinguishes the phatic from the rhetic act by noting that a phatic act must be reported through quotation—“he said, ‘the cat is on the mat’”—whereas the rhetic act can be reported through indirect speech—“he said that the cat was on the mat”. However, as Searle notes, any report using indirect speech necessarily reports not a rhetic act, but an illocutionary act:

even “said” carries illocutionary force, so we are not simply describing *what* was uttered, but also *how* it was uttered.

I glossed Austin’s ternary distinction earlier with the example of “I just want to be friends”:

... she has performed three acts: the locutionary act of saying something about what she wants and making reference to friendship among other things; the illocutionary act of ending the relationship *in* saying these words; and the perlocutionary act of breaking her boyfriend’s heart *by* saying these words.

I specified the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts with simple English phrases, but the locutionary act required more awkward phrasing to avoid the redundancy of “the locutionary act of saying that she just wants to be friends”. Grice’s favoured phrase for isolating the semantic component of an utterance is that it picks out “what is said”.²⁶ However, consider how we explain in actual cases what was said in a given utterance: all we offer are further utterances. Such explanations can specify illocutionary and perlocutionary acts: “*In/By* saying *x*, she...”. These explanations can also clear up ambiguity or misunderstandings in the original utterance: “When she said ‘I don’t want to’, she was talking about going to the dentist tomorrow, not about going to your party tonight”. However, when the original utterance is itself perfectly clear, specifying ‘what is said’ is a strikingly pointless undertaking. Consider Austin’s specification of a locutionary act: “He said to me ‘Shoot her!’ meaning by ‘shoot’ shoot and referring by ‘her’ to *her*” (*HDTW*, 101). There doesn’t seem to be a locutionary act here that can be distinguished from the utterance itself.

The original motivation for positing a distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts is that saying (for instance) “I promise” can be described both as the action of saying some words and as the action of making a promise. However, if all utterances are illocutionary acts, specifying a locutionary act without any illocutionary force becomes a hopeless enterprise. Adopting the Fregean terminology

²⁶ Cf. Grice 1989b, 25, and *passim*.

of sense and reference makes Austin vulnerable to the charge that all utterances can in fact be assessed according to their truth-conditions. Rather than posit a distinct locutionary act, we would do better to say that any speech act can be described in terms of various different illocutionary acts depending on the aims of the description. “I promise” can be described both as the *illocutionary* act of saying some words *and* as the illocutionary act of making a promise. In this respect, I concur with Searle’s claim that Austin’s locutionary and illocutionary acts collapse together.

Problems for the propositional act and literal meaning

Searle takes Austin’s locutionary act to aim at identifying the literal meaning of a sentence, which it cannot do if it is always entwined with context-dependent illocutionary forces. To remedy what he perceives to be Austin’s error, Searle proposes replacing the locutionary act with the propositional act, which he describes as “the act of *expressing the proposition* (a phrase which is neutral as to illocutionary force)” (Searle 1968, 420). In other words, Searle takes Austin’s failing to be that he doesn’t successfully specify the literal meaning of an utterance. In this respect, I think Searle has it exactly wrong: the problem is precisely with the notion of literal meaning encapsulated in Searle’s propositional act rather than its inextricability from the illocutionary act.

Why “expressing the proposition” is neutral as to illocutionary force where “saying”, “telling”, and “asking” are not, Searle does not say. This point is not just incidental. In saying all verbs of utterance bear illocutionary force, Searle tells us that there is no entirely force-neutral way of describing an utterance. To exempt “express the proposition” from this general principle is to take McDowell’s sideways perspective with respect to that particular phrase. If a sentence containing the phrase “expresses the proposition” carries illocutionary force just like any other sentence, Searle’s propositional act is no more isolable from the total context of a speech act than Austin’s locutionary act.

At the heart of Searle's revision of Austin is his "Principle of Expressivity" (1968, 415; 1969, 19), which claims that "whatever can be meant can be said". Searle does not mean to deny that I might sometimes find myself unable to say just what I mean—because I lack the words, for instance—but he argues that such limitations are merely contingent, and can in principle always be remedied with enough knowledge and imagination. He also points out that we can sometimes say less than we mean: "You ask me, 'Are you going to the party?' I say, 'Yes'. But what I mean is 'Yes, I am going to the party', not 'Yes, it is a fine day'" (1968, 415). Enshrined in the principle, then, is the notion of a propositional act, such that two different utterances can mean exactly the same thing by virtue of expressing the same proposition. On this view, a shorter sentence is elliptical for the longer one, and, in particular, the longer version is actually what the shorter one means (rather than vice versa).²⁷

This Principle of Expressivity is logically equivalent to the claim: "If you can mean it, then you can say it". This restatement leaves open the possibility that one can say things that one cannot mean, but not that one can mean things that one cannot say. In granting that one can say more than one means, Searle envisages the same propositional act being performed in different utterances: one can say the same thing in many ways. And in claiming that one cannot mean more than one can say, he claims that there is a fully explicit, literal formulation of anything we could mean, both in terms of the propositional and the illocutionary acts we perform in speaking. "I'm going to do it" may be ambiguous as to its illocutionary force, but, Searle says, the same expression can be restated unambiguously as "I hereby promise...", "I hereby warn...", "I hereby predict...", and so on. We may have all manner of reasons for not giving completely literal and unambiguous expressions of our meaning—Grice's conversational maxims providing some valuable ones—but such literal and unambiguous expression is always in principle possible. This claim reinforces a sharp

²⁷ Wittgenstein provides an illuminating discussion of elliptical expressions in *PI* §§19 – 20, but I will not dwell on this point here.

distinction between semantics and pragmatics: whatever the pragmatic implicatures of my saying what I say in the way that I say it, the underlying literal meaning remains fixed.

The notion that every utterance has an unambiguous, literal equivalent is problematic for a number of reasons. The simplest is that we are sometimes deliberately ambiguous. Suppose that, in saying “I’m going to do it”, I want you be unsure whether I intend my words as a warning or as a threat. I am hardly making an equivalent propositional act if I say instead “I hereby either warn or threaten that I’m going to do it”. The ensuing dialogue is farcical:

- Well, which one is it, a warning or a threat?
- I’m not telling. I want it to be ambiguous.

Or consider spelling out the literal equivalent of a sarcastic remark. If I smirkingly say, “It’s a little chilly in here” in an overheated room, is the literal equivalent “It’s quite warm in here”? One reason for resisting the platitude that sarcastic remarks mean the opposite of what they say is that it fails even on a simple test of truth-conditions. If I say, “It’s quite warm in here” with a straight face when it’s in fact cold, I have spoken falsely (perhaps I have a fever and don’t notice everyone shivering). Is it false to say “It’s a little chilly in here” sarcastically when it is in fact cold? Such a remark suffers the kind of infelicity that pre-empts questions of truth and falsity.

Searle diagnoses Austin and his contemporaries with having made a number of fallacies that his own theory of speech acts remedies. The most pertinent to the discussion at hand is called “the assertion fallacy” (Searle 1969, 141). Like Grice, Searle criticizes the notion that one can only make certain assertions under certain circumstances, singling out such claims as that I cannot *know* that I am in pain, that in normal circumstances I cannot be said to *remember* my name, and that an action performed in normal circumstances cannot be described as being done *voluntarily*.

Searle agrees that such statements would be odd, but not because they would be meaningless or false, but rather because they would be so obviously true.

Two points in Searle's argument are worth singling out. First, he denies that these limitations on what we should say when reveal something about the concepts of knowledge, remembering, voluntary action, and so on. He claims that just the same oddness attaches to sentences without any of these potentially philosophical words, such as "He has five fingers" or "He is breathing". The oddness, Searle says, is no more revelatory of the concept of knowledge in the one case than it is of the concept of fingers in the other. And second, he claims, these sentences cannot be completely meaningless—by which he means devoid of truth-conditions—because their negations can quite obviously be false: "He does not remember his name" or "He is not breathing" are unambiguously false when said of a person of sound mind and sound health.²⁸

Searle himself later acknowledges that the concept of knowledge has application within a web of other concepts, presuppositions, excluders, and so on, that makes it more philosophically pertinent than the concept of fingers (Searle 1969, 150). Another difference is that claims about what I know are not statements about me right now in the way that "I am breathing" is: verbs like "know", "remember", "doubt", etc., are rarely used in the present progressive form because they are not the things one can talk about in terms of stopping and starting, interrupting and resuming. This difference points to a difference in Searle's argument from negation: must we interpret "He does not know he's in pain" as an obvious falsehood? Searle is probably thinking of these words uttered in front of someone writhing on the floor in agony, in which case their potential falsehood would be only the least of their infelicities: stop doing philosophy and help the poor man. But Wittgenstein says something very close to this at *PI* §246, and he does not put it forward as an obvious

²⁸ Grice (1965, 452 – 3) argues similarly in "The Causal Theory of Perception", giving an example of an *L*-statement that is clearly false without its falsity presupposing the fulfilment of the *D*-or-*D* condition.

falsehood.²⁹ One of the dangers of providing no context for our words is that we risk missing the sorts of contexts in which they find application.

At this point, I want to return to the line of criticism I used with Grice, which is not to say that Searle is *wrong*, that it is *false* to say that “I know I am in pain” or “He is breathing” can be understood without any contextual stage-setting. Rather, I question whether Searle can seriously claim that extracting these words from any possible context identifies their unambiguous, literal meaning.³⁰ The claim that a sentence like “He is breathing” has a literal meaning that remains the same and has application regardless of context presupposes that the expression “literal meaning” has a literal meaning that remains the same and has application regardless of context. But “literal” is one half of a contrasting pair. We have no trouble explaining the literal meaning of “It’s raining cats and dogs”, but how would we explain the literal meaning of “The cat is on the mat”, used in a non-figurative context? “Well, it means that the cat is on the mat”. Nothing is explained here. To talk about ‘literal meaning’ at all, we need a term of contrast, and so the notion of ‘unambiguous, literal’ meaning is confused: we only need to explain the literal meaning of an expression when there is some clear alternative way of understanding it.

Can we not still say that every sentence (or almost every sentence) has either a literal meaning or an unambiguous meaning, and whichever one of these it is, this is what a propositional act expresses? To say whether we want to understand a sentence in its literal or its unambiguous sense requires a context to tell us which of these we want to do. We can talk about the literal meaning of “The cat is on the mat” in contexts where it could be taken metaphorically, or as a parody, or as a coded signal, and we can talk about its unambiguous meaning when there might be some confusion over which cat or which mat. We can only be clear on what propositional act is

²⁹ What Wittgenstein actually says is: “It can’t be said of me at all (except perhaps as a joke) that I *know* I’m in pain”. Wittgenstein doesn’t negate “I know I’m in pain” but questions the possibility of talking about knowledge in this context at all.

³⁰ The argument that follows draws significantly on a similar one made by Crary (2006, 50).

expressed once we understand the speech act in which it is embedded. Searle rejected the notion of a locutionary act precisely because it was inextricable from the broader speech act, but his propositional act is just as inextricable. As a tool for isolating what Searle calls “literal meaning”, the propositional act is no more successful than the locutionary act Searle means to replace.

I am not denying that we can make sense of sentences like “The cat is on the mat” or “He has five fingers” without embedding them in a particular context (you don’t need contextual cues to know which of these two sentences deals with the location of a member of Family Felidae). I am not resisting the possibility of understanding such sentences, but rather the philosophical work Searle and others want this possibility to do. Namely, that we make sense of such sentences by virtue of recognizing something called their “literal meaning”, which is encoded in a proposition and is expressed in the part of a speech act called the “propositional act”.

One motivation for positing propositions that encode a literal meaning independent of context is that different sentences can play the same inferential role. In the appropriate circumstances, “John is going to ask Jean to marry him” and “He’s going to do it” can have all the same inferential connections to other sentences. These similarities incline us to say that the two sentences have *something* in common. Because we cannot account for that something simply in terms of the actual words in the sentence, we infer that both express the same proposition.

However, we get things backward if we conclude that the similarity in inferential relations between the two sentences means that they both express the same proposition. Rather, we talk about a similarity in the first place *because* we note a similarity in their inferential relations. In my introductory chapter, I suggested that the appeal to ordinary language effects something like the shift in aspect we experience with the Necker Cube illusion, where foreground and background are inverted. By considering the place that talk about propositions has in our lives—by investigating what circumstances incline us toward talking about propositions—the appeal to ordinary language reverses our sense of what depends upon what. The

proposition is not a discovery that *explains* the similarity in inferential relations between different sentences, but is rather a placeholder that *describes* a similarity in role between sentences that crops up in the practice of drawing inferences.

Like with Grice, Searle's argument relies on exempting certain key terms from consideration. We saw that Grice does not treat utterances of cancellation as themselves subject to conversational implicatures. Searle exempts "expressing the proposition" from illocutionary force, and "literal meaning" from contextual considerations. Making such exemptions characterizes the illusory sideways perspective, from which philosophers try to speak *about* language without speaking *in* language. Exposing the incoherence of such an attempt is a central feature of the appeal to ordinary language.

1.5. Third Objection: Derrida and seriousness

Both Grice and Searle try to isolate a semantic component of language from the broader speech act in which it is embedded. Austin resists parcelling out the parts of a speech act: "the total speech act in the total speech situation is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating" (*HDTW*, 148). This emphasis on a total speech act and total speech situation motivates Austin's resistance to theorizing and explains the inevitable incompleteness of his classification of speech acts. Theorizing and classification necessarily simplify, and while a good classification can help us see the phenomena under investigation more clearly, we should not mistake the classification for the phenomena themselves.

While Derrida is far more sympathetic to Austin's approach than he is to Grice's or Searle's, he finds Austin betraying himself precisely in this appeal to a 'total' speech act or speech situation. This appeal, according to Derrida, ties Austin to a conception of communication as the transmission of representations from one mind to another. Of this conception of communication, Derrida writes, "I do not believe that a single counterexample can be found in the entire history of philosophy as such" (*Sec*, 3). This conception of communication manifests the desire to fix

language in terms of a single, univocal meaning. As Simon Glendinning puts it, “according to Derrida, the idea that the meaning of a word or utterance should, ideally, be exact or definite in this way is not one prejudice or injustice among others in philosophy; rather it is *the* philosophical prejudice, *the* philosophical injustice” (Glendinning 2000, 317).³¹ Austin ostensibly works against certain conceptions of the fixity of meaning—his attack on the descriptive fallacy rejects the view that all sentences are essentially statements of facts whose truth-conditions fully account for their meaning—so if he is guilty of what Derrida takes to be ‘*the* philosophical injustice’, he is not straightforwardly so. Indeed, Derrida’s interest in Austin stems precisely from Austin’s resistance to this injustice, and his recapitulation of it in spite of himself. The appeal to a total context is not obviously linked to an appeal to univocity, and part of Derrida’s aim in criticizing Austin is to expose and explore the connection between the two.

Austin’s appeal to a totality raises the question of what makes a speech act or speech situation ‘total’: at what point do we draw the line and conclude that we have now taken into consideration everything that pertains to the speech act or speech situation? Despite Austin’s resistance to idealization in the philosophy of language, the appeal to a totality is itself an idealization. Consider an analogy from physics. In the study of thermodynamics, it’s often helpful to talk about an ‘isolated system’, which exchanges no heat with the outside world, among other things. This idealization helps to formulate the Laws of Thermodynamics—and it’s possible to construct physical systems that closely approximate the theorized conditions of an isolated system—but it remains an idealization. No system can be *totally* sealed off from heat exchanges with the world around it. Strictly speaking, there is only one isolated system, and that isolated system is the universe itself. We might similarly say that the only ‘total context’ is the universe as a whole, in its entire history. Short of those absolute limits, we can never entirely isolate a context. Austin’s idealization,

³¹ Cf. also Glendinning 1998, 78. In Chapter Four, I discuss the importance of play to Derrida, which will help justify the outsize importance Derrida attributes to the ‘injustice’ of seeking univocity.

however, is more problematic than the physicist's. Isolated systems are acknowledged idealizations, but Austin appeals to a 'total context' precisely in order to reject the distorting idealizations of isolated propositions and their truth-conditions. Austin's total context is meant to be an antidote to idealization, not an idealization itself.

'Seriousness' in How To Do Things With Words

Austin's interest in performative utterances stems significantly from their disproving the claim that sentences are "the outward and visible sign, for convenience or other record or for information, of an inward and spiritual act" (*HDTW*, 9). He specifically dwells on the predicament of the self-styled "solid moralist" who insists that "promising is not merely a matter of uttering words! It is an inward spiritual act!" (*HDTW*, 10), showing that this stance allows us to break promises by uttering words but keeping our mental fingers crossed: "Accuracy and morality alike are on the side of the plain saying that *our word is our bond*" (*HDTW*, 10). Showing that language does more than simply convey mental contents from one consciousness to another is one of Austin's main results.

And yet, Derrida claims, Austin recapitulates this very move. One of the essential elements of Austin's total context "remains, classically, consciousness, the conscious presence of the intention of the speaking subject in the totality of his speech act. As a result, performative communication becomes once more the communication of an intentional meaning" (*Sec*, 14). Derrida zeroes in on Austin's exclusion of what Austin calls 'non-serious' speech:

A performative utterance will ... be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance—a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use—ways which fall under the doctrine of the etiolations of language. All this we

are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances. (*HDTW*, 22)

Without Derrida putting us on guard, Austin's exclusionary gesture here seems innocuous enough. It's perfectly true that we don't hold people to promises uttered when performing on a stage or reading from a book, and saying so does not in itself commit us to any conception of communication as transmitting intentions. If we want to understand the claims that performative utterances make on us, it's important to delineate the circumstances in which they do not place any claim upon us.

Somewhat less innocuous, even without Derrida looking over our shoulder, is Austin's use of "serious" as a term of exclusion. This is not how the word "serious" normally occurs in Austin's work. In teasing out what I found problematic in Grice's and Searle's appropriations of Austin, I drew on Austin's use of "serious" as a term of criticism. Austin's criticism does not amount to saying that his opponent says *x* but *x* is false, but rather it amounts to saying that his opponent, in saying "*x*", has failed to say anything intelligible at all. More often than not, Austin finds this descent into nonsense arising from an "*ivresse des grandes profondeurs*" (*PPh*, 179)³²—a failure to be serious that arises precisely from taking oneself too seriously. Austin's pervasive humour is meant in part³³ to show how quickly we fall into saying something ridiculous if we don't attend carefully to the ordinary uses of the words we employ, and the distinctions between them.

However, seriousness does double duty in *How To Do Things With Words*. Austin exposes the hollow seriousness of the 'solid moralist' who insists that promising is an inward and spiritual act, but he also speaks of 'serious' uses of words in contrast with their uses in fiction, joking, performing, citation, and so on. In discussing promises, these two uses of "serious" occur in consecutive sentences:

³² An allusion to Cousteau's description of nitrogen narcosis as "raptures of the deep", though *ivresse* also means "inebriation": philosophers have become giddy by trying to plunge too deep too quickly.

³³ Though only in part—as Christopher Ricks (1996) and Shoshana Felman (2002) both show, Austin's humour is too anarchic to be so simply contained.

Surely the words must be spoken ‘seriously’ and so as to be taken ‘seriously’? This is, though vague, true enough in general—it is an important commonplace in discussing the purport of any utterance whatsoever. I must not be joking, for example, nor writing a poem. But we are apt to have a feeling that their being serious consists in their being uttered as (merely) the outward and visible sign, for convenience or other record or for information, of an inward and spiritual act. (*HDTW*, 9)

These two requirements of seriousness—that one not be joking or writing a poem and that one have some sort of inward commitment to one’s words—are curiously tied up in Austin’s text. He ridicules this second requirement by showing how its moralistic sentiment in fact produces the opposite result, citing Hippolytus’ lame excuse that “my tongue swore to, but my heart (or mind or other backstage artiste) did not” (*HDTW*, 9 – 10).³⁴ Instead, Austin avers, “Accuracy and morality alike are on the side of the plain saying that *our word is our bond*” (*HDTW*, 10).

Hippolytus’ word may be his bond, but the promise is hollow and void by Austin’s lights by reason of the other failure of seriousness: Hippolytus is a fictional character who appears on stage, and the actor who speaks those lines is not thereby bound to the promise. The sorts of speech that Austin thus excludes as non-serious make for an odd mishmash: he rules out words spoken by an actor (*HDTW*, 22, 92n, 104), used jokingly (*HDTW*, 9, 92n, 104, 122), and used in a poem (*HDTW*, 9, 22, 92n), while also excluding fiction and quotation (*HDTW*, 92n). In all these cases, Austin offers these exclusions not as an exhaustive list, but as samples (“for example” or “e.g.” precede most of these lists), but it’s not clear what sort of list we should extrapolate from these samples. What do performing in a play, reading from a poem (or writing one), and telling a joke have in common? The words uttered in these contexts are not normally taken to be binding as performatives outside of the

³⁴ In the context of Austin’s discussion, at least, Hippolytus’ words are a lame excuse for breaking a promise. In the context of Euripides’ play, they are not. Cavell (1994) discusses both the implications of alluding to tragedy at just this point in Austin’s text, as well as the fact that Austin was probably channelling Plato’s *Symposium*, which quotes *Hippolytus* in a manner similar to Austin’s own appropriation.

context in which they're uttered,³⁵ but not because the speaker wasn't serious. "I wasn't serious" might serve as an excuse or a justification that diminishes or removes the unintended illocutionary effects of a speech act,³⁶ but not one that applies to all the contexts that Austin excludes as 'non-serious'. Let me consider each in turn.

Words spoken from a stage are no more accurately described as "non-serious" than ordinary speech is. When we see a masterful actor giving an impassioned performance, we don't say that she doesn't *really* mean what she says, nor that she isn't *really* serious. A parent might comfort a child terrified by a disturbing play by saying, "Don't worry, it's just a story", but not, "Don't worry, the woman on the stage isn't serious". The "just" in "just a story" comforts the child not because nothing happening on the stage is serious, but because the events in a story do not spill out into the world in quite a straightforward manner.³⁷ The vow that Hamlet swears to his dead father is binding on Hamlet, but is not binding on the actor who plays Hamlet. Anyone who reproaches the actor after the show for not continuing to honour the vow he made on stage does not know what a play is. Certainly, the actor would not excuse himself by saying, "I wasn't serious"—to say so would amount to a betrayal of his art. Austin alludes here to a "sea-change in special circumstances". Words spoken on stage are transformed—perhaps in the spotlight rendered more glittering and beautiful than the ordinary commerce of words that pass us by unnoticed—but not in a way that diminishes their illocutionary force. Hamlet is bound by his promise every bit as much as a person would be in ordinary circumstances. The actor is not bound, but then the actor didn't promise: Hamlet

³⁵ Hippolytus' promise counts as a promise within the context of the play, for example. And even a promise made in jest can still be treated as a promise by someone who extends the joke.

³⁶ Austin (*PPb*, 176 – 7) distinguishes justifications from excuses: charged with wrong conduct, we justify an action by explaining why it wasn't wrong, and we excuse an action by admitting that it was wrong, but pleading that it wasn't as bad as it's made out to be. On this distinction, saying "I wasn't serious" could count either as a justification (you misunderstood the context: I was parodying a bigot) or as an excuse (I know it was in poor taste, but I was only joking).

³⁷ Specifying how stories are or are not cordoned off from the world is a tremendously fraught issue. I don't mean to imply that stories cannot affect the world outside the story (pogroms and wars have been sparked by stories), nor to ignore the complicated ways in which stories and the world overlap (is the world of a culture 'outside' the myths that give this world its shape?).

did. What we find here is less an etiolation (even if it's *just* a story) but a sea-change, where the very same speech acts that are performed in the world outside the theatre are also performed in the world of the play.

Of the forms of utterance that Austin calls “non-serious”, joking is the most accurately so described: unlike the case of the actor, we can excuse (or try to excuse) words spoken in jest by saying “I wasn’t serious”. But although we can try to excuse words spoken in jest by appeal to non-seriousness, these words also suffer a kind of sea-change: any words that can be uttered in ‘ordinary’ circumstances can also be uttered in a joke, so no grammatical criterion distinguishes them. In particular, “I’m serious” might signal that the speaker is no longer joking, or it could be a part of a joke, and sometimes the distinction is unclear.³⁸ What distinguishes jokes from ‘ordinary’ utterances is not, or not decisively, a matter of the words that are uttered, but the spirit in which they’re uttered and received, something supplied by context.

The case of poetry is the most tenuous of all, and both Christopher Ricks (1996) and Geoffrey Hill (2008) challenge Austin’s seeming dismissal of poetry, and literature more generally, as “non-serious”. The question of who is speaking in a poem, and with what intent, is incredibly delicate, and assimilating all forms of poetic utterance in a single category of ‘non-serious’ would be as clumsy as clumping together “composing a quarrel with striking a match, winning a war with sneezing” (*PPh*, 179). We might treat Robert Browning’s dramatic monologues as stage utterances, but in other cases the poet is not only speaking *in propria persona*, but the poetic utterance is far more ‘serious’ than the poet’s ‘ordinary’ utterances. When Austin writes, “Walt Whitman does not seriously incite the eagle of liberty to soar” (*HDTW*, 104), Henry Staten raises his eyebrows: “If Whitman was not serious about *that*, I feel like saying, he wasn’t serious about anything” (Staten 1984, 125).

³⁸ A *Kids in the Hall* sketch features a man in a sarcastic tone of voice insisting, “I’m not being sarcastic. No, this is just a little speech impediment”. Available on the web at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjMYQyhjiYA>. Cf. also Glendinning 1998, 40: “we should remember that the addition or presence of further ‘outward’ *words* (such as ‘I intend this seriously’) cannot, even in ‘silent speech’, be assumed to settle the question; for as far as the Austinian analysis is concerned they, too, can be present without having been used with the requisite seriousness”.

Furthermore, as Maximilian de Gaynesford (2010) points out, many performative utterances in poems *are* felicitous. Not to think so is likely a consequence of taking commissives like promises as the paradigmatic instances of performative utterances. But expositives like “I tell you” or “I ask you”, as well as many other illocutionary acts besides, are often made felicitously in poetry.

Not only are stage utterances, jokes, and poems quite different from one another, but only one of them would appropriately be described as “non-serious”. Austin’s ‘non-serious’ utterances share in common nothing more than that they stand in contrast to the category of ‘serious’ utterance that Austin wants to consider. As it happens, Austin has a term for such contrasts. “Serious”, like “real”, is a ‘trouser-word’ (SS, 70). It only makes sense to call a duck “a real duck” if there is some specified way in which the duck might not be real (it’s a toy, a decoy, etc.). Similarly, an utterance is ‘serious’ only in contrast with some specified way in which it might be ‘non-serious’. Things can be ‘not real’ and utterances can be ‘non-serious’ in a diversity of ways, and no single set of criteria captures this multiplicity. In this sense, neither “serious” nor “non-serious” (nor “real” nor “unreal”) denote fixed categories, but rather turn on the contrast between the two. Given a particular doubt about an utterance—was it a joke, was it part of a play, was it a citation, was it part of a fictional story—we might clarify its intent by saying that it was spoken ‘seriously’ or ‘non-seriously’, but this contrast only works in particular instances, and as we have seen, it isn’t the right contrast for stage speech or poetry anyway.

Austin’s requirement that a felicitous performative utterance be ‘serious’ becomes problematic if that requirement reifies this ‘seriousness’ into a distinct category.³⁹ The previous sentence (and indeed this one) only count as ‘serious’

³⁹ In this respect, Searle and those who have followed him are guiltier than Austin. Searle frequently uses “serious and literal” as a rider to rule out various forms of utterance he doesn’t want to consider, and this “serious and literal” moniker has since become pervasive in the philosophy of language. When he introduces the phrase, he footnotes an explanation: “I contrast ‘serious’ utterances with play acting, teaching a language, reciting poems, practicing pronunciation, etc., and I contrast ‘literal’ with metaphorical, sarcastic, etc.” (Searle 1969, 57n). The reader is left to fill in the gaps of these *et ceteras*

utterances if some specified doubt is raised as to the intent with which I wrote them. If—as I hope—no one suspects that I’m just joking around or telling a story, there’s no reason to call these words “serious”. Nevertheless, Austin requires that felicitous performatives be spoken ‘seriously’, and also wants to exclude the ‘non-serious’ as a category of utterance. This requirement not only confuses Austin’s use of “serious” as a term of criticism, but it also misuses the word “serious” according to the sort of ordinary language analysis that Austin himself pioneers.

Austin does not use “serious” as a trouser-word, but wants it to have a definite, fixed meaning, according to which it or its contrary apply to every utterance. For this contrasting pair to do its work, we must be able to ask of any utterance, “serious or not?” Despite criticizing the impulse to ask of any action whether or not it was performed voluntarily or freely, Austin wants to be able to ask a similar question about any utterance.

As Glendinning (2000, 322 – 326)⁴⁰ points out, the translator of *The Foundations of Arithmetic* inherits this more rigid conception of seriousness from Gottlob Frege. We find in Frege’s essay “Thoughts” the same association of stage performance and poetry with non-seriousness. Frege associates a thought—the sense of a sentence, for which the question of truth can arise—with the assertoric force of a sentence. Commands are sentences, but they do not express thoughts on Frege’s view because they lack assertoric force and so the question of truth does not arise for them. How, Frege asks, can we identify a sentence as expressing a thought? Not by virtue of their containing the words “is true”, he says: an assertion needn’t contain these words in order to be true, and a sentence can contain these words and still lack assertoric force. “This happens when we are not speaking seriously”, Frege says, singling out stage assertion and poetry as examples (Frege 1984, 356). In such instances, we are not expressing thoughts, but only “‘mock thoughts’. ... Assertions in fiction are not to be taken seriously; they are only mock assertions” (Frege 1979, 130).

and figure out just what play acting has in common with teaching a language or practicing pronunciation.

⁴⁰ Cf. also Glendinning 1998, 35 – 38.

Frege introduces seriousness to distinguish assertions that have assertoric force from those that have the same form but lack assertoric force. This conception of assertoric force is central to a model of communication that Austin, in the main, resists. Assertion is the paradigmatic form of communication for Frege, because language, for him, is in the business of communicating thoughts,⁴¹ and thoughts are encoded and expressed primarily in assertions.⁴² Thoughts themselves are not mental entities but abstract entities, but communication involves the mental act of grasping thoughts. Frege is famously anti-psychologistic, and does not characterize thoughts in terms of mental states or intentions, but he nevertheless maintains that language is a vehicle for transmitting abstract thoughts from one mind to another.

Though Austin resists this model of communication, he inherits the structure of this model in his exclusion of stage speech, poetry, joking, etc., as ‘non-serious’. Frege cordons off ‘non-serious’ utterances in order to preserve a realm of assertoric force where questions of truth can arise. While Austin wants to “play Old Harry with ... the true/false fetish” (*HDTW*, 150), he maintains Frege’s structure in cordoning off ‘non-serious’ utterance in order to preserve a realm of illocutionary force where questions of felicity can arise.⁴³ “Serious” does double service in *How To Do Things With Words* because one use—Austin’s term of criticism for philosophers who cannot mean what they say—is a native Austinian expression while the other—the exclusionary gesture that cordons off a realm of illocutionary force—is an import from Frege.

⁴¹ This is actually a contestable point in Frege scholarship. Michael Dummett (1992) reads Frege as trying to develop a general theory of meaning, from which it would indeed follow that his model of asserted judgments is meant to be paradigmatic for meaningful utterances in general. However, we could more charitably read Frege not as developing a theory of meaning *as a whole*, but simply as trying to establish the rules for rational discourse. Warren Goldfarb (2001) contests the view that Frege’s fundamental project was a theory of meaning, claiming instead that logic, not semantics, was fundamental for Frege. On this view, Frege’s philosophy of language only treats that domain of meaningful language that enables rational discourse, and not meaningful language as a whole.

⁴² Propositional questions also express thoughts on Frege’s view, only these thoughts are not asserted but only put forward for examination.

⁴³ Cf. Cavell 1994, 81.

Cavell (1994, 88 – 96) defends Austin against the charge that he excludes from consideration the possibilities of infelicity and non-seriousness. These exclusions, Cavell claims, are simply deferrals, and Austin deals with them elsewhere, namely in his papers “A Plea for Excuses” and “Pretending”, respectively. This response is inadequate for three reasons.⁴⁴ First, as Roger V. Bell (2004, 201) points out, Austin does not present “A Plea for Excuses” or “Pretending” as the completion of a general theory that complements his work on performative utterances, and his methodological remarks in “A Plea for Excuses” suggest that the significance of that paper lies elsewhere. Second, as Cavell himself points out (1994, 91), Austin was dissatisfied with his work on pretending, and given that Cavell agrees that he should have been, this deferral is hardly satisfactory. Third, even if Derrida had read these other papers, I don’t think he would have changed his tune.⁴⁵ Derrida claims not simply that Austin nowhere deals with the possibility of infelicity, but that he orients his analysis of the performative toward the incoherent ideal of the ‘pure’ performative. The structure of iterability is pervasive on Derrida’s view, so that even a provisional exclusion of this structure is an error.

The ‘standard’ case of promises or of statements would never occur as such, with its ‘normal’ effects, were it not, from its very inception on, parasited, harboring and haunted by the possibility of being repeated in *all kinds of ways*. ... One neither can nor ought to exclude, even ‘strategically’, the very roots of

⁴⁴ I return to this response in Chapter Two, however, where I consider the possibility that Cavell’s invocation of deferral echoes Derrida’s coinage of *différance* in a way that does find traction against Derrida.

⁴⁵ Cavell (1995b, 71) claims that Derrida simply slipped in failing to read the relevant papers of Austin’s. Cavell may have spoken with Derrida on the subject and may know things that I don’t, but I doubt that a reader as careful and voracious as Derrida would not also have read these papers of Austin’s in addition to *How To Do Things With Words*. In his acerbic reply to Searle, Derrida remarks that Searle has clearly not read much of Derrida’s work, and Derrida shows that he has read a great deal of Searle’s work before responding (*LI*, 29). It would be surprising that he would extend this courtesy to Searle but not to Austin. Derrida later (2000) refers to “A Plea For Excuses”, and his position on Austin is unchanged, whether or not he had read this paper when he initially composed “Signature Event Context”.

what one purports to analyze. For these roots are two-fold: you cannot root-out the ‘parasite’ without rooting-out the ‘standard’ at the same time. (*LI*, 90)

Cavell refers us to “A Plea for Excuses” and “Pretending” to show that what Derrida deems an exclusionary gesture is merely a strategic deferral. But according to Derrida’s critique, even a strategic deferral constitutes a problematic exclusion.⁴⁶

Conscious intention

On Derrida’s reading—which I find suggestive but not entirely satisfying—Austin’s exclusion of seriousness relies suspiciously on a conception of conscious intention: “Nothing can distinguish a serious or sincere promise from the same ‘promise’ that is nonserious or insincere except for the intention which informs and animates it” (*LI*, 68 – 69). Frege claims that the assertoric force of a sentence lies in its “assertoric sentence-form” (Frege 1984, 356) but then says that non-serious utterances, which lack assertoric force, can have exactly the same form. Any sentence that can be uttered ‘seriously’ can also be uttered ‘non-seriously’, so no grammatical criterion can distinguish the serious from the non-serious.⁴⁷ If no grammatical criterion distinguishes the serious from the non-serious, Derrida claims, the distinction must rest on some criterion that’s hidden from view. Lurking behind this talk of seriousness, Derrida sees the guiding hand of conscious intention. Glendinning endorses Derrida’s criticism, saying of the criterion that distinguishes serious from non-serious utterances that “what is specified here will have to be construed as something essentially invisible to others in the circumstances of speech.

⁴⁶ Incidentally, passages like *PI* §365 and §393 suggest that Wittgenstein does not exclude ‘non-serious’ utterances, even provisionally, but treats them as part of an uninterrupted economy of language, and capable of throwing light on the use of words in ‘serious’ contexts.

⁴⁷ In Cavell’s language, the difference between the serious and the non-serious is not a criterial difference. Cavell criticizes Austin for failing to appreciate the importance of scepticism, and in particular, for failing to recognize that “[t]he difference between real and imaginary, between existence and absence, is not a criterial difference, not one of recognition” (*CR*, 51). In this respect, Austin’s exclusion of the non-serious is closely tied to his too-hasty dispatch of scepticism, which I discuss in Chapter Three. Cf. also Cavell 1994, 91 – 92.

In short, it will have to be what is classically called a private mental act” (Glendinning 1998, 40).

This leap from the lack of a grammatical criterion to private conscious intention is a bit hasty. Glendinning claims that Austin gets this conception of a private mental act as grounding meaning from Frege. Rather than defend Austin against this charge, a better strategy would be to show that this charge, stated baldly, is equally implausible in Frege’s case. Frege insists throughout his career on separating the logical from the psychological, and not allowing private intention to play a role in determining the meanings of utterances. Frege certainly doesn’t claim explicitly that conscious intention distinguishes assertions from ‘non-serious’ uses of the assertoric sentence form.

In laying conscious intention at the feet of Austin and, by extension, Frege, Derrida imports terms of criticism he applies more fruitfully to thinkers in the continental tradition, such as Husserl, Rousseau, and Condorcet. After all, the charge that Husserl harbours a covert psychologism finds expression in Frege more than half a century before Derrida makes a similar charge in very different terms. Cavell suggests that Derrida’s criticism of Husserl inspires a similar attack on Austin, and yet “Austin’s tone in philosophy, his mode of arrogation, is so opposed to Husserl’s that no term of criticism that fits both is likely to be equally interesting philosophically about both” (Cavell 1994, 74).

Austin notes the importance of a person’s having “certain thoughts and feelings” in a felicitous performative, and that “a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves” (*HDTW*, 15). However, he distinguishes failures of appropriate thought and feeling from miscarriages of the conventions of the performative utterance, calling the latter “misfires”, in which case the performative is not carried off, and calling the former “abuses”, and saying that the performative is achieved, however infelicitously. An insincere promise is still a promise: the absence of conscious intention does not relieve the insincere speaker of

the commitment entailed by the promise. Abuses are exceptional cases for Austin, and the model of the happy performative from which abuses deviate involves conscious intention. However, these abuses are different from the ‘non-serious’ utterances that catch Derrida’s attention. Austin might characterize a stage promise as ‘non-serious’, but he would not characterize it as an abuse: he might reproach Hippolytus for wanting to renege on a promise because he lacked the appropriate intention, but he wouldn’t reproach the actor playing Hippolytus on those grounds.

Moreover, Austin introduces abuses in the second lecture of *How To Do Things With Words*, before he concludes that no grammatical criterion distinguishes constative and performative utterances, and abandons the distinction in favour of his ternary distinction of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. Does the notion of conscious intention even survive the early stages of his discussion? His closer examination of abuses in Lecture V begins to push him in the direction of abandoning the constative/performative distinction. Reflecting that performatives will be judged abuses based on subsequent behaviour, Austin remarks that “for a certain performative utterance to be happy, certain statements have *to be true*” (*HDTW*, 45), thus muddying the distinction between stating a fact and performing a deed. Considering these difficulties, Austin concludes:

[W]e see that in order to explain what can go wrong with statements we cannot just concentrate on the proposition involved (whatever that is) as has been done traditionally. We must consider the total situation in which the utterance is issued—the total speech-act—if we are to see the parallel between statements and performative utterances, and how each can go wrong. So the total speech act in the total speech situation is emerging from logic piecemeal as important in special cases: and thus we are assimilating the supposed constative utterance to the performative. (*HDTW*, 52)

Far from retreating inward to conscious intention in order to get a handle on infelicity, Austin expands outward to consider the speech act and speech situation in their totality. This appeal to a total context also gives us a lever by which to distinguish ‘serious’ from ‘non-serious’ utterances without relying on the conscious

intention of the speaker or on any grammatical criterion. Anything that can be said in life can be said on stage, and any Stanislavski-trained actor will marry her intentions to her words, but the context of the actor's utterance—traditionally framed by the proscenium arch—gives us an appropriate sense of the bounds of her illocutionary acts.

The appeal to a totality

On one hand, I think Derrida misidentifies consciousness as grounding Austin's distinction between the serious and the non-serious: like Frege, Austin does not place undue weight on mental acts to ground the meanings of utterances. On the other hand, however, I have argued that this criticism is misplaced by showing that Austin's appeal to a 'total speech-act' animates his transition into the ternary distinction he draws in the second half of *How To Do Things With Words*. Derrida himself flags this totalizing impulse as problematic, and here I believe his criticism finds more purchase.

This appeal to a totality effectively appeals to a standard where ambiguity is removed, a perspective of total clarity where no doubt remains about the nature of the speech-act in question. Austin does not appeal to consciousness, but this notion of total clarity is precisely what traditional appeals to consciousness aim to establish, and in this respect, Austin affirms the tradition despite his deviation from it. Staten draws this connection by questioning the perspective from which one could judge a 'total' context:

The 'total' context continues to function as the norm in terms of which ... mistakes and accidents are defined, and that norm is projected as ideally determinate in the form that it would have for an ideal consciousness, one that knew precisely what's what—meanings, necessary conditions, and its own intention. Of course Austin does not say that the 'total context' is the one that is there for an ideal consciousness; he simply idealizes and presents the idealization as something given in ordinary speech and discoverable by empirical investigation. It is precisely the brunt of the deconstructive critique

to show the idealizing, totalizing form of this empirical inquiry. (Staten 1984, 117)

The notion of a ‘total’ context aspires to the possibility of, ideally, fully specifying the sense of our words, of taking a perspective on an utterance that is complete and immune to any further elaboration or supplementation. Such a notion bears the mark of a metaphysical demand placed on utterances: the demand that we be clear, not just for any practical purposes, but in an absolute sense.

This (qualified) Derridean criticism of Austin runs, in short, like this. Austin’s exclusion of ‘non-serious’ utterances, as well as his highlighting conscious intention in the case of abuses, points to the difficulty of supplying any grammatical criterion to distinguish felicitous from infelicitous performative utterances and from constative utterances. His later distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts relies not on a grammatical criterion but on context; in particular, Austin insists that we need to consider the ‘total speech-act in the total speech situation’ in order to determine the nature of a speech act. However, this appeal to a ‘total’ speech act presupposes an impossible ideal, since we can never cordon off a certain area of human life as providing all that we need to specify a ‘total’ context for a given speech-act.

Austin might challenge the claim that this appeal to a totality necessarily involves any kind of metaphysical demand placed on our understanding of a context. A context is ‘total’ not in an absolute sense, but only for all practical purposes. We need to supply sufficient contextual cues to determine that a promise was made sincerely, that circumstances were such as to avoid infelicity, and so on, but that demand for contextual stage-setting needn’t ramify indefinitely. But this response raises the question of how far the contextual stage setting needs to ramify. Grice and Searle both think they can specify the meaning of an utterance with far less contextual stage setting than Austin. The response to them is that they only *think* they have specified a meaning—they only *think* that what they say makes sense—and that we need to flesh out the context of utterance more completely to show the

incoherence of what they say. In this respect, there seems no principled end point to the specification of context. To suggest otherwise licenses Searle's project of providing a comprehensive theory of speech-acts.

1.6. Conclusion

I alluded earlier to Glendinning's characterization of "the idea that the meaning of a word or utterance should, ideally, be exact or definite" as "*the* philosophical prejudice, *the* philosophical injustice", according to Derrida. Derrida sees Austin's exclusion of 'non-serious' utterances as reiterating this same prejudice or injustice. In excluding the non-serious, Derrida claims, Austin attempts to "pass off as ordinary an ethical and teleological determination", which he characterizes as "the univocity of the utterance" (*Sec*, 17). That is, Derrida believes that Austin's exclusion of non-serious utterances arises from a desire to preserve the possibility that meaning can be total, exact, definite.

Derrida's challenge cuts to the heart of the appeal to ordinary language on two points. First, if it relies on a conception of a 'total' context, the appeal to ordinary language rests on an idealization of just the sort I claim it seeks to disenchant. And second, if setting up this totality relies on an exclusionary gesture—a distinction of the ordinary from the non-ordinary—does this mean that it excludes an actual domain of language rather than just nonsense?

These two points are related: idealizations tend to involve exclusionary gestures. In the introductory chapter, I argued that we should not conceive of the appeal to ordinary language as an exclusionary gesture, but rather as bringing home strayed, metaphysical misuses of language. However, even this conception of the ordinary as home should raise Derridean eyebrows. The conception of the ordinary as home itself implies a hierarchy, according to which there is a preferred, ideal 'home' for our words, and a way in which they can stray from this home. I considered this appeal to home as a kind of nostalgia, and found it linked—explicitly in Austin's case, implicitly in Wittgenstein's—to a mythology of the Fall: 'ordinary language' is a

place of originary purity from which we have fallen into metaphysical sin and corruption. A Derridean line of criticism reveals that we are always already fallen. While the appeal to ordinary language sharply criticizes the metaphysical ideal of univocity, its nostalgia risks recapitulating that totalizing impulse.

If we abandon the notion of the ordinary as home, does anything remain of the appeal to ordinary language? Ultimately, I will reconceive the ordinary in terms of play. I will not fully express this point until the final chapter of the thesis. The first step in addressing Derrida's challenge is to consider the appeal to ordinary language in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. I do so in the next chapter, where I claim that Wittgenstein's appeal to ordinary language is not subject to the same criticisms as Austin's.

CHAPTER TWO

“I HAVE NO OPINION”: THE FIRST PERSON AND ATTUNEMENT IN WITTGENSTEIN’S LATER PHILOSOPHY

*We commonly do not remember that it is, after
all, always the first person that is speaking.*

– Henry David Thoreau

2.1. Introduction

In my introductory chapter, I described the appeal to ordinary language as resisting the metaphysical demand that the definition of our concepts be absolutely exact. However, in Chapter One, I argued that Derrida exposes just such a demand in Austin’s appeal to a ‘total’ context. The notion of a *total* context presupposes an ideal perspective that requires no further elaboration or supplementation, from which we can provide an exact and definite account of a speech act. Derrida’s challenge is troubling, because Austin’s appeal to a total context distinguishes him from Grice and Searle, who think they can isolate the literal meaning of a sentence independent of its context. In this chapter, I turn the spotlight on Wittgenstein, and ask whether he is equal to Derrida’s challenge.

Though both Austin and Wittgenstein exemplify the appeal to ordinary language, they differ considerably in their approach. Austin avows enthusiasm for dictionaries,¹ data from law and psychology,² and Chomskian linguistics.³ Wittgenstein is instinctively suspicious of such sophisticated resources, focusing instead on language-games, scenes of teaching and learning, and simple but careful analogies and contrasts. Where Austin deliberately avoids the deeper questions about the nature and importance of philosophy,⁴ Wittgenstein is possessed by them. And unlike Austin, Wittgenstein frequently writes in the first person singular, including himself in the scenes he imagines and remarking on what he is inclined or tempted to say in response to or in description of these scenes.

The first person plural occurs frequently in both Wittgenstein and Austin, and is closely connected to the attunement on which the appeal to ordinary language draws: we can appeal to our attunement in forms of life precisely because there is a “we” that shares these forms of life. However, Wittgenstein’s “we” is less assured than Austin’s: the attunement he probes isn’t found in a dictionary but in the pre-institutional connections people make, or fail to make.⁵ The first person plural is in constant dialogue with the first person singular in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein’s sense of the fragility and flexibility of our attunement is central to the appeal to ordinary language as I wish to develop it, and a first step in that direction will be to consider the role of the first person in the *Philosophical Investigations*.

I begin by considering Bernard Williams’s (1981) discussion of Wittgenstein’s “we”, which he links to transcendental idealism (2.2). I spell out this position in

¹ Cf. *PPc*, 74; *PPd*, 96; *PPg*, 163 – 4; *PPb*, 186 – 7; *PPi*, 211; *PPj*, 243.

² Cf. *PPd*, 115; *PPb*, 187 – 9.

³ Cf. Hacker 1996, 151.

⁴ Cf. *PPk*, 271: “I am not sure importance is important”. Cf. also Grice 1989c, 181 – 2: “When we asked for a distinction between what is important and what is not important ... we were liable to be met by the statement ... that he, Austin, was not very good at distinguishing between what is important and what is not”.

⁵ Wittgenstein describes following a rule, making a report, giving an order, and playing a game of chess as “institutions” (*PI* §199) and refers to institutions elsewhere in the *Investigations* as well (*PI* §§337, 380, 540, 584), but in all of these cases he does not take the institutions for granted, but precisely explores the question of how we establish these institutions.

tandem with a conventionalist reading of Wittgenstein, and find that both commit Wittgenstein to views on necessity that cannot find coherent articulation. After proposing a preferable reading of Wittgenstein on necessity, I link that reading to Wittgenstein's use of the first person plural, showing that it lacks the confidence of the transcendental and conventionalist readings (2.3). This reading provides space to distinguish Wittgenstein from Austin in such a way that Wittgenstein does not fall subject to Derrida's critique (2.4). A close comparison between Wittgenstein and Derrida also reveals Derrida's own failure to acknowledge the distinctiveness of the appeal to ordinary language.

2.2. Wittgenstein's "we": transcendental and conventionalist readings

Wittgenstein calls his a "grammatical" investigation (*PI* §90). We grasp the essence of a concept like understanding (to use an example treated at *PI* §§138 – 155) by investigating its grammar: how it is used, how it is taught, what we can say using the word, and how sense breaks down in misuses of it. A Wittgensteinian investigation examines the kinds of sense that we can make in our talk about phenomena: "our investigation is directed not towards *phenomena*, but rather, 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" (*PI* §90).

Wittgenstein does not intend to discover anything new about the nature of language or our forms of life, but rather to call to mind what we already know we do.⁶ Wittgenstein is interested not in empirical research, but in discovering "what is possible *before* all new discoveries and inventions" (*PI* §126). His grammatical investigations are not empirical data, then, and certainly do not adhere to a scientific methodology. So what protects Wittgenstein from the charge that he is engaged in armchair linguistics? Though the stylistic differences between Wittgenstein's work and standard empirical research are many and important, the one I find the most suggestive is Wittgenstein's frequent invocation of the first person: he appeals to

⁶ Cf. *PI* §§89, 90, 127.

“the *kinds of statement* that **we** make about phenomena” (*PI* §90). The linguist who speaks about a community can run surveys and talk about how ‘they’ speak, but could neither confirm nor disconfirm a claim about what ‘we’ do.⁷ Invocations of the first person plural can be mistaken—at the opening of the eponymous essay in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Cavell addresses a seeming disagreement between Ryle and Austin about what actions we call voluntary—and empirical evidence might highlight the mistake, but empirical evidence does not have normative force in correcting this kind of mistake. Such a mistake does not come from a lack of knowledge, which can be corrected by providing new facts, but from misstating what one already knows, which can be corrected by providing a reminder.⁸

Transcendental and conventionalist readings

If Wittgenstein’s investigation neither is, nor should be, an empirical one, the “we” that features so prominently in his work is not an empirical “we”, not an anthropological entity that could be captured through surveys or field studies. How best we should make sense of it, then, and its philosophical importance, is not altogether clear. Bernard Williams (1981) understands this “we” as a transcendental subject, and a descendant of the first person singular of *TLP* 5.6: “*The limits of **my** language mean the limits of **my** world*”. In both the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*, Williams argues, Wittgenstein explores the limits of language from the inside, not stating a limit to language but showing that certain expressions are nonsensical. The first person in the *Tractatus* is not an empirical entity to be met with in the world, and nor is it an empirical question in the *Tractatus* why the world or language that delimit this first personal subject are the way that they are. Wittgenstein abandons

⁷ Hanfling (2000, 58) emphasizes the difference between observations about the speaking patterns of ‘a subject’ and questions about *the meaning* of a word, saying that the latter investigation requires the appeal to ordinary language rather than empirical research.

⁸ Two native speakers of English might turn to a grammar text—which plays the role of empirical evidence—in order to settle a dispute as to whether it is wrong to say “it’s me” rather than “it is I”. But the extent to which formal grammar should govern everyday speech is itself open to argument, and the grammar text only has normative force if both parties agree that it should.

the transcendental solipsism of the *Tractatus*, Williams claims, but he holds on to a transcendental framework by shifting from “I” to “we”:

[I]f the idea that the limits of *my* language mean the limits of *my* world can point to transcendental solipsism, then perhaps there is a form of transcendental idealism which is suggested, not indeed by the confused idea that the limits of *each* person’s language means the limits of *each* person’s world, but by the idea that the limits of *our* language mean the limits of *our* world (Williams 1981, 150).

Williams distinguishes this standpoint from an empirical, Whorfian hypothesis, according to which our language shapes our worldview and different cultures see things differently by virtue of having different linguistic categories:

Anything that can be empirically explained, as that certain external features of the world are this way rather than that, or that we ... see things in a certain way, or deal with things in one way rather than another—all these fall *within* the world of our language, and are not the transcendental facts. (Williams 1981, 152)

Wittgenstein, Williams claims, is not particularly exercised by the differences between different human groups, but rather imagines alternatives to our forms of life—like the community of *RFM* I §149, which prices wood according to the area it covers, regardless of the height of the pile of wood—in order to shed light on our own. “The imagined alternatives are not alternatives *to* us; they are alternatives *for* us, markers of how far we might go and still remain, within our world—a world leaving which would not mean that we saw something different, but just that we ceased to see” (Williams 1981, 160).

Jonathan Lear (1982, 1984) adopts Williams’s transcendental reading of Wittgenstein as a response to conventionalist readings he finds in Michael Dummett

(1959), Crispin Wright (1980), and Saul Kripke (1982).⁹ All three, he claims, take Wittgenstein's "we" as an empirical entity, where descriptions of what 'we' do reflect the agreed-upon conventions of a particular community. Dummett's Wittgenstein embraces a "full-blooded conventionalism", whereby "the logical necessity of any statement is always the *direct* expression of linguistic convention" (Dummett 1959, 329). What we take to be logically necessary, on this view, is due to individual conventions and nothing more. Wright also emphasizes the importance of communal agreement, claiming that our concept of correctness is relative to a community: "None of us unilaterally can make sense of the idea of correct employment of language save by reference to the authority of securable communal assent on the matter; and for the community itself there is no authority, so no standard to meet" (Wright 1980, 220). Kripke focuses on the 'paradox' of *PI* §201: "no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule". This paradox, says Kripke, arises if we adopt a truth-conditional conception of meaning. Kripke's Wittgenstein proposes that we think of meaning instead in terms of assertability conditions or justification conditions (Kripke 1982, 74): rather than ask whether a rule is followed *correctly*, we should ask under what conditions we are licensed to follow a rule in a particular way, and the answer, it turns out, depends on the agreement of a community.

Lear thinks this "we" of communal agreement gets things wrong. Lear follows Williams in reading Wittgenstein's "we" as a transcendental "we", which expresses what he calls our "mindedness": we share "perceptions of salience, routes of interest, feelings of naturalness" (Lear 1982, 385). He thinks conventionalist readings of Wittgenstein go astray in assuming that our mindedness is one possibility among many. We do not choose to get four as the sum of two and two, as the conventionalist reading suggests, but are rather compelled to by our mindedness offering no alternatives. Contrary to Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein, which offers a

⁹ A. W. Moore (1985) also explores this transcendental reading, though shows greater scepticism about finding transcendental idealism in the later Wittgenstein. Moore (2007) later claims Wittgenstein rejects transcendental idealism, but struggles against the powerful temptation to adopt it.

Humean sceptical solution to a sceptical paradox, Lear proposes we read Wittgenstein “as a *post-Kantian* rather than as a neo-Humean” (Lear 1984, 224).

Not only does our mindedness offer no alternatives to our forms of life, Lear claims, but we cannot make coherent sense of the notion of a culture that has radically different forms of life from our own. According to Lear, Wittgenstein’s bizarre thought experiments do not apprehend realistic alternatives to our mindedness, but rather serve as heuristics for exploring our own (Lear 1982, 389f). When Wittgenstein considers a tribe with alternative practices—such as the wood sellers of *RFM* I §149—such a tribe “is not studied in any detail, ‘it’ is presented in abstraction, conjured up at a moment to make us aware, say, that the practice of measuring does not exist in a void, sealed off from the other interests, aims, projects and practices of a community” (Lear 1984, 240). Either we can make sense of such practices, in which case we assimilate them to our own understanding of the world—our own mindedness—or they are incomprehensible to us, and in falling outside the bounds of what we can make sense of, do not offer a coherent alternative to our own forms of life. These bounds are not clearly demarcated—Lear speaks of a “twilight that constitutes the outer bounds of our mindedness” (Lear 1982, 390)—and Wittgenstein’s thought experiments explore this twilight area, to see what we can make sense of, and how much sense we can make of it. We cannot escape our forms of life and examine them from the outside, Lear claims, but by pushing against their limits, we get some sense of their contours.

Lear’s reading leaves us in an ambiguous position with regard to modality. Finding four the only conceivably correct result of adding two and two is a feature of how ‘we’ practice addition. However, Lear does not describe this feature as a convention based in communal agreement, where other conventions are imaginable, but rather says that our mindedness does not permit the conceivability of alternatives. That this is the mindedness that we share, and not some other, is left unaccountable. And without asserting that we *necessarily* share just this mindedness, it may appear radically contingent. Certain practices appear necessary from the

empirical perspective we occupy within our mindedness, says Lear, but contingent from the transcendental perspective of reflecting on the contingency of that mindedness itself. Lear speaks of “a modal form of the duck-rabbit” (Lear 1982, 386): the fact that we are minded in such a way seems alternately necessary and contingent. The feeling of contingency creeps in when we consider that nothing external to our forms of life grounds the fact that they are as they are, and the feeling of necessity returns when we reflect that no alternative forms of life are conceivable.

Wittgenstein and necessity

Wittgenstein’s “we” relates to the concept of necessity. Wittgenstein often invokes the first person plural to draw attention to grammatical features that are not contingent matters of fact, but the form by which we represent matters of fact. For instance, at *PI* §199 Wittgenstein asks of “what **we** call ‘following a rule’” whether it is something “it would be possible for only *one* person, only *once* in a lifetime, to do?” Wittgenstein answers no: following a rule is a custom, and we only make sense of the concept of a rule or of following it because rule following is a common practice in our lives. The impossibility of one person obeying one rule only once is not a matter of insisting that it could not happen, but rather of insisting that, whatever happens, it could not accurately be so described. Following a rule is *necessarily* a custom: in reflecting on what ‘we’ say or do, Wittgenstein’s grammatical investigations describe the web of concepts that give them the sense that they do. Remove the concept of a rule from its connections with concepts like regularity and correctness, and we lose our grip on the concept.

Conventionalist and transcendental readings of Wittgenstein both offer distinctive takes on necessity. On a conventionalist reading, the propositions we call necessary hold only with respect to a particular community that agrees to take them as binding, and it makes no sense to talk about necessity from outside the practices of a particular community. On Lear’s reading, necessary propositions occupy a modal middle ground. I remark first of all that either of these positions would be inimical to

a Platonist, who thinks necessary propositions correspond to unchanging abstract universals. And second, the sort of debate that might ensue between these three camps is at odds with Wittgenstein's claim at *PI* §128, that "[i]f someone were to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them". If we take Wittgenstein at his word, we have some explaining away to do: if any of the above views on modality could be expressed as a philosophical thesis, the ensuing debate would put the lie to *PI* §128.

This explaining away is a central feature of the appeal to ordinary language in Wittgenstein's philosophy. Wittgenstein repeatedly emphasizes that he wishes to describe rather than to explain (*PI* §109), that he doesn't want to tell us anything new (*PI* §89), but just remind us of what we already know (*PI* §127). Wittgenstein intends his own remarks to have this character of simply describing and saying nothing controversial:

On all questions we discuss I have no opinion; and if I had, and it disagreed with one of your opinions, I would at once give it up for the sake of argument because it would be of no importance for our discussion. We constantly move in a realm where we all have the same opinions. (*AWL*, 97)¹⁰

By presenting reminders, descriptions, and illuminating objects of comparison, Wittgenstein does not tell us anything we can disagree with—and if we are inclined to disagree, Wittgenstein will drop the point—and aims through this work to dissolve the felt need for philosophical positions. The impression that different debatable positions present themselves is an illusion that arises from trying to take McDowell's sideways perspective. Conventionalist or Platonist positions on necessity are not false so much as nonsensical: pushed in the appropriate ways, we realize that we cannot articulate these positions.

Let me then describe how we use necessary propositions. The concept of necessity works in connection not just with other modal concepts, but also with a

¹⁰ Cf. also *LFM*, 22 and 103, and Rhees 1970b, 43.

broader set of ideas about justification and agreement. A proposition that we consider to be necessarily true leaves no room for debate, admits of no empirical confirmation or disconfirmation, we treat the truth of such propositions as independent of our will, and so on. Because necessary propositions are not open to debate, those who dissent from them are normally thought to have misunderstood. We have little more to say to the wayward pupil of *PI* §185—who follows the rule “Add 2” after 1000 with 1004, 1008, ...—than “Look what you’re doing!” and “But can’t you see...?” I cannot give *reasons* why bachelors are unmarried: if you don’t already know this, then you don’t know what a bachelor is (what “bachelor” means).

These descriptions bring out the forms of life in which the concept of necessity is used: they describe what we are like such that the concept of necessity is salient to us. Neither a conventionalist nor a Platonist would dissent from these descriptions. Nor would they disagree that we use the word “necessary” to describe propositions of this sort. They would further agree that propositions describing what sorts of practices are natural to us, what customs we observe, how we use words, and so on are not propositions of this sort: we consider our forms of life to be contingent because we can—and often do—imagine them otherwise. And this, Wittgenstein wants to tell us, is all the story there is to tell.

An account of the necessity of mathematical truths amounts to a description of our mathematical practices, and the inexorability with which we insist that mathematics leaves no room for deviation or debate. In taking the laws of logic to be inexorable, “it is *we* that are inexorable in applying these laws” (*RFM* I §118).¹¹ The conventionalist would want to seize on this description and insist that mathematical truth is therefore relative to the practices in which the concept of mathematical truth finds application, and is therefore conventional. But such insistence misfires, since it views the concept of relativity from sideways on. We describe a concept as relative to a particular community or set of conventions when the former supervenes upon the latter, such that a change in our community or conventions would entail a

¹¹ Cf. also *Z* §299.

change in the concept. If we treated all our concepts as relative in this sense, we would not have a concept of necessity (or a concept of relativity, for that matter): mathematical truths hold necessarily because they hold independently of convention. What we call necessary is precisely *not* relative, and if we regarded all so-called necessary propositions as relative to convention, we would not describe them as inexorable, and we would have no concept of necessity.

The Platonist would want to seize on the same description as evidence that Wittgenstein does not appreciate that the truth of necessary propositions is independent of what we say or do, but such a claim misfires as well, since the description does say necessary propositions are independent of what we say or do. However, Wittgenstein is also no Platonist: he describes how we use certain concepts, but does not say anything about what these concepts *really* correspond to, since there is no “really” to grope toward beyond these descriptions.

Cavell (CR, 118) describes Wittgenstein’s as “an anthropological, or even anthropomorphic, view of necessity”, and acknowledges the disappointment such a view may engender:

... as if it is not really *necessity* which he has given an anthropological view of. As though if the a priori has a history it cannot really be the a priori in question. – “But something can *be* necessary whatever *we* happen to take as, or believe to be, necessary”. – But that only says that we have a (the) concept of necessity—for it is part of the meaning of that concept that the thing called necessary is *beyond our control*. (CR, 119)

The sense of disappointment, and the disagreement between conventionalists and Platonists, comes from the confused notion that our concepts have a reality independent of the forms of life in which we use them. To speak about an independent reality, we would have to step outside our forms of life, and hence step outside ourselves, and such ecstasies are not for the sober philosopher. This illusory outside perspective is the sideways perspective that McDowell warns us against.

No disagreements: a short example

I began this section by asking how we should understand Wittgenstein's use of the first person plural in his later philosophy. I considered the conventionalist position that takes Wittgenstein's "we" to articulate the conventions of a particular community and the transcendental position that takes Wittgenstein's "we" to express the conditions for the possibility of making sense at all. I claimed that neither of these positions can find coherent expression, and that a grammatical investigation of the concept of necessity comes to an end before these positions distinguish themselves from one another, or from Platonism. Wittgenstein responds to such confusions not by refuting them, but by pushing them to find clear expression. In doing so, he shows that, to the extent that they find expression, they do not disagree with the positions they distinguish themselves from, and to the extent that they think they disagree, they cannot find expression.

Wittgenstein's treatment of solipsism illustrates this approach, and it is particularly pertinent in the case at hand, since Williams takes the shift from the first person singular of the *Tractatus* to the first person plural of the *Investigations* to denote a shift from transcendental solipsism to transcendental idealism. Ultimately, Wittgenstein says that solipsism and idealism collapse together with realism.

Wittgenstein's treatment of solipsism begins at *PI* §398.¹² His interlocutor begins by insisting that, "when I imagine something, or even actually *see* objects, surely I have *got* something which my neighbour has not" (*PI* §398). But, Wittgenstein claims, none of her words do the work she wants them to do: "can't one add: 'There is here no question of a "seeing"—and therefore none of a "having"—nor of a subject, nor therefore of the I either?'" (*PI* §398). To speak of 'having' a visual experience makes the connection between the self and the experience too weak. My relationship to my experience, unlike my relationship to my shoes, or even to my feet, is not one of having, since to talk about having something, it must be

¹² These sections receive surprisingly little attention in the secondary literature, but we find illuminating discussions in Hacker (1993), McGinn (1997, 181–189), and Minar (1998).

conceivable that I not have it. I can cease to have *this* visual experience—by turning my head, for instance. But when I turn my head, the visual experience does not then slip out of my possession as I might cease to have a penny if it falls out of my pocket. The visual experience has no existence independent of my having it, and so the transitivity of the verb “to have” is misleading.

Revealingly, Wittgenstein does not try to shut down or refute his interlocutor, but actively encourages the dialectic: “I understand you” is his initial response at *PI* §398. Note that Wittgenstein does not say, “I understand *what you are saying*”. His interlocutor doesn’t herself know what she’s saying: what he understands isn’t the sense of a proposition, but an impulse that finds words in a confused manner.¹³ Rather than shut down the interlocutor’s confused impulse, Wittgenstein teases it out. The endgame is not to make his interlocutor agree with him, but to help her see that they didn’t disagree about anything substantial in the first place.

Having shown that the words with which his interlocutor expressed her initial impulse fail to do the work she wants them to do, Wittgenstein acknowledges that his interlocutor might nevertheless insist on the rightness of her words. However, doing so only amounts to recommending an alternative form of expression. It doesn’t register new facts.

For *this* is what disputes between idealists, solipsists and realists look like. The one party attacks the normal form of expression as if they were attacking an assertion; the others defend it, as if they were stating facts recognized by every reasonable human being.

If I were to reserve the word “pain” solely for what I had previously called “my pain”, and others “L.W.’s pain”, I’d do other people no injustice, so long as a notation were provided in which the loss of the word “pain” in other contexts were somehow made good. Other people would still be pitied, treated by doctors, and so on. ... But what would I gain from this new mode of

¹³ A similar expression is the lynchpin for the ‘resolute reading’ of the *Tractatus*. Diamond (2000, 150) emphasizes that *TLP* 6.54 runs: “My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands **me** eventually recognizes them as nonsensical...” rather than “... anyone who understands **them**...”. In both cases (if we accept Diamond’s reading of *TLP* 6.54), Wittgenstein maintains that we can understand *people* when they speak without understanding their words.

representation? Nothing. But then the solipsist does not *want* any practical advantage when he advances his view either! (*PI* §402 – 3)

What the solipsist *wants* is to capture “a new conception” (*PI* §401),¹⁴ and this is all right, as long as the solipsist does not then think that this new conception expresses the discovery of new facts, facts that cannot find expression in our ordinary way of speaking. By granting that this alternative notation is acceptable, Wittgenstein shows that this notation does not in fact reveal new facts: the alternative notation is acceptable precisely because it allows us to talk about all the facts we talk about in ordinary language.

In pushing on his interlocutor’s language, Wittgenstein causes her perceived difference from received opinion to evaporate. None of what she thinks constitutes a discovery can find expression except in either commonplaces that brook no disagreement or recommendations for an alternative way of speaking, which we can take or leave without our powers of expression being any weaker or stronger. Similarly, conventionalist, transcendental idealist, and Platonist positions on necessity do not express falsehoods. To the extent that what they say makes sense, they agree: all three would tell the same story about the way we use the concept of necessity. To the extent that they disagree, what they say does not make sense, or at best amounts to recommending an alternative notation.

2.3. Wittgenstein’s “we” and the appeal to ordinary language

Both conventionalist and transcendental readings of Wittgenstein take his “we” as a fixed given: as an actual community with agreed-upon practices on the conventionalist reading, or as the broader community of anyone we could hope to make sense to or of on the transcendental reading. Both of these readings miss what I take to be the distinctive feature of Wittgenstein’s appeal to ordinary language,

¹⁴ “Conception” is a translation of the German *Auffassung*, which means a point of view or way of thinking about something. Anscombe translates this term as “way of looking at things”, which sounds more natural in English, but has unfortunate visual connotations.

which is that this “we” is something we establish—and sometimes fail to establish—in exchange with one another, and not something given in advance of that exchange.

Wittgenstein’s uncertain “we”

Rather than simply describe what ‘we’ do, Wittgenstein frequently invokes imagined scenarios where people do not behave as we expect them to. Debates in the secondary literature over the degree to which such imagined scenarios represent realistic possibilities misses the point.¹⁵ The central point of such thought experiments, as I understand them, is to draw our attention to the basic facts about our forms of life that make usable the concepts that we use. If people frequently responded to teaching the way the wayward pupil of *PI* §185 does, we would not have the mathematical practices that we have. Such an example highlights the ways in which we might teach a rule like “add 2”, the ways in which we could (or could not) justify it, explain it, and so on, as well as highlighting the basic attunement involved in ordinary teaching and learning. The scenario of trying to teach the wayward pupil reveals how quickly our explanations come to an end with a practice like mathematics, and hence reveals the nature of the agreement that our mathematical practices depend upon. If you don’t understand this, there is no deeper level of agreement I can appeal to in order to bring you back onside; if you don’t understand this, I have no idea where I stand with you, I have no sense of what you might agree to. You are an enigma to me.

Wittgenstein does not *assert* our shared attunement—which Lear seems to do in describing our ‘mindedness’—but rather frames it as a conditional: *if* we are to understand one another, *then* we must agree in a wide range of practices.¹⁶ Not the agreement of active consent, but the agreement of what Wittgenstein calls

¹⁵ Though they disagree on many points, Lear (1982, 1984) and Stroud (1965, 1984) both argue that alternative forms of life are unintelligible, while Baker and Hacker (2009) argue forcefully for their intelligibility. Williams (1981) and Cassam (1986) occupy a middle ground, providing conflicting evidence on the matter.

¹⁶ Cf. *PI* §242.

Übereinstimmung (PI §241 – 2): the fact that our lives line up in certain ways. I have been calling this agreement “attunement”. If we did not share a vast raft of basic agreements, we would not share our lives together.

However, Wittgenstein also wants us to be struck by just how remarkable it is that we are indeed mutually attuned. Enigmas like the wayward pupil bring this reminder into sharp relief. We could be enigmas to one another—we sometimes are—and if this were the rule rather than the painful exception, we would not share the forms of life that we do. If we could never be certain that others add as we do, we would not use addition in the ways that we do. Our attunement is a matter of our sharing forms of life, but we should take it not as a given, but as remarkable, that we share as much as we do.

To the natural question of what licenses Wittgenstein to use the first person plural, to speak for a community rather than just for himself, the unsettling answer is that nothing does. That for the most part we are sufficiently attuned that we make sense to others and they to us is essential to our being able to share a language and forms of life, but nothing guarantees this attunement. Wittgenstein’s appeal to ordinary language goes deeper than Austin’s in its constant awareness that this attunement may give out, and often does. “Disagreement about our criteria, or the possibility of disagreement, is as fundamental a topic in Wittgenstein as the eliciting of criteria itself is”, writes Cavell (CR, 18), suggesting that the invocation of the first person plural is not a generalization from the individual’s case, but a sample:

The introduction of the sample by the words “We say...” is an invitation for you to see whether you have such a sample, or can accept mine as a sound one. One sample does not refute or disconfirm another; if two are in disagreement they vie with one another for the same confirmation. The only source of confirmation here is ourselves. And each of us is fully authoritative in this struggle. ... [I]f the disagreement persists, there is no appeal beyond us, or if beyond us two, then not beyond some eventual us. (CR, 19)

In not wanting to venture an opinion, not say anything that his interlocutor will disagree with, Wittgenstein seeks out the common ground upon which our common life is founded. To the extent that he says something about what 'we' do that meets with disagreement, "[h]e hasn't said something false about 'us'; he has learned that there is no us (yet, maybe never) to say anything about. What is wrong with his statement is that he made it to the wrong party" (CR, 19 – 20). When it comes to appealing to what 'we' do, no absolute authority brings us together or allows us to coerce dissenters.

Wittgenstein's use of the first person plural does not simply describe a community but appeals to that community. Consider the appeal to community made in the claim, "We hold these truths to be self-evident...". These words do not so much describe a community that already exists, but rather attempt to forge a community through these words. We do not just passively receive our attunement, but also actively create it in engaging with others.

Forms of life and the scene of instruction

In exploring the uses of words, Wittgenstein also explores the forms of life that give these words their use. Wittgenstein sees a deep connection between the forms of expression we use and the forms of life to which we give expression, such that investigating what we can say is tantamount to exploring what kind of creatures we are. Developing Rush Rhees's (1970b, 45) remark that "rules of grammar are rules of the lives in which there is language", Cora Diamond argues that a grammatical investigation explores the forms of life in which a concept finds application. Investigating our concept of fear, for example, does not reveal the circumstances under which we are licensed to use the concept, but rather shows "how the commerce with the word 'fear' is interwoven with the rest of the lives of the people who use the word" (Diamond 1989, 15). A list of the circumstances in which people use the word "fear" only tells us that people are inclined to make a certain sound

under certain circumstances, but it tells us nothing about what fear is, or about the lives in which such a concept is used.

The very notion of use suggests a word functioning in conjunction with others. Wittgenstein often uses the metaphor of a mechanism to show how our words and concepts are interconnected:¹⁷ we understand a part of a larger whole by considering how it connects to other parts, and what these parts accomplish in moving together. Grasping the use of a word involves understanding the forms of life in which it finds application. This point may be clearer in the case of “fear” or “understanding” than in the case of “cat” or “tree”, but it applies generally. Examples involving chairs recur throughout the *Investigations*,¹⁸ with Wittgenstein showing how this mundane concept relates to various other concepts—like sameness, simple/composite, belief, and so on—such that its use is embedded in our broader life with words.

If understanding a word also means understanding the forms of life in which it finds application, learning language is also a process of acculturation, where we are inducted into the forms of life that involve language. Wittgenstein shows a deep interest in what Cavell (1991) calls “the scene of instruction”, where an act of teaching or learning takes place.¹⁹ This scene of instruction depends crucially on attunement between the teacher and the learner. Most learning takes place within a framework that the learner already shares with the teacher. High school mathematics, for instance, follows a linear progression because topics build on one another successively. Students need a foundation in coordinate geometry before they learn

¹⁷ E.g. *PI* §§6, 12, 193 – 4, 270 – 1, 559. Though we have to be careful in reading Wittgenstein’s use of the machine metaphor, as he also frequently uses it to exemplify a kind of thinking he wishes to criticize.

¹⁸ Cf. *PI* §§1, 35, 47, 60, 80, 253, 356, 361, 368, 486, 575.

¹⁹ Besides the opening sections of the *Investigations*, which consider Augustine’s child and the tribe of builders, see also *PI* §§27, 31, 32, 35, 49, 53, 54, 77, 85, 86, 143, 144, 145, 156, 157, 159, 162, 179, 185, 189, 197, 198, 206, 207, 208, 223, 224, 232, 233, 237, 244, 249, 250, 257, 282, 308, 320, 328, 340, 361, 362, 375, 376, 378, 384, 385, 386, 441, 495, 535, 590, 630, 636, and 693. Cf. also Cavell 1989, 75: “In the culture depicted in the *Investigations* we are all teachers and all students—talkers, hearers, overhearers, hearsayers, believers, explainers; we learn and teach incessantly, indiscriminately; we are all elders and all justices”.

trigonometry, and a teacher inducts students into the principles of trigonometry by drawing on that shared framework of coordinate geometry. The shared framework need not be so academically oriented: to teach someone to give and obey orders, the teacher and learner need to share a language, a sense of what a task is and why it is worth accomplishing, of teamwork, and so on (or we might manage to teach someone *this* set of commands because we already share a sense of what a command in general is, how it is taught, obeyed, and so on).

As the example of mathematics illustrates, what we learn can become the shared framework for further learning: trigonometry builds on the framework supplied by coordinate geometry, which in turn builds upon the framework supplied by Euclidean geometry, algebra, and the Cartesian coordinate system, and these frameworks in turn build upon more elementary frameworks, and so on down. But how far down? How, for instance, can we speak of learning the activity of learning without circularity? Eventually our ability to learn from or with one another reaches bedrock. Ultimately, our ability to learn relies upon our prior attunement, which is not itself something we can teach. This attunement is not given automatically or absolutely, but is something we repeatedly discover, and whose limits we anxiously probe. The importance of attunement to understanding—and the fact that this attunement is not grounded in anything deeper than itself—is the central lesson of the parable of the wayward pupil, whose first appearance at *PI* §143 and whose subsequent reappearance at *PI* §185 motivates much of Wittgenstein's discussion of rule following. That the teacher tries prompting the pupil suggests that the teacher at least hopes to find some common ground with the pupil, and the ultimate failure of this prompting suggests the possibility that this common ground might not exist.

No set pattern prescribes what happens when our attempts at explanation or justification give out. The bedrock Wittgenstein alludes to at *PI* §217 is not a fixed ground to our reasoning, but simply the point at which we find ourselves unable to say or do anything to breach a particular impasse in understanding. Cavell (1991, 70 – 1) distinguishes his reading of Wittgenstein from Kripke's in part by noting the

different inflections they give to Wittgenstein's response to reaching bedrock: "Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do'" (*PI* §217). Kripke, as Cavell reads him, takes Wittgenstein to be saying: "Then I am licensed to say: 'This is simply what I am inclined to do'". Kripke sees a fixed answer to what happens when justifications give out: we fall back on our inclinations, and the normative heft of our inclinations comes with our sharing these inclinations with others. On this reading, "This is simply what I do" stands as a kind of ultimatum: do as I do or you do not belong to our community. On Cavell's reading, the *inclination* to say, "This is simply what I do" stands as an invitation: with the failed attempts at explanation and justification, the teacher offers herself and her conduct as a sample, which may or may not bridge the gap between teacher and pupil. What we are inclined to say, as Cavell points out, is not necessarily what we go on to say, or should say.²⁰ Part of the difficulty of the impasse between the teacher and the pupil is that it's far from clear whether and how the gap can be bridged.

Learning and projection

A natural objection to this emphasis on the scene of instruction is that Wittgenstein himself denies that how we learn a concept plays any role in its subsequent application:

Teaching as the hypothetical history of our subsequent actions (understanding, obeying, estimating a length, etc.) drops out of our considerations. The rule which has been taught and is subsequently applied interests us only so far as it is involved in the application. A rule, so far as it interests us, does not act at a distance. (*BB*, 14)²¹

²⁰ Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein seems to rely on his putting down the book after the first paragraph of *PI* §201, and not reading onward. The last paragraph of *PI* §201 reads: "That's why there is an inclination to say: every action according to a rule is an interpretation. But one should speak of interpretation only when one expression of a rule is substituted for another". Wittgenstein makes it clear that what we are inclined to say is not necessarily what we should say.

²¹ Cf. also *PI* §495 and *PG*, 81.

This objection highlights a parallel point to the one I made about Wittgenstein's use of the first person plural: Wittgenstein's investigation is not empirical, and he shows no interest in the psychology of language acquisition. What interests Wittgenstein in the scene of instruction is that it illustrates how we learn language together with the forms of life in which we use language. Recall my discussion of criteria from the introductory chapter: we learn what a thing is called together with learning what that thing *is*. An empirical investigation of language acquisition considers how children come to learn to talk about the world. Wittgenstein's grammatical investigation of language acquisition considers how we come to learn the world that we learn to talk about.

The *Investigations* open with St. Augustine's account of how he learned language, and the "picture of the essence of human language" (*PI* §1) that sets the *Investigations* in motion comes from an account of language acquisition. Wittgenstein finds inadequate Augustine's conception of language learning as primarily an activity of attaching names to things, since it assumes that language learning is simply a matter of finding the right words to give voice to a thinking that is already in place (*PI* §32). Or, to assimilate the thought at *PI* §19 that "to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life", the problem with Augustine's scenario is that it imagines the pre-linguistic child as already sharing its elders' forms of life, so that all it must learn are the names attached to various things and practices, all the while presupposing a ready familiarity with these things and practices.

In turning to the scene of instruction, Wittgenstein reminds us that learning a language is not a matter of learning to put names to things, but an activity in which we learn *inter alia* what names are and what things are. Cavell highlights Wittgenstein's sense that we learn words and the forms of life in which we use them simultaneously: in learning language, children do not simply learn to attach labels to things, but learn the things along with the labels.

In 'learning language' you learn not merely what the names of things are, but what a name is; not merely what the form of expression is for expressing a

wish, but what expressing a wish is; not merely what the word for “father” is, but what a father is; not merely what the word for “love” is, but what love is. In learning language, you do not merely learn the pronunciation of sounds, and their grammatical orders, but the ‘forms of life’ which make those sounds the words they are, do what they do—e.g., name, call, point, express a wish or affection, indicate a choice or an aversion, etc. And Wittgenstein sees the relations among *these* forms as ‘grammatical’ also. (CR, 177 – 8)

Because the context in which we learn words is finite and the possible contexts in which we can use words is infinite, no set of rules exhaustively dictates how we should use words in all contexts. Cavell speaks of ‘projecting’ words into new contexts to describe how we apply and extend the criteria for using words in this non-rule-governed manner: his example is a child unproblematically understanding what it means to ‘feed the meter’ having learned what it means to ‘feed the kitty’ (CR, 181). That we project words in ways that others understand, and that we understand the projections of others, is not secured by semantic rules, but manifests our shared attunement. This projectability isn’t something we need to be *taught* because without it there is nothing to learn: it is part of what teaching *is* that the teaching can be applied in new contexts that differ in unanticipated ways from the scene of instruction. If we fail to grasp the projectability of words, we’ve failed to grasp what language is.

If no rule dictates how and whether our projections succeed, and how and whether others take them up, nothing guarantees that we will go on in the same way as others—in our use of words or in our behaviour. The “we” that does go on in the same way is not a secure community for Wittgenstein, but one that must sometimes rediscover and reinvent itself. While Austin confidently resorts to dictionaries and other communal resources, Wittgenstein calls those very resources into question, examining the contexts in which we try to establish them. His “we” is always modulated by a tentative “I”. In discussion with the Vienna Circle, Wittgenstein remarks on his shift to the first person singular at the end of his “Lecture on Ethics”: “Here there is nothing to be stated anymore; all I can do is to step forth as an

individual and speak in the first person” (Waismann 1979, 117). Offering oneself as a sample is a necessary first step to finding attunement with others, and not a step that will necessarily meet with success.

2.4. Wittgenstein and Derrida

In the previous chapter, I found that Derrida is justified in questioning Austin’s appeal to a ‘total’ context to establish the nature of a speech act, and asked whether Derrida’s criticism applies to Wittgenstein and the appeal to ordinary language more generally. In this chapter, I have considered a salient difference between Austin’s and Wittgenstein’s appeals to ordinary language, namely the confidence they place in our attunement. When Austin appeals to “what we should say when” (*PPh*, 182), he speaks of a “we” whose attunement is already established, and enshrined in communal resources. Wittgenstein’s “we”, I have argued, is more tentative, and questions the basis upon which our attunement is established rather than taking that attunement for granted. This tentative approach to attunement leads Wittgenstein to consider the scene of instruction as the place where attunement is put to the test. The scene of instruction informs Wittgenstein’s vision of language according to which learning a language is a process of acculturation, and learning to use words is not simply a matter of learning rules, but also a matter of learning to project words beyond the contexts in which we have learned them. These features of Wittgenstein’s vision of language not only buffer him against Derrida’s challenge, but permit an interesting encounter between the two to unfold.

Stone on Derrida

Rather than reading Derrida as posing a challenge for Wittgenstein, Martin Stone (2000) reads Wittgenstein as posing a challenge for Derrida.²² Stone argues that Derrida is closer to Kripke’s Wittgenstein than the Wittgenstein of Cavell,

²² Cf. also Altieri (1976) and Norris (1991, 129 – 135), who also read Wittgenstein as challenging Derrida’s ‘scepticism’.

Diamond, McDowell, and others for whom the appeal to ordinary language is of central importance. Stone sees Derrida's vision of language embracing the same sceptical approach as Kripke's Wittgenstein, which he calls a 'deconstructive' reading of Wittgenstein. On this reading, the requirement that every meaningful utterance stand in need of interpretation leads to a regress because interpretations themselves count as meaningful utterances, and so we never reach a bedrock of stable interpretation but instead have an unending economy of interpretations of interpretations of interpretations.

This 'deconstructive' Wittgenstein addresses only one misconception about meaning—a Platonist conception—while the real Wittgenstein, Stone argues, addresses a second misconception, namely the deconstructive reading itself. On the deconstructive reading, Wittgenstein undermines a Platonist conception, according to which meanings are univocal and self-present entities that ground the sense of our utterances, with his paradox of interpretation. However, Stone claims, saying that the paradox of interpretation responds to Platonist yearnings puts the horse before the cart. On a careful reading of the rule following passages, we see that the paradox of interpretation *motivates* the Platonist conception of meaning rather than refuting it: the Platonist conception of meaning responds to the anxiety, induced by the paradox of interpretation, that nothing grounds the meaning of our utterances.

What the Wittgenstein attuned to ordinary language has that the deconstructive Wittgenstein lacks, says Stone, is a conception of interpretation that is only required in cases of ambiguity or other need.²³ The paradox of interpretation arises from a hyperbolic conception of interpretation, according to which every meaningful sign stands in need of interpretation. Derrida embraces the same hyperbolic conceptions as the metaphysical tradition he deconstructs, claims Stone:

²³ Linda M. G. Zerilli (2001, 34 – 35) also remarks on this conception of ambiguity as a central difference between deconstruction and Wittgenstein's appeal to ordinary language: where deconstruction takes all language to be marked by ambiguity, ambiguity for Wittgenstein arises only in cases where we are genuinely unsure how to proceed.

he undermines metaphysics by showing the impossibility of such conceptions, but he still takes them to be the only conceptions on offer.

Stone offers a clear account of how Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein falls short, but he too easily allies Derrida with Kripke. In his attempt to bring Derrida into dialogue with Wittgenstein scholarship, he rather hastily assimilates Derridean terms like "iterability" and "*différance*" to "interpretation", and then pins on Derrida the view that every meaning-event "requires an interpretation" at every step (Stone 2000, 86). That "interpretation" sounds suspiciously like a mental act of intending should make us wary of the claim that it represents Derrida's view. The difference between Derrida and Kripke becomes clearer if we consider Derrida's conception of iterability. As it happens, iterability features centrally in Derrida's criticism of Austin.

Excursus on Derrida's vision of language

Derrida is particularly interested in Austin's exclusion of 'non-serious' speech because he takes the excluded forms of utterance as exemplary of a "general citationality" (*Sec*, 17) of language, which, once accepted, undermines the appeal to a linguistic totality. Austin's exclusion of these forms of utterance, then, bespeaks the desire to suppress or resist this consideration of citationality so as to keep his conception of a 'total speech-act' from collapsing.

Derrida reads Austin as rehearsing the traditional philosophical distinction between the essential and the accidental when he characterizes non-serious forms of utterance as "*parasitic*" on "ordinary circumstances" (*HDTW*, 22): the ordinary case is essential, while parasitic cases of non-seriousness are accidents, which needn't ever occur, and which can only occur given the structure already provided by the essential, ordinary cases. They can only ever be the exception, not the norm.²⁴ Throughout his

²⁴ This charge hardly sticks to Austin uncontroversially. Cavell (1994) claims that Austin's work on excuses acknowledges the standing possibility of error in our words and deeds. Austin treats the study of excuses not as the study of an accidental offshoot, but as central to our understanding of action in general.

work, Derrida endeavours to expose the distinction between essential and accidental, necessary and contingent, as a hierarchical distinction that unjustifiably promotes a favoured term in a pair of binary opposites, relegating the disfavoured term to the status of a mere accident. Any binary pair plays on the contrast between the two terms in the pair, Derrida points out, so the sense of each member of the pair depends on its contrast with the other. The ‘essential’ term in a pair of opposites cannot be anymore essential than its ‘accidental’ counterpart, since the ‘essential’ cannot exist without its contrasting, ‘accidental’, counterpart. Derrida deliberately confuses these contrasts by writing about an “essential accident” (*OG*, 200) and a “necessary possibility” (*Sec*, 15).²⁵

The ‘necessary possibility’ of non-serious utterance is, by Derrida’s lights, an essential and ineradicable feature of language use, and to ignore, or even defer, discussion of this necessary possibility distorts our comprehension of the whole. If no grammatical criterion distinguishes serious from non-serious utterances, any utterance-token that can be spoken ‘seriously’ can also be spoken ‘non-seriously’, and that means that the possibility of non-serious utterance is a standing possibility, characteristic of all utterance-tokens. This standing possibility is one feature, Derrida takes it, “of a general citationality—or rather, a general iterability—without which there would not even be a ‘successful’ performative” (*Sec*, 17). Derrida uses the term “citationality” here because the supposed parasitism of non-serious utterances involves lifting words that can be spoken seriously from those serious contexts, and ‘citing’ them in a non-serious context. However, Derrida claims, this citationality or iterability is a general feature of language, and so we cannot exclude non-serious utterances on the basis of their citationality.²⁶

²⁵ I risk overreaching here in my comparisons of analytic and continental traditions in philosophy, but Derrida’s claim that “a possibility ... is *always* possible, and is in some sense a necessary possibility” (*Sec*, 15) is an axiom of S5 modal logic: $\Diamond A \rightarrow \Box \Diamond A$. S5 is the most widely accepted modal logic, but it’s also the strongest commonly used modal logic. Weaker modal logics that lack this axiom are sometimes called for, especially when dealing with deontic and temporal logic (Garson 2009).

²⁶ In the previous chapter, I questioned the appropriateness of “non-serious” to describe cases of acting and reciting poetry, among other things. The same doubts apply to “citationality”. An actor

All words, Derrida claims, can be iterated into further contexts. The possibility of reusing words is part of the nature of words. Derrida claims the very idea of a ‘proper’ name is misconceived, to the extent that a proper name purports to pick out a particular thing in its uniqueness. All words, in order to be usable, must be reusable, so they must all be applicable to more than one thing in one particular instance. A so-called proper name is susceptible to just the same citationality and iterability as a performative utterance. As units of language, “proper names are already no longer proper names ... their production is their obliteration” (*OG*, 109).²⁷

Derrida does not deny that stage utterance, for instance, is a special case—we do not usually repeat *verbatim* the words that someone else set down for us—but claims that stage utterance is one instance of a more general iterability that all expressions share. Performative utterances could not take hold, for instance, if they

did not repeat a ‘coded’ or iterable utterance, or in other words, if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as *conforming* with an iterable model, if it were not then identifiable in some way as a ‘citation’. (*Sec*, 18)

In this respect, Derrida claims, Austin’s ‘pure performative’ “does not emerge *in opposition to* citationality or iterability, but in opposition to other kinds of iteration within a general iterability which constitutes a violation of the allegedly rigorous purity of every event of discourse or every *speech act*” (*Sec*, 18). All language is iterable,

speaks lines that someone else has set down for her, but she does not ‘cite’ the playwright in doing so. And while we might cite lines of poetry, we do not necessarily do so when reading from a poem. Derrida’s use of “citationality” here points to a more general feature of language: that words get their sense not simply in their use, but in their re-use. However, this expanded use of “citationality” is a feature of a dilemma Derrida creates between metaphysical and deconstructive language, leaving no room for the ordinary in the middle. I discuss this dilemma later.

²⁷ Cf. also *OG*, 91: “Is it not evident that no signifier, whatever its substance and form, has a ‘unique and singular reality’? A signifier is from the very beginning the possibility of its own repetition, of its own image or resemblance. It is the condition of its ideality, what identifies it as signifier, and makes it function as such, relating it to a signified which, for the same reasons, could never be a ‘unique and singular reality’. From the moment that the sign appears, that is to say from the very beginning, there is no chance of encountering anywhere the purity of ‘reality’, ‘unicity’, ‘singularity’”.

and so rather than dismiss some manifestations of iterability as accidental, a rigorous investigation would pursue a typology of speech acts within this general field of iterability:

Rather than oppose citation or iteration to the noniteration of an event, one ought to construct a differential typology of forms of iteration, assuming that such a project is tenable and can result in an exhaustive program, a question I hold in abeyance here. In such a typology, the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance. Above all, at that point, we will be dealing with different kinds of marks or chains of iterable marks and not with an opposition between citational utterances, on the one hand, and singular and original event-utterances, on the other. (*Sec*, 18)

Derrida does not deny the distinction between felicitous performative utterances and those spoken from a stage or in a joke, nor does he deny the presence of conscious intention in much of our language use. Rather, he denies that these distinctions are fundamental, instead drawing them within the more pervasive field of the iterability of language.

On Derrida's vision of language, meaning can never be finally pinned down, but relies on a constant deferral and play of difference, a combination expressed in his coinage, *différance*. We define the meaning of a sign through other signs ("sign" here is construed broadly enough to include ostensive definition), signs which themselves are defined through further signs, and so forth. This process has no fixed end point: this deferral of meaning never reaches its conclusion in a fixed point outside the system of signs. Derrida calls the ideal of such a fixed external point a "transcendental signified".²⁸ His deconstructive readings expose the point—and Austin's appeal to a 'total speech-act' would seem to be such a point—where a text seeks to root itself in a transcendental signified, and then work through the consequences of the impossibility of such a rooting. Derrida invokes iterability to show that language, and meaning, do not work, and cannot work, by latching on to

²⁸ Cf. e.g. *OG*, 20, 23, 49, 50, 158.

something exterior to language. Hence his notorious claim, which he describes as the “axial proposition” (OG, 163) of *Of Grammatology*, that “*There is nothing outside the text*” (OG, 158).²⁹

This claim has often been read, to my mind wrongly, as a statement of linguistic scepticism, denying that language can be about anything other than itself. We come closer to Derrida’s meaning if we read him alongside the appeal to ordinary language in refusing the sideways perspective: we can only speak about language from within language, and cannot exempt any of our words or signs from the terms of our critique. If we see that the sideways perspective isn’t genuinely a perspective at all, we see that the appeal to ordinary language does not *deny* anything that we want to maintain, but rather shows that there was nothing there to deny in the first place. Similarly, Derrida does not deny an extra-textual reality, but rather draws our attention to the confusion inherent in thinking that we can root meaning in anything that lacks the iterable structure of the sign. Bernard Harrison evokes something very much like the sideways perspective in discussing Derrida’s deconstruction of the concept of metaphor in “White Mythology”:

[A]ny attempt to set up the contrast between the metaphorical and the literal (or proper) in a language which transcends that distinction, which distinguishes, ***from a standpoint outside language***, between the direct relationship between a name and its bearer and the indirect relationship between name and name involved in metaphor and periphrasis, will fail because the terms in which it operates will prove to be themselves explicable only, at some point, by dint of metaphor and periphrasis. (Harrison 1999, 515)

On Harrison’s reading, a rigid distinction between metaphorical and non-metaphorical language depends on a sideways perspective on language, one that we cannot take as long as we use language to set up that distinction.

²⁹ “Text”, for Derrida, means more than just language. The iterable structure of writing ramifies broadly, and Derrida draws attention to this iterability in events more generally. Obviously what I offer in this brief summary does not explore many of the important consequences of Derrida’s elaboration of iterability.

Wittgenstein and Derrida: points of contact

Contrary to Stone's reading, Derrida's conception of iterability requires neither that an act of interpretation must, nor that one actually does, take place when operating with signs. Derrida's point is rather that nothing 'outside the text' grounds our operation with signs. This point, I take it, is compatible with Wittgenstein's awareness of the ungroundedness of our practices:³⁰ we can provide no absolute justification for our practices, and yet we manage to get by without this absolute justification anyhow. Derrida's deconstruction shares with the appeal to ordinary language its resistance to the metaphysical demand that we find absolute justification for our practices, instead recognizing that our language and our practices are our own, and so responsive to our own needs and to no higher authority than that. Derrida affirms not that further interpretation is *always* required, but, with Wittgenstein, that we can never find absolute assurance that it will *not* be required. His criticism of Austin targets the notion that a 'total context' provides absolute assurance.

Stone misreads Derrida when he claims Derrida responds only to a Platonist conception of meaning, and not to the sceptical view that language consists only of endless interpretations. Just as the appeal to ordinary language resists both the metaphysical demand of univocity *and* relativism, Derrida's deconstruction is double-edged—indeed, Derrida himself refers to “a double gesture, a double science, a double writing” (*Sec*, 21) in the practice of deconstruction. Deconstruction does not just supplant one term in a hierarchical pair with its marginalized counterpart, but goes on to use this reversal to undermine the opposition altogether. Like Wittgenstein, Derrida does not replace a Platonistic conception of meaning with

³⁰ Staten (2001, 51 – 2) compares Derrida's claim that there is nothing outside the text with Wittgenstein's definition (one among several) of a language-game as “the whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven” (*PI* §7). This ‘whole’, like Derrida's text, admits no outside. In this respect, it differs from Austin's ‘total’ context, which is problematic precisely because it cordons off a distinct part of the whole as uniquely relevant to the meaning of a speech act.

linguistic scepticism, but rather undermines the perception that these are our two choices.

Derrida's conception of iterability places him closer to Cavell than to Kripke, in particular sharing much with Cavell's discussion of projection in his "Excursus on Wittgenstein's Vision of Language".³¹ Iterability for Derrida, like projectability for Cavell, acknowledges that words are used and reused, and that no established set of rules restricts the ways in which words are reused in further contexts. What I said earlier on Derrida's behalf about proper names—that all words are reusable, and that the very notion of a word that can only be applied once in one particular context is incoherent—finds an echo in Cavell writing on Wittgenstein's behalf:

I think that what Wittgenstein ultimately wishes to show is that it *makes no sense* at all to give a general explanation for the generality of language, because it makes no sense at all to suppose words in general might *not* recur, that we might possess a name for a thing (say "chair" or "feeding") and yet be willing to call *nothing* (else) "the same thing". ... Being willing to call other ideas (or objects) "the same sort" and being willing to use 'the same word' for them is one and the same thing. The former does not explain the latter. (CR, 188)

For both Derrida and Cavell, iterability (or "generality" as Cavell uses it here) does not need to be explained or justified because language would be unimaginable without it.³² Furthermore, both resist a sharp distinction between the meanings of words and the being of objects: the world is not already organized into types, so that language simply describes these ready-made types, but rather the way we project words into new circumstances defines what we take to be similar to, or the same as, what else.

More generally, both the Derridean and the Cavellian/Wittgensteinian visions of language resist the idea that, in order to be meaningful, language must be rooted in

³¹ Cf. CR, 168 – 190. Cavell (1994, 67 – 75) himself notes the parallel between this aspect of his work and Derrida's critique of Husserl.

³² Glendinning (1998, 121) also emphasizes this point, and draws further parallels between Wittgenstein and Derrida.

something outside itself, in objects or universals. Both resist this idea not frontally by arguing against it, but rather by suggesting that this idea only arises in order to meet a felt requirement for meaningfulness that we needn't feel.

On Cavell's reading, Wittgenstein invokes family resemblance not to refute the idea of universals, but rather to illustrate the projectability of words that dissolves the need for universals. Universals address the problem of linguistic creativity: how we can use new combinations of familiar words to describe circumstances that bear resemblances to elements of past circumstances. However, if the capacity for words to be projected into ever new contexts isn't a property that attaches to words, but simply part of what it *is* for something to be a word in the first place, this capacity does not stand in need of further explanation. Theories of universals are not so much wrong as invoked to meet a requirement that does not need to be met.

We find a similar strategy in Derrida's discussion of metaphor in "White Mythology". There, he describes metaphor as a "philosopheme" (WM, 247), suggesting that the philosophical problematic of the metaphor emerges only through an improper contrast between metaphors and proper names. This contrast depends upon a conception of language according to which the 'proper' role of language is to link names to objects. This conception of the proper name, whose very possibility Derrida contests, lies at the very heart of the philosophical conception of language: "A noun is proper when it has but a single sense. Better, it is only in this case that it is properly a noun. Univocity is the essence, or better, the *telos* of language. No philosophy, as such, has ever renounced this Aristotelian ideal. This ideal is philosophy" (WM, 247). If we recognize that all language operates within a field of iterability, metaphorical projection emerges as one kind of iteration among many rather than as an exception to the ideal of univocity. Contrary to Stone's reading, Derrida does not introduce a 'paradox of interpretation' that refutes theories of meaning that demand univocity. Instead, he shows that such theories attempt to meet a need—how non-metaphorical words have stable meanings—that needn't be

met, nor could be met. Like Wittgenstein, Derrida does not undermine metaphysical casts of thought, but rather dissolves the felt need for them.

Cavell also deals with metaphor in his “Excursus on Wittgenstein’s vision of language”, and explicitly notes, and resists, the temptation to draw from the phenomenon of projection the moral that “All language is metaphorical” (CR, 190). However, he notes that “the possibility of metaphor is the same as the possibility of language generally”, claiming that the difference between projection and what we ordinarily call metaphor is that projection proceeds naturally, while the transfer involved in metaphor “is *unnatural*—it breaks up the established, normal directions of projection” (CR, 190). Cavell shares Derrida’s sense that no rigid or absolute distinction separates metaphor from language use more generally. Furthermore, Derrida’s own position would be caricatured by the claim that ‘all language is metaphorical’: he no more wants to characterize all language as metaphorical than he wants to characterize language as ‘properly’ non-metaphorical. Rather, Derrida shares Cavell’s sense that the feature of language that enables metaphor is a feature of language that applies generally. The only difference is that, where Derrida calls metaphor a ‘philosopheme’, Cavell attempts to recover an ordinary conception of metaphor, one where it has a limited scope, and therefore a real use. That Derrida does not make that move pertains to a later stage of this discussion.

Wittgenstein’s resistance to the ideal of univocity is closely related to the disenchanting of philosophy that I claim is central to the appeal to ordinary language. Wittgenstein—and Austin, though less successfully, as we have seen—resists the temptation to invoke ideal entities as a means of philosophical explanation. This disenchanting of ideals brings out a further similarity with Derrida: their shared emphasis on the materiality of the sign. An explanation of my meaning is an explanation of what I want to say,³³ and if the words in which I initially gave my meaning were insufficient, all I can offer to clarify my meaning is more words or

³³ This point takes on a distinct inflection in French, where “meaning” is *vouloir dire*, or “wanting to say”.

gestures. Wittgenstein's emphasis on use in connection with meaning, and Derrida's conception of iterability and the absence of a transcendental signified, remind us that meaning emerges from the constant play of signs off one another, and is not grounded in anything outside the system of signs.

Wittgenstein is stubbornly insistent that we consider language in its materiality. He frequently resorts to samples, tables, and pictures to show that any work his interlocutor wants to do with idealized structures ("the yet uncomprehended process in the yet unexplored medium" (*PI* §308)) can just as easily be done with material structures, a tendency Henry Staten (1984, 73) characterizes as Wittgenstein's "extreme literalness". For instance, dealing with a conception of understanding that involves pictures floating before the mind, Wittgenstein adds, "isn't it obvious here that it is absolutely inessential that this picture be in his imagination, rather than in front of him as a drawing or model; or again, as something that he himself constructs as a model?" (*PI* §141). In the boxed remark between *PI* §108 and §109, Wittgenstein insists: "We're talking about the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language, not about some non-spatial, atemporal non-entity". The continual refrain of "ask yourself" in the *Philosophical Investigations*³⁴ prompts Wittgenstein's readers away from abstract explanations and back to the actual contexts in which words are used, taught, and explained.³⁵

Staten is particularly keen to emphasize this similarity between Wittgenstein and Derrida over the materiality of signs:

In order to present the sense of words we must present the scenes of their use; and these scenes are themselves presented in words, the words *are* scenes when their materiality and power of figuration are unleashed. Derrida and Wittgenstein both rely heavily, though in very different ways, on figuration, on image and metaphor, in general on *style*. (Staten 1984, 26)

³⁴ Cf. *PI* §§18, 73, 77, 137, 154, 158, 171, 174, 178, 190, 385, 489, 533, 578, and 687.

³⁵ Beth Savickey (unpublished) argues that the *Investigations* are full of invitations to imagine or improvise with forms of language, and that taking up these invitations significantly affects our reading.

Staten later remarks on the prevalence of colour tables, arrow schemas, and other marks throughout Wittgenstein's text, claiming that these "blur the distinction between language and non-language, leaving us instead with a sense of signs as *ciphers*—which, however, rather than calling for *decipherment* call for *syntaxis*, sequencing or arrangement" (Staten 1984, 86). Emphasizing the materiality of the sign blurs the distinction between words and things, lending credence to Derrida's conception of a system of interrelated signs without any external anchoring.

Kripke takes Wittgenstein's 'sceptical paradox' to be a discovery, and takes this discovery to deny the possibility of meaning something definite with our words. One difficulty with this reading is that it seems to contradict what Wittgenstein says elsewhere, about philosophy not making discoveries (*PI* §126) and about not wanting to deny anything (*PI* §305). The same two points militate against reading too much Kripke into Derrida. Derrida does not add anything new to the texts he reads, but rather uncovers and explores tensions that are already present in the texts themselves. His conception of language does not refute theses any more than Wittgenstein's, but rather exposes the impossibility of coherently formulating these theses in the first place. As Staten notes, style is crucial to both Wittgenstein and Derrida because they must write in a way that does not commit them to recapitulating the metaphysics they seek to dismantle. Both aim to erase their steps as they make them, to dismantle *Luftgebäude*³⁶ without throwing up new structures in their wake.³⁷

In most of its essentials, I find Derrida's vision of language to be remarkably close to Wittgenstein's. In this respect, I share Staten's sense that Wittgenstein is unique among Derrida's predecessors in "having achieved ... a consistently deconstructive standpoint" (Staten 1984, 1). However, I do not equate deconstruction

³⁶ Cf. *PI* §118. In this context, the translation of *Luftgebäude* as "houses of cards" is particularly infelicitous, since a house of cards, however unstable, is still *something*. The thought evoked by Wittgenstein's structures of air is that there was nothing palpable there to be destroyed in the first place.

³⁷ Staten (1984, 66) speaks of a "zigzag" movement in Wittgenstein's writing, which he compares with deconstruction.

with the appeal to ordinary language, and precisely because Derrida does not recognize the appeal to ordinary language as a distinct move in the philosophical dialectic. His readings rely on a dilemma between metaphysics and deconstruction in which the voice of the ordinary goes unheard. Cavell makes this charge in responding to Derrida's reading of Austin, and I will revisit this reading briefly to flesh out Cavell's charge.

Derrida and the ordinary

In the previous chapter, I found inadequate Cavell's claim that Austin's exclusion of non-serious speech was merely a strategic deferral. We find more traction against Derrida, however, if we read Cavell's echoing of Derrida's talk of deferral as a subtle counterpoint to the conception of deferral at work in Derrida's *différance*.³⁸ For Derrida, the dream of univocity is a dream deferred: we can never pin down the meaning of a sign or text absolutely. This conception of deferral that constitutes one half of *différance* opposes a metaphysical picture of the fixity of meaning by turning the metaphysical language of absolutes against itself: against the demand that meaning be fixed absolutely, Derrida claims that language is absolutely deferred, always open to further supplementation. However, the ordinary concept of deferral is not one of something forever put off or pushed back to a later time, but rather of something put off temporarily and then later completed.³⁹ If I propose that we defer our meeting to a later date, I'm simply unreliable unless we actually do ultimately meet within a relatively short time. Cavell's invocation of deferral here suggests that Derrida misreads Austin's language as harbouring metaphysical presuppositions. Derrida does not appreciate how Austin's appeal to ordinary language sets him at odds with the metaphysical tradition that Derrida so ably deconstructs. Invoking the other half of Derrida's coinage of *différance*, Cavell claims

³⁸ This way of reading Cavell's invocation of deferral was suggested to me by Stephen Mulhall.

³⁹ Cf. also Cavell (1989, 74), where he contrasts the "particular refusal of endlessness" in the appeal to ordinary language with the "endlessness of deferral" in Derrida.

that Derrida and Searle alike fail to acknowledge that “Austin’s is a (philosophical) voice whose signature it is *difficult* to assess and important to hear out in its **difference**” (Cavell 1994, 61).

This appeal to an ordinary conception of deferral may not vindicate Austin’s supposed strategic deferrals, but it highlights a distinctive feature of the appeal to ordinary language. Derrida’s language works in contestation with metaphysical language, and does not register the distinctive anti-metaphysical tenor of the appeal to ordinary language. Where Derrida sees in language a continual deferral of meaning, Wittgenstein sees explanations coming to an end.⁴⁰ Considering how we can explain the meaning of words, and the possible misunderstandings that might attend such explanations, Wittgenstein writes:

Well, we’ll just have to explain them. Explain, then, by means of other words! And what about the last explanation in this chain? (Don’t say: “There isn’t a ‘last’ explanation”. That is just as if you were to say: “There isn’t a last house in this road; one can always build an additional one”.) (*PI* §29)

We can draw no *absolute* limit to the extent to which meaning might be deferred or require further supplementation, but this is only a problem if we demand an *absolute* or metaphysical conception of meaning. Derrida’s proper names place the same strain on ordinary language that Russell’s proper names do.⁴¹ And just as we might answer Russell by saying that, far from being the only *genuine* proper names, “this” and “that” are not proper names at all, we might answer Derrida by saying that “Derrida” is a perfectly adequate proper name despite its eminent iterability.

At the end of “Signature Event Context”, Derrida identifies a lingering metaphysics of presence in Austin’s remark about signatures: in the case of ‘written

⁴⁰ Cf. *PI* §1.

⁴¹ Cf. e.g. Russell 2007, 201: “The only words one does use as names in the logical sense are words like ‘this’ and ‘that’”. Wittgenstein takes Russell’s conception of logically proper names as an attempt to “sublimate the logic of our language” (*PI* §38), the very phrase he uses to launch his methodological reflections in *PI* §89. Staten (1984, 68) calls Wittgenstein’s discussion of “this” “the hinge on which his deconstruction turns”. However, Wittgenstein’s deconstruction—if that’s the word for it—turns not on showing the impossibility of proper names, but of restoring that concept to its ordinary use.

utterances', a signature ties the utterance to the person who wrote it because "written utterances are not tethered to their origin in the way spoken ones are" (*HDTW*, 61). Derrida claims that the concept of the signature attempts the impossible, to tether words absolutely to their source: "In order for the tethering to the source to occur, what must be retained is the absolute singularity of a signature-event and a signature-form: the pure reproducibility of a pure event" (*Sec*, 20). While accepting that signatures occur "of course, every day", Derrida also insists that "the condition of possibility of those effects [of signatures] is simultaneously ... the condition of their impossibility, of the impossibility of their rigorous purity" (*Sec*, 20), again invoking iterability as rendering impossible the singularity of any inscription. The concept of the signature, according to Derrida, invokes an impossible metaphysical ideal.

Cavell picks up on Derrida's "of course", linking it to a familiar gambit in the sceptical problematic:

[Derrida] says that of course he is not denying that there are 'effects' of the ordinary, for example—I take it—that we know, and so are not wrong to say that there are words and signatures and things and animals and persons, etc. In my philosophical upbringing such a concession is familiar from academic scepticism. It matches the moment in which the academic sceptic says *of course* we know that there are tables and pens and hats, etc., *for practical purposes*. But what are these practical purposes? The goals of life? (Cavell 1995b, 74)

Cavell's charge is essentially that Derrida makes no room for the ordinary in his readings. For Derrida, the only concept of the signature is the metaphysical concept, which demands an impossible ideal of purity. Of course we operate with this concept, Derrida says, but only by compromising the ideal of purity that we attach to the concept. Cavell's response, and the response from the position of ordinary language, is to question whether this 'pure' concept of the signature is the only, or even the right, way of thinking about signatures. Our ordinary way of operating with signatures is not an impure shadow of a pure but impossible ideal: rather, this

ordinary way of operating with signatures is the true home of our concept of the signature, and any purified, ideal conception of the signature that demands more than what signatures provide in ordinary contexts misapplies that concept.

Derrida engages with the appeal to ordinary language by singling out a passage in which Austin, in his talk about seriousness, is at his most Fregean, the point at which his work most closely resembles the tradition he inherits. Mulhall (2000, 2001b) suggests that Derrida's engagement with the ordinary might have gone differently had he read Wittgenstein instead. Cavell (1994, 63) draws a curious but apt distinction, allying Derrida with Nietzsche and Plato as philosophers for whom "philosophy retains a given reality, an autonomous, cultural, intellectual, institutional life", while grouping Wittgenstein and Austin with Socrates, Descartes, Hume, Emerson, and Thoreau as philosophers for whom "the mood of philosophy begins in the street, or in doorways, or closets, anywhere but in philosophical schools". One contrast between Derrida and Wittgenstein could hardly be starker: while Derrida's writings incessantly engage in exquisitely careful readings of other texts, Wittgenstein writes almost with the air that he has never read any philosophy at all. Derrida finds the injustices of philosophy deeply embedded in the texts of the philosophical tradition; for Wittgenstein, they begin in ordinary language, a language that needn't be in any particular way informed by the philosophical tradition.

On one hand, these radically different approaches are simply two routes to the same response to metaphysics. Derrida shares Wittgenstein's self-critical orientation, recognizing the views he opposes not simply as mistakes that can and should be avoided, but as deep tendencies in our intellectual inheritance, and ones he must work through rather than around. Derrida deconstructs the metaphysical tradition from within, acknowledging his own starting point within that tradition and using that tradition's own terms and distinctions to reveal pre-existing inherent tensions:

The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by

inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it. (OG, 24)

Mulhall (2004, 78) argues that Wittgenstein's pivot at *PI* §108 turns the investigation around precisely by retaining the language of the philosophical tradition while de-subliming it. Wittgenstein's interlocutor also speaks for Wittgenstein himself, acknowledging his own temptation to place a metaphysical demand upon his language. For both Derrida and Wittgenstein, this self-critical orientation is necessary because metaphysical thinking is not simply an occupational hazard of professional philosophers, but a tendency in our thinking in general, and one whose insinuation we scarcely notice.

On the other hand, Derrida and Wittgenstein think differently about this insinuation. Derrida finds in the philosophical tradition the most explicit formulations of our intellectual orientation. For Derrida, the metaphysical conception of signatures predominates, and this conception is subtly at work even in what we take to be our ordinary operation with signatures. For Wittgenstein, the temptation to sublime our language is constant, subtle, and often overwhelming, but our concepts are not always already sublimed in this way. Cavell (1988, 174) contrasts his own work with Derrida's, claiming that, on Derrida's view, philosophy "originates in a domineering construction of (false) presence", while on Cavell's, "it institutes an (a false) absence, for which it falsely offers compensations". The subliming of our concepts to which the appeal to ordinary language responds arises from an anxiety that our concepts as we ordinarily use them are incomplete or cannot assure us that we will be understood. Metaphysics, on this view, is not the starting point for our thinking, but a retreat from the ordinary. Derrida addresses our metaphysical cast of thought in a manner similar to Wittgenstein, but without Wittgenstein's sense that metaphysics is something we anxiously withdraw to rather than something we are born into.

2.5. Conclusion

In my introductory chapter, I presented a mythology of the Fall that I found implicit in the appeal to ordinary language, according to which philosophy—or the philosophical cast of thought to which all of us are subject—is metaphysically corrupted, and we must return to the prelapsarian home of ordinary language. The deconstructive response is that we are always already Fallen: metaphysics is not something we are corrupted by, but is an inescapable feature of our commerce with words, such that our aim should be to deconstruct it rather than escape from it. Derrida is acutely critical of ideals of purity in our thinking, and in a Derridean spirit we could ask whether the appeal to ordinary language aspires to a kind of unreal purity in philosophy, to a spirit that is, *per impossibile*, uncorrupted by metaphysics. According to this line of thought, the very notion of a non-metaphysical ‘home’ of ordinary language is itself a metaphysical idealization.

In considering a number of ways that we could read Wittgenstein’s invocation of the first person plural, I considered a number of ways that we could make sense of the attunement that is central to the appeal to ordinary language. Unlike Austin’s confidence in our communal resources, I argued, Wittgenstein’s “we” is tentative and exploratory, acknowledging that our attunement lacks a secure foundation. We cannot claim secure ownership of the home presented in Wittgenstein’s conception of attunement, and we are in perpetual danger of falling behind on our mortgage payments. Where Austin’s appeal to a total context situates his conception of ordinary language within a stable frame, Wittgenstein eludes Derrida’s criticism precisely by forbearing any secure foundation for his understanding of ordinary language.

The encounter with Derrida that I have staged in the last two chapters brings out the fact that our attunement is not a stable or constant structure that underwrites our practices. In the next chapter, I will explore some consequences of acknowledging our attunement as ungrounded. And just as Derrida helped to tease out Wittgenstein’s difference from Austin, Heidegger’s discussion of uncanniness—

and its broader situation within Heidegger's analytic of Da-sein—will help me explore the ungroundedness of our attunement.

CHAPTER THREE

HIDING IN PLAIN VIEW: HEIDEGGER, EVERYDAYNESS, AND AUTHENTICITY

These, like the overly-largely lettered signs and placards of the street, escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious; and here the physical oversight is precisely analogous with the moral inapprehension by which the intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident.

– Poe, “The Purloined Letter”

3.1. Introduction

My emphasis on the importance of attunement, and its centrality to the appeal to ordinary language, is not a discovery. No one would deny that our common life requires a certain amount of common ground, and that this common ground precedes deliberate consent because it's the ground upon which we move toward consent in the first place. The appeal to ordinary language does not consist of discoveries, but of drawing attention to what we already know. A central innovation of the appeal to ordinary language is its recognition that reminders of what we

already know can be philosophically fruitful at all, and that what's open to view may still be hidden.

Avrum Stroll (2002, 104) claims that Wittgenstein is the first philosopher to recognize that reminders of ordinary and obvious facts can have powerful and less-than-obvious philosophical consequences. Stroll seems to have forgotten about phenomenology, and Heidegger in particular. The oversight is understandable: the phenomenological tradition is remote from and opaque to many of the people interested in Wittgenstein, and Heidegger's style and ambitions seem impossibly remote from anything we might recognize as 'ordinary language'. Nevertheless, the similarities between Heidegger and Wittgenstein are striking, the more so for the lack of contact or shared influence between them.

Division One of *Being and Time* analyzes everyday Da-sein—"Da-sein" being Heidegger's term of art for the distinctive being of human beings, who relate to the world understandingly—and I find important parallels between Heidegger's everydayness and the conception of the ordinary that I have been developing in this thesis. Wittgenstein and Heidegger share more than an interest in the ordinary—as Charles Guignon notes, they share an outlook that is "holistic, anti-dualist, and nonfoundationalist" (Guignon 1990, 666)—but their emphasis on the ordinary most distinguishes them from other philosophers with similar themes. However, Heidegger takes his analysis of Da-sein's 'average everydayness' to disclose an *inauthentic* Da-sein, and in Division Two of *Being and Time*, he explores the possibility of an authenticity by which Da-sein exceeds its average everydayness. If the appeal to ordinary language is akin to an appeal to everydayness, a Heideggerian critic might challenge this appeal as being adequate only to an inauthentic understanding of Da-sein.

I find the appeal to ordinary language capable of rising to this challenge, but only if we take full account of the ungrounded conception of attunement I developed in the previous chapter. One consequence of responding to Heidegger's challenge is that we find in the appeal to ordinary language something like Heidegger's appeal to

authenticity. Wittgenstein has little to say about ethics and is dismissive of saying anything of much use about it, but at the same time his work carries a rare moral intensity.¹ The appeal to ordinary language represents a shift not just in methodological orientation, but in overall orientation, which affects not just the way we think about philosophical problems, but the way we think about our place in the world. In the introductory chapter, I remarked on the moral fervour we find in both Austin and Wittgenstein. In this chapter, I develop my thinking on this point further.

I begin this chapter by presenting Heidegger's conception of everydayness, which draws on the shared world of Da-sein's being-with (3.2). Heidegger characterizes being-with in terms of *das Man*, a term he loads with connotations of conformism. I propose a novel understanding of *das Man* by placing it alongside distantiality: Da-sein is neither fully constituted by shared norms nor fully its own. I then consider Heidegger's conception of authenticity and the challenge it poses to the appeal to ordinary language (3.3). I argue that, far from endorsing the average everydayness of inauthentic Da-sein, the appeal to ordinary language shares many of the features of Heidegger's appeal to authenticity. In particular, the appeal to ordinary language draws our attention to the fundamental uncanniness of existence that authentic Da-sein acknowledges. Neither Wittgenstein nor Austin discusses uncanniness explicitly, however, but both employ it in their work. In particular, I discuss Wittgenstein's use of pictures and objects of comparison, which allows him to reflect on our conceptual life without slipping into nonsense (3.4). I contrast Wittgenstein's treatment of truth with Heidegger's, which, I claim, fails to find the words it wants.

¹ Wittgenstein tends not to condemn the shallowness of his contemporaries within the bodies of his texts, but his prefatory remarks often speak to his dissatisfaction with the way things are normally done. The preface to the *Philosophical Investigations* speaks of "the darkness of this time" (*PI*, p. 4), while the foreword to the *Philosophical Remarks* powerfully expresses the moral tenor of Wittgenstein's dissatisfaction with the contemporary world.

3.2. Everydayness in *Being and Time*

Heidegger's project in *Being and Time*—and indeed, throughout his career—is “to work out the question of the meaning of *being*” (BT, 1). His fundamental ontology aims not at the question of what there is, or why there is what there is, but the *meaning* of being. All entities have meaning to us to the extent that we can make sense of them, that they are features of a world in which we exist understandingly. Heidegger is not primarily interested in the question of how individual entities have meaning, but how being itself is meaningful, how we have understanding at all such that individual entities might show up as meaningful. Heidegger's ontology is fundamental in contrast to traditional ontologies in that they presuppose the fundamental understandability of the world—they presuppose that there's sense to be made of the world in the first place such that an ontological project is worth undertaking—whose structure Heidegger sets out to investigate. In this respect, he does not beg the question against bare naturalism by inquiring after the *meaning* of being, but rather suggests that this meaningfulness is a condition for the possibility of advancing an ontology of bare naturalism.

At the heart of Heidegger's delineation of ontology is a sentiment that is familiar and sympathetic to admirers of Wittgenstein: he wants to draw a sharp distinction between philosophy and the ontic sciences—“ontic sciences” being Heidegger's term for the knowledge-generating disciplines in the German sense of *Wissenschaften*—distinguishing them in particular by the fact that philosophy lacks the cognitive content of the sciences. Knowledge is “exposed and delimited” (BT, 9) by the ontic sciences. Fundamental ontology does not provide a new, deeper level of knowledge—it is not an extra set of truths couched within a novel theoretical framework that the phenomenologist discovers—but rather describes the ways in which entities show up for us such that they can be objects of knowledge. Heidegger is clear, however, that he is not offering us a theory of knowledge (BT, 10 – 11), but—

like Wittgenstein—something more like the logic by which beings are intelligible to us.²

We cannot separate the question of the meaning of being from the question of our understanding of being, and indeed, Heidegger connects the two early on: “What is *asked about* in the question to be elaborated is being, that which determines beings as beings, that in terms of which beings have always been understood no matter how they are discussed” (*BT*, 6). In this way, Heidegger’s project is a successor of Kant’s: it treats the investigation of the being of entities as inseparable from an investigation of the conditions for their intelligibility as entities. Heidegger’s existential analytic, like Kant’s transcendental analytic, is at once both ontological and hermeneutical: he seeks to investigate being and our understanding of beings at the same time. Both Heidegger and Kant oppose the dogmatic metaphysics that would seek to consider the being of entities without considering how these entities show up for us.

Da-sein as being-in-the-world

Heidegger starts with the analytic of Da-sein in its average everydayness, which constitutes the first division of *Being and Time*. Da-sein makes an obvious starting point for Heidegger’s ontological/hermeneutical investigation: Da-sein is the being for whom the world shows up as meaningful and the hermeneutical conditions that Heidegger sets out to delineate are the conditions by which Da-sein understands and interprets being. Heidegger calls Da-sein a “clearing” (*BT*, 133), because it’s only within the space opened up by Da-sein that entities can be interpreted in their being. These hermeneutical conditions crucially depend on Da-sein’s self-understanding: we

² Cf. Rhees 1970b, 37: “Wittgenstein wanted the two books [the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*] read together. But this has not helped people to see that the *Investigations* is a book on the philosophy of logic; it has led many ... to read the *Tractatus* as a theory of knowledge”.

make sense of how being has meaning for Da-sein by grasping how Da-sein's world is meaningful to Da-sein.³

The self-understanding that interests Heidegger is not the thematic self-understanding of human existence that we find in the work of philosophers, but the pre-theoretical understanding with which Da-sein engages in the world initially and for the most part.⁴ Before giving any explicit answer as to how it understands being, Da-sein already gives an implicit answer in its practical engagement with the world. Heidegger's attempt to retrieve the question of being begins by investigating Da-sein as being-in-the-world: he begins, that is, by considering Da-sein as embedded in and engaged with its world rather than considering it from a position of detached contemplation. "Sciences and disciplines are ways of being of Da-sein in which Da-sein also relates to beings that it need not itself be. But *being in a world* belongs essentially to Da-sein" (BT, 13). In other words, Heidegger begins with the ordinary.

Heidegger's work, much like the appeal to ordinary language, draws our attention to things we have passed over because they are already so familiar. For Heidegger, the most familiar entities are the ones whose significance is the most difficult to assess: "What is ontically nearest and familiar is ontologically the farthest, unrecognized and constantly overlooked in its ontological significance" (BT, 43). When we consider the nature of an object, bring it to thematic awareness, we abstract it from its surroundings and our own uses for it. This abstraction distorts

³ Hubert Dreyfus (1991, 28) cites three reasons that Heidegger gives for taking Da-sein as a starting point—that Da-sein relates to its being as a question, that Da-sein understands itself in terms of its average understanding, and that Da-sein's understanding of its being implies an understanding of all modes of being—while remarking that none is fully convincing. I'm not sure they're meant to be, or could be. Heidegger conceives of his project as a hermeneutic circle: no matter where we start, we'll have to provisionally take some things for granted and then circle back to question those assumptions and reconfigure our project in light of this further questioning. If there were rock-solid reasons for taking just this starting point, there would be no reason to circle back and reinterpret it.

⁴ This frequent Heideggerism is Stambaugh's translation of *zunächst und zumeinst*. Macquarrie and Robinson have it as "proximally and for the most part". *Zunächst* can mean either "initially" or "proximally", depending on context, and both translations are appropriate: Heidegger emphasizes that we tend to encounter tools as ready-to-hand *before* we contemplate them in a disengaged manner, and we encounter them in this way because they are ontically *near* to us (*das ontisch Nächste* (BT, 43)).

our pre-ontological understanding of it and makes it difficult to assess its ontological significance.

Heidegger shares Wittgenstein's and Austin's emphasis on description over explanation. While the analytic of Da-sein in *Being and Time* unfolds within a complex and terminologically intricate framework, Heidegger presents this analytic as simply describing how entities appear to us: "to let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself" (BT, 34). Like Wittgenstein, Heidegger aims to describe phenomena in ways that nevertheless have philosophical impact because they bring to light features of our understanding of the world that we have passed over because they were so obvious.

Glendinning (2007) presents five 'theses' (a term he uses with understandable caution) that he takes to be characteristic of phenomenology; theses, which, he claims, allow us to see that Wittgenstein, as well as Austin, Ryle, McDowell, Cavell, Putnam, and others also count as phenomenologists in a broader understanding of the term.⁵ The second of these is that phenomenology aims at description rather than explanation or analysis. These descriptions aim at something "we, in some way, already understand, or with which we are already, in some way, familiar, but which, for some reason, we cannot get into clear focus for ourselves without more ado" (Glendinning 2007, 16). This methodological orientation indeed applies as much to Wittgenstein and Austin as it does to Heidegger: Austin (*PPh*, 182) even tentatively describes his method as "linguistic phenomenology". Like Wittgenstein and Austin, Heidegger describes features of our everyday understanding that we miss or distort by bringing a theoretical mindset to philosophical investigations.

⁵ While I obviously see important points of connection between philosophers like Wittgenstein and Austin who appeal to ordinary language on the one hand and phenomenologists on the other, I'm not sure it clarifies matters more than it confuses them to call this first group of philosophers "phenomenologists". Rather than argue the point, I'll simply suggest that I don't think Glendinning himself quite believes it. His book has chapters on the major figures in phenomenology from Brentano and Husserl to Derrida and Levinas, and yet there's no chapter on Wittgenstein. Surely, if Wittgenstein counts as a phenomenologist, he is a figure of sufficient importance and originality—and one Glendinning clearly admires—to merit a chapter of his own rather than just passing reference throughout.

In particular, Heidegger characterizes our detached contemplation of entities as encountering them in their *Vorhandenheit* or presence-at-hand and our engaged involvement with entities as encountering them in their *Zuhandenheit* or readiness-to-hand.⁶ Philosophy traditionally treats all entities, including Da-sein, as present-at-hand, such that the world is a container furnished with present-at-hand entities standing in diverse relations to one another. Heidegger reverses the traditional philosophical hierarchy by claiming that we encounter entities initially and for the most part as ready-to-hand. Two related arguments support Heidegger's prioritization of readiness-to-hand over presence-at-hand. First, the engaged attitude is a condition for the possibility of the disengaged one that reveals entities as present-at-hand. The disengaged thinker that contemplates objects as present-at-hand entities is always already a person that exists engaged in a world that has significance to her. Descartes' meditator is not born in an isolated chamber, but must first retreat from the world in order to do the meditating. Second, Heidegger believes he can account for how we retreat from engagement with equipment to detached contemplation, but an ontology that takes all entities as primarily present-at-hand cannot account for readiness-to-hand. This claim is at least contestable: working within a present-at-hand ontology, scientific research has hardly found itself at a loss in terms of explaining our engaged coping with the world, much as we might question its success. More fundamentally, however, Heidegger claims that a present-at-hand ontology cannot escape from the sceptical problematic, which cannot even arise within the terms he lays out.⁷

⁶ Though I generally prefer, and rely on, Stambaugh's translation, I use Macquarrie and Robinson's translation of *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit* as "present-at-hand" and "ready-to-hand" respectively, as they capture the implied contrast between the two terms more neatly than Stambaugh's "objective presence" and "handiness".

⁷ In footnote 3, I claim that Heidegger's choice of Da-sein as a starting point is not meant to be irrefutably correct. The same point holds with regard to his prioritization of readiness-to-hand over presence-at-hand. At this early stage in his project, he asks us to pursue the investigation along the lines that he lays out, and to let the results speak for themselves. His later work offers a more complicated classification of entities than a tripartite distinction between presence-at-hand,

Heidegger's prioritization of readiness-to-hand over presence-at-hand involves a shift similar to the one I described in the introductory chapter in terms of the Necker Cube illusion: foreground becomes background and vice versa, inverting our sense of the order of explanation. Treating presence-at-hand as emerging from a prior readiness-to-hand rather than as the basis for all further explanation shifts our sense of what needs explaining and how. Heidegger understands the sceptical problematic as arising from a present-at-hand ontology, and claims to dissolve the entire problematic through his Necker Cube shift. This shift in perspective is strikingly similar to the shift in perspective effected by seeing attunement already implicit in all our explanations.⁸ Both shifts foreground our practical engagement with the world and give our more abstract thinking its appropriate scope by situating it within this practical engagement.

We do, of course, achieve some understanding of objects when we consider them as present-at-hand entities: the various ontic sciences do precisely that. Heidegger's prioritization of readiness-to-hand over presence-at-hand is not the epistemological claim that we must do something akin to Heideggerian phenomenology before we can do ontic science. Nor is it a metaphysical claim: Heidegger is not reversing traditional metaphysics and telling us that the objects we thought of as present-at-hand are really ready-to-hand instead. Rather, readiness-to-hand has priority over presence-at-hand in terms of the ontological/hermeneutical project of grasping the meaning of being that I discussed above. The ontic sciences give us rich and detailed knowledge of various entities, but they cannot reveal why these entities are intelligible to these particular sciences in the way that they are. While the ontic sciences provide various kinds of understanding, Heideggerian phenomenology is interested in the conditions for the possibility of such understanding. Presence-at-hand may claim priority over readiness-to-hand in the

readiness-to-hand, and *Da-sein*, suggesting that this distinction is a hermeneutical starting point rather than a fixed foundation.

⁸ The shift is similar, but not identical: as we shall see, the appeal to ordinary language responds to scepticism differently from Heidegger.

understanding of entities according to the ontic sciences, but readiness-to-hand must claim priority if we want to grasp the conditions of possibility for such understanding. We must already be in a world animated with ready-to-hand equipment if we want to understand these entities in the ways that the various ontic sciences make available to us.

Our engagement with ready-to-hand equipment is holistic and transparent. This ready-to-hand engagement is holistic in the sense that every piece of equipment is essentially connected to a broader network of entities and activities. What makes a shoe a shoe is not simply the assemblage of its various parts, but also the fact that this assemblage has a purpose and a place within the broader set of aims and aspirations that make a human life a human life and not just a complex set of chemical reactions. Ready-to-hand engagement is transparent in that tools are ready-to-hand only to the extent that we see through them to the activities we're engaged in. In their readiness-to-hand, tools are self-concealing: they come to our attention only when they cease to function as they should. The irony of turning our attention to ready-to-hand tools is that, Medusa-like, we turn them into inert present-at-hand entities in doing so.

Average everydayness and being-with

Da-sein is the whole within which equipment shows up holistically. We put our tools to work for the sake of particular goals, and we encounter non-tool equipment *as* equipment insofar as it helps or hinders us in our goals. These particular goals, in turn, only count as goals to the extent that they're a part of Da-sein's existence, in which smaller goals normally serve broader projects by which Da-sein defines itself.

Like the readiness-to-hand of equipment, Da-sein's existence is inconspicuous because transparent. For the most part, we are too busy going about the business of living to contemplate what it means that we are living. And since contemplation requires disengagement from the business of living, the results of such

contemplation—from the Cartesian meditator’s retreat into solitude to the geneticist’s isolation of genes in a laboratory setting—give us a conception of the self that is itself essentially disengaged from the world. To understand Da-sein as being-in-the-world, we must analyze it in what Heidegger calls its ‘average everydayness’ (*BT*, 43).

Both words in the phrase “average everydayness” carry their own crucial inflections. “Everydayness” draws our attention to those features of Da-sein’s existence that we pass over because their familiarity makes them inconspicuous. Da-sein is always already engaged in its world, using tools and interacting with other Da-seins,⁹ which both help Da-sein pursue its various projects and help Da-sein to define those projects in the first place. This world of everydayness claims priority over the results of disengaged contemplation because we inhabit the everyday world initially and for the most part and this everyday world is a condition for the possibility of disengaged contemplation. To use Heideggerian jargon, disengaged contemplation is an existentiell possibility for Da-sein (it is a human activity that we may or may not undertake at any given time), whose existential structure is grounded in the everyday (everydayness is a necessary and pervasive condition of Da-sein’s existence).

To understand how this everydayness can be ‘average’—and to consider the possibility of a non-average everydayness—we must come to grips with another crucial feature of Heidegger’s analytic of Da-sein: the fact that we are not Da-sein alone, but exist essentially in this world *with* other Da-seins. Just as we encounter tools initially and for the most part *as* tools, and not as present-at-hand objects whose significance we must subsequently infer, we encounter other people initially and for

⁹ Some questions have been raised over whether we can effectively treat Da-sein as coextensive with individual human beings in such a way that we can talk about Da-sein being *with* other ‘Da-seins’. Tugendhat (1986) notes that “Da-sein” is a mass noun, not a count noun, so that the plural form “Da-seins” is ungrammatical, and Haugeland (1982) identifies Da-sein not with the individual but with the entire way of life such that the world, sciences, and language are all Da-sein as well. I find Carman’s (2003, 35 – 43) response to these suggestions persuasive, noting that Heidegger does occasionally use “Da-sein” in the plural and mostly treats it as grammatically similar to the obsolete English term “man” (“man relates to the world understandingly”), which denotes not a way of life, but either individuals or individuals understood in an undifferentiated sense.

the most part as Da-sein, and not as the sealed-off enigmas that the problematic of other minds scepticism presents to us. I don't encounter other individuals and then infer that they are people rather than automata; rather I encounter other people as other people and only subsequently can I even entertain the possibility that they might be automata rather than people. The engaged world of living and acting finds us acting with and upon tools that were equally made for, and could equally be used by, others like ourselves. Furthermore, our own sense of who and what we are is shaped by our engaging with others whom we deem to be our fellows.

The traditional conception of the self as an isolated consciousness is inadequate on Heidegger's view because the self does not have a prior existence that it then learns to accommodate to a world full of others selves and entities. Rather, Da-sein comes into its Da-sein-hood as being-with-one-another: the "who" of everyday Da-sein isn't the isolated individual, but the individual constituted by social norms. Being-with is a necessary and structural feature of Da-sein—an existential in Heidegger's jargon—because it is a condition for the possibility of the kind of articulated, intelligible world that's characteristic of Da-sein. While each of us makes sense of the world in our own way, the very notion of making sense of the world in the first place, as well as the concepts with which we make sense of the world, are things we articulate together.

If being-with is constitutive of Da-sein's existence, then Da-sein's existence is largely constituted by features that are not uniquely its own. One feature of tools' readiness-to-hand is that they are ready-to-hand for others as well. A shoe is only a shoe if anyone with the same sized foot can wear it. My shoes are available to me *as* shoes only insofar as they are available as shoes to others as well. This promiscuous availability is part of what makes a shoe a shoe: it is available to many people indiscriminately because there is a way that *one wears shoes* that applies across the board. As being-with, Da-sein is constituted by a wide range of norms that dictate what *one* does—the averageness of the average everyday—which Heidegger calls *das*

Man.¹⁰ *Das Man* is not an individual, nor a group, nor even (as I will argue) a particular mode of existence, but, as Taylor Carman has it, “the impersonal normative authority underwriting the social practices that make things intelligible on a mundane level” (Carman 2003, 138). Heidegger’s *Da-sein* is constituted by the norms and attunement it shares with others, and so is never entirely itself. *Da-sein* is always constituted in part by its own individual choices and decisions and in part by its absorption in *das Man*. We could say that Heidegger has an externalist conception of the self.¹¹

Das Man: conformity or conformism?

Heidegger is interested in what *one does*, not because one has decided to do things this way, but because this is how things *are done*. The passive voice is revealing: we identify with *das Man* passively, rather than actively choosing our own course. In our average everydayness, Heidegger suggests, we identify with *das Man* unthinkingly, allowing our actions and opinions to be dictated to us by what ‘one’ does or thinks, reneging on our freedom to take responsibility for these actions and opinions. This identification with *das Man* enables a great cover-up, presenting our forms of life to ourselves as binding and necessary. In according ourselves with what ‘one does’, we do not simply choose not to find our own way of doing things, but we avoid acknowledging that there is even a choice there to be made.

Heidegger’s discussion of *das Man* is notoriously confusing and inconsistent. It’s one thing to say that shoes are available to many others indiscriminately, and

¹⁰ Both Stambaugh and Macquarrie and Robinson translate this term as “the ‘They’”, which renders unsatisfactorily a term for which there is no good English equivalent. *Man* is the German impersonal third person singular, the same as “one” in English, but translating *das Man* literally as “the one”, as Dreyfus and Carman do, carries confusingly Messianic connotations. However, as Dreyfus (1991, 152) points out, “we” or “anyone” fail to “capture the normative character of the expression. *We* or *Anyone* might try to cheat the Internal Revenue Service, but still, *one* pays *one’s* taxes”. I leave *das Man* untranslated in this thesis, but bring out the implications of Heidegger’s usage by using verbs with either the impersonal third person singular or the passive voice: *das Man* speaks to what ‘one does’ or what ‘is done’.

¹¹ Carman (1994, 2003) describes Heidegger as a “social externalist”.

another thing altogether to say that we subsume our actions and opinions to groupthink. Two related questions stand out in the secondary literature on *das Man*. First is the question of whether our identification with *das Man* constitutes just an unproblematic conformity or a more problematic conformism, and the extent to which these two can be separated. And the second, which feeds the first, is a seeming inconsistency in the text of *Being and Time* itself: is *das Man* an existential, of which authentic Da-sein is an existentiell modification, or is the reverse true?

The debate about conformity versus conformism is in a sense a debate between two of Heidegger's main influences, Wilhelm Dilthey and Søren Kierkegaard, and a good point of entry comes in Hubert Dreyfus's commentary on Division I of *Being and Time*. Dreyfus sees Dilthey and Kierkegaard pulling Heidegger in different directions as concerns our constitution by *das Man*:

... whereas Dilthey emphasized the positive function of social phenomena, which he called the "objectifications of life", Kierkegaard focused on the negative effects of the conformism and banality of what he called "the public". Heidegger takes up and extends the Diltheyan insight that intelligibility and truth arise only in the context of public, historical practices, but he is also deeply influenced by the Kierkegaardian view that "the truth is never in the crowd". (Dreyfus 1991, 143)

Dreyfus claims that Heidegger's discussion of *das Man* fails to distinguish between conformity and conformism. Talking about the 'dictatorship' of *das Man*, Heidegger describes the conformism it induces: "We enjoy ourselves and have fun the way *one* enjoys oneself. We read, see, and judge literature and art the way *one* sees and judges" (BT, 126 – 7).¹² The sort of judgments that involve conforming with popular views on literature and art are a far cry from the sorts of agreement that are constitutive of our social existence. The latter kinds of agreement are what make discourse possible at all; the former are the sorts of matters over which we can debate, agree, and disagree because of the fundamental agreements of the latter kind. While we compromise our

¹² I have altered Stambaugh's translation, rendering *man* as "one" instead of "they".

individuality by conforming to popular tastes in art simply because these are the opinions ‘one’ holds, we surely do not compromise ourselves greatly by sharing basic linguistic norms with others.

If *das Man* just indicates conformity, we shouldn’t be too troubled at the thought of its pervasiveness, but if Heidegger also intends to indicate conformism, its pervasiveness should be deeply troubling. Against Dreyfus and Carman, Frederick Olafson (1994a, 1994b) insists that *das Man* be understood not as social norms generally, but as a specific kind of levelling conformism that Heidegger takes to be neither desirable nor necessary, and which, Olafson claims, plays only a marginal role in Heidegger’s overall philosophy at the time of *Being and Time* (it receives no mention in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, for instance). Carman (1994) and Dreyfus (1995) answer Olafson, to my mind successfully, arguing that Heidegger introduces *das Man* as an existential, and that treating it as such—and taking *das Man* to denote conformity in general rather than just a more rigid conformism—provides a more consistent reading of *Being and Time*. However, both note that Olafson’s reading is not unsupported by the text, which is itself inconsistent, allowing for conflicting readings.

The inconsistency concerns the ontological status of *das Man* and the possibilities of authentic or inauthentic being, a distinction I will come to shortly. Heidegger’s introduction of *das Man* in §27 of *Being and Time* supports the Dreyfus/Carman reading: *das Man* is treated as part of the essential structure of *Da-sein*, and we are told that it “*is an existential and belongs as a primordial phenomenon to the positive constitution of Da-sein*” (BT, 129). Later, Heidegger makes the priority of *das Man* over authentic *Da-sein* even more explicit: “Authentic being-a-self shows itself to be an existentiell modification of *das Man* which is to be defined existentially” (BT, 267). Puzzlingly, Heidegger later still seems to say the reverse: “The one-self is an existentiell modification of the authentic self” (BT, 317).¹³ This later point is bolstered by a passage that seems to reject the earlier discussion as provisional: “*Our existential*

¹³ I have modified Stambaugh’s translation of *Man-selbst* as “they-self”.

analytic of Da-sein up to now cannot lay claim to primordiality. Its fore-having never included more than the *inauthentic* being of Da-sein, of Da-sein as *fragmentary*” (BT, 233). While I don’t think the inconsistency is an illusion, I also don’t think it’s as glaring as Carman and Dreyfus make out. I will now try to show how, first by offering some reflections on the nature of *das Man* and then by positioning it in contrast with Heidegger’s conception of distantiality.

Disanalogies between das Man and Da-sein

Much of the commentary on *das Man*—and indeed, in Heidegger’s own writing on the subject—characterizes *das Man* as having a similar existential status to Da-sein. Heidegger defines *das Man* as the ‘who’ of everyday Da-sein (BT, 126), and Dreyfus (1991, 158) characterizes *das Man* as a “Substitute Da-sein”. Whether it is an existential or an existentiell modification of Da-sein, *das Man* is portrayed as a way that Da-sein could or must *be*. However, we should be careful not to describe the being of *das Man* on too close an analogy with the being of Da-sein. I will focus on three disanalogies: that *das Man* lacks particularity, that it lacks unity, and that it has fuzzy boundaries. Having laid out these disanalogies, I will offer some positive reflections on how we might make sense of *das Man*’s way of being.

The most straightforward disanalogy between Da-sein’s way of being and *das Man*’s is that we cannot speak about what ‘one’ does on too close an analogy with how we speak about what ‘I’ or ‘you’ or ‘he’ or ‘she’ does. We can talk about impersonal norms in the first person singular or the impersonal third person singular with equal ease: “I look people in the eyes when toasting” versus “one looks people in the eyes when toasting”. However, references to what ‘one’ does by their nature lack particularity: I can say that *I* want the Canucks to win the Stanley Cup or that *she* wants the Canadiens to win the Stanley Cup, but the most that one can say for *das Man* is that *one* wants one’s favourite (or perhaps home) team to win the championship. In its impersonality, *das Man* lacks the crucial particularity that is a central feature of Da-sein’s existence.

A second disanalogy between *das Man* and Da-sein is that *das Man* lacks unity. *Being and Time* itself, and much of the secondary literature, often speak of *das Man* as a unified set of norms that we identify with to greater or lesser extents, as if there were one particular way in which ‘one’ behaves. But social norms are rarely so univocal. One does not take tea with salt or maple syrup, but one might take it with milk and/or sugar, or even honey or a twist of lemon. If there were a single way in which ‘one’ takes tea, there would be no need to ask “milk or sugar?” when serving it. Proverbs, the quintessential repository of common wisdom, are notoriously contradictory. Should one look before one leaps, or remember that he who hesitates is lost? Do many hands make light work, or do too many cooks spoil the broth? Even if we wanted to subsume all our decisions to the dictates of the impersonal authority of social norms, we could not live on auto-pilot: these norms point in many different directions at once. *Das Man* is not a uniform cloth, but one with many wrinkles and holes through which the individual emerges.

As a constitutive set of norms that is nevertheless not suffocatingly restrictive in its dictates, *das Man* works in close analogy with rules in games. On one hand, a sport like football is constituted by its rules, and we are not playing football if we do not follow the rules. On the other hand, the rules still allow for—indeed, impose—a certain amount of freedom. Within the framework provided by the rules, the number of possible actions of the players is restricted and yet still infinite. Players cannot do whatever they like on the field—and given sufficiently outrageous forms of behaviour they would cease to be players—but the rules define the aims of the game and place some restriction upon how those aims can be achieved without placing any absolute demands on exactly how to set about achieving them. Similarly, *das Man* provides a framework for the sorts of aims one might have in life and how one might appropriately set about achieving them, but the life that *das Man* constitutes is more like football than connect-the-dots: the rules do not tell us what to do. Every game unfolds differently for every distinct player, such that what he or she does at any

given moment is at least partly determined by his or her unique character, instincts, and capacities.¹⁴

Life is not a game, of course, and two particular differences stand out in the present context. First, life does not have a single, definite aim: Da-sein can project itself toward a variety of possible futures, and this projection need not be defined by any single goal. Second, the socially constituted norms of *das Man* are less clearly defined than the rules of a game. Life does not come with a book of rules. Some norms are more coercive than others, but no sharp line distinguishes the sorts of conformity that make social life possible from the conformism of certain social habits. Heidegger speaks disparagingly about the Da-sein who shares popular tastes in art and literature because Da-sein can lead a coherent and socially acceptable life without giving in to such conformism, but he could not as easily disparage Da-sein's agreement with others that the earth has existed for more than five minutes. However, no sharp line separates the latter kind of agreement from the former.¹⁵ Not only is *das Man* not a unity, but its boundaries are also fuzzy.

I have highlighted three ways in which *das Man* is unlike Da-sein: it lacks Da-sein's particularity, it lacks Da-sein's unity, and it lacks Da-sein's clear boundaries. This third point becomes particularly pertinent if we press beyond these disanalogies and ask what *das Man* is. If *das Man* is what can be described in terms of what 'one' does, an exhaustive catalogue would include features that constitute a mere conformity to the most basic structures of intelligibility as well as features that constitute the most craven conformism. I offer below a classification of the sorts of norms and forms of behaviour comprised by *das Man*, more in order to provide a sense of the diversity of such norms and forms of behaviour than to provide a perfect taxonomy:

¹⁴ I discuss games in more detail in the next chapter.

¹⁵ This discussion relates to Wittgenstein's riverbed analogy in *OC* §§96 – 9.

- a) *Agreement in definitions*: In order to have language at all, we must mean the same things with our words. What one's words mean is determined by the norms of a shared language.
- b) *Agreement in basic judgments*: The sorts of propositions that interested G. E. Moore and the Wittgenstein of *On Certainty*: that the earth has existed for more than five minutes, that I have hands, and so on. That is, the sorts of propositions about which agreement is necessary before rational debate can even begin.
- c) *Use of equipment*: Equipment is ready-to-hand for any Da-sein indiscriminately, and there are particular ways in which one uses hammers, wears shoes, turns doorknobs, etc.
- d) *Thrown projection*: One's particular cultural and historical situation opens up certain possibilities, makes certain options live, and closes off other possibilities that might be open to other people at other places and times.
- e) *Coordination principles*: What side of the road one drives on is largely arbitrary, but it is important that everyone in a given country drive on the same side of the road to avoid collisions. A great deal of our social life depends on such simple norms for coordination.¹⁶
- f) *Social conventions*: Recall Dreyfus's earlier example of "one pays one's taxes". Social conventions range from such official rules to norms like "Don't address your teacher by his or her first name". These conventions are imposed by authority.
- g) *Moral norms*: Between the ages of five and eight, children learn to distinguish social conventions from moral norms, the former drawing on authority, and the latter holding independent of any authority (one characteristic of psychopathy is the failure to recognize the difference). While one only pays one's taxes because the government requires it, one is expected not to need the imposition of authority in order to keep one's promises.

¹⁶ The *locus classicus* for discussions of such coordination games is Lewis 1969.

- h) *Relations to kin and non-kin*: One of the central areas of interest to anthropologists is the kinship structures within a society: who counts as family and what sorts of relations are appropriate between different members of one's family. We can include here also one's relations to those outside one's family structure. Norms dictate how one relates to strangers, and what levels of intimacy are appropriate in what circumstances.
- i) *Etiquette*: In the West, one greets with a handshake or a kiss on the cheek; in Japan, one greets with a bow. Principles of etiquette are somewhat weaker than moral norms, but still shape and ease a great deal of social interaction.
- j) *Ceremonies*: From religious rituals to birthday parties, we have various ceremonial means for expressing and affirming our solidarity, and more or less strict guidelines on how one participates in such ceremonies.
- k) *Common wisdom and proverbs*: Discussed above, our common stock of wisdom is hardly consistent, but it still provides general guidelines for how one thinks and behaves.
- l) *Behaviour appropriate to specific roles*: Particular occupations have their own particular norms: that one turn out the lights and lock up if one is the last to leave the office, that one leave the driver's area tidy for the next bus driver, and so on. The same can be said for the various non-professional social roles that people take on, whether it be behaviour appropriate to one's class, gender, age, and so on.
- m) *Common modes of thought, behaviour, and feeling*: A very broad class, which can include everything from what one thinks of a film to what one feels on hearing the news that a friend's parent has died to one's gait when walking down the street.
- n) *Common modes of expression for thought, behaviour, and feeling*: What one thinks of a film is one thing; how one talks about it is another. What one feels upon hearing bad news is one thing; how one expresses that feeling is another. Also,

while the fact that one wears clothes is covered by c) above, what kinds of clothes are fashionable fall under this category.

Heidegger's seeming inconsistency as to whether *das Man* represents conformity or conformism reflects the broad spectrum of norms *das Man* covers. Some items toward the top of this list are necessary for any kind of social existence at all, but they seem to be in the minority. While one's social existence would be significantly hampered by rejecting certain basic forms of etiquette and interpersonal relations, one would not thereby forfeit the very possibility of being-with-one-another.

Nevertheless, although following the latest fashions is hardly a necessary or constitutive feature of Da-sein's intelligibility, this list still provides good grounds for treating *das Man* as an existential. Whether any particular Da-sein adheres to a given norm or not, the fact of its social existence means that it lives in a society that has norms about how one dresses, how one expresses opinions, what kinds of opinions are acceptable, and so on. What passes as a norm, and the stringency of its demands, lack clear boundaries: at what point an innovation becomes a trend and a trend a cliché is open to debate. That there are norms, however, is undeniable, and these norms are an inescapable aspect of Da-sein's being-with. Even deviation from social norms is understood as deviation only in its relation to these norms.

Because *das Man* lacks Da-sein's particularity, unity, and distinctness, Da-sein cannot be 'lost' in *das Man* entirely. Norms of conformism can be part of Da-sein's existential structure because *das Man* is not the whole story. We do better, I propose, to consider *das Man* as one—but only one—aspect of Da-sein's existential structure. Equally important, though mostly unnoticed in the secondary literature, is distantiality.

Distantiality

Heidegger's discussion of *das Man* is prefaced by a discussion of *Abständigkeit*, a term both Macquarrie and Robinson and Stambaugh render as "distantiality"¹⁷:

In taking care of the things which one has taken hold of, for, and against others, there is constant care as to the way one differs from them, whether this difference is to be equalized, whether one's own Da-sein has lagged behind others and wants to catch up in relation to them, whether Da-sein in its priority over others is intent on suppressing them. Being-with-one-another is, unknown to itself, disquieted by the care about this distance. Existentially expressed, being-with-one-another has the character of *distantiality*. (BT, 126)

Heidegger defines distantiality, like *das Man*, as an existential: it is not a feature that Da-sein may or may not have at any given moment, but is an essential feature of Da-sein's constitution. Thus it cannot be "a kind of diffidence, an inhibition of personal rapport, a kind of social skittishness", as Carman (1994, 219) has it, but something more abiding. What kind of 'something more', however, is unclear, and Heidegger gives us very little to go on.

According to Dreyfus (1995, 427 – 8), distantiality is "our essential tendency to minimize the distance between ourselves and others by subtle coercion or co-option, especially when we are not aware of doing so" and "denotes an essential structure of all *Dasein's* activity that inconspicuously reduces difference and so performs the ontological function of establishing norms and thus opening up a shared human world". This account conflates two separate aspects of Da-sein's constitution. Dreyfus tells us that (a) we are aware of our difference from others, and (b) this awareness of difference prompts a tendency to minimize this difference. Heidegger's talk about 'care' lends some plausibility to the conflation, but we do better to understand distantiality as consisting only of (a) and not also of (b).

¹⁷ Carman translates this term as "standoffishness", which I think is inappropriate. In his translation of *The History of the Concept of Time*, Kiesel renders it felicitously as "apartness". I will stay with "distantiality" for the ease of familiarity that this term will have with readers of *Being and Time*, and because, unlike "the 'They'", I don't think the term is misleading.

Four reasons incline me toward this reading, two textual and two interpretative. First, Heidegger's neologism *Abständigkeit* derives from the German *Abstand*, which means a gap or a distance between things. The term connotes the fact of our distance from one another and not our response to that fact. Second, though Heidegger talks about the care we have for our distance from one another, he introduces distantiality as a feature of being-with-one-another *simpliciter*, not as a feature of a particular kind of being-with-one-another. Third, phenomenologically speaking, Da-sein is constantly aware of its difference from others, but it is not constantly making efforts to minimize this distance. We may unthinkingly and for the most part coordinate ourselves with others, but surely we may also foster and accentuate our differences from others in some respects. We may describe people who do so habitually as eccentrics, but we do not thereby deny their personhood. Our tendency to minimize our distance from others is an existentiell modification of a more pervasive and existential distantiality: only (a), and not (b), is an existential. Fourth, reading distantiality as just an awareness of distance from others makes for a cleaner reading of some of the interpretative issues surrounding *das Man*. On this reading, *das Man* and distantiality are a contrasting pair, and the contrast diminishes some of the worries that arise from treating *das Man* as an existential.

Though *das Man* steals the limelight in the secondary literature, it is just one of two existentials that Heidegger introduces in §27 of *Being and Time*, the other being distantiality. I maintain that they are best understood as complements to one another, together revealing Da-sein as suspended between two poles, never entirely itself alone and yet never entirely given over to socially constituted norms. On one hand, Da-sein is inescapably constituted by the norms of *das Man*, but on the other hand, Da-sein is equally inescapably unique: an ineradicable distance separates Da-sein from others. Despite all of Heidegger's dire talk of being lost in *das Man*, we can no more erase all traces of individuality than we can live entirely free of norms.

The mode of existence Heidegger associates with lostness is not *das Man* but the one-self. This is the inauthentic mode of being that suppresses its awareness of

its distantiality from *das Man*, that minimizes its sense of how much room for creativity there is within the normative structure of *das Man*. Heidegger calls this one-self, and not *das Man* itself, an existentiell modification of authentic Da-sein. My next task will be to explore how authentic Da-sein relates to these existential features of its being.

3.3. Authenticity and the ordinary

I have dealt at some length with Heidegger's conception of *das Man* because its place in Heidegger's analytic of everyday Da-sein is similar to the place of attunement in the appeal to ordinary language. Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Austin all recognize the importance of shared norms to the constitution of the everyday. Situating *das Man* with regard to authenticity helps us orient the appeal to ordinary language with regard to authenticity.

Das Man and distantiality are as much features of authentic Da-sein as inauthentic Da-sein: their being existentials means precisely that Da-sein *must* have them. Teasing out the difference between authentic and inauthentic Da-sein will clarify how the appeal to ordinary language does not simply represent an inauthentic immersion in the one-self.

Authenticity and constancy

We can read Heidegger's conception of authenticity in two contrasting ways. On one reading, authentic Da-sein, in taking ownership of itself, achieves a kind of stability and unity in its selfhood that inauthentic Da-sein fails to achieve in its dispersal in *das Man*. On the other reading, far from achieving stability or unity, authentic Da-sein differs from inauthentic Da-sein precisely in acknowledging and accepting its instability. I will argue for this second reading, but first I need to say why the first reading might seem attractive.

First of all, Heidegger's term for authenticity, *Eigentlichkeit*, literally means something like "ownness", implying that authentic Da-sein takes ownership of itself. Furthermore, as Carman (2003, 265) notes, following Charles Taylor and Isaiah Berlin, Heidegger's talk of authenticity falls within a tradition dating back to Rousseau and Herder and leading through Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, and Dilthey, and it would seem natural to assume Heidegger conforms to this tradition that reads authenticity as complete self-realization. On this reading, authentic Da-sein differs from its inauthentic counterpart in seeing its life as a unified whole and taking responsibility for the completeness and coherence of its biographical narrative. Heidegger's language reinforces this contrast, describing inauthenticity as lostness from the self, as a "not I" (BT, 116) which supposedly contrasts with the unified self of authentic Da-sein.

Furthermore, in contrast to the *Abständigkeit* of distantiality, Heidegger invokes constancy (*Ständigkeit*) to characterize the resoluteness of authentic Da-sein. Contrasting Da-sein with present-at-hand entities, Heidegger claims Da-sein's "content" is not founded in the substantiality of a substance, but in the 'self-constancy' of the existing self whose being was conceived as care" (BT, 303). He later takes this self-constancy as characteristic of authentic Da-sein: "The *constancy of the self* in the double sense of constancy and steadfastness [*beständigen Standfestigkeit*] is the *authentic* counter-possibility to the lack of constancy of irresolute falling prey" (BT, 322).

However, Heidegger's constancy is explicitly not "the substantiality of a substance": the constancy of authentic Da-sein is not a matter of complete and autonomous subjecthood. Instead, Heidegger closely associates constancy with resoluteness, which he defines as "*the reticent projecting oneself upon one's ownmost being-guilty which is ready for anxiety*" (BT, 296 – 7). Heidegger speaks of the ontological guilt of being "the (null) ground of a nullity" (BT, 285): Da-sein is thrown into its world, and so the basis of its existence is not one of its choosing or design (it is a "null ground") and in projecting itself into the future, it must always negate the

possibilities it does not choose (it is a “nullity”).¹⁸ This double nullity is inescapable: Da-sein cannot choose its past, and in leading just a single existence it cannot avoid negating other possibilities. We do better to understand the constancy of authentic Da-sein as a constant acknowledgment of its instability rather than as a stable constancy. My earlier discussion of *das Man* and distantiality lays the groundwork for such a reading.

I’ve said that authentic Da-sein and the one-self of inauthentic Da-sein are both existentiell modes that relate to the existential features of *das Man* and distantiality in different ways. Our existence is constituted by shared social norms (*das Man*) but not exhaustively so (distantiality). This existence is fundamentally unstable. Da-sein is rooted neither entirely in *das Man* nor in itself alone, it is thrown into a world that it did not choose, and it faces the burden of choice as to how it will project itself into the future. Unlike present-at-hand entities, Da-sein lacks the stability of simply being what it is. The term Heidegger gives for this instability is *Unheimlichkeit*, uncanniness or unsettledness. Da-sein is fundamentally not at home in the world. This uncanniness is disturbing, and we are tempted to cover it over. The lostness of the one-self is an attempt by Da-sein to escape from its uncanniness by suppressing it. Uncanniness can be suppressed but it cannot be escaped: “Uncanniness is the fundamental kind of being-in-the-world, although it is covered over in everydayness” (BT, 277).

One upshot of highlighting the opposition between *das Man* and distantiality is that the issue of conformity versus conformism I raised earlier becomes a red herring. Lostness in *das Man* is not a vaguely defined conformism, but rather the suppression of the awareness of the distantiality that limits the extent to which we are constituted by *das Man*. Rather than confront the uncanniness of existence, inauthentic Da-sein takes comfort in affirming its stability. The lostness of the one-self arises not through conformism in judgment over the topic *du jour* but through

¹⁸ Heidegger’s word for this projection is *Entwurf*, which is also the German word for “draft”. In projecting itself into the future, Da-sein is constantly drafting and re-drafting itself, never coming to completeness.

Da-sein's losing its sense of difference from itself and from others, seeing the self as a settled and constant presence. Such an attitude accepts the conformity of social norms no more than authentic Da-sein, but relates to them differently. It accepts these norms as fixed and necessary, not the result of human agreement or attunement, but simply as 'the way things are'. This attitude is also liable to fall into conformism. A Da-sein that sees itself as settled and constant feels no need for innovation or creativity: having suppressed its sense of difference from others, it doesn't need to develop opinions that differ from received wisdom, and having suppressed its sense of itself as being an incomplete project, it doesn't need to question itself, challenge itself, or motivate itself to find new ways of seeing.

Heidegger inherits from the traditional conception of authenticity the notion of taking ownership of one's self or becoming one's self, but radically rejects the traditional notion of this self being a complete or stable subject. The constancy of authentic Da-sein does not denote stability, but rather resoluteness in the face of existential instability. Whatever choices Da-sein faces or makes are conditioned by factors Da-sein could not have chosen, and so the self that Da-sein chooses to be will never be uniquely Da-sein's own. Authenticity is not an unrealizable ideal of unconditioned freedom, but rather the freedom of making choices in full awareness of these conditions.

Heidegger's conception of authenticity-through-constancy differs markedly from the traditional conception of the authentic and autonomous subject, and he signals this departure by setting up his own account of constancy by criticizing Kant's conception of the subject. On one traditional account, saying "I" refers to a distinct entity, a present-at-hand Cartesian subject. Kant rejects this notion of the subject as a substance, claiming that the subject is not itself something that can be represented but is rather the form of all representation. At a deeper level, however, Heidegger claims that Kant holds on to the notion of self as substance: Kant's analytic unity of apperception holds that "I think" "adheres to every experience and precedes it" (*CPR*, A354). The subject in Kant thus binds representations together

and plays same underlying role as substance does in traditional metaphysics. The step Kant failed to take, according to Heidegger, is to recognize that the “I think”, to the extent that the “think” relates transitively to representations, already presupposes the subject’s existence in a world. The self emerges as an isolated subject only because this self is seen as distinct from its representations rather than always already being-in-the-world.

In this respect, Heidegger’s analysis of Da-sein as being-in-the-world already separates his conception of the subject from the traditional conception of a distinct and in principle completable substance. Da-sein is not an entity distinct from its world but is importantly *of* that world. For Heidegger, the self does not have boundaries at the cerebral cortex or the sensory surfaces or the human body, but reaches out into the world. The deep point about *das Man* is not simply that we are conditioned by our being-with-others, but that, to some extent, these others are part of the self as Heidegger conceives of it. Authenticity requires that we acknowledge this truth, not that we secure more definite boundaries for the self.

Scepticism and authenticity

With all this said, we can return to the appeal to ordinary language. One natural way of situating this appeal within a Heideggerian framework equates the ordinary with average everydayness. Doing so raises an immediate challenge for the appeal to ordinary language: an appeal to average everydayness neglects the possibility of authenticity and so amounts to an inauthentic immersion in the one-self. In Chapter Two, I emphasized the importance of the first person plural in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy: an appeal to ordinary language that returns always to what ‘we’ say or do is uncomfortably similar to a retreat from the possibility of authenticity that returns always to what ‘one’ says or does.

We could also frame this challenge in terms of uncanniness. In the introductory chapter, I characterized the ordinary as home and showed how metaphors of returning home feature in both Wittgenstein’s and Austin’s appeals to

ordinary language. Uncanniness—*Unheimlichkeit*—signifies a displacement from home (*das Heim*), motivating me earlier to characterize Da-sein as “fundamentally not at home in the world”. I characterized authenticity not as an achievement of stability, but quite the contrary, remaining constant in Da-sein’s acknowledgment of its fundamental uncanniness. In its desire to bring language back ‘home’, does the appeal to ordinary language represent an inauthentic fleeing from this uncanniness for the illusory stability offered by the one-self?

This challenge pertains to an appeal to ordinary language that treats our attunement as fixed and definite. In the previous chapter in particular, I have pushed against such a reading of attunement. Our attunement is not guaranteed, but is something we rediscover on each new encounter. Not only do I think Wittgenstein’s appeal to ordinary language is not subject to this Heideggerian challenge, but I think his appeal to ordinary language presents something like a veiled appeal to authenticity. In fact, as I will show, even Austin’s appeal to ordinary language subtly acknowledges uncanniness.

The appeal to ordinary language is not an assertion of or insistence upon attunement, but precisely an appeal: our attunement is not guaranteed, but it is all we have to go on. This attunement is our bedrock, and it’s not inconceivable that it should fail—indeed, it’s part of the human condition that we sometimes simply fail to understand one another, and if we always made sense to one another we would have no need for Kafka or Pinter, or for that matter Austen or Flaubert—but if it does fail, we have nothing more to fall back upon. The stability sought by the one-self is the guarantee that our attunement will not fail. The appeal to ordinary language, on the contrary, recognizes the role of attunement in our mutual understanding, and the necessity of this understanding taking place for the most part if we are to have thought at all, while also recognizing that nothing grounds this attunement and that it can give way at any time.

In the introductory chapter, I contrasted the ordinary concept of explanation with the metaphysical demand we place upon that concept. Explanations are not,

cannot be, and are not meant to be, absolute: an explanation is adequate if it fills a particular gap in understanding for the particular person to whom it's addressed. No explanation can fill every conceivable gap so that no possible doubt remains. Placing such a hyperbolic, metaphysical expectation upon explanation opens the door to scepticism: if we expect that explanation can stop up every gap, we are bound to be disappointed. Nevertheless, we can never entirely close the door on scepticism either: we have no guarantee that any explanation we give will be understood or accepted as complete by the person we are speaking to.

For Cavell, the appeal to ordinary language responds to the problematic of scepticism: "Wittgenstein's teaching is everywhere controlled by a response to scepticism, or, as I will prefer to say, by a response to the threat of scepticism" (*CR*, 7). Scepticism on Cavell's understanding is not just a thesis to which a minority of philosophers subscribe, but the entire problematic that takes epistemological doubts as substantial philosophical concerns:

I do not ... confine the term ["scepticism"] to philosophers who wind up denying that we can ever know; I apply it to any view which takes the existence of the world to be a problem of knowledge. A crucial step for me, in calling an argument sceptical, is that it contain a passage running roughly, "So we don't know (on the basis of the senses (or behaviour) alone); then (how) do we know?" (*CR*, 46)

For Cavell, the metaphysical demand that a successful explanation stop up every possible gap in understanding would be just as sceptical as an argument that 'genuine' explanation is impossible. In transforming the anxieties about explanation into a substantial problem awaiting a solution, the proposed solution is just as much entwined in the sceptical problematic as the sceptic's denial of the possibility of a solution. In this respect, metaphysics and scepticism are twin temptations: metaphysics demands absolute exactness, and scepticism treats the question of whether such a demand can be met as a philosophical crisis.

In my introductory chapter, I discussed Cavell's distinction between specific and generic objects. This distinction reveals the difference in Austin's and Wittgenstein's responses to scepticism. Austin deploys specific objects and their criteria for identification to engage with scepticism in "Other Minds". In ordinary circumstances, he argues, "How do you know?" questions are questions of identification: given a claim ("That's a goldfinch"), the interlocutor asks for a basis for that claim ("How do you know?"), for which the interlocutor provides a basis ("By its red head"), and the interlocutor can provide grounds for doubt, calling for a further basis ("Plenty of other birds have red heads"). The interplay of bases and grounds for doubt halts either when the interlocutor is satisfied, when the speaker retracts the claim, or when one or both of them gives up in frustration.

By taking specific objects as his examples for epistemological investigation, and thus by taking questions of knowledge to be questions of identification, Austin guarantees an end point to explanation. Ultimately, differentia pick out the specific object, and while the knowledge claimant might not be familiar enough with the criteria or not be in optimal conditions for judging, the claimant can still, at least in principle, give an adequate explanation for how she knows what she claims to know.

However, in restricting his attention to specific objects and guaranteeing an end point to explanation, Austin takes our attunement for granted. What Cavell finds distinctive about Wittgenstein is that on one hand he recognizes our attunement and its importance, but on the other hand, he also recognizes its ungroundedness, and the standing possibility that our attunement might be repudiated. Our criteria for generic objects are not as neatly trotted out as the criteria for Austin's goldfinch, and the challenge to produce them raises the anxiety that we may not make ourselves clear. Austin does not acknowledge the anxieties of completeness and understanding, their attraction and the road from the ordinary toward metaphysics that they open up. Wittgenstein does not deny these anxieties, but rather draws attention to their source. In this respect, Wittgenstein's appeal to

ordinary language digs deeper, not simply insisting on ordinary language, but acknowledging the force of the temptation to stray from ordinary language.

Cavell's characterization of scepticism as the foil for the appeal to ordinary language is rich and suggestive, but not entirely without problems. Scepticism is an epistemological problematic, but Wittgenstein scarcely mentions knowledge in the *Philosophical Investigations*: he is more concerned with understanding and meaning, and the related concepts of explanation and teaching. Anthony Palmer (2004) claims that Cavell is right to find a sustained response to scepticism in Wittgenstein, but that he misplaces the emphasis in locating the source of this sceptical problematic in Descartes. Rather, Palmer claims, Wittgenstein engages with, and endorses, the Pyrrhonian scepticism of Sextus Empiricus.¹⁹ However, Cavell's interest in modern scepticism is precisely that it represents something new: "The issue posed is no longer, or not alone, as with earlier scepticism, how to conduct oneself best in an uncertain world; the issue suggested is how to live at all in a groundless world" (Cavell 2003, 3).

This notion of a 'groundless world' connects with knowledge insofar as knowledge is related to certainty. Knowledge may not be a constant preoccupation for Wittgenstein, but certainty and its near cousin, absoluteness, are. Wittgenstein addresses the demand that we find absolutely compelling explanations, that we provide a certain route to understanding, that we fix meaning with absolute precision. To say that our world is 'groundless' implies that it lacks grounds: that there might have been satisfactory grounds, but, regrettably, these grounds are lacking. Understanding, explanation, meaning, and so on, rest on nothing more than the attunement they manifest, and metaphysics wants grounds less relative than this. The search for absolute grounds, in its perceived successes as well as in its disappointments, is the problematic to which the appeal to ordinary language responds.

¹⁹ Robert Fogelin (1987, 226 – 234) also argues for a Pyrrhonian reading of Wittgenstein, while David Stern (2004, 34f) argues that we can understand the 'New Wittgenstein' of Diamond, Conant, later Baker, and others as essentially Pyrrhonian.

The appeal to ordinary language does not deny the groundlessness of our attunement but rather shifts its weight. Rather than see our attunement as groundless, and hence lacking grounds, the appeal to ordinary language treats it as ungrounded, as not requiring grounds, and hence neither having *nor* lacking them. The appeal to ordinary language appeals to the adequacy of our attunement, inviting the sceptic not to be dissatisfied with our attunement.

Cavell reads Wittgenstein not as trying to refute scepticism, but as acknowledging its truth:

On the contrary, Wittgenstein, as I read him, rather affirms that thesis [of scepticism], or rather takes it as *undeniable*, and so shifts its weight. What the thesis now means is something like: Our relation to the world as a whole, or to others in general, is not one of knowing, where knowing construes itself as being certain. (CR, 45)

And yet, the truth of scepticism isn't as dire as sceptics or their opponents fear: our attunement in criteria gets us by for the most part, and its occasional failure is not an intellectual scandal but a fact of life. What we discover in acknowledging the truth of scepticism is the ordinary:

I might epitomize Wittgenstein's originality in this regard by saying that he takes the drift toward skepticism as the *discovery* of the everyday, a discovery of exactly *what* it is that skepticism would deny. It turns out to be something that the very impulse to philosophy, the impulse to take thought about our lives, inherently seeks to deny, as if what philosophy is dissatisfied by is inherently the everyday. (Cavell 1988, 170 – 1)

What philosophy is dissatisfied with is attunement: the attunement upon which the everyday is founded appears too fragile and the impulse to philosophy demands a foundation that is more secure than our attunement.

This position on scepticism differs subtly from Heidegger's. Heidegger doesn't try to refute scepticism either, but far from acknowledging its truth, Heidegger rejects the entire problematic, declaring the "scandal of philosophy" to be

its repeated attempt to refute scepticism (BT, 205). For Heidegger, scepticism about the external world cannot get started when we recognize that Da-sein is always already being-in-the-world and scepticism about other minds cannot get started when we recognize that Da-sein is always already being-with. This position shares much with the Wittgenstein of *The Claim of Reason*: both recognize that attempting to refute the sceptic is bound to fail, since the attempted refutation already accepts the sceptical problematic. Unlike Heidegger, however, Cavell's Wittgenstein recognizes that scepticism isn't simply opposed to the everyday, but is woven into the fabric of the everyday. The temptation of scepticism remains a standing possibility as long as we engage in language and engage with others.

In characterizing the ordinary as home, I described ordinary language as the language that speaks from the attunement we share with others. The embrace of the one-self represents a yearning for stability, for seeing this attunement as secure beyond doubt. We want the security of seeing our home as grounded on the most solid bedrock, but even the most solid bedrock is afloat upon a sea of magma: even the firmest foundations are unstable. Recognizing the instability of attunement induces anxiety: if nothing guarantees our attunement, our words might not reach others. We might not be able to explain ourselves, to understand or be understood. In this respect, the appeal to the ordinary as home does not clash with the uncanniness that Heidegger takes to be the fundamental kind of being-in-the-world. On the contrary, drawing our attention to the insecurity of our home in attunement brings out the unsettled anxiety of the uncanny. In drawing our attention to attunement, the appeal to ordinary language draws our attention to the uncanny ungroundedness of this attunement.²⁰

If I am right in tracing these parallel trajectories through Division I of *Being and Time* and the appeal to ordinary language, Heidegger's exhortation to

²⁰ Staten (2001, 45) claims that "concepts in general are 'essentially contestable', and they could not function as concepts if they were not". Staten goes on to suggest that the rest Wittgenstein seeks in philosophy is not so much a rest *from* the disquietude that philosophy brings upon us, but a rest *in* this disquietude, which doesn't seek to escape from it.

authenticity in Division II no more repudiates the everydayness of Division I than Wittgenstein's and Austin's reminders of the ordinary repudiate the ordinary. Heidegger emphasizes that authentic Da-sein needn't in any outward way differ from inauthentic Da-sein, just as someone who inhabits ordinary practices fully cognizant of the uncanniness of the ordinary needn't in any outward way differ from someone who treats these practices as absolutely grounded.²¹ Mulhall (1994) emphasizes that Heidegger's analysis of inauthentic Da-sein is an analysis of Da-sein in its *average* everydayness, raising the question of whether there are other ways of inhabiting the everyday. Mulhall answers that authentic Da-sein repudiates inauthentic Da-sein's averageness—its subjecting of itself to the average—and not its everydayness: “Authentic Being-in-the-world is not a transcendence of or escape from everydayness but a mode of everydayness; it is not an extraordinary mode of Being, but a mode of inhabiting the ordinary” (Mulhall 1994, 151).²² The contrast with average everydayness for Mulhall is authentic everydayness. Authentic Da-sein doesn't move beyond the everyday, but accepts the everyday without becoming lost in it.

This contrast echoes Cavell's (1989, 46) contrast between the ‘actual’ and ‘eventual’ everyday. The actual everyday is the “scene of illusion” (Cavell 1989, 46), the average everydayness of the one-self in which we find ourselves initially and for the most part. However, the actual everyday requires not rejection but reconfiguration: Wittgenstein's appeal to ordinary language neither endorses the actual everyday nor rejects the everyday, but rather appeals to the eventual everyday. This eventual everyday, as I understand it, resembles Heidegger's authentic Da-sein.

²¹ Here we might see Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's shared influence from Kierkegaard, whose knight of faith in *Fear and Trembling* could appear to all the world as a humble shopman.

²² Here again, we find inconsistency in Heidegger's handling of everydayness. Mulhall marshals evidence to support his reading: “... *authentic* existence is not something which floats above falling everydayness; existentially, it is only a modified way in which such everydayness is seized upon” (BT, 179). On the other hand, in the initial discussion of *das Man* Heidegger says: “The self of everyday Da-sein is the *one-self* which we distinguish from the *authentic self*” (BT, 129), making no allowance for the self of an *authentic* everyday Da-sein as distinct from an *average* everyday Da-sein. I find Mulhall's reading compelling, and consonant with what I think is the stronger way of reading through Heidegger's inconsistencies, so I feel comfortable following it despite textual evidence to the contrary.

It calls not for a change in our outward forms of life but for an inward change in our relation to them.

The moral fervour that we find in Austin and Wittgenstein has much in common with what inspires fervour in Heidegger's appeal to authenticity. Austin and Wittgenstein see most of us—particularly those who embrace traditional methods of doing philosophy—as lost and needing recovery. This recovery does not require new truths or new theories, but rather helps us inhabit where we are without self-deception. In my initial discussion of the ordinary as home, I identified a spirit of nostalgia in Wittgenstein and Austin, a sense that we have been exiled from our proper home and must find our way back. Wittgenstein's calling us back to the ordinary resembles Heidegger's call of conscience, which reminds inauthentic *Da-sein* of the possibility of authenticity. Both of these writers, despite vast stylistic differences, characterize this call in terms of bringing back: "What *we* do is to **bring words back** from their metaphysical to their everyday use", Wittgenstein says (*PI* §116), while in heeding the call of conscience, Heidegger tells us, "Da-sein explicitly **brings itself back** to itself from its lostness in *das Man*" (*BT*, 268). Philosophy, for both Wittgenstein and Austin, and for Heidegger, is not a matter of moving forward to the new discovery that will ground our practices, but rather a matter of calling us back to the ungroundedness that we have always already known and always already forgotten.

In the previous chapter, I contrasted Wittgenstein's and Austin's appeal to ordinary language by claiming that Wittgenstein is less confident in our attunement, and explores the ground of our attunement where Austin takes it for granted. That contrast might suggest that Austin makes an inauthentic appeal to ordinary language even if Wittgenstein doesn't, but Austin deserves more credit than that. Neither Wittgenstein nor Austin explicitly discuss the uncanny in the way that Heidegger does, but both of them employ it in their appeal to ordinary language. Despite the humdrum sound of "ordinary language", both Austin's and Wittgenstein's texts sparkle with bizarre examples, parables, and thought experiments. When we are

invited to imagine throwing a brick at someone “spontaneously” (*PPb*, 190), or treading on a baby “inadvertently” (*PPb*, 194), or losing control of oneself at high table (*PPb*, 198n), Austin invites us to imagine the extraordinary and the unacceptable. The very fact of its imaginability draws our attention to how easily our standard forms of behaviour can be subverted, and how quickly we might find ourselves unsure what to say:²³ “we have merely felt that initial trepidation, experienced when the firm ground of prejudice begins to slip away beneath the feet” (*PPc*, 65).

Even more than Austin’s, Wittgenstein’s writings are peopled with a variety of strange creatures, from the wood-sellers (*RFM* I §149) to the wayward pupil (*PI* §§143 and 185) to the talking lion (*PPF* xi §327). These bizarre examples dislodge the impression of absoluteness that sometimes attach to our practices, and remind us that our normal attunement with one another is an achievement, and not a matter of course. In addition, they serve an important methodological purpose, which allows Wittgenstein to explore the nature of our attunement without risking taking a sideways perspective toward it. Austin and Heidegger both describe the topics they consider systematically, but Wittgenstein gives us nothing like Austin’s classification of speech acts or Heidegger’s analytic of *Da-sein*. In place of systematic descriptions, Wittgenstein offers pictures.

3.4. Pictures in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy

In discussing the appeal to ordinary language, I have invoked the temptation to take a ‘sideways perspective’ on our language and practices, which leads us to say things about our language and practices that we literally cannot mean. As we saw in the previous chapter, this temptation afflicts even those who claim to speak on Wittgenstein’s behalf. For the most part, the best perspective to take on something

²³ “Words literally fail us”, says Austin (*PPd*, 88; cf. also *PPc*, 68). But Cavell (*CR*, 61) claims the reverse is true when something truly inexplicable happens: “words were not failing me (not, anyway, in the sense that they were abandoning me); they were overwhelming me”. Whatever our response, it is a response to the uncanny.

we describe is an external one: I can more easily describe a building from the outside than from the inside. Similarly, we can be tempted to exempt ourselves and our words from our descriptions of our language and practices even though in this case there is no outside. Wittgenstein's pictures provide an ingenious method of describing our attunement, and the possibility of its failure, from within it. Before I consider this method, however, I will consider Heidegger's account of truth in Chapter 44 of *Being and Time*. Heidegger's account slips into a sideways perspective in a way that Wittgenstein's treatment of truth does not.

Heidegger on truth

Critical of the tradition that sees truth residing primarily in judgment, Heidegger describes truth as "disclosedness", saying that "Da-sein is essentially in the truth" (BT, 226). Da-sein is the clearing in which truth can appear, and so truth does not hold independently of Da-sein, but rather is disclosed to Da-sein: "*There is' truth only insofar as Da-sein is and as long as it is ... all truth is relative to the being of Da-sein*" (BT, 226). This position leads Heidegger to the seemingly paradoxical claim that Newton's laws have been true only since Newton formulated them: "Before there was any Da-sein, there was no truth; nor will there be any after Da-sein is no more. ... Before Newton's laws were discovered, they were not 'true'" (BT, 226). This claim may seem less paradoxical if we confine it to general scientific laws. Newton's Laws aren't particular truths, but rather provide a framework within which we can make sense of particular facts. We were only able to formulate truths about objects in motion in terms of force and momentum once Newton had provided the framework within which such formulations could be made. However, Heidegger applies this claim about truth generally. While he focuses primarily on laws rather than empirical truths, he does not draw any such distinction in what he says about truth: "Newton's laws, the law of contradiction, **and any truth whatsoever**, are true only as long as Da-sein is" (BT, 226).

This claim loses its air of paradox, claims Heidegger, if we consider the primordial meaning of “true”, that is, the conditions for the possibility of our concept of truth. The primordial meaning Heidegger brings to light is, roughly, this: the sorts of judgments that can be true (or false) are available only to beings who relate to the world questioningly, i.e. Da-sein, and so Da-sein’s existence is a necessary condition for there to be truth in the first place. We can talk about truths dating back to the Precambrian and before, but only because we have uncovered these truths: during the Precambrian itself, there was no Da-sein and so no truth about the entities that were present at that time. In its primordial sense, truth is not simply a correspondence between assertions and facts, but rather the very capacity of Da-sein to uncover the being of entities. This primordial conception of truth is necessary to explain the ‘ordinary’ conception of truth that treats truths like Newton’s Laws as atemporal. And, although we often fail to register it, this primordial conception is always already at work as the background for our ordinary conception of truth. Or so Heidegger gives us to understand.

Daniel O. Dahlstrom (2001) claims that Heidegger holds a two-tiered conception of truth similar to what we find in Kant. On an empirical level, we have truths that could also have been falsehoods, which are expressed in bivalent propositions. On the transcendental level, we have the original disclosure (the synthetic unity of apperception in Kant) that makes the empirical realm meaningful in the first place, and hence subject to judgments of truth and falsity. Dahlstrom claims that disclosedness is not only a necessary condition for the possibility of truth according to Heidegger, but disclosure is the process by which entities are revealed as they are in themselves. Far from ruling out the bivalence of propositional truth, Dahlstrom claims, Heidegger shows how this bivalence is possible: only given the primordial disclosure of being can entities be uncovered, as they are in themselves or otherwise. Heidegger’s primordial-truth-as-disclosedness is not bivalent, but it provides the ground upon which bivalent propositions can be asserted.

How this transcendental truth finds expression is a more complicated matter. Dahlstrom acknowledges that any assertion of the truth of disclosedness must take the form of a proposition, which “must be considered *prima facie* bivalent” (Dahlstrom 2001, 421). Nevertheless, these assertions can serve as ‘formal indications’, which help us retrieve a conception of primordial truth. Though language does not lend itself readily to expressing this primordial conception of truth, Dahlstrom claims that we should not take this to be a disaster:

[T]here is no inherent reason why we should not be able to use true ... propositions to point to this truth that underlies every ... propositional truth. Since we succeed in speaking of things, including speech itself, there is every reason to suppose that we can speak about what, while not identical to speech, makes the connection between speech and what is spoken of—or, better, the disclosive event of discourse—possible at all. (Dahlstrom 2001, 407)

The Wittgensteinian line of criticism I want to pursue questions just this claim: whether we can find any coherent way of talking about transcendental truth. The point is not simply that transcendental truth is ineffable. The criticism is meant to cut even deeper: if we cannot avoid nonsense in talking about transcendental truth, then the very concept itself is nonsensical.

Much of what Heidegger says about truth might sound familiar and sympathetic to a reader of the *Philosophical Investigations*. In claiming that Newton’s Laws were not ‘true’ before Newton, Heidegger does not claim to be discovering something about the nature of truth, but to be drawing our attention to an important but neglected aspect of the concept of truth as we already know it. Like Wittgenstein, he shows an interest in the “‘possibilities’ of phenomena” (*PI* §90), revealing the conditions for the possibility of our having a concept of truth. Wittgenstein also draws attention to the broader context within which our concepts are embedded. In other words, we might want to argue, Wittgenstein is just as

keenly attuned to the status of our concept of truth as constituted by us as Heidegger is.

However, it's manifestly not a feature of our ordinary concept of truth that the truth is constituted by us. Truth, we want to say, like necessity, holds independently of us. Newton's Laws are only true because they hold of a world that's independent of the human will, and had Newton formulated different Laws of Motion, they would have been false no matter how many people believed them. A grammatical investigation of our concept of truth reveals, among other things, that we use the words "true" and "false" with respect to propositions (cf. *PI* §136),²⁴ that we relate to those we judge to be true differently from the ones we judge to be false, that which ones are true and which ones are false depends on how the world is, and so on. We cannot say that our concept of truth is, in some deeper sense, dependent on us, because there is no such deeper sense. All we can do is reflect on how we actually use words.

But isn't this description a description of *our* concept of truth? Isn't this precisely the sense in which the truth, according to Heidegger, is constituted by us? The answer to the first question, at least, is "certainly". However, this grammatical investigation describes the truth as *not* constituted by us. We can argue over whether beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but not truth. We can insist that we only grasp the concept of truth if we situate it within our forms of life, but this is true of any concept. Saying that this situatedness reveals something about truth misfires, because it makes it sound like there is a feature of our concept of truth—that it is 'constituted by us'—that it might or might not have had, and that it happens to have. Saying, "The truth is constituted by us" amounts to saying, "The concept of truth is a concept", and that says precisely nothing.

²⁴ This is not to say that "true" applies only to propositions. In fact, a Heideggerian conception of truth as disclosedness has a stronger etymological claim in English than in German. While the German *Wahrheit* shares its roots with the Latin *veritas*, the English word "true" was originally associated with faithfulness ("let us be true to one another") and only later picked up the connotation of correspondence with the facts.

I described the sideways perspective in terms of exempting one's own words or practices to claims that are supposed to apply universally. Dahlstrom's account of formal indications that use propositions to describe a conception of truth that cannot be described in propositional form would seem to be a classic case. That Heidegger might try to adopt a sideways perspective is not a simple matter of misguided methodology. Borrowing McDowell's coinage, Glendinning (2007, 17 – 20) cites the nonsensicality of a sideways perspective as the fourth of his five phenomenological 'theses'. If Heidegger tries to take the sideways perspective, he does so against his own methodological intent. This temptation to try to take a sideways perspective is subtle enough that Heidegger can avoid it in most respects and yet succumb to it nonetheless. Refusing this sideways perspective, for instance, is crucial to the move by which Heidegger undertakes to do ontology and hermeneutics simultaneously. Considering how the world shows itself to us only appears like a second-best alternative to considering how the world actually *is* as long as we cling to the idea of a sideways perspective from which we can consider the world independently of how it shows itself to us.

The appeal to ordinary language earns Austin's title of "linguistic phenomenology" because it undertakes a similar move, but with respect to language. Heidegger's conception of truth begins by rejecting the sideways perspective, denying that we can characterize the concept of truth independently of how we use it. Refusing the sideways perspective at a first level means refusing to speak of truths existing independently of us. On a second (linguistic) level, it means acknowledging that there is no other way of speaking of them. But if this 'second level' seems to insist on what the first denied, how can the appeal to ordinary language reveal the importance of situating our concepts in the lives that make them usable?

Wittgenstein is acutely aware of the difficulty of acknowledging the centrality of our attunement without asserting any dependence of our concepts upon that attunement. Wittgenstein's particular insight is that what we need is not new words—hence the relative absence of jargon in his work—but the right perspective

on the words we use. The words a Platonist might utter are perfectly acceptable; what is problematic is the supposition that they meet a metaphysical demand that we erroneously place upon our conception of truth. Wittgenstein does not want to *contradict* the claim that the truth holds independently of us, but rather to shift our way of looking at that claim so that we can understand it without confusion. He effects such shifts not by telling us something new, but by placing what we are inclined to say alongside something else—an object of comparison or a picture—where the contrast resolves our confusion. I will now explore this point in more detail.²⁵

Teaching with pictures

Wittgenstein's later philosophy is full of bizarre thought experiments and parables about people very different from ourselves. These examples contrast with particular tendencies of thought in such a way as to jolt us out of these tendencies. Wittgenstein describes both these tendencies and the points of contrast he provides as “pictures”, occasionally also calling the points of contrast “*objects of comparison*” (*PI* §130), comparisons that help us see our ordinary practices in a fresh light.

Pictures in this special sense connect to observations Wittgenstein makes about literal pictures in a number of ways. Pictures do not dictate their applications any more than rules do. What sense we make of a picture depends in large part upon us, and upon the uses we make of pictures. Consider the second boxed remark between *PI* §§139 and 140:

I see a picture; it represents an old man walking up a steep path leaning on a stick. – How? Might it not have looked just the same if he had been sliding downhill in that position? Perhaps a Martian would describe the picture so. I don't need to explain why *we* don't describe it so. (*PI*, p. 60)

²⁵ Some of what follows comes directly from my (2011) published paper on pictures, but some of it is original, and constitutes new material rather than just elaborations on material already in that paper.

The picture on its own seems open to more than one interpretation, and Wittgenstein describes reading a picture in a particular way as an “application” of the picture, or a “method of projection”. No further attempt to disambiguate the picture has any guarantee of succeeding since any disambiguation is also open to more than one application. Suppose we were to draw an arrow pointing up the hill. Not only could we equally read that arrow as pointing back down the hill (cf. *PI* §85), but we needn’t read the arrow as signifying the direction of the man’s movement at all. In cases of genuine doubt, instruction or interpretation can clarify the application of a picture, but they can no more remove the possibility of ambiguity in an absolute sense than the picture itself. The point here is not that the picture is inescapably ambiguous, but that neither the picture itself nor further instruction or interpretation can irresistibly dictate the picture’s application. For the most part, we apply pictures similarly, but only because we share a sense of what pictures are, what they tend to depict, how people communicate with them, and so on.²⁶ The idea of climbing a mountain is familiar to us, as is using a stick to help in the climb, as is the human practice of depicting such scenes from human life. Sliding backwards down a hill while holding a stick is alien to us, and so it takes an effort to see the picture in this way. Wittgenstein’s Martian might not apply the picture similarly because it might not share with us the basic forms of life that manifest our attunement in applying the picture.

What we see in the picture depends on how the picture relates to other activities, how we habitually apply pictures, and so on, and we cannot specify what a picture depicts independent of this background. If we see a picture as ineluctably pointing to a particular application, we treat it as a ‘super-picture’ (*LRB*, 67), and fail

²⁶ Wittgenstein imagines ways in which our practices with pictures could have been different: “We could easily imagine people who did not have this attitude to such pictures [that a face in a photograph represents a person’s face]. Who, for example, would be repelled by photographs, because a face without colour, and even perhaps a face reduced in scale, struck them as inhuman” (*PPF* xi §198). Cf. also *PG*, 42.

to consider the use we make of it.²⁷ Wittgenstein finds the same danger of misunderstanding lurking in our language:

In the first place, our language describes a picture. What is to be done with the picture, how it is to be used, is still obscure. Quite clearly, however, it must be explored if we want to understand the sense of our words. But the picture seems to spare us this work: it already points to a particular use. This is how it takes us in. (*PPF* vii §55)²⁸

In talking about language as describing a picture, Wittgenstein draws our attention to the way in which our language and our habits in using language prejudice us at a deep level that comes before deliberate reflection. Pictures, in this distinctively Wittgensteinian sense of the word, are the basis for reflection rather than the result of reflection. They frequently escape critical notice because they lie so deep, and don't simply shape the answers we give to philosophical questions but are the source of the confusions that give rise to the questions in the first place (they constitute "The decisive movement in the conjuring trick" (*PI* §308)).²⁹ The "picture of the essence of human language" (*PI* §1) that Wittgenstein discusses at the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations* does not *tell* us anything,³⁰ but it encourages us to ask certain questions in certain ways: if we picture words as names for things, we are inclined to investigate the relation between word and thing, and expect that that relation could then reveal the essence of language.

²⁷ Wittgenstein often uses "super-" as a prefix to denote the kind of superlative rigidity that we do not find in life but often seek in philosophy. Cf. e.g. *PI* §§97, 192, 197, 389.

²⁸ Similarly, in *PI* §§422 – 27, Wittgenstein repeatedly urges us to consider the application of pictures that seem innocuous to us.

²⁹ Warren Goldfarb writes about Wittgenstein's engagement with "protopictures" (1983, 280) and the "proto-philosophical level" (1997, 78) as central to his method, describing this level as "the way of looking at things that we tend to adopt at the start, without noticing that a step has been taken, which then functions to establish what questions are to be asked and answered by philosophical theorizing" (1997, 78).

³⁰ Cavell emphasizes that Augustine's account of language acquisition could strike us as commonplace or astonishing depending on how we look at it (Cavell 1991, 98 – 9), and that the parable of the builders at *PI* §2 reads differently depending on the context we situate it in (Cavell 1989, 60 – 4).

If confusion arises from treating pictures as super-pictures, whose application is somehow given in the picture itself, Wittgenstein's treatment of the confusion consists in situating our pictures within our forms of life. He does so by presenting other pictures that stand as revealing contrasts with the one we have, and shift our way of thinking about it. At *PPF* xi §125, Wittgenstein invites us to consider two pictures of the duck-rabbit, one surrounded by other pictures of rabbits, the other surrounded by other pictures of ducks. A person unfamiliar with the double aspect of the duck-rabbit may reflexively see the duck-rabbit in the former picture as a rabbit, and only notice the duck aspect when presented with the second picture. By providing the right contrast, Wittgenstein aims to shift the way we look at a matter.

At *PI* §143, Wittgenstein imagines a teacher instructing a pupil in writing out a series of numbers according to a particular formation rule. He considers not only the various ways the teacher might instruct the pupil, but also considers various ways the student could go wrong, ranging along a continuous spectrum from random to systematic mistakes. In each case, he considers the possibility that the pupil will simply not understand, that the teacher can do nothing that will bring the pupil to write out the series as the teacher intends. Wittgenstein considers possible strategies by which the teacher might wean the pupil from a systematic error, and then concludes, "And here too, our pupil's ability to learn may come to an end" (*PI* §143).

Immediately afterwards, he questions this last remark:

What do I mean when I say "the pupil's ability to learn *may* come to an end here"? Do I report this from my own experience? Of course not. (Even if I have had such experience.) Then what am I doing with that remark? After all, I'd like you to say: "Yes, it's true, one could imagine that too, that might happen too!" —But was I trying to draw someone's attention to the fact that he is able to imagine that? — I wanted to put that picture before him, and his *acceptance* of the picture consists in his now being inclined to regard a given case differently: that is, to compare it with *this* sequence of pictures. I have

changed his *way of looking at things*. (Indian mathematicians: “Look at this!”)³¹
(*PI* §144)

Wittgenstein wants to weaken the grip of a certain picture of how rules work by giving us an alternative picture, one that helps us see the former in a different light. In the particular case of *PI* §143, he draws our attention to the scene of instruction between teacher and pupil so that we see rule following as a practice that we learn in particular contexts, and that nothing guarantees this teaching will succeed. Presenting the establishment of rules in a medium as organic and fragile as human communication helps to weaken the notion of rules as rigid, mechanical, as “rails invisibly laid to infinity” (*PI* §218).

Note, first of all, that Wittgenstein’s teaching relies crucially on the “*acceptance* of the picture” by his interlocutor. Wittgenstein cannot dictate how his interlocutor will take up the pictures he presents, nor even that his interlocutor will take them up at all (he’d *like* his reader to say “one could imagine that too”, but he can’t enforce this response). His teaching cannot compel us, and he can only lead us as far as we are willing to follow. Second, the acceptance of a picture is crucially different from the acceptance of a proposition or a thesis. In accepting a picture, we do not accept an opinion that Wittgenstein wants us to adopt, but rather we accept a way of looking at a matter. Wittgenstein does not tell us what we should conclude from the shift in perspective that he prompts, but simply urges us to consider a contrast we might have resisted considering: he doesn’t make us believe something we don’t believe, but makes us do something we won’t do.³²

In this respect, the role of pictures in Wittgenstein’s method is much closer to that traditionally assigned to literature than to philosophy. While philosophy presents arguments, makes a case, literature simply tells stories, and what we make of these stories is up to us. Literature nevertheless can have considerable impact: stories

³¹ Cf. *Z* §461: “I once read somewhere that a geometrical figure, with the words ‘Look at this’, serves as a proof for certain Indian mathematicians. This looking too effects an alteration in one’s way of seeing”.

³² Cf. Rhees 1970b, 43.

shape the way we look at things, and can re-orient our perspective or draw out the salience of matters we had neglected. Wittgenstein aims not so much at refuting arguments as at interrupting patterns of thought. Responding to thesis *p* with *not-p* often retains the structure of the problematic that caused the problem in the first place. We cannot easily be argued into shifting the terms on which we approach a problem, but the right picture, the right object of comparison, can help us see these terms in a different light, and open us up to the possibility of alternatives. Diamond (1991c, 2000) sees the imaginative engagement called forth by literature as a crucial component of moral reasoning. A similar demand for imaginative engagement is present in Wittgenstein's use of pictures.

The contrast provided by Wittgenstein's pictures reveals the extent to which our concepts are tied to the uses we have for them. This contrast in turn destabilizes our sense that our concepts pick out properties of the world that exist in an absolute sense. But the alternative is not that our concepts pick out properties that are relative to us or constituted by us. Wittgenstein's pictures destabilize certain kinds of absolutism about our concepts without asserting anything that might misdescribe our use of these concepts.

Later Baker's later Wittgenstein

Much of what I have said here resembles the reading of Wittgenstein that Gordon Baker developed in the last decade of his life, and indeed, Baker is rare among Wittgenstein's interpreters in drawing attention to the importance of pictures in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. While I have some sympathy for Baker's reading, it is hardly unqualified. Considering his and other approaches to Wittgenstein on pictures will clarify my own.

Baker shares my sense that pictures do not themselves give us false claims to refute but are rather pre-theoretical frameworks that often lack perspicuity. Baker (2004b, 2004c) treats pictures as forms or norms of representation, which operate not at the first-order level of depicting regions of our grammar, but at the second-

order level of depicting how we conceive of the structure of our grammar. These pictures are not in themselves descriptive, and so neither describe nor misdescribe anything. Being caught in a picture is a matter of mistaking the picture for an accurate first-order description of grammar, and so not allowing for alternatives. Wittgenstein uses pictures, Baker claims, as objects of comparison: by presenting us with an alternative picture (e.g. Baker takes *PI* §43 to be offering meaning as use as an *alternative picture* to the Augustinian picture introduced in *PI* §1), Wittgenstein does not give us a more accurate depiction of anything, but rather shifts the aspect under which we conceive of a matter and so frees us from the feeling of necessity that we attach to certain pictures.³³

One immediate advantage of this reading is it that cashes out the distinctive significance of pictures, as opposed to, say, assumptions. Contrast Baker's reading to that of Eugen Fischer (2006), who treats pictures as paradigms or "thought-schemas" that philosophers take to be representative of a wider range of cases and accord them a significance they would otherwise not have. Fischer's analysis suggests that pictures are essentially unexamined assumptions and are problematic by virtue of leading to unwarranted generalisations. On this analysis bad philosophical pictures differ from false propositions only in being held implicitly and more deeply.³⁴ In contrast, Baker makes pictures out to be of a different kind from propositions or assumptions, and treating them requires a different methodology and vocabulary (hence "picture" instead of "assumption") than that employed in traditional forms of criticism.

However, reading Wittgenstein as interested in no more than shifting aspects in order to release the grip that pictures have on us has two problematic features. The first is that Baker is unclear what he means by the aspect of a picture in this conceptual sense. Wittgenstein's discussion of aspect shifting deals with different

³³ We see similar arguments to the effect that pictures are objects of comparison and that Wittgenstein's aim is to free us from the grip certain pictures have on us in Kuusela (2006, 2008) and Hutchinson and Read (2008).

³⁴ Interestingly, Fischer's reading is close to what Austin (*PPh*, 202) describes as "pictures or *models* of how things happen or are done". In effect, I think Fischer makes Wittgenstein out to be more Austinian than he is.

applications of the same picture. The conceptual analogue would be to apply the same picture in different ways: to take the claim that a man has a soul, for instance (cf. *PI* §422), as a theological truth or as an expression of the attitude we take toward others as living beings rather than as automata. But Baker's signal example of a shift in aspect is the shift from the Augustinian picture of language to the 'picture' that meaning is use. Is Wittgenstein shifting the aspect of the same picture here, or is he offering us an alternative picture? Baker's work is ambiguous on this point.

The second problematic feature of Baker's reading is that Wittgenstein does not simply talk about pictures in terms of the hold they have on us, but quite plainly talks about pictures being "bad" (*PI* §136) and even "false" (*PI* §604, *Z* §20, §III, *OC* §249). Baker acknowledges that Wittgenstein often takes pictures themselves to be a problem: "A picture may be both *empty* and *pernicious*—this seeming paradox is fundamental to Wittgenstein's conception of pictures" (2004c, 268). As an example, Baker cites Wittgenstein's description of the Augustinian picture of language as surrounding "the working of language with a haze which makes clear vision impossible" (*PI* §5). A picture might perniciously obscure our vision and yet still be empty, but it's hard to see how it can be both empty and *false*.

If Wittgenstein's sole aim with pictures is to release the grip they have on us—an attribution that might not stick to Baker quite so simply, but Hutchinson and Read (2008, 149 – 50) seem committed to this view—the sole measure of the perniciousness of a picture would be the strength of the grip it has on us. This view leads to some bizarre results: is the human body the best picture of the human soul (*PPF* iv §25) only in the sense that this picture has less of a grip on us than other pictures? Surely, Wittgenstein does not simply want to free us from the grip of pictures, but also to show us how some pictures are less susceptible to misapplication than others.

Maintaining the analogy between pictures and literature gives us an insight into how a picture might be 'false'. Wittgenstein does not mean pictures are false in the weak sense that the stories we find in the Book of Genesis are false; that, *pace*

creationism, an anthropomorphic deity did not create the world in seven days in the not-so-distant past. This weak sense misapplies the stories of the Bible by misunderstanding the role they have in our lives, as if they would cease to have any power over us if they were historically inaccurate. Rather, Wittgenstein finds problematic pictures false in the strong sense that Nietzsche finds much of the New Testament false. “Mythically false”, as Cavell describes Wittgenstein’s attitude to pictures that lodge particularly deep in our thinking: “Not just untrue but destructive of truth” (CR, 365).

How can Wittgenstein’s pictures be “destructive of truth”? Consider Z §III:

We are not at all *prepared* for the task of describing the use of e.g. the word “to think” (And why should we be? What is such a description useful for?)

And the naïve idea that one forms of it does not correspond to reality at all. We expect a smooth contour and what we get to see is ragged. Here it might really be said that we have constructed a false picture.

The ‘false picture’ here is not the same as the ‘naïve idea’ one forms as a description of the use of “to think”. The picture at issue at Z §III isn’t a specific set of refutable ideas about how we use a certain word, but rather the expectation of what such ideas must look like. It’s not simply that people caught in this picture want to grasp the concept “to think” and expect that such a concept will have smooth contours, but rather they will not consider the concept grasped until they have found a satisfactory description that has smooth contours. The expectation of smoothness is the *telos* of the investigation, such that abandoning this picture means abandoning the investigation.

“Concepts have smooth contours” might seem like a false proposition, but we have to consider its role in the investigation. It functions not as an assertion but as the demand that guides the investigation. In the sections leading up to the passage cited above, Wittgenstein explores a diverse range of examples where we might be prepared to talk about thinking, and concludes: “‘Thinking’, a widely ramified

concept. A concept that comprises many manifestations of life. The *phenomena* of thinking are widely scattered” (Z §110). As long as we hold to the picture that leads us to expect smooth contours, we turn away from examining the details that show otherwise. The picture is not just false, but destructive of truth, because it makes us resist making the examinations we ought to make. In investigating and probing philosophical pictures, Wittgenstein is interested in “what it is in philosophy that resists such an examination of details”, something, he claims, “we have yet to come to understand” (PI §52).

Pictures and truth

I claimed that Heidegger’s treatment of truth slides into a sideways perspective, and that Wittgenstein’s use of pictures helps him avoid misspeaking in the same way. Let me spell out this claim by considering how Wittgenstein treats the concept of truth in mathematics. This case is unusual, because Wittgenstein thinks it’s confused to call mathematical propositions true at all, but the case is instructive because here, if anywhere, Wittgenstein might be tempted to say something to the effect that these ‘truths’ would not be true had humans not formulated them, or some such. He does not, but rather uses pictures to bring out his point without drawing a line around our grammar and pointing to it as it were from the outside.

Wittgenstein claims that the ordering of the series of cardinal numbers seems inexorable because what we call “counting” involves listing off the series of numbers in this particular order. The “peculiar inexorability of mathematics” (RFM I §4) comes not from some feature of the numbers themselves but from the fact that our practice of counting does not admit of variation. But situating this inexorability in our practices does not make it arbitrary:

We should presumably not call it “counting” if everyone said the numbers one after the other *anyhow*; but of course it is not simply a question of a name. For what we call “counting” is an important part of our life’s activities. Counting and calculating are not—e.g.—simply a pastime. Counting (and that means:

counting like *this*) is a technique that is employed daily in the most various operations of our lives. And that is why we learn to count as we do: with endless practice, with merciless exactitude; that is why it is inexorably insisted that we shall all say “two” after “one”, “three” after “two” and so on. —But is this counting only a *use*, then; isn’t there also some truth corresponding to this sequence?” The *truth* is that counting has proved to pay. —“Then do you want to say that ‘being true’ means: being usable (or useful)?” —No, not that; but that it can’t be said of the series of natural numbers—any more than of our language—that it is true, but: that it is usable, and, above all, *it is used*. (RFM I §4)

Wittgenstein resists the charge that he wants to reduce truth to usefulness. Rather, he claims that the concept of truth is inapplicable here precisely because we are talking about a practice, and a practice is itself neither true nor false any more than laying out the rules of a game constitutes correct or incorrect moves in a game.

The obvious target of Wittgenstein’s investigation is Platonism, but in drawing our attention to the way in which our concept of truth relates to our practices with numbers, Wittgenstein does not take Heidegger’s route of telling us that there would be no mathematical truths without human beings who constitute that truth. Instead, he destabilizes the Platonist picture by setting it alongside an alternative picture. If our system of counting contains truth, counting wrong would mean coming into conflict with the truth. But in what sense is counting wrong in conflict with the truth? Wittgenstein gives us a picture:

How should we get into conflict with truth, if our footrules were made of very soft rubber instead of wood and steel? —“Well, we shouldn’t get to know the correct measurement of the table”. —You mean: we should not get, or could not be sure of getting, *that* measurement which we get with our rigid rulers. So if you had measured the table with the elastic rulers and said it measured five feet by our usual way of measuring, you would be wrong; but if you say that it measured five feet by your way of measuring, that is correct. —“But surely that isn’t measuring at all!” —It is similar to our measuring and capable, in certain circumstances, of fulfilling ‘practical purposes’. (A shopkeeper might use it to treat different customers differently.)

If a ruler expanded to an extraordinary extent when slightly heated, we should say—in normal circumstances—that that made it *unusable*. But we could think of a situation in which this was just what was wanted. I am imagining that we perceive the expansion with the naked eye; and we ascribe the same numerical measure of length to bodies in rooms of different temperatures, if they measure the same by the ruler which to the eye is now longer, now shorter. (*RFM* I §5)

In picturing the practice of measuring with expanding rulers, Wittgenstein does not explore an empirical possibility (which is not to say that it's an empirical impossibility), but rather calls for our imaginative engagement with a picture, inviting us to put this picture alongside our ordinary practices of counting and measurement and see what the contrast reveals.

Among other things, the contrast destabilizes the picture of our concepts picking out properties of the world that exist in some absolute sense. But the alternative is not that our concepts pick out properties that are somehow relative to us or constituted by us. Saying that Newton's Laws were not true before Newton abuses our concept of truth just as much as insisting that the concept of truth was out there waiting for early language users to find it every bit as much as firewood and food were. Wittgenstein's pictures destabilize certain kinds of absolutism about our concepts without asserting anything that might misdescribe them.

3.5. Conclusion

Heidegger's recounting of authenticity takes place within an existential analytic of *Da-sein*. He aims to describe not only how different people conduct their lives—the existentiell modifications of their being—but the necessary structure of the existence of any *Da-sein*. Being-with—and hence the twin poles of *das Man* and distantiality—is a feature of every *Da-sein*'s existence, for instance. Heidegger's vocabulary is self-consciously difficult because this existential level of description is almost entirely unfamiliar to us. Just as we fail to notice the readiness-to-hand of tools because they are ready-to-hand precisely when we are using them and not

contemplating their nature, we see through Da-sein's existential structure in order to engage with the more mundane aspects of its existence. Being in this respect is self-concealing: the ontological structure of the world has to become transparent in order for the entities in the world to be visible. Our language, by and large, helps us to navigate our way through the world, and we lack the vocabulary to reflect on its ontological structure. Heidegger's writing is difficult because he wants us to reflect on what we lack the words to reflect on.

Despite the emphasis Wittgenstein places on ordinary language, he shares Heidegger's dissatisfaction with ordinary language. Both are aware that our ordinary forms of expression mislead us and induce philosophical confusion. However, Heidegger concludes that ordinary language is insufficient for his purposes whereas Wittgenstein struggles to reform our self-understanding from within ordinary language. For Heidegger, ordinary language is rife with metaphysical commitments and he develops a novel vocabulary in order to free himself of these commitments. Wittgenstein does not deny that ordinary language has its metaphysical lures: "*A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably*" (*PI* §115). However, a picture for Wittgenstein is importantly not a metaphysical commitment. Pictures cannot themselves tell us how they are to be applied (and if they could, we could still ask how to apply the instructions for applying the picture), though the absence of clear alternative applications may make it seem like they can. However, the way out of metaphysical confusion lies not with disowning the pictures language urges on us, but rather with taking care in how we apply these pictures.

Wittgenstein's method requires tremendous creativity and subtlety, since he reforms our self-understanding using the very same words that lead us astray. His use of pictures and reminders prods us to look at matters differently, but they cannot be guaranteed of success. One of the central lessons I have been exploring in the appeal to ordinary language is precisely the importance of our attunement and the lack of

guarantees underwriting this attunement. Wittgenstein's use of pictures brings about the recognition of uncanniness that Heidegger links to authenticity.

In my final chapter, I address the ungrounded nature of attunement directly. At the heart of our attunement, I argue, is our capacity for play. This conception of play also reflects Wittgenstein's method as I have characterized it. The use of objects of comparison to shift our understanding relies on a play of contrasts just as our understanding of one another relies on an interplay between us.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ORDINARY AS PLAY

... man is made God's plaything, and that is the best part of him.

– Plato, *Laws*

I do not know any other way of associating with great tasks than play.

– Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*

4.1. Introduction

Throughout this exploration of the appeal to ordinary language, I have drawn on Derrida and Heidegger as instructive objects of comparison. Both philosophers are superficially remote from the style and techniques of Austin and Wittgenstein, but share deeper similarities in their aims and method. I have included them in my discussion not simply to bring out unexpected similarities, interesting as that may have been. Rather, in using them as objects of comparison, I have tried to highlight aspects of the appeal to ordinary language that might otherwise have remained obscure.

In particular, my engagement with Derrida and Heidegger has pushed on and highlighted a feature of the appeal to ordinary language that I have been treating as

central. In the introduction, I emphasized attunement: the importance of our attunement, the ungroundedness of our attunement, the lack of assurance that we would find attunement with others, and the temptation in philosophy to seek out ground more stable than our attunement. Responding to challenges from Derrida and Heidegger has demanded that I return to this theme repeatedly. Finding attunement woven into our forms of life presents these forms of life as regular while resisting the thought that they are regulated: no fixed set of rules dictates how we are attuned or how we project words into new contexts. In this final chapter, I bring the appeal to ordinary language into dialogue with my continental objects of comparison one last time to explore the unregulated regularity of attunement. I will argue that we realize this attunement through play.

I begin by discussing the nature of games and their relation to non-game play, which feeds a particular reading of Wittgenstein's language-game analogy, a reading that comes into sharper relief in the face of criticism by Roy Harris (4.2). Harris develops his criticism through a comparison with Saussure, but I argue that Wittgenstein's conception of play brings him closer to Derrida, while also noting differences between Wittgenstein and Derrida (4.3). I then address a line of criticism from Wittgenstein's pupil, Rush Rhees, which finds echoes in both Heidegger and Gadamer. Addressing these criticisms shows that play is not a superficial feature of our lives, but an essential component of our lives with others (4.4). I conclude by connecting this conception of play to the appeal to ordinary language that I have been developing throughout this thesis (4.5).

4.2. Games and play in Wittgenstein

The coinage "language-game" first appears in the *Philosophical Investigations* at §7, and it is multi-faceted from its inception. Wittgenstein introduces it as a kind of ostensive teaching by which a child learns a language, but immediately adds that he will use the same term to describe the sorts of primitive languages he uses as objects of comparison. He also adds that he will "call the whole, consisting of language and

the activities into which it is woven, a ‘language-game’”. At *PI* §23, he adds that the various sectors of natural language can also be described as language-games, with the emphasis on “game” suggesting “that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life”. Starting at §65, Wittgenstein develops a further analogy between language and games, claiming that neither “language” nor “game” has fixed boundaries, and that their various instances are connected not by sharing a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, but by sharing a set of family resemblances.

The language-game analogy bolsters Wittgenstein’s emphasis on the connection between meaning and use. Wittgenstein often speaks about meaningful utterances as moves in a language-game,¹ and his primary analogy here is chess: utterances form the same sorts of discrete units in language that moves do in chess, units that we do not find in free-flowing games. Associating utterances with moves in a game emphasizes that speaking is a matter of doing something, and if we are to avoid a stalemate, it is a matter of doing something that changes the state of the game. The analogy with games draws our attention to a number of contrasts in language that we risk passing over due to similarities in grammatical structure. At *PI* §49, for instance, Wittgenstein rejects the view that naming is a special kind of description, saying that describing is a move in a language-game, but that naming is not itself a move but a precondition of making a move: “Naming is so far not a move in the language-game—any more than putting a piece in its place on the board is a move in chess”. Naming and describing can be expressed in sentences with identical grammatical structures—indeed, with identical wording (e.g. “The captain is Black” vs. “The captain is black”)—but the analogy with moves in a game brings out a crucial difference. Thinking of language in analogy with games shows that our words gain meaning by being put into play in a language-game. Any other use of words is either a preparatory step toward playing a language-game, or it is simply idling.

Another point of analogy between language and games is that both are constituted by rules, and these rules are autonomous in the sense that they are not

¹ Cf. e.g. *PI* §§22, 31, 33, and 49.

constrained by any external purpose: at *PG*, 184 – 5, Wittgenstein contrasts games and language with cookery, where the aim of cookery constrains what rules we can follow when cooking. However, Wittgenstein acknowledges that we use language far more flexibly than we obey the rules of a game, and he treats the model of a game with fixed rules as an object of comparison rather than a direct analogy: “If we look at the actual use of a word, what we see is something constantly fluctuating. In our investigations we set over against this fluctuation something more fixed, just as one paints a stationary picture of the constantly altering face of the landscape” (*PG*, 77).

The standard interpretation of Wittgenstein’s language-game analogy focuses on the rule-like structure that language shares with games, and Wittgenstein’s claim that we can speak and play games without explicitly learning the rules.² However, this interpretation treats the games themselves as given to us in advance, and does not consider the analogy in terms of how we learn language or learn a game. In this respect, it manifests what we might call an Augustinian conception of games, according to which a child that learns a language-game already knows how to play games, only not this one.³ This interpretation misses a deeper point about games, which is that games are *played*, and that they manifest the human capacity to play. This deeper point also brings out the importance and nature of the attunement that enables us to speak to one another. To bring out this point, I will explore the connection between games and play and some of the criticisms directed toward Wittgenstein’s language-game analogy.

Games and play

Let me begin by drawing some distinctions. Games are a special case of play. Invariably, we ‘play’ games, but not all play consists of games. The most obvious difference between games and non-game play is that games are constituted and governed by a more or less rigid and explicit set of rules. John Searle (1969, 33f)

² I am thinking here primarily of Baker & Hacker 2005d and Kenny 2006, 126 – 140.

³ Cf. *PI* §32.

distinguishes constitutive and regulative rules: constitutive rules establish the institution of a game and regulative rules direct what one may, must, or must not do within that institution.⁴ The constitutive rules of football tell us the dimensions of the pitch, the number of players on a team, the aim of the sport, and so on. Outside the institution of football, a football pitch is just a patch of grass and a player is just a person: the constitutive rules establish what Johan Huizinga (1995, 11) calls the ‘magic circle’ within which the patch of grass becomes a football pitch and the person becomes the player. Regulative rules restrict how players behave within this institution: only the goalkeeper can legitimately handle the ball, for instance, and only within his or her own penalty area.

This conception of regulative rules is one part of a tripartite definition presented in Bernard Suits’s (2005) charming book-length analysis of games. According to Suits, games involve (1) a prelusory goal: an aim that can be defined independent of the regulative rules, whether it be to cross the finish line before everyone else, to checkmate the king, or to get the ball into the net more often than the other team; (2) lusory means: restrictions on how players can achieve this goal, whether it be that one must stay within one’s lane, move pieces only according to certain rules, or not touch the ball with one’s hands; and (3) a lusory attitude: the game is played for the sake of the game itself, and not due to some outside compulsion. Or, in his pithy summation, “playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles” (Suits 2005, 55).

I find much of Suits’s discussion illuminating, and make use of some of his distinctions later in this chapter. However, Suits’s definition also poses a challenge: it has been taken as a knockdown refutation of Wittgenstein’s claim that we cannot define “game” with a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. Suits makes only passing reference to Wittgenstein in his preface (Suits 2005, 21), but his intent is clear: as Thomas Hurka delicately puts it, “His book is ... a precisely placed boot in Wittgenstein’s balls” (Hurka 2005, 11). Fortunately, I don’t think Suits’s definition is

⁴ Cavell (*CR*, 305) similarly distinguishes rules as defining from rules as regulating.

entirely successful, and discussing four problems I find with it sheds further light on the nature of games.

First, Suits's definition explicitly includes activities such as mountain climbing and sports like high jumping that we might not normally describe as "games", despite their similarities to games. In a discussion that is also not shy of criticizing Wittgenstein, Bede Rundle (1990, 45f) argues that sports and contests are distinct from games, despite considerable overlap. This difference between Suits and Rundle only works in Wittgenstein's favour, as it suggests that concept-terms like "game" need not have sharp boundaries. John Tasioulas (2006) adds that Suits's definition also includes a number of activities that no one would be inclined to call games, like pilgrimage or H. L. A. Hart's conception of the justified infliction of punishment.

Searle's distinction between constitutive and regulative rules enables a second objection to Suits's definition. Suits also marks this distinction, talking about descriptive and prescriptive rules, and acknowledging that the prelusory goal of a game often makes reference to the institution of the game established by its constitutive rules (Suits 2005, 58). For instance, we cannot describe checkmate without referring to the pieces and board defined by the constitutive rules of the game. Similarly, Suits's lusory means often presuppose the institution of a game. The trouble is that board games like chess are almost entirely specified by their constitutive rules, leaving very little work for regulative rules or Suits's lusory means. Because the constitutive rules already establish rigid limits on the space of play and how play proceeds, we need no further restrictions on the means by which players pursue the prelusory goal of checkmate. Besides minor regulations, such as the rule that one must say "*j'adoube*" when adjusting the placement of a piece one does not intend to play, chess is a game without Suits's lusory means. Suits fudges this point, giving as an example of lusory means in chess the fact that we cannot move the

knight diagonally (Suits 2005, 47). Suits's argument requires that the rule defining the knight's movement be both constitutive and regulative.⁵

Third, Suits does not distinguish explicit regulations from implicit rules. The restrictions on achieving the prelusory goal are not exhausted by the former. In ice hockey, certain attempts to interfere with members of the opposing team result in penalties outlined in the rules, so that a player may get two minutes in the penalty box for hooking or five for fighting, but the rules nowhere specify how a player should be penalized for throwing a grenade at the opposing team. Rules do not cover all outcomes in all possible cases, but rather provide clarity where clarity is needed. Like explanations, rules do not cover all cases and the fact that they do not is no lacuna. Because hockey players have a propensity for stopping play in order to punch each other in the face, the rulebook does well to consider what to do in such situations. But since hockey players tend not to carry explosives with them onto the ice, the rulebook is silent about such cases.

These last two points show that Suits's lusory means are not the same as rules. He assumes their identity with rules, but lusory means do not cover constitutive rules, and rules do not cover all the possible restrictions that constitute lusory means. These differences between rules and lusory means are important when considering the analogy with language, because language has rules of a sort, but it does not have lusory means. Language has no lusory means because, in one important respect, language is not a game: language has no prelusory goal, and while we often speak in order to attain some goal or other, the goals of speaking are no less extensive than the goals of the people who speak, and often we have no specified or even specifiable goal when we speak. Because language is not a contest, we do not seek out restrictions to make it more challenging for us.

Suits's definition becomes even more tenuous when we consider a fourth objection, which is that games also do not always have a prelusory goal. I am thinking

⁵ Searle and Cavell both miss the near-total absence of regulative rules in games like chess as well. Cavell specifically draws on the example of chess, and uses the touch-move rule to illustrate what a regulative rule is, but does not seem to consider how limited the range of regulative rules for chess is.

of role-playing games, the most salient example being *Second Life*, a massively multi-player online role-playing game in which players adopt avatars in a world much like our own and are free to pursue whatever goals they please. By design, the goals of *Second Life* are just as extensive and diverse as the goals of the players' first, off-line, life. Such games still employ Suits's lusory attitude, but both the prelusory goal and lusory means are absent. The distinguishing feature, it seems, is that even these games are constituted by rules of a sort (programming codes, or game handbooks in the case of table-top role-playing games), and these rules remain more or less fixed.⁶

We can challenge even the notion that games must have fixed rules. A salient counter-example is the card game Fluxx, where both the rules and the objective of the game change depending on which cards are played. Nevertheless, the game has clear rules and goals at any given moment, and, importantly, what those rules and goals are, and how they change, is fixed before the game begins. Earlier I drew attention to this feature of the standard interpretation of language-games: they take the structure of the language-game to be given prior to and independent of the play of the game itself.

Play, by contrast, is not unstructured—even the 'unstructured play' of children has a surprisingly finicky structure—but this structure is never explicit, and it is more fluid. Consider the "platform and tilt" approach to improvised storytelling discussed by Keith Johnstone (1999, 89 – 100), one of the great developers and acknowledged masters of improvisational theatre. A story evolves by establishing a platform—a relatively stable world, cast of characters, trajectory, and so on—and then tilting this platform: introducing a new element or twist that disrupts the platform. This tilt then stabilizes into a new platform, which can then be tilted, and so on. A platform without tilts quickly becomes boring, and a series of tilts without any established

⁶ I have chosen *Second Life* because it is the most striking case of a game having goals that are just as extensive and diverse as the goals of life. One might challenge the claim that *Second Life* is a game, and not, for instance, a 'virtual world', for this very reason. Nevertheless, other role-playing games—which are undeniably games—also lack a clearly specified prelusory goal, even if the goals one can pursue in such games are not as broad as in *Second Life*.

platforms is disorienting, and also weakens each individual tilt because there is nothing for the tilt to disrupt. The art of establishing a clear and compelling platform and finding a surprising but appropriate tilt is tremendously complex, and no fixed rules dictate how one must proceed.⁷ No constitutive or regulative rules dictate how to ‘play well’, but only what Cavell (*CR*, 305) calls principles and maxims of good play. The principles and maxims of improvisation do not direct players toward an already specified prelusory goal, but rather toward the more elusive aesthetic goals of good storytelling.

While very little play has as substantial a narrative element as improvisational theatre, all play has a rhythm whose structure bears some resemblance to Johnstone’s platforms and tilts. Children’s play may shift rapidly in its focus (it may tilt), but at any given moment, the children are fully invested in a particular structured activity (it has a platform). The themes and variations of improvising musicians also resemble this structure of platform and tilt. To the extent that a platform has structure, an observer could presumably formulate rules that define the platform, but these rules do not explicitly guide the players, and so the observer could never be certain to have characterized the rules accurately. More importantly, no rules guide the direction of tilts. Some tilts may be habitual or predictable, but the creativity of play derives from the freedom players have not only to play within a given platform but to tilt it. The only restrictions guiding tilts is whether a tilt is taken up by the players and does not bring the play to a halt. The capacity for a tilt to perpetuate play depends as much on the players as it does on the particular tilt. One distinction between games and non-game play is that the rules of a game provide a stable platform—and one that is often explicitly formulated—while the platforms of play are constantly changing through unregulated tilts.⁸

⁷ Various theatre and storytelling games impose particular rules on the improvisers. However, precisely by virtue of imposing these rules, the improvisation becomes a game.

⁸ My example of Fluxx, above, is a game because the changes in the rules are regulated rather than a matter of spontaneous decision by the players.

From what I said in Chapter Two about the projectability of words on Wittgenstein's conception of language, it would seem language, on Wittgenstein's view, exhibits many of the features of non-game play rather than games. If words can be projected, the rules for applying words are not rigidly regulated, but are more like platforms that are always open to being tilted. However, we should not conclude that Wittgenstein sees language on analogy with non-game play *rather than* with games. Instead, we need to see how the analogy connects to *both* games and non-game play. Doing so answers the criticism that Wittgenstein draws too close an analogy between language and games. Taking some of this criticism into consideration will help sharpen our sense of the place of both games and play in Wittgenstein's understanding of language.

Roy Harris (1988) compares the analogy of games and language in Saussure and Wittgenstein, claiming that the analogy helps them overcome certain misconceptions, but that, particularly in Wittgenstein's case, it creates new problems.⁹ Harris raises concerns precisely about the feature of games that distinguishes them from non-game play: rules. The rules of a game, Harris claims, are explicitly and exhaustively formulated, and must already be in place and agreed upon by all players before the game can begin.¹⁰ By contrast, the diversity of idiolects and the gradual and unlegislated change of languages suggest that language does not follow the dictates laid down by pre-set rules, but that we rather formulate rules to track a language that evolves independent of those rules.

⁹ Chris Lawn pursues a line of criticism similar to Harris, though with less rigour and care than Harris. He claims that Wittgenstein's account of language places "stress upon strict rule-governedness" (Lawn 2004, 134), without justifying the attribution of strictness to Wittgenstein, nor explaining what it would mean for language to be leniently governed by rules. I will deal here with Harris, who strikes me as more responsive to Wittgenstein's text and more precise in his analysis.

¹⁰ The standard interpretation of language-games does not claim that the rules of a language-game are explicitly and exhaustively formulated, but it does assume that the rules of a language-game, and what language-game is being played, are given in advance of playing it.

Wittgenstein is hardly blind to these differences. He frequently returns to the point that language users do not need to consult or obey rules in order to speak, and that our criteria are fluid, and in doing so he claims the analogy with games still holds. Wittgenstein tells us: “one can also imagine someone’s having learnt the game without ever learning or formulating rules” (*PI* §31) and returns to this point at *PI* §54, while at *PI* §83, he claims that games can evolve without anyone ever formulating rules:

We can easily imagine people amusing themselves in a field by playing with a ball like this: starting various existing games, but playing several without finishing them, and in between throwing the ball aimlessly into the air, chasing one another with the ball, throwing it at one another for a joke, and so on. And now someone says: The whole time they are playing a ball-game and therefore are following definite rules at every throw.

And is there not also the case where we play, and make up the rules as we go along? And even where we alter them—as we go along.

One of the guiding themes of *On Certainty* is the mutability of our fundamental rules of thought and language. *OC* §95 likens the “propositions describing [our] world-picture” to the rules of a game, and claims that we need never explicitly learn these rules, while the following two sections present the famous river-bed analogy, whereby Wittgenstein claims that these propositions are subject to gradual change. As early as *Philosophical Grammar*, Wittgenstein acknowledges the fluidity of language: “If we look at the actual use of a word, what we see is something constantly fluctuating” (*PG*, 77).

Harris acknowledges these points, but challenges Wittgenstein’s intuition that they uphold the analogy between language and games. On the one hand, the openness of criteria differs markedly from games like chess, where the rules are formulated explicitly: when confronted with the disappearing chair of *PI* §80 or borderline cases of plants (*PG*, 117), there is room for discussion or innovation in terms of how we will apply our words, but the same is not the case with chess:

The rule of the knight's move *does* cover all possible positions on the chess board. Whereas in the case of language it is up to the user to *decide* what to call the dubious plant or the disappearing chair. This has no parallel in the game of chess because the game of chess is not open-ended in the way language is. (Harris 1988, 91)

On the other hand, if we liken language to the sorts of open-ended games where innovation *is* possible, we lose the institutional character of language:

The whole point of the chess analogy is that the rules *do* determine in advance all the possible moves, and that the grammar of the game is *not* decided by individual players as the spirit moves them. Games which are not like chess in this respect, although they may have every right to count as games, simply do not supply the right model for explicating the institutional character of language, its regularity and its autonomy. Once we come to games where play is an improvised free-for-all, there is not only no guarantee that different players are not playing by different rules but no clear way of making good the claim that there are any rules at all. (Harris 1988, 91 – 2)

As Harris sees it, Wittgenstein's analogy between language and games catches him in a dilemma: the appeal to rules is supposed to explain the regularity of language, but this same appeal to rules disables the open-endedness of language that permits change and innovation.

Harris's criticism points to a curious tension in Wittgenstein's use of games as an analogy: Wittgenstein uses both chess and open-ended play as examples when discussing games. The differences between the two are striking. The rules of chess are almost entirely constitutive, and regulative rules play a very small part. Chess clearly appeals to Wittgenstein as a source of analogy because language, like chess, is mostly devoid of regulative rules:¹¹ my conversation partner does not get a free

¹¹ Does language have regulative rules? One candidate would be the sorts of obligations undertaken in illocutionary speech acts. In making a promise, I undertake the obligation to keep my promise: keeping promises is a regulative rule of the speech act of promising. To borrow Austin's distinction (*HDTW*, 18), the infelicities he classes as misfires violate the constitutive rules of performative utterances—if we violate them, the performative utterance is not realized—and the infelicities he

sentence if I misplace a modifier.¹² By contrast, open-ended play has neither constitutive nor regulative rules, and often has only the most faintly defined aims.

The tension between these two sources of analogy seems to Harris to rule decisively against Wittgenstein, but I think Harris is wrong. He is wrong as much because he misunderstands the nature of rules as because he misunderstands Wittgenstein. For Harris, a game is everywhere defined by its rules.¹³ Harris distinguishes rules from rule-formulations, claiming that, while Wittgenstein is right that no rule-formulation states how high one can throw a ball in tennis when serving (*PI* §68), there is nevertheless a perfectly clear rule: “The rule is that the server can throw the ball to any height” (Harris 1988, 70). Rule-formulations do not cover every possible action in a game, but unwritten rules account for every possible action even when the written rules remain mute. This distinction between rules and rule-formulations involves just the kind of idealization of rules that Wittgenstein struggles against. That we know that the server can throw the ball to any height in tennis is not a consequence of our knowing an unformulated rule, but a consequence of there being no rule constraining how high the server can throw the ball.

Wittgenstein sees greater continuity between games and non-game play than Harris because, unlike Harris, he does not think rules definitively ground the activities they constitute. Rules have a number of roles in games, which we can see by considering how appeals to rules actually feature in games. Sometimes we refer to

classes as abuses violate the regulative rules of performative utterances—if we violate them, the performative utterance is realized, but in a reproachable manner.

¹² Another feature of chess that makes it particularly apt in analogy with language is that it is a perfect information game. Unlike in poker or Battleships, where each player has information that the other lacks, both players in chess see the entire state of play at any given time. With chess as with language, “nothing is hidden” (*PI* §435).

¹³ This characterization is particularly apt for chess, where the rules constrain the range of possible moves more closely than in free-flowing games. The chess analogy might appeal to Wittgenstein for precisely this reason. Mulhall (2001a, 136 – 7) suggests that Wittgenstein focuses on mathematical examples in his discussion of rule following because ordinary language is often seen to be lacking in rigour in comparison with mathematics. If he can dispel the notion of a sublime and rigid conception of rules with regard to mathematics he can dispel the entire picture that demands similar rigidity from language. Similarly, if we can see that even the tightly regulated moves of chess are founded upon unregulated play (a point I am working toward), then we will see the same is true of language.

rules in order to learn a game, or teach a game by teaching someone its rules, though in this latter case, we almost never teach all the rules all at once. I feel fairly comfortable watching and playing tennis, but I have never read the ITF rulebook in its entirety (it runs 44 pages), and skimming through it I find a number of rules with which I was unfamiliar (rule 22, dealing with a let during the service, contains a number of surprises, though none that would have altered any game I have ever played). Some of the rules are more important to teaching the game than others. In cases of disputes or violations of the rules, players can refer to a rulebook to settle their dispute, or to a referee or umpire whose authority derives from a certified mastery of the rules. However, most games for the most part are played without any explicit reference to the rules. Appeals to rules are normally isolated to borderline cases or scenes of instruction. Furthermore, players might appeal to rules in order to explain what they are doing: if someone unfamiliar with tennis asked why both players stopped trying to hit the ball after it bounced outside the baseline, the players could explain themselves by appeal to the rules.¹⁴

The difference between a game and the unregulated play Wittgenstein imagines at *PI* §83 amounts to no more than this: the play is less regular than the play of a game, and players neither teach nor justify their behaviour by appeal to rules that have already been formulated. Chess does not exhibit the irregularities of open-ended play because any attempt to play differently will be met with an objection from the other player, and that objection appeals to the rules. For Wittgenstein, games are not a totally separate category from play, but rather a more regular form of play whose regularity is maintained by certain agreements (either in the sense of *Übereinstimmung* or *Einverständnis*),¹⁵ which, in a pinch, can be enforced by an appeal

¹⁴ Wittgenstein considers our ordinary use of rules, and their role in instruction, at *PI* §54.

¹⁵ In the penultimate chapter of what is, for the most part, a carefully argued book, Harris takes Wittgenstein to task for his insistence on “agreement in definitions” at *PI* §242, assuming that Wittgenstein means that we need prior agreement in the way that we might need prior agreement on the rules of a game in order to play. In effect, Harris seems to take Wittgenstein to be insisting on the agreement of *Einverständnis* rather than the agreement of *Übereinstimmung*, and, in effect, takes Wittgenstein’s own position as an argument against him. This point is hardly incidental, since my

to the rules. The regularity of games does not reflect the inexorability of their rules, but rather our inexorability in applying them.¹⁶

Consider the analogous case with language. For the most part we speak freely with one another, without considering or appealing to the criteria that determine the correct use of our words. We teach others new words or new language-games not by providing them with an exhaustive list of rules, but usually through a series of examples or definitions, or whatever else we think is sufficient to ensure that they will go on as we do. Occasionally disputes or uncertainties may arise about whether we are speaking correctly, and one way of addressing these disputes is to appeal to a dictionary or some other equivalent to a rulebook.¹⁷ To what extent our use of words is regular, and to what extent it is open-ended, depends considerably on the language-game we are playing. Mathematicians tend to be very regular in their application of criteria, whereas discussions of ethics or aesthetics often consist of disputes over the very definitions of the words in use. These differences are not due to the greater rigour of mathematics, but rather to the way that the language-game is played.

Language-games are diverse, and some exhibit greater regularity than others. All we really want when giving and obeying commands on a building site is that we and our interlocutors behave exactly in accordance with the same regular patterns of behaviour that this language-game normally produces. Certain contexts are unfamiliar enough, or call for sufficient individuality of response that we cannot appeal to any practice with the regularity of a game to guide our response. In such cases, our use of language is more like the open-ended play that invites others to

criticism of Harris depends heavily on the importance of attunement in rule-following, a point he neglects.

¹⁶ Cf. *RFM* I §118.

¹⁷ Harris (1988, 71 – 5) is right to say that natural languages pre-exist any explicit codification of their vocabulary and grammar, but wrong to say that the reverse is true of games. Most sports are played for some time before their rules are codified by officially recognized bodies. Almost all sporting leagues with official rulebooks are less than one hundred and fifty years old, and yet sports have existed for much longer.

follow along with us and introduce their own variants, and where appeals to rules are at best stubbornly dogmatic.

4.3. Wittgenstein, Derrida, and play

Harris compares Wittgenstein and Saussure, both of whom use the analogy with games to explicate their views on language. However, I find Wittgenstein's vision of language to be closer to Derrida's than to Saussure's. In Chapter Two, I found strong similarities between Derrida's conception of iterability and the conception of projectability that Cavell finds in Wittgenstein. Derrida's conception of iterability reflects "the play of the world" (*OG*, 259), according to which signs engage in a constant interplay with one another unrooted in any transcendental signified. This conception of play is also central to Derrida's criticism of Saussure:¹⁸ Saussure draws an absolute distinction between the rigidity of a structure and the play of signs within that structure, but Derrida argues that the structure itself requires some degree of play in order to enable the play of signs. Wittgenstein bears a closer resemblance to Saussure's most radical critic than to Saussure himself. While we find similarities with Derrida's conception of play, the emphases in Wittgenstein are subtly different, and ultimately reflect the importance of attunement in Wittgenstein's appeal to ordinary language.

Interplay in Derrida and Wittgenstein

In contrast to univocity, Derrida offers iterability; in contrast to the transcendental signified, Derrida offers play: "One could call *play* the absence of the transcendental signified as limitlessness of play, that is to say as the destruction of onto-theology and the metaphysics of presence" (*OG*, 50). This play is 'limitless' in the sense that Derrida does not construe play as a space of *différance* contained within an essentially unchanging world, but—with a view to there being nothing

¹⁸ Most notably *OG*, 27 – 73, though Derrida's early work frequently engages with Saussure and structuralism.

‘outside the text’ to which the iterable structure of the sign does not apply—as pervasive. “Within the play of supplementarity, one will always be able to relate the substitutes to their signified, this last will be yet another signified. The fundamental signified, the meaning of the being represented, even less the thing itself, will never be given us in person, outside the sign or outside play” (OG, 266). Derrida claims the play of writing is not a “play *in the world*” [un jeu *dans le monde*] where the play exists within a clearly defined structure, but rather “*the game of the world*” [le jeu *du monde*], which “must be first thought; before attempting to understand all the forms of play in the world” (OG, 50).

Wittgenstein shares Derrida’s appraisal of unregulated play as more fundamental than the structure in which it is situated. Derrida’s insight is similar to Wittgenstein’s insight that our attunement is ungrounded: whatever ultimate grounding we might purport to find must itself be ungrounded. Rather than seeing the world as a fixed structure into which a certain amount of play is introduced, Derrida sees structure as possible only on the basis of play that creates order.

Glendinning (1998, 80) identifies two senses of “play” in Derrida’s conception of language, both of which he connects to Wittgenstein. The first is the ludic sense in which Wittgenstein talks about language-*games*: as in a game, the elements of language play off of one another and gain their significance through this interplay. For both Derrida and Wittgenstein, signs do not derive their meaning vertically, where individual elements of a language connect with corresponding elements of reality, but rather horizontally, in their interplay with one another. The elements of a language-game find their role in their relation to other elements in the language-game, and the moves that are possible within the language-game. A block of wood becomes a chess king by virtue of its relationship to other pieces on the board and their respective roles in the game.

The second sense of “play” is the operational sense in which a machine must allow a certain amount of play between its parts in order to move: the ideal of absolutely fixed and univocal meanings is like a machine where every part is so tightly

slotted together that the mechanism can do no work. Derrida (1992, 64) and Wittgenstein (*PI* §§270 – 1) both use the analogy of a mechanism whose parts need to move in relation with one another in order to function. These two senses of “play” are clearly related: the former draws out the importance of interplay between the elements in a system and the latter identifies the conditions that enable this interplay.

Although both Wittgenstein and Derrida draw attention to the interplay of signs in a system, the overall importance of play in their thinking takes on different inflections. For Derrida, this interplay is a global ‘play of the world’, where play takes on a seemingly ontological significance. For Derrida, play is what we are left with when we let go of the transcendental signified to which the metaphysical tradition aspires. Derrida emphasizes play primarily as a feature of the dynamic of signs rather than as a human activity. That humans play with one another is one manifestation of a more general ‘play of the world’, whereby everything is at play.

Wittgenstein’s appeal to ordinary language, by contrast, gives the human aspect of play greater emphasis. In directing his attention to attunement and the scene of instruction, Wittgenstein considers the interactions between people that enable them to build and share their lives together. Our shared capacity for play, and the regularity that emerges through this play, is at the heart of these interactions. For Wittgenstein as for Derrida, this play is not confined within a fixed structure, but is rather the ungrounded source of all structures. But for Wittgenstein, this play is primarily something we *do*. We find, or fail to find, common ground with one another in the attempt to discover or create regularities through interactions that are not themselves regulated. This kind of interpersonal play does not feature in Derrida’s writings.

Attunement and the scene of instruction

These reflections on play inform our understanding of attunement, which has been a running theme throughout this thesis. The common ground of our

attunement is both discovered and created. In dealing with others, we learn how those others behave, how they react, how and toward what they register interest, surprise, fear, and so on. We learn to interact with others partly through imitation and partly through finding our own ways of behaving, reacting, and so on. We calibrate ourselves to others by interacting with them. This interaction or calibration does not itself follow set rules, since rules only emerge as a consequence of this interaction or calibration. It is unregulated activity that nevertheless gives rise to the regularity of attunement. In a word, it is play. In playing, we discover and create regularities that constitute our social lives as criteria and norms. As Huizinga (1995, 10) remarks, play “creates order, *is* order”. Our ordered world of criteria and norms is not something we are given, but something we play our way into.

The shared attunement that enables this play is itself ungrounded: it is the means by which we develop norms and rules in the first place. In this respect, attunement is something we discover. As we learn to play with one another, we expand the ground upon which we find attunement: once certain forms of play are familiar—are ‘in play’, so to speak—we can build variations and deviations upon them. In this respect, attunement is something we create.¹⁹ Our attunement inclines us to go on in similar ways, but only in this interplay do we actually find ourselves going on in similar ways, thereby allowing us to expand our attunement and to probe its limits.

Consider a game where a parent teaches his child “please” and “thank you” by ritually passing an object back and forth between them. The parent cannot explain to the child how the game will run—that is part of what he is teaching—but rather relies on his attunement with the child, in both capacities and responses, which ensure that the child will respond in certain expected ways. The child may need a bit

¹⁹ Beth Savickey (unpublished) places particular emphasis on the creative aspect of play, contrasting her position with that of David Cerbone’s (1994) singular focus on attunement as discovered: “While Cerbone claims that the point of imagination in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy is to ‘recover [our] own familiar concepts as our own and to see the extent to which our (form of) life is inseparable from them’, I wish to extend this role beyond one of recovery (of the lost, forgotten, unseen, or denied) to one of exploration or investigation (of the details, depth, richness, and complexity of life)”.

of prompting at first—and again, this prompting cannot take the form of established rules or norms of explanation, since these rules and norms are part of what is being established—but will gradually grasp the game and start playing along. Nothing guarantees that parent and child will fall into accord such that they manage to play happily together, and that they do for the most part is a consequence of their attunement.

As this example suggests, play is central to the scene of instruction, whose importance to Wittgenstein I emphasized in Chapter Two. Cavell (*CR*, 1995c) and Mulhall (2001a, 2001b, 2005) both remark on the importance of play in the opening sections of the *Investigations*, and its importance to the scene of instruction, and Beth Savickey (unpublished) treats these sections as improvisational games. Mulhall registers the absence of play in the Augustinian picture of language as contrasting with Wittgenstein's own conception of language. In contrast to Augustine's child, who learns language by mutely watching his elders point out and name the objects of their desire or aversion, Wittgenstein offers the parable of a shopping expedition for five red apples (*PI* §1d). Following Cavell, Mulhall imagines this expedition in terms of a child being sent on the errand, thereby offering a "counter-narrative about the acquisition of language" (Mulhall 2001a, 48 – 9): the child's parents have sent her on this shopping expedition as a way of inducting her into their life with words. The child is playing at shopping, and through this play learning what it is to go shopping, to buy things, to do one of the countless things that adults do with words. In learning to play language-games, Wittgenstein's child learns to make language her own: something she can improvise with, expand upon, and express herself with. Augustine's child, by contrast, only ever learns to imitate his elders, and so relates to language as external to himself, something to be quoted rather than played with.

If people spoke to one another only when conveying information relevant to their survival and flourishing, they would speak very little. We can get by in a foreign country with only a few simple phrases because we need only that much to exchange the minimum information about prices, food, and lodging. If parents spoke to their

children only when informing them of important facts, they would speak to their children so infrequently that the children would never learn to speak. We learn language because our elders do not simply point at the objects of their desire or aversion and name them, as Augustine imagines, but because they chatter to us constantly, play simple games of passing objects back and forth and naming them as they do so, and so on. A language whose primary role is to make assertions that also meet certain theorized relevance conditions is a language no child could ever learn.

Even getting as far as he does with language, Augustine's child relies implicitly on play. Augustine writes that he learned to grasp the intentions behind his elders' words by observing "their gestures, **the natural language of all peoples**, the language that by means of facial expression and the play of eyes, of the movement 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" (quoted at *PI* §1). As anyone with much experience travelling abroad can attest, the meaning of gestures and facial expressions, far from being shared 'naturally' by 'all peoples', is surprisingly local. Augustine's child learns his elders' intentions by already being attuned with the elders: he has a sufficiently rich conception of how people interact with one another to learn to read their physical movements before he learns to understand their words.

Unlike Derrida's 'play of the world', Wittgenstein's localized conception of play marks the possibility that play might break down or fail. We discover and create attunement in interplay with one another, but we cannot guarantee that we will succeed in establishing attunement. Inscribed in Wittgenstein's conception of play is the anxiety every child feels when it steps in to the playground: will I fit in? This anxiety, as I have remarked, is as much a feature of Wittgenstein's appeal to ordinary language as the assurance that, for the most part, we do fit in with one another.

The comparison between Derrida and Wittgenstein on play accentuates the difference between Wittgenstein and Austin I considered in Chapter Two. Derrida criticizes Austin's formulation of a total context because it requires an absolute perspective from which we can define our speech acts. Such a perspective is the

perspective of Derrida's transcendental signified that tries to put a stop to play. Where Wittgenstein sees a ceaseless probing to find common ground with others, Austin looks for the perspective from which such probing would be unnecessary. Because he lacks Wittgenstein's appreciation of the ungroundedness of our attunement, Austin's appeal to ordinary language does not place the same emphasis on play as the means of discovering or creating this attunement. Austin takes the sorts of agreements in definitions that provide the basis for a dictionary as given, and does not probe the nature and source of these agreements. Austin's failure to recognize the role of play in discovering and creating these agreements makes him susceptible to Derrida's criticism in a way that Wittgenstein is not.

4.4. The unity of language: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Gadamer, Rhees

Derrida is not the only figure in the continental tradition for whom play is important. Hans-Georg Gadamer, a student of Heidegger's, gives play a central place in unfolding his conception of hermeneutics. Gadamer's hermeneutics owes a considerable debt of inspiration to Heidegger, and we find the seeds of his thinking about play in *Being and Time*. More strikingly, Gadamer's account of understanding in terms of conversation finds strong echoes in one of Wittgenstein's most faithful students, Rush Rhees. For Rhees, however, Wittgenstein's language-game analogy—and by extension, the distinctive role Wittgenstein gives to play—risks turning language into a sophistical playground that empties discourse of genuine depth and seriousness.

Play in Heidegger and Gadamer

Heidegger's prioritization of readiness-to-hand over presence-at-hand suggests a priority of play with regard to structure similar to what we find in Wittgenstein and Derrida. Tools show up as ready-to-hand only in the broader context of their relations to other equipment, the ends for which they are used, the

natural material they are made of, and the interests of the people that use them. The contexts in which tools show up as ready-to-hand are indefinitely rich and various: just as we cannot lay out in advance all the acceptable projections of a word, we cannot lay out in advance all the manifestations of a tool's readiness-to-hand. This "we cannot lay out in advance" is not a practical limitation, simply a consequence of the possible projections of a word or manifestations of a tool's readiness-to-hand being inordinately complex, but a conceptual limit. Consider by way of analogy the frame problem in the study of Artificial Intelligence.²⁰ Suppose we want to programme a robot that will behave autonomously when placed into an unfamiliar environment. The procedure by which the robot processes the finite amount of relevant information in order to decide what to do is independent of the procedure by which the robot determines what information is relevant. We can write finite programmes to perform the former procedure completely, but not the latter. Similarly, a tool can show up as ready-to-hand in infinitely many ways and contexts, and no finite list of rules can specify in advance the domain of possible manifestations.

Our own sense of what is relevant in our environment—the framing we give to our practical decision-making—is not a matter of propositional knowledge but rather of know-how. Similarly, our capacity to engage with tools as ready-to-hand involves a know-how whose principles cannot be laid out explicitly. Before we can thematize knowledge in explicit, propositional form, we must already relate to our world with a non-propositional understanding. This understanding precedes and gives rise to the regularity of rule-like structures. Like Wittgenstein, Heidegger finds the unregulated regularity of play to be prior to any regulated structure.

This conception of play finds explicit expression in Gadamer's hermeneutical project, as laid out in *Truth and Method*, which situates understanding within its historical context. Understanding is not a matter of an ideal consciousness

²⁰ Dreyfus (1992) is the *locus classicus* for a Heideggerian critique of Artificial Intelligence. Wheeler (2005) develops a similarly Heideggerian approach.

apprehending an ideal meaning, but always a matter of interpretation, where an interpreter conditioned by his or her historical context comes into contact with a text conditioned by its own historical context. Gadamer stresses the situatedness of understanding: our understanding is conditioned by what Gadamer calls the 'prejudices' of our particular situation, which he links to Heidegger's discussion of the fore-structure of understanding (Gadamer 1989, 269). We cannot adopt an objective point of view, and the correct hermeneutic method is not to aim at such unattainable objectivity, but to take our own prejudices critically into account. Understanding and interpretation present a two-way hermeneutical street: in interpreting an entity, we do not simply gain a new understanding of that entity, but we also shift our prejudices in accommodation of this new understanding.

Gadamer does not see prejudice in a negative light, but rather as the necessary condition of any understanding whatsoever. Our prior involvement in the world, and the prejudices that this prior involvement brings with it, are precisely what allow us to engage with the world in an understanding manner. The Enlightenment ideal of attaining an unbiased perspective on truth, which conceives of all prejudice in a negative light, reflects a "prejudice against prejudice" (Gadamer 1989, 273). Wittgenstein sees some pictures as false or misleading, but nevertheless sees pictures as an inescapable part of our conceptual architecture, and Gadamer similarly sees some prejudices as harmful or misleading but sees prejudice itself as inescapable. With both pictures and prejudices, the aim is not (*per impossibile*) to free ourselves of them entirely, but rather to reflect on them critically and adopt those that bring clarity rather than confusion. Following Heidegger (1971),²¹ Gadamer sees the disclosive possibilities of understanding as intimately linked with concealment: in disclosing the world to us in a particular way, our prejudices also conceal other

²¹ Though the theme of concealment and unconcealment is particularly prominent in "The Origin of the Work of Art", we find it throughout Heidegger's later work, and indeed in *Being and Time* as well: "The full existential and ontological meaning of the statement 'Dasein is in the truth' also says equiprimordially that 'Dasein is in untruth'. But only insofar as Dasein is disclosed, is it also closed off, and insofar as innerworldly beings are always already discovered with Dasein, are such beings covered over (hidden) or disguised as possible innerworldly beings to be encountered" (BT, 222).

possibilities of understanding. Our prejudices are neither simply disclosive nor simply concealing, but are rather the enabling conditions that make possible both concealment and unconcealment.

Conditioned by our prejudices, all understanding takes place within a 'horizon', according to Gadamer: "The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer 1989, 302). For Gadamer, however, horizons are not static and unchanging: indeed, historical interpretation is difficult because horizons change over time. This change occurs through a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer 1989, 306), which is a condition for the possibility of hermeneutical engagement. On a simple level, two people reach a shared understanding by coming to understand each other's point of view: this mutual understanding requires a fusion of the different horizons of the two people. Interpreting texts requires a similar fusion of horizons: we bring our conditioned understanding to a text that may in many ways be alien to us, and the understanding we draw from the text is not the neutral and objective 'meaning' of that text, but rather the conditioned understanding that arises from bringing our own horizon critically into contact with the horizon of the text.

Gadamer's model for understanding is conversation: we achieve understanding not by gathering within ourselves data we have acquired from outside of ourselves, but rather by engaging with others—other people, other texts, other entities—and allowing our understanding to change and grow through the fusion of horizons that emerges. Such understanding, for Gadamer, relies crucially and incessantly upon interpretation: understanding changes by bringing what is initially alien into contact with our present horizon, and having that horizon shift by assimilating it through interpretation.

Gadamer's hermeneutics, with its shifting prejudices, fusions of horizons, and conversational exchange, involves a constant back-and-forth without absolute grounding, which Gadamer characterizes in terms of play. Play for Gadamer is not a subjective aspect of the player's experience, but rather a characteristic of the

interplay between the player and the other people or texts that are in play: “The players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (*Darstellung*) through the players” (Gadamer 1989, 103). Gadamer considers “the play of light, the play of the waves, the play of gears or parts of machinery, the interplay of limbs, the play of forces, the play of gnats, even a play on words”, noting that “what is intended is to-and-fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end” (Gadamer 1989, 103):

The movement of playing has no goal that brings it to an end; rather, it renews itself in constant repetition. The movement backward and forward is obviously so central to the definition of play that it makes no difference who or what performs this movement. The movement of play as such has, as it were, no substrate. It is the game that is played—it is irrelevant whether or not there is a subject who plays it. The play is the occurrence of the movement as such. (Gadamer 1989, 103)

Play, on Gadamer’s account, has its own momentum rather than being perpetuated by agents who create play. In this respect, says Gadamer, “all playing is a being-played” (Gadamer 1989, 106): the back-and-forth momentum of play is not created by individual players but arises through the interplay between them.

Gadamer identifies a similarity between himself and Wittgenstein in their shared emphasis on play,²² though his conception of playing as being-played is more impersonal than the search for attunement in Wittgenstein. Gadamer’s emphasis on being-played reacts against an overly subjective conception of play that he finds in Kant and Schiller (Gadamer 1989, 102), drawing on Huizinga to show that play is not simply in the minds of the players, but is an independent dynamic that players are drawn into. I highlighted the importance of play to Wittgenstein in connection with the anxious predicament of the individual who is uncertain whether his or her words will be understood or accepted as complete. In seeking out a common ground with our interlocutors, we do not simply immerse ourselves in a dynamic of play, but

²² Cf. Gadamer 1989, xxxvi, as well as Gadamer 1976, 173f.

rather actively shape that dynamic in our search for shared understanding. Our engagement with others involves interplay, whereby each player is changed in unpredictable ways, but we also shape this dynamic to suit our aims and intent. Playing is being-played, but it is also playing.

Rhees's criticism

In characterizing understanding in terms of conversation, Gadamer places himself close to a line of criticism against Wittgenstein that takes Wittgenstein's analogy between language and games as problematic. Although he is sympathetic to much of Wittgenstein's philosophy, Rush Rhees (1970c, 2006) expresses concern with the notion that language might be composed of a collection of independent and distinct games. Rhees grants that different language-games relate to different aspects of our lives, but insists that these language-games hang together as part of a unified language. Games lack this unity: the sense of chess is not affected by the way it relates to table tennis. For Rhees, the unity of language comes hand in hand with the unity of life: our language-games are connected to the extent that our purposes in playing them are connected, which in turn depends on all the aspects of our lives being connected.

This concern about the unity of language feeds a second concern for Rhees: games do not have a point in the way that language does. Unlike games, language is *about* something. Rhees ties this 'reality of language'²³ to its capacity to induce learning, understanding, and growth. What we learn from or through language is not limited by the rules of a game, but only by our own limitations. Language is open-ended: it does not have a particular subject matter, but is rather the medium in which we can talk about anything.

Rather than consider language in analogy with games, Rhees proposes we use the model of conversation when thinking about language. He does not claim that all language is conversational, or that it consists essentially of conversation, but rather

²³ Cf. Rhees (2006) 33, 85, 119, 125, 131, and 138.

urges us to consider conversation as an important ‘centre of variation’ (Rhees 1970c, 69).²⁴ Like games, conversations constitute discrete units, bounded in space and time, but unlike games, conversations have repercussions that extend beyond these bounds. The conversations we have pertain to one another (they have unity) and they have a point (they have reality). In engaging in conversation, we can grow in understanding.

In characterizing language in terms of conversation, and doing so because conversation enables the growth of understanding, Rhees makes a number of the same moves as Gadamer.²⁵ As far as I know, Rhees and Gadamer came to these ideas independently, but in both cases they can be construed as a criticism of Wittgenstein. In Rhees’s case, the criticism of Wittgenstein is his central concern. Gadamer is less directly concerned with criticizing Wittgenstein, but his remarks on Wittgenstein are occasionally critical,²⁶ and Chris Lawn (2004) works out a detailed critique of Wittgenstein from a Gadamerian perspective.

Rhees’s concern with the unity of language also finds echoes in Heidegger’s fundamental ontology. An ontic science investigates a particular region of being, and a regional ontology investigates the grounds upon which an ontic science bases its modes of explanation and investigation, and the assumptions that guide these explanations and investigations. A regional ontology, in turn, “arises from the domain of beings themselves” (*BT*, 10), and presupposes the fundamental understandability of being. Fundamental ontology, for Heidegger, investigates the conditions that enable us so much as to relate to being in terms of the ontic sciences and regional ontologies. This investigation reveals the connections between the various ontic sciences and regional ontologies in a way that reveals the unity, or at least the connectedness, in the diverse ways in which being is disclosed to *Da-sein*.

²⁴ Cf. also Rhees (2006) 8, 47, 69, 85, 91, 104, and 108.

²⁵ Patrick Rogers Horn (2005) also remarks on similarities between Rhees and Gadamer, while distinguishing them with the claim that Gadamer sees the unity of language as corresponding to an already unified reality, whereas for Rhees, language is only unified to the extent that what people say to one another is connected.

²⁶ Cf. Lawn 2004, 131.

Neither Rhees nor Heidegger argues for a unifying structure that *must* underlie our diverse practices.²⁷ The unity of language or being is not given in advance of our investigation, but is rather a feature of the connections we are able to draw. D. Z. Phillips glosses Rhees's view as follows:

As in a conversation, the unity of a language is not formal, and what one emphasizes is not the differences between things but how one thing leads to another. But if one asks how one leads to another, the answer will not be, Because they *must*, but rather, Because they *do*. What will count as 'sayable' will depend on how people actually talk to one another. Or, better, that people talk to one another in the ways in which they do, that they make the connections they do, will show what is and what is not 'sayable'. (Phillips 1999, 51)

Similarly, Heidegger does not insist that our ontic sciences and regional ontologies *must* hang together, but rather that they *do*. We can thematize our understanding of being in a variety of ways, but we can also find and draw connections within this variety.

Although Heidegger and Rhees do not theorize a formal unity, their emphasis on unity separates them from Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's language-games and objects of comparison highlight not the unappreciated unity but the telling contrast. Wittgenstein remarks on his interest in diversity over unity by contrasting himself with Hegel: "Hegel seems to me to be always wanting to say that things which look different are really the same. Whereas my interest is in showing that things which look the same are really different" (Drury 1984, 157).²⁸ For Wittgenstein, our confusions come not from failing to appreciate the deep connectedness of things, but from failing to appreciate their diversity. While Phillips argues that we find the unity of language in what people *do*, I have emphasized Wittgenstein's awareness that we

²⁷ Whether Gadamer holds this view or not is a matter of debate. Caputo (1987) and Horn (2005) argue that Gadamer's conception of "world" makes implicit metaphysical demands, while Wright (1986), Grondin (1995), and Risser (1995) deny this claim. Cf. Horn 2005, 76.

²⁸ Cf. also *LFM*, 15.

might not find any such unity. The parable of the wayward pupil does not illustrate a global breakdown in communication or attunement: the pupil shares enough with the teacher to understand the teacher's language and to have some understanding of the context of the lesson. However, the pupil's sharing some forms of life with the teacher does not prevent a breakdown of attunement in the particular case of learning the rule "Add 2". In this respect, our forms of life are not unified: if you share this many forms of life with me, it does not follow you will be able to share all my forms of life with me, even in principle. Wittgenstein claims that insisting that other people's feelings are hidden from us in some unreachable sense is nonsense, but adds: "It is, however, important as regards our considerations that one human being can be a complete enigma to another" (*PPF* xi §325). If human beings can be enigmas to one another—either completely or with regard to certain aspects of their lives—then we cannot be confident not just that the things they say *must* all hang together, but even that they *do*.

Sophistry and spoilsports

Wittgenstein may thus be able to dig in his heels and say that language-games *might not* exhibit unity, but Rhees's concern is that, if we conceive of language on analogy with a game, then our language-games *cannot* exhibit unity. In contrasting conversation not just with games, but also with techniques and institutions (two other frequent centres of variation for Wittgenstein), Rhees takes himself to be engaging in Plato's ancient battle against sophistry. If the words we speak are just moves in a game, skilful deployments of a technique, then "the growth of understanding could only mean the growth of a skill (efficiency, I suppose) or the multiplication of skills" (Rhees 2006, 3) and the only value of the words we speak would be their efficacy in achieving the desired ends. If speaking is simply a means to a desired and predetermined end, language becomes a sophistical battlefield, the site where orators spar and determine whose rhetoric wins out. If every conversation

already has a prelusory goal, then we can never truly learn from a conversation, since the only conclusion to a conversation will be the result of victory or defeat.

Rhees's concern about sophistry resonates with Heidegger's concerns from the outset of *Being and Time*.²⁹ Like Rhees, Heidegger is concerned with the threat of sophistry, or the danger that our discourse amounts to nothing more than idle talk (though, as I will discuss shortly, sophistry and idle talk are not quite the same thing). If our forms of discourse are just isolated games, undertaken for their own sake, then they lack genuine worth. Rhees's reality of language depends upon the unity of language: our conversations result in understanding and growth *because* they pertain to other conversations and other aspects of our lives. A self-standing language-game contributes to nothing but itself.

I think Rhees misplaces the point in characterizing sophistry as treating discussion as simply moves in a game. Playing a game successfully requires coordination and cooperation between players. Rhetorical exchanges between sophists have many of the characteristics of a game, but what concerns Rhees, as well as Heidegger and Plato, is the challenge sophistry presents to any discussion whatsoever. In Book I of the *Republic*, Thrasymachus does not treat as a game what the others take seriously, but rather he denies the possibility of taking a discussion of justice seriously in the way that Socrates wants to. As far as Thrasymachus is concerned, justice is unreal: high-minded talk about justice is just empty chatter, and we could excise the word "justice" from our vocabulary entirely by substituting talk about power. Rhees has this sort of challenge in mind when he talks about the reality of language.

The contrast between sophistry and philosophy is not one of play and seriousness—that sophists are playing with language whereas philosophers take their words seriously—because play and seriousness are not opposites. In one sense play contrasts with seriousness, but in another sense, seriousness is absolutely essential to

²⁹ Mulhall (2001a) discusses the way in which the epigraph to *Being and Time*, from Plato's *Sophist*, orients the work as a whole, and announces as a central concern the distinction between sophistry and philosophy. Mulhall (2007) also explicitly links Rhees's concerns with Heidegger's.

play. Huizinga (1995, 5) recognizes this point, and Gadamer—who acknowledges his debt to Huizinga—links this point to a deeper contrast between sophistry and philosophy: “seriousness in playing is necessary to make the play wholly play. Someone who doesn’t take the game seriously is a spoilsport” (Gadamer 1989, 102). Sophistry is not a matter of playing where others are serious, but rather a matter of playing the spoilsport where others play seriously.

Suits (2005, 60) draws the following distinction: “triflers recognize rules but not goals, cheats recognize goals but not rules, players recognize both rules and goals, and spoilsports recognize neither rules nor goals”. Conversations do not have a prelusory goal but they usually have aims, or at least a point: one reason for engaging in conversation, according to Rhees, is so that we can grow in understanding. A sophist both refuses to recognize this aim and denies its very possibility, thereby rejecting the framework within which these conversations take place: what counts as a pertinent contribution to the conversation, what constitutes a valid argument or objection, and so on. In these respects, a sophist does not resemble a trifter—someone who fails to take the conversation seriously—so much as a spoilsport. (The discursive trifter is closer to the sort of person who engages in Heidegger’s ‘idle talk’ (*BT* 167 – 170),³⁰ while the cheat relies on specious reasoning or false evidence to win an argument. Unlike the spoilsport/sophist, the cheat is fully invested in the reality of the discussion, but takes illegitimate shortcuts.³¹)

The games analogy does not license sophistry but rather provides within it the tools for thinking about the distinction between sophistry and philosophy, and it

³⁰ Harry Frankfurt (2005) colourfully describes talk undertaken without any particular concern for its truth or falsity as “bullshit”.

³¹ If the ‘goal’ of a conversation is the growth of understanding, does a cheat still recognize that goal if she employs methods, like specious reasoning and false evidence, whose illegitimacy rests on the fact that they do not lead to genuine understanding? I think so, to the extent that the cheat, unlike the spoilsport, still recognizes growth in understanding through the conversation as a worthwhile goal. When we converse, we have all sorts of aims, of which growth in understanding is just one. We are also concerned with the impression we are making on our interlocutors, exchanges in status between interlocutors, wanting to respond to the human needs behind the words of our interlocutors, and so on. The aim of impressing others sometimes trumps the aim of growing in understanding, but this latter aim may still be genuine even if it is betrayed.

does so more cleanly than Rhees's somewhat vague talk about the reality of language. The analogy between language and games does not deny the reality of language, characterizing all discussion as 'just a game', but rather suggests that language derives its reality from being 'in play' in discussion. Conversation falls prey to sophistry not when the people engaged in conversation allow the conversation to move according to the dynamic of play, but precisely on the contrary, when one or more people reject the very grounds for holding the conversation, behaving like spoilsports.

Huizinga remarks that spoilsports draw more ire than cheats because cheats at least allow the game to continue, whereas spoilsports bring everything to a halt: the spoilsport "must be cast out, for he threatens the existence of the play-community" (Huizinga 1995, 11). However, Huizinga sees in discursive spoilsports more noble possibilities than sophistry:

In the world of high seriousness, too, the cheat and the hypocrite have always had an easier time of it than the spoil-sports, here called apostates, heretics, innovators, prophets, conscientious objectors, etc. It sometimes happens, however, that the spoil-sports in their turn make a new community with rules of its own. The outlaw, the revolutionary, the cabbalist or member of a secret society, indeed heretics of all kinds are of a highly associative if not sociable disposition, and a certain element of play is prominent in all their doings. (Huizinga 1995, 12)

The sophist and the revolutionary both reject certain operative modes of discourse as unreal, and their criticism often involves rejecting or defining away key terms in these modes of discourse: compare "Justice is the advantage of the stronger" and "Property is theft". Revolutions—whether they be political or intellectual—generally have a positive intent as well: they reject as illegitimate some language-games but seek to establish others in their place.

A discursive spoilsport, then, is not necessarily contemptible. No clear criteria distinguish the sophist from the revolutionary, nor the revolutionary we admire from the revolutionary we condemn. What we should make of a discursive spoilsport is itself a topic for discussion, with its own norms of appropriateness, and its own

possibilities for playing the spoilsport, cheat, or trifler. Part of what is under discussion in *Republic* I is how the discussion itself ought to proceed, and while such discussions have a structure—Socrates and Thrasymachus share enough common ground to argue over how much common ground they share—they clearly do not have any hard and fast rules.

One of the difficulties with sophistry is that no clear criteria mark it off from serious discourse, certainly not the criterion that they relate to conversation as a game. Which language-game we are playing, and which language-game we should be playing, is not established in advance, but is rather itself a matter open to debate and discussion. This point, however, requires that we see language-games as fluid and based in play, and not, as the standard interpretation has it, fixed in advance. If we neglect this fundamental element of play in Wittgenstein's language-game analogy, we risk developing a conception of discourse that is indeed subject to Rhees's criticism. By taking play into account, however, I believe Wittgenstein's language-games give us fruitful insight into the nature of the growth in understanding that's possible in language.

Play and the ethics of discourse

I argued that the distinction between games and non-game play is fluid with regard to Wittgenstein's analogy with language. Some language-games are more regular than others, and we address controversial moves in different language-games in different ways. Someone who fails to obey an order either misunderstands the order or refuses to obey it, and we engage with both of these forms of behaviour, and distinguish one from the other, in familiar ways. In moral discussion, there is a far greater range of possible responses than in the language-game of giving and obeying orders, and far greater fluidity as to whether interlocutors are cooperating with one another. This greater fluidity in the case of moral discussion gives rise to language-games with far less regularity, where the very nature and structure of the language-games are a part of what is in question.

Cavell (CR, 308) claims that games are the sorts of things that can be *played* because what we *must* do is clearly separated from what we *ought* to do. The constitutive and regulative rules are clearly separated from the principles and maxims that make for skilful play, so that there is no room for *akrasia* in games: as soon as we perceive the most expedient means to a particular end, there is no room for questioning whether this is the end we should be pursuing. By contrast, in matters concerning morality, “What you say you *must* do is not ‘defined by the practice’, for there is no such practice until you make it one, make it *yours*. We might say, such a declaration defines *you*, establishes your position” (CR, 309). What I take to be my moral obligations is a part of my moral life. This is a central respect in which morality—and indeed life more generally—lacks the lusory attitude of games: we accept the rules of a game for the sake of playing the game itself, whereas the reasons we accept certain moral claims as binding upon us are themselves subject to moral evaluation. We do not take on moral responsibilities just for the sake of having moral responsibilities.

Morality does not recognize the sharp distinction between rules on the one hand and principles and maxims on the other because no pre-established rules structure moral discussion. Like with open-ended play, the rules we accord ourselves with are themselves open to being played upon and improvised with. We act in accordance with the rules of chess *in order to* play a game of chess. Similarly, we act in accordance with the criteria laid out in a particular language-game *in order to* play that language-game; however, that “in order to” is not (or not necessarily) justified by appeal to the lusory attitude. Which language-game we should be playing, and why and how, is itself open to debate and question, and this debating and questioning itself takes place in language-games, language-games to which the debating and questioning apply reflexively. To treat our language-games, and the appropriateness of particular language-games to particular circumstances, as already established, misses this crucial point.

The ludic aspect of language opens up the very possibility of debate and discussion. If our language-games, complete with criteria, were simply given to us, unchangeable and immaculate, as Augustine's parable suggests, there would be nothing to discuss or debate. If clear criteria fixed whether and when it was acceptable to break a promise, we would never debate the issue. Rhees is right to note that, if language were like a game that had unbending rules and principles, discussion would be impossible. Language is more like a game where a part of the game involves deciding what game to play and agreeing upon the rules. Wittgenstein's analogy works at a deeper level: discussion is possible because, like a game, language is something we play.

As a quintessentially serious form of discourse, let us take morality as an example to spell out the close relationship between language and play. Moral discourse, like any discourse, is something we learn. We learn criteria for using the language of morality: what a promise is, what obligation and responsibility are, what compassion and forgiveness are, and so on. We also learn that the criteria in our moral discourse are themselves subject to debate: we learn that there are various justifiable grounds (and various rhetorical tricks) for calling courageous what someone else calls disobedient, for calling disingenuous what someone else calls sincere. Our moral discourse leaves far more room for debate than, say, our discourse about mathematics. A person who treats morality as consisting of hard-and-fast criteria that are as closed to debate as the criteria for correctly performing multiplication has failed to understand what morality is (or, at best, is unbefriendably doctrinaire).³² Part of what we learn when we learn the language-games of morality is that one of them is the language-game of moral discussion. Characterizing these interlocking language-games as language-games does not deny them their reality, but rather insists on it. Morality seems false or empty only to those who dissent from the

³² When Wittgenstein describes the predicament of looking for sharp definitions that correspond to our concepts in ethics, he imagines his interlocutor finding she can draw her definitions however she likes: "Anything—and nothing—is right" (*PI* §77). His point here, I take it, is not that all moral discourse is worthless, but that the idea of requiring sharp definitions in moral discourse is worthless.

language-games of morality, who play the spoilsport, either out of contempt or out of conviction.

Rhees (2006, 48) remarks that, though we may teach children to speak by teaching them games, we are not teaching them simply to go on playing such games. Bearing in mind Mulhall's claim that "play is not only our route into the inheritance of language but also an essential dimension of the language we inherit" (2001a, 64), we can see that the games we play with children are linked to our capacity as adults to undertake serious discussion. In learning language through play, we learn that the concepts and criteria we learn are ours to play with. Far from rendering discourse frivolous, this capacity for play makes meaningful discourse possible. If moral questions could be settled by appeal to an absolute and impartial set of criteria, debating them would be a sign of ignorance or idleness. On the contrary, however, the criteria for our moral concepts are established, mutated, and extended precisely through the language-game of moral debate.

4.5. The Ordinary as Play

This thesis responds primarily to two challenges to the appeal to ordinary language, one external and one internal. The external challenge is the metaphysical demand that I first presented in the introduction by contrasting two ways of thinking about explanation. As we ordinarily use them, explanations fill gaps in understanding, and the criterion for a successful explanation is that it results in understanding. No explanation guarantees success, however: we cannot close all possible gaps at once, nor can we be sure that the explanation we provide will close the gaps it aims to close. That our explanations often are successful is not a guaranteed result, but a manifestation of our sharing a certain degree of attunement with our interlocutors. This attunement is itself ungrounded, and recognizing its ungroundedness may incline us to seek a more certain basis for our explanations. The anxiety that our explanations may not be understood or may not be deemed complete generates a metaphysical demand on explanation, which treats all

explanations as incomplete unless they close all possible gaps and compel understanding.

The appeal to ordinary language appeals to the adequacy of, in this case, our ordinary use of explanations. More generally, this appeal reminds us of the criteria for our ordinary use of concepts, of the adequacy of these criteria, and the embeddedness of our concepts in our forms of life. The appeal to ordinary language also acknowledges the exquisite temptation to try to speak from a sideways perspective; that is, to suppose that what we say about our life with words is not itself a part of this life with words.

The internal challenge to the appeal to ordinary language is the temptation to think of our attunement as something fixed and given to us prior to any particular interaction. The point I have developed in this final chapter is that we are responsible for our attunement, and actively create it. We create—and discover—attunement through play. If we conceive of our concepts as fixed and stable and our attunement as guaranteed, play seems unnecessary. In drawing our attention to the projectability of words and the ungroundedness of attunement, Wittgenstein draws our attention to the necessity of play.

I have developed both this conception of play and the idea that our attunement is ungrounded, by placing Wittgenstein and Austin in dialogue with figures from the so-called ‘continental’ tradition in twentieth-century philosophy: Derrida and Heidegger, as well as Gadamer to a lesser extent. These thinkers have exposed tensions in certain ways of thinking about my protagonists, and addressing these tensions has shaped the overall picture I have given of the appeal to ordinary language. The analytic tradition often reads Wittgenstein, for instance, as telling us a story about what language is and how it works. In using Derrida to draw out Wittgenstein’s sense of the ungroundedness of our attunement, and in using Heidegger to draw out the sense of the uncanny that this ungroundedness induces, I have read Wittgenstein not just as telling us how language works, but also as inducing in us a sense of wonder that we have language at all.

We have language at all because we learn it from others. The scene of instruction is itself a scene of play. As the parable of the wayward pupil suggests, no amount of attunement between us until now guarantees that we will continue to go on in the same way in the future. We are continually re-discovering and re-creating our attunement, and so our continuation with shared criteria requires a constant interplay with one another (surely, it is not coincidental that we characterize play as 're-creation'). This constant interplay means that we play with our criteria: we project them and expand them in imaginative ways that respond to the novelty of a situation or help us and others see a familiar situation in a new light. The connection between play and criteria shows that our criteria are *ours*, that we bring them into being, shape them, and sustain them, through play.

I remarked in the introductory chapter on the theme of nostalgia in the appeal to ordinary language: Wittgenstein writes about returning our words 'home', while Austin invokes the Myth of the Fall in characterizing the move toward metaphysics. I complicated this picture by invoking Derrida to suggest that we are always already fallen, and that a 'home' for our language unpolluted by metaphysics is as much a philosophical hallucination as the ideal of univocity. My discussion of play in this chapter offers an alternative to a return to originary purity. The naïve realism of pre-philosophical reflection simply accepts our criteria as given. Metaphysical realism attempts to give a rigorous basis for this acceptance in offering grounds for our criteria. In acknowledging the ludic aspect of our criteria, the appeal to ordinary language reveals these criteria as ungrounded, but as no less serviceable as a consequence. The dissatisfaction with criteria that arises in the sceptical problematic as Cavell engages it emerges from a metaphysical demand that insists that our criteria *must* have grounds. However, if the appeal to ordinary language reveals that our criteria have grounds no deeper than our attunement in play, the result is not the vertigo of scepticism, but the acknowledgment of our criteria as being our own. The appeal to ordinary language induces a self-reflexive perspective, from which we see that our capacity to play animates the criteria we use.

Wittgenstein's style reflects this conception of play as central to our self-understanding. He does not record the results of his reasoning, but rather invites his reader to think with him, and play with him. Savickey (unpublished) explores the importance of improvisation exercises and acts of imagination in Wittgenstein's investigations, arguing that Wittgenstein invites active engagement in these exercises. We can imagine and act out the shopping expedition of *PI* §1 or the builders of *PI* §2 in a number of different ways, and imagining this diversity is a crucial part of Wittgenstein's method. Wittgenstein wants to consider the life and language that emerge in our engagement with one another, and enacting such engagement is an essential part of his considerations. Both the form and content of the *Investigations* highlights the interpersonal play that lies at the heart of our attunement.

Savickey shows that play is not simply something that we can draw from Wittgenstein's writings, but also something we must bring to them in order to understand their richness. In Chapter Three, I discussed Wittgenstein's use of pictures, which encourage a shift in our perspective without dictating how our perspective will change. Wittgenstein does not expect his words to dictate their own projection, but rather invites his readers to project his words into a variety of imagined scenarios and explore for themselves the consequences of these projections. In this respect, there is no single answer to what we should make of, say, the wood sellers of *RFM* I §149: instead, we should improvise with this scenario, imagine various alternatives for what kinds of people these wood sellers might be and how interactions between them, and with foreigners, might unfold. Savickey remarks that the secondary literature on the builders of *PI* §2 normally imagines them as mechanical or animal-like, but that a playwright like John Mighton (1988) has the imaginative capacity to project a number of more lively possibilities on to this scenario. Savickey illuminates the relationship between author and reader that Wittgenstein's style calls for. The readers of Wittgenstein with whom I feel the greatest affinity—Cavell, Diamond, and Mulhall most prominently—all engage in

this kind of imaginative reading, not simply remarking on what Wittgenstein says, but exploring how these words might be expanded and projected.

In this spirit, we can see an alternative moral to the parable of the wayward pupil. Perhaps the wayward pupil is not confused, or alien, as the teacher supposes. Perhaps the wayward pupil is the one doing the teaching. The teacher is a mathematical realist, firm in the conviction that mathematical truth is unshakeable and absolute. The pupil works to induce in the teacher the recognition that the unshakeable nature of our mathematical procedures itself relies on the unshakeability with which we go on in the same way. If we imagine the pupil as a child, we can imagine that this pupil is teaching the teacher one of the things adults continually forget and of which children remind them: that we are, at heart and at our best, creatures that play.

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