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PHILOSOPHY, SOLIPSISM AND THOUGHT

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I

Wittgenstein's view of philosophy, in the *Tractatus*, had many features in common with the view of the nineteenth-century positivists and of the followers of Kant. The positivists held that all knowledge is based on sense-experience. Unlike the positivists of the present century, however, they did not believe that what is revealed in sense-experience exhausts the whole of reality. Like the Kantians, they held that the world transcends sense-experience. Their point was that so far as it transcends sense-experience it cannot be known. The attempt to transcend sense-experience was therefore futile. Indeed it was worse than futile, for it produced an infection of thought, a proliferation of confusion. It gave rise, in short, to metaphysics. One may wonder what place is left, on this view, for philosophy at all. For it is empirical science, not philosophy, which is based on sense-experience, and what cannot be revealed in sense-experience cannot be known. Like the Kantians, however, the positivists found a place for philosophy, not in obtaining knowledge about the world, but in elucidating the methods by which such knowledge is obtained. The philosopher makes statements not about the world but about the language in which we speak about it. The activity is useful. For in clarifying our methods of representation, philosophy serves to remove those metaphysical confusions which obstruct the progress of science. By the turn of the century, this view was widely accepted. It may be illustrated, for example, by Karl Pearson's influential work *The Grammar of Science* (London, 1892). The very title is significant. Pearson indicates by his use of the term 'grammar' that he will be concerned not to replace science

with metaphysics but simply to elucidate its language. Wittgenstein uses the word in a very similar sense in his later philosophy.

Wittgenstein's view in the *Tractatus*, however, was not the same as the one I have just sketched. For he denied that philosophy should produce doctrines at all, whether about the world or about language. He accepted the view that metaphysical doctrines arise through confusion of thought. But he held that thought could be revealed without remainder in the use of signs, so that if one developed a sufficiently perspicuous symbolism, such confusion could not arise in the first place. Under this treatment, for example, metaphysical confusion simply disappears. One does not have to refute it. Thus in his own way Wittgenstein achieves the aim of the positivists.

But the view is even more ingenious than it appears. For it serves not simply to eliminate metaphysical doctrines but also to show the inadequacy of positivism. Thus under Wittgenstein's treatment metaphysical doctrines cannot be stated. That achieves the positivist's aim. But the positivist fails to realize that what is true in metaphysics does not need to be stated. It shows itself in the use of signs. For example, on the positivist's view, which Wittgenstein accepts, one can state only what is contingent. A statement can be true only if it can be false, and whether it is one or the other can be determined only by observing what happens to be so. Now suppose I say 'There is a difference between sense and nonsense'. That is not a statement which is contingent in the required sense. For example, it cannot be informative. Unless a person already knows the difference between sense and nonsense, one cannot inform him about anything at all. Consequently, it cannot be stated. But then it does not need to be stated. For it shows itself in *every* statement. Whenever signs are used, they show the difference between sense and nonsense.

For Wittgenstein, there is truth in all the great metaphysical doctrines. For they reveal the conditions which are not contingent or accidental, the permanent conditions of our existence, without which nothing that is contingent or accidental could ever be expressed. But they are misbegotten when expressed as doctrine, since in that form they have the effect of turning what is permanent into what is contingent or accidental, thereby falsifying themselves. For example, the realist states against the sceptic that there is an independent world. His view takes the form of a contingent statement, whereby one picks out an empirical object by contrast with another, affirms that this exists rather than that. But the realist does not mean that it is the world rather than some other object which exists. He does not have in mind any other object. What he is trying to say he does not express. His mistake is to try. For what he is trying to say already shows itself

in *every* statement about an object. Whatever we say presupposes and therefore shows the reality of the world.

For Wittgenstein, therefore, we have only to develop a perspicuous symbolism. For then what is true in metaphysics will show itself and what is confused will be eliminated. There will be no need for doctrines. But all this presupposes, it may be noted, that thought is not independent of language or the use of signs. For otherwise it would be idle to develop a symbolism, however perspicuous. What is essential, therefore, to Wittgenstein's view of philosophy is that thought can be revealed without remainder in the use of signs. Now at first sight that does not seem to be true. For example, one does not have to express what one thinks, nor indeed does one have to think in words. But Wittgenstein does not deny those points. What he denies is that thought is *logically* prior to language. Thus all thought is in symbols. The symbols may be non-verbal. Wittgenstein, again, does not deny the point. What he insists, however, is that non-verbal symbols are *on the same level* as verbal ones. For they must have a logical structure which is common to verbal symbols, and having a common structure they cannot have logical priority. Consequently whatever can be thought can be revealed in the use of signs. Wittgenstein holds, in short, that thought is always a kind of language, whether or not it occurs in the language of words. This is what makes his view of philosophy distinctive. Otherwise it would hardly be distinguishable from nineteenth-century positivism.

II

There is, however, a common view of the *Tractatus* which would deprive it even of this degree of distinctiveness. For many commentators hold that for Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* thought *is* logically prior to language. On this interpretation, language has meaning injected into it by thought. Thus, taken in themselves, the signs of language are mere dead matter, marks and sounds. What gives them meaning is the mental act of meaning them. Whenever I utter words I accompany them with a mental operation which gives them the meaning they have in utterance. This interpretation is very widely held. For example, one finds it in Anthony Kenny, Peter Hacker, David Stern and Hans-Johann Glock. But it is most lucidly stated, as one might expect, in the work of Norman Malcolm.[1] It will be useful to consider what he says.

Malcolm's interpretation (p. 65) is influenced by an exchange of letters between Wittgenstein and Russell.

[1] *Wittgenstein: Nothing is Hidden* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 63–83.

> Russell had asked: what are the constituents of a thought, and what is their relation to those of the pictured fact? Wittgenstein replied:
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> 'I don't know what the constituents of a thought are, but I know that it must have such constituents which correspond to the words of language. Again the kind of relation of the constituents of the thought and the pictured fact is irrelevant. It would be a matter of psychology to find out.'
>
> To Russell's question, 'Does a thought (*Gedanke*) consist of words?', Wittgenstein replied:
>
> 'No! But of psychical constituents that have the same sort of relation to reality as words. What those constituents are I don't know.'

According to Malcolm, Wittgenstein here states without qualification that a thought consists of mental elements. Malcolm takes this to mean that a thought is essentially mental. It is a configuration of mental elements which intrinsically represent the world. As such, it does not have to be expressed in a physical sentence. By contrast, a physical sentence does have to be the expression of a mental thought. For its meaning is just what a mental thought thinks into it. In short, thought is *logically* prior to language.

It follows that in every use of signs we may distinguish three levels. There are the objects of the world, the physical signs of the proposition and, above these, a third level at which thought injects sense into the physical signs by correlating them with objects in the world. In support of this view, Malcolm quotes 3.11: 'We use the perceptible sign of a proposition (spoken or written, etc.) as a projection of a possible situation. Thinking the sense of the sentence is the method of projection.'

Now let us first note that this view, as Malcolm states it, nowhere appears in the *Tractatus*. Proposition 3.11 suggests the view to Malcolm. But I doubt that it would suggest that view to someone who was familiar only with the *Tractatus*. Malcolm relies on the exchange between Wittgenstein and Russell. But he relies also on his knowledge of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. In his later philosophy, Wittgenstein often criticized views he had held in the *Tractatus*. He often criticized also the view that meaning is a mental act or process. Putting the two together, one may arrive by association at the idea that when Wittgenstein criticized the latter view he was criticizing one he had held in the *Tractatus*. Moreover anyone who has this idea in mind when he reads the *Tractatus* may well find passages which seem to confirm it. Unless I am mistaken, that is the process by which Malcolm arrived at this view. It is not an unnatural way to think. But let us note that it makes for a perilous mode of interpretation. There is no reason to suppose that Wittgenstein in his later philosophy criticized only views he had held himself. For example, no view in the later philosophy is criticized more often than the view that the aim of philosophy, like that of science, is to advance theories.

But that is not a view he held in the *Tractatus*. In fact his view in the *Tractatus* is identical with that of the later philosophy. Proposition 4.111: 'Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences'.

Let us now look more closely at Malcolm's view. We may begin with proposition 3.11. On one level, a proposition is a set of physical signs (marks or sounds). On another, it is the picture of a possible state of affairs. What transforms the marks or sounds into a picture? What is the method of projection by which it is transformed from one level to the other? Wittgenstein says that it is thinking the sense of the proposition. But everything depends on what this means. What, for example, counts as thinking or thought? At 3.5, Wittgenstein says 'An applied, thought out, propositional sign is a thought'. Here 'applied' and 'thought out' are plainly alternative expressions. Let us, for a moment, omit 'thought out'. We then get: an applied propositional sign is a thought. So far, in short, we have no reason to suppose that thinking is other than applying or using propositional signs or symbols, whether in the mind or in speech. At 4.0141, Wittgenstein says:

> There is a general rule by means of which the musician can obtain the symphony from the score, and which makes it possible to derive the symphony from the groove on the gramophone record, and, using the first rule, to derive the score again. That is what constitutes the inner similarity between these things which seem to be constructed in such entirely different ways. And that rule is the law of projection which projects the symphony into the language of musical notation. It is the rule for translating this language into the language of gramophone records.

Here Wittgenstein gives examples of transforming a set of signs. The transformation occurs through a method of projection. He explains very clearly what is involved in a method of projection and therefore what is involved in thinking the sense of a proposition. He does not say that the projection occurs through injecting into the signs a mental activity which is intrinsically meaningful. He says that there is a method of projection where there is a *rule* for transforming the signs. Now if in one's mental activity one follows the rule, one certainly thinks the sense of a proposition. But it is obvious that one does this not because of one's mental activity in itself but because, in one's mental activity, one follows the *rule*. In short, it is not one's thinking which determines the rule or method of projection. It is whether one follows the rule or method of projection which determines whether one is thinking. To say there is a rule for the application of signs is to say there is a difference between using them correctly and incorrectly. One thinks when one uses signs correctly. In other words, there is on this point no substantial difference between Wittgenstein's earlier and later work. In neither is meaning a mental process.

Wherever one looks in the *Tractatus*, one will find this view confirmed. Let us take some passages, more or less at random. At 3.328, Wittgenstein says:

> If a sign is *useless*, it is meaningless. That is the point of Ockham's maxim. (If everything behaves as if a sign has meaning, then it does have meaning.)

Now an evident candidate for Ockham's maxim is surely Malcolm's third level of intrinsic meaning. According to Malcolm, a person uses signs meaningfully if he injects into them his own mental process. Wittgenstein's point is that if a person uses signs meaningfully, it is irrelevant what his mental processes are. At 4.002, Wittgenstein says:

> Man possesses the ability to construct languages capable of expressing every sense, without having any idea how each word has meaning or what its meaning is – just as people speak without knowing how the individual sounds are produced.

Here surely there is no suggestion that each of us produces the meaning of his own words by injecting into them his own mental processes. We produce meaningful sentences, as we produce sounds. But we are not responsible for how we produce that meaning, any more than we are responsible for how we produce the sounds. In short, it would be as absurd to suppose that we produce sentences by a mental act which is intrinsically meaningful as to suppose that we produce sounds by a mental act which is intrinsically vocal.

It is indeed essential to Wittgenstein's view in the *Tractatus* that it is not *we* who produce language. There are elements in language for which we are responsible. An example would be the differences in vocabulary between different languages. But these for Wittgenstein are the conventional or arbitrary elements. What is essential to language is logic, and it is *not* we who have produced logic. Quite the contrary: the logic of a language is perspicuously revealed only in so far as we remove the conventional or arbitrary elements. It is revealed, in short, only in so far as we remove the human contribution. Wittgenstein expresses the point at 6.124:

> This contains the decisive point. We have said that some things are arbitrary in the symbols that we use and that some things are not. In logic it is only the latter that express: but that means that logic is not a field in which *we* express what we wish with the help of signs, but rather one in which the nature of the absolutely necessary signs speaks for itself.

The same point is made, in different terms, in *Philosophical Remarks* §6:

> Suppose I have said to someone '*A* is ill', but he doesn't know what I mean by '*A*', and I point at a man, saying 'This is *A*'. Here the expression is a definition, but this can only be understood if he has already gathered what kind of object it is through his understanding of the grammar of the proposition '*A* is ill'. But this means that any kind of explanation of a language presupposes a language already. And in a certain

> sense, the use of language is something that cannot be taught, i.e., I cannot use a language to teach it in the way in which language could be used to teach someone to play the piano. – And that of course is just another way of saying: I cannot use language to get outside language.

The terms in which this is expressed are somewhat different from those Wittgenstein used in the *Tractatus*. But the point expressed is exactly the same. To say that I cannot use language to get outside language is only to say that the limits of my language are the limits of my world (5.62). I cannot step outside language and consider the world and language independently of one another. But this is only to say that the connection between language and the world cannot depend on *me*. I can speak of the world only because there is *already* a relation between the language I use and the world, only because there is an *internal* relation between the two. I can, of course, set up the relation between a particular symbol and the world. But that is because I rely in so doing on a relation between symbols and the world which I have *not* set up. I rely on an internal relation between the two. What I cannot do is set up the very relation between symbols and the world. For unless there is *already* such a relation, nothing I do can count as thinking at all. The point is not incidental to the *Tractatus*. It is expressive of its very substance.

III

At this point, it will be useful to return to the exchange between Wittgenstein and Russell on which Malcolm places so much weight. It is evident from the exchange that Russell is unsure about the relation between non-verbal or psychic thought and thought which is expressed in words. He may believe that thought in words requires psychic thought. In any case, he wants to know the constituents of the latter and their relation to reality. If Malcolm's interpretation is correct, Russell is raising a question of the first importance. For there can be no relation between words and reality unless there is already a relation between psychical thoughts and reality. It is the latter relation which is logically prior. Yet it is evident from Wittgenstein's reply that he attaches no importance to Russell's question. Indeed, he explicitly states that it is irrelevant. That is because the relation between psychic thought and reality cannot be different from the relation between words and reality. He says that psychical constituents have 'the same sort of relation to reality as words'. Consequently, the whole question of the nature of psychic thought and its relation to reality is irrelevant to logic. 'It would be a matter of psychology to find out.' In short, he treats Russell as raising a problem in psychology. It is irrelevant to his work in the *Tractatus*.

To see clearly what Wittgenstein means, let us consider a later discussion of the same issue. In *Philosophical Remarks*, he raises the question of whether a child would think without learning a language. In short, he explicitly raises the issue of the relation between language and thought. He writes as follows (§5):

> But in my view, if it thinks, then it forms for itself pictures and in a certain sense these are arbitrary, that is to say, in so far as other pictures could have played the same role. On the other hand, language has certainly come about naturally, i.e., there must presumably have been a first man who for the first time expressed a definite thought in spoken words. And besides, the whole question is a matter of indifference because a child learning a language only learns it by beginning to think in it. Suddenly beginning; I mean: there is no preliminary stage in which a child already uses a language, so to speak uses it for communication, but does not yet think in it.

Wittgenstein here allows that thought may precede language, since there was presumably a first man who first expressed a thought in words. (He would not have said that later. The point is, however, that we are not dealing with his later views but with ones he held earlier.) He adds immediately, however, that the point is a matter of indifference. In short, it is irrelevant to logic. That is because when the child learns to speak, it thinks *in* language. It does not speak by first thinking in non-verbal terms and then translating them into words. It thinks *in* words. But then thought in language cannot depend logically on non-verbal thought. The latter may be prior in *time*. But that is significant only to psychologists. We know that thought can sometimes occur in words. In short, genuine thought can sometimes occur independently of non-verbal thought. But if non-verbal thought is sometimes unnecessary, it never can be *logically* necessary. In logic, therefore, we may dispense with it and deal with thought through the use of language. Everything can be displayed in the use of signs. That is why it is irrelevant in logic to ask further questions about the nature and constituents of thought. It is precisely this point which Wittgenstein is expressing in his exchange with Russell.

Here I return to my opening remarks. What is distinctive in Wittgenstein's philosophy, as he implies at 4.1121, is that he has replaced the study of thought-processes with the study of sign-language. In this way, we may hope to avoid a continual source of confusion in this area. This is the confusion between logic and psychology. To avoid this, we must see that in logic, as distinct from psychology, we need refer only to those mental processes which can be revealed without remainder in the use of signs. But this means that in logic, as distinct from psychology, we need not refer to mental processes at all. Here we may clearly demarcate between the two studies. In logic, everything which is essential can be displayed in the use of signs.

IV

But we must now consider a variation on Malcolm's view. As we have seen, Malcolm holds that signs acquire their meaning through mental elements which are intrinsically meaningful. Kenny, Stern and Glock reject this view.[2] Kenny, for example, holds that the source of meaning lies not in mental elements which pass through the subject's mind but in the activity of his transcendental or metaphysical self. This, in effect, is to add a further level to Malcolm's three. We have objects in the world, signs, mental elements, and beyond these a fourth level at which the metaphysical self working through the mental elements correlates signs with objects in the world. In this respect, Kenny differs from Malcolm. But in one essential respect they agree. For both, it is the individual, through his own activity, who confers meaning on signs. It is I who produce not simply my thoughts but their very meaning.

Now let us note again that this view nowhere appears in the *Tractatus*. Like Malcolm's view, it relies heavily on background information. Glock and Stern, in particular, rely heavily on what they take to be the influence on Wittgenstein of Schopenhauer. Both indeed assume that, under the influence of Schopenhauer, Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* was advancing some form of solipsism. Thus in the *Tractatus* (5.62) he says 'what the solipsist *means* is quite correct; only it cannot be *said*, but makes itself manifest'. This is very widely taken to mean that while it would be a mistake to state solipsism, it is nevertheless quite true. Thus, in ordinary life, it would be confused of me to *say* 'Only I exist'. Nevertheless, in a deeper sense, it is true. For, ultimately, the world is *my* world. At the metaphysical level, I am the source of all that exists. It follows, of course, that I must also be the source of all meaning. It will be useful to consider this interpretation in some detail.

One difficulty in attributing Wittgenstein's alleged solipsism to the influence of Schopenhauer is that Schopenhauer was never a solipsist. He allowed that solipsism is *formally* irrefutable, but denied that it is of philosophical interest. For example, he said that the solipsist, were he serious, would require not refutation but cure. But here, perhaps, we shall be treated as naïve. We are working, as it were, on the surface of his denial, and overlooking the deeper level at which he is committed precisely to what he

[2] A. Kenny, 'Wittgenstein's Early Philosophy of Mind', in I. Block (ed.), *Perspectives on the Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981); D. Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language* (Oxford UP, 1995); H.-J. Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996).

denies. Let us, therefore, look more closely at his views. Like Kant, Schopenhauer distinguished between the world as we experience it and the essence of the world which transcends our experience. He distinguished, in short, between phenomenon and noumenon. The phenomenal world is one of appearance. But appearance is not illusion. There can be no appearance without something to appear. It is essentially *of* something. What appears to the subject therefore requires an object. But subject and object are *correlated*. For it is equally true that no object can be characterized except as it appears to some subject. Wittgenstein vividly expresses this view in *Philosophical Remarks* §47:

> That it does not strike us at all when we look around us, move about in space, feel our own bodies, etc., etc., shows how natural these things are to us. We do not notice that we see space perspectivally or that our visual field is in some sense blurred towards the edges. It doesn't strike us and never can strike us because it is *the* way we perceive. We never give it a thought and it's impossible we should, since there is nothing that contrasts with the form of our world.

All our experience of the world presupposes a perspective which is not identical with any object itself. For example, we never see, nor can we even imagine seeing, all the sides of an (opaque) object simultaneously. *In* experience, this never strikes us, for there is no contrast. We cannot step outside our perspective on the world and compare the world with how it appears in that perspective. Our perspective on the world is not something that happens to us *in* experience. It is the very form of experience; it is the form in which we know the world. That is why in experience itself we never notice it.

But it is something that can be noticed. For it is what the solipsist notices. It is indeed the truth in solipsism. The solipsist notices that all his knowledge of the world presupposes how it appears to *him*. The world is *his* world. But the solipsist's view is not Schopenhauer's. For Schopenhauer, the solipsist has grasped only one half of the truth. He has grasped that the world is his world. His error is that he thinks he can therefore eliminate the world, so that only he exists. He has failed to grasp that subject and object are *correlative*. Each needs the other. If he eliminates the world, he eliminates himself.

Once again we can elucidate Schopenhauer's view by referring directly to Wittgenstein's. Wittgenstein argued that if we confine ourselves strictly to what is subjective in experience we do not find the subject at all. We may take as an instance the visual field. By the visual field we refer not to some object of sight but to visual experience itself, our experience in seeing. For example, when I look over the top of my spectacles the page in front of me

becomes blurred. The change is not in the page. What has changed is my visual field or experience. We can make the point another way. The word 'blurred' can be used to refer to the surface of a pond disturbed by the wind. Here the blurred area can be clearly demarcated by contrast with what lies on either side of it. But when a myopic person refers to the blur in his vision, it makes no sense to ask what lies on either side of the blur. In his later philosophy, Wittgenstein said that the uses of 'blurred' in the two cases have different grammars; they belong to different modes of speech. At the time of the *Tractatus*, he made the same point by saying that the visual field has no *neighbours*.

Now Wittgenstein's point is that if we confine ourselves to the visual field, no subject appears. He makes an analogy between the subject or self and the eye in its relation to the visual field. Without the eye there is no visual field, but in the visual field itself we find no eye. Even if we look in a mirror we see a reflection of the eye, not the eye itself. An analogous point applies to the subject. Moreover it applies throughout purely sensory experience. For example, if you are in pain, you are aware of the pain, not of yourself. If you say 'I am in pain', you have already gone beyond the bare sensation. Consequently, if we confine ourselves strictly to subjective experience, we cannot distinguish the subject. We need a different grammar. We need one in which we can speak about neighbours, in which I can refer to myself as *distinct from others*. In short, we need to recognize that the subject is intelligible only in relation to an object, that subject and object are *correlative*.

But we now find that we have eliminated solipsism. I cannot say that I alone exist, as against the world, for without the world I cannot distinguish my own existence. Consequently what is true in solipsism cannot be expressed without recognizing the truth in realism. I cannot say that the world appears to *me*, without recognizing the reality of the *world* which so appears.

> Here it can be seen that solipsism, when its implications are followed out strictly, coincides with pure realism. The self of solipsism shrinks to a point without extension, and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it (*Tractatus* 5.64).

It will be useful to take this point in a later formulation. Shortly after the passage from *Philosophical Remarks* which I have recently quoted, Wittgenstein writes (§47):

> Time and again the attempt is made to use language to limit the world and set it in relief but it can't be done. The self-evidence of the world expresses itself in the very fact that language can and does only refer to it.
>
> For since language only derives the way in which it means from its meaning, from the world, no language is conceivable which does not represent the world.

Here Wittgenstein acknowledges the truth in solipsism. Solipsism is correct, as against certain forms of realism, in holding that we cannot know the world independently of the human perspective, independently of how it appears in language or experience. Where the solipsist is confused is in supposing that he must therefore deny the reality of the world. The reality of the world shows itself *in* language and experience. Every time we speak we acknowledge the reality of the world. For 'no language is conceivable which does not represent this world'.

V

It will be evident that there is, so far, nothing in the views of either Schopenhauer or Wittgenstein which commits them to solipsism. So far as there is truth in solipsism, it is compatible with realism. So far as it goes beyond this, it is confused. But we have noted that Schopenhauer distinguishes between phenomenon and noumenon. Let us consider whether this gives us cause to change our minds. The reality of the noumenon is shown by the limits of the phenomenal. The limits of the phenomenal may be drawn from within, by an analysis of what it involves. Just as far as its limits are drawn in this way, they reveal the reality of the noumenon, of what transcends them. We may take as an instance the distinction between the modes of subject and object. Within the phenomenal world, an object can be known only through the subjective mode; whatever appears to a subject requires an object. Consequently the distinction permeates the phenomenal world. Within this world, it cannot be explained but is presupposed in every explanation; it cannot be eliminated, because without it there is no phenomenal world. Schopenhauer takes this to show that subject and object are expressions of a reality which transcends the phenomenal and which cannot be expressed in its terms, not even in terms of subject and object. The point is important. Subject and object are expressions *in* the phenomenal world of what *transcends* it. In other words, Schopenhauer is *not* transferring the human subject to a metaphysical level. At the level of the noumenon, the human subject no longer exists.

It is true that Schopenhauer attempts, in some manner, to characterize the noumenon by reference to the human will. Wittgenstein rejected this side of his thought. In the *Tractatus*, he rejects any attempt to characterize the transcendent. Its reality shows itself in what we say about other things, in what we say about this world. Nevertheless it is manifest that Schopenhauer does not *identify* the noumenon with the human will. It makes no sense to attribute the human will to the noumenon. For it transcends the human

sphere. Moreover, supposing it made some sense to identify the noumenon with the human will, there would be no more reason to identify it with *my* will than with anyone else's. On Schopenhauer's view, nothing could be more absurd than for me to suppose that I am the source of the whole world. I am a mere ephemeral expression of what transcends the terms of my existence. The noumenon transcends the very terms in which solipsism can be expressed.

Now, with the qualification we have noted, Wittgenstein's views are the same as Schopenhauer's. We may illustrate the point by reference to 5.641:

> Thus there really is a sense in which philosophy can talk about the self in a non-psychological way.
>
> What brings the self into philosophy is the fact that 'the world is my world'.
>
> The philosophical self is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world – not a part of it.

As we have seen, 'the world is my world' is an expression of my subjective perspective on the world. This perspective is not something I encounter *in* experience. It is the very *form* in which I experience the world. Now, in the *Tractatus*, what can be *stated* is exhausted by the language of science, by what is contingent and can be expressed in the third-person mode. It follows that the subjective perspective cannot be stated. For it is not in that way contingent, and in the third-person mode it does not appear at all. This means that it cannot be stated in psychology. The psychologist uses the language of science. For him, the subject is an object to be described in the third-person mode. He can record only what happens to pass through the subject's mind. But what he says in that way cannot be exhaustive of the subject. The subjective mode cannot even appear in his language.

Why then does Wittgenstein say that *philosophy* can reveal the subject or self in a non-psychological way? It can do so because the difference between subject and object *shows itself* in the use of language. Take the statement 'Mounce is in pain'. This expresses the same fact whether uttered by you or by me. Nevertheless there is a significant difference. In order to know that fact you have to observe Mounce. But I do not have to observe him at all. This asymmetry in the use of the statement reveals the reality of the distinction between the two modes, the subjective and the objective. It is something that only philosophy can elucidate. For it does not call for empirical discovery. In a sense, we all know it already, as we show in our speech. But because it is always present we do not sufficiently notice it; or, if we do, we tend, like the solipsist, to falsify or confuse it. Philosophy can remove this confusion through the elucidation of language. Moreover, in so

doing, the philosopher does not *simply* elucidate language. Quite the contrary: he elucidates also, in the only appropriate way, the form or limits of our world.

It should be evident, from the above remarks, that Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* was not advancing any form of solipsism. Indeed the views I have just sketched are not essentially different from those he held in his later philosophy. We may illustrate the point by referring to his celebrated discussion of 'noticing an aspect' in *Philosophical Investigations* II §xi. He opens the section by describing two uses of the word 'see'. In one, I describe what I see, in the sense of reporting the object seen. Here, though I may use the personal pronoun, I adopt what is essentially the objective mode. For example, I could have reported what I see by making a drawing of it, without referring to myself. But suppose I suddenly notice a likeness between two faces. Here there is an essentially subjective aspect. For example, suppose that someone else does not see the likeness. Here it may be idle to make a drawing, however exact, of the two faces. For if the person does not see the likeness in the faces, why should he see it in the drawing? Or again, take a drawing which can be seen in different ways, such as the duck-rabbit. Someone who is asked to describe the drawing may say 'It's a rabbit'. That is a description of the drawing. But suppose someone who has been looking at it for some time suddenly exclaims 'Now it's a rabbit'. That is a quite different use of language. The person is reporting a change, not in the drawing, for it has not changed at all, but *in the way it appears to him*. The difference is akin to the one in the word 'blurred' when it is used to describe the surface of a pond and when it is used to describe the visual field.

Wittgenstein's aim, in short, throughout this section, is to distinguish the subjective from the objective. He does so in the only appropriate way, by elucidating the grammars of the different modes. He seeks to elucidate a difference which runs through our lives but which we tend to confuse in philosophical reflection. For example, there is a tendency in philosophical reflection to eliminate the subjective by assimilating it to the objective mode. Thus we tend to distinguish the visual impression of a drawing from the drawing itself by treating the visual impression as though it were an object which occurs *within* us, rather than without. Here the subjective is plainly assimilated to the objective. For the difference between the drawing and the visual impression is treated as a difference in location, as though the two just happened to be in different places.

> And above all do *not* say 'After all my visual impression is not the drawing; it is *this* – which I can't show to anyone'. – Of course it is not the drawing but neither is it anything of the same category, which I carry within myself (*PI* p. 196).

The error here does not lie in distinguishing the visual impression from the drawing. ('Of course it is not the drawing.') It is to treat the two as different objects falling within the same category. This is an error not because it exaggerates but because it *underestimates* the difference. The subjective and the objective are different *modes* of existence, not different kinds of object. The difference is appropriately elucidated through reflecting on our use of language, not because it is simply a difference in how we happen to speak, but because, to be clear about it, we do not need an empirical discovery; we need rather to reflect on what already runs through our lives. Here there is a real resemblance between the earlier and the later views. Neither depends on any form of solipsism.

VI

The same point can be illustrated by reference to Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Colour*, one of his last writings (§319):

> Can I teach the blind what seeing is, or can I teach this to the sighted? That doesn't mean anything. Then what does it mean: to describe *seeing*? But I can teach human beings the meaning of the words 'blind' and 'sighted', and indeed the sighted learn them, just as the blind do. Then do the blind know what it is like to see? But do the sighted know? Do they also know what it's like to have consciousness?
>
> But can't psychologists observe the difference between the behaviour of the sighted and the blind? (Meteorologists the difference between rain and drought?) We certainly could, e.g., observe the difference between the behaviour of rats whose whiskers had been removed and of those which were not mutilated in this way. And perhaps we could call that describing the role of this tactile apparatus. – The lives of the blind are different from those of the sighted.

It may be noted in this passage that Wittgenstein rejects a view which many commentators attribute to Wittgenstein himself. Thus many assume that for Wittgenstein the difference between the sighted and the blind lies in their behavioural capacities. For example, if a traffic light turns red, the sighted can react immediately; the blind cannot react at all. But that is to treat the difference between the sighted and the blind as though it were like the difference in behaviour between those rats who do and those who do not have whiskers. One is treating the difference as though it consisted of the presence or absence of some process which a psychologist might describe in the third person. Wittgenstein's point is that the *lives* of the blind are different from those of the sighted. This means that it is from within one life or the other that one produces any description. Now what about the difference between the lives of the blind and of the sighted? From within which

life does one describe that difference? Or is there a third life, different from either, from within which one can describe both? These are not questions which would arise for a psychologist who is content simply to describe the behaviour of rats.

To bring out the importance of those questions, here is an example. Someone from a younger generation asks me what I mean by a poker. I tell him that in the old days we used to warm ourselves at coal fires and used an iron instrument, which I can draw, in order to poke the coal and keep it burning. Here I produce a description which informs. It does so by making a connection between the object he does not know and what he does. In that way he comes to know it. Now can I in the same way describe what seeing is? Here is a person who has never had sight. Can I inform him what it is simply by describing it? How do I connect seeing, which he does not know, with what he does know? I should have to connect his life with mine, and the trouble is that what is central in my life is completely absent from his. It is not that I cannot succeed but that I do not know how to try. The best I could do is produce some description in behaviouristic terms, analogous to what a psychologist might produce in describing the behaviour of rats. But the important point is not that I do not know how to produce a description which would be informative to a blind person. The important point, as Wittgenstein implies, is that I do not know how to produce a description that would be informative to *myself*. That is not because I am already informed. For example, I am already informed what a poker is, but I can still produce a description which might have served another to inform me, had I not known. In the case of seeing, however, I have no terms available which are not already visual, which do not already presuppose the life of the sighted. The difficulty is akin to that of describing what language is. Any such description is meaningful only to those who already have a language. And to them it cannot be informative.

The difficulty in philosophy is that the concepts which concern it cannot be described in terms which are available to those who do not have the concepts. I cannot describe seeing or language as I can describe a poker. But, in that case, can there be no investigation into what seeing or language is? Yes, there can be such an investigation; it is the one that Wittgenstein conducts. For example, the sighted may seek to remind themselves of what seeing is, through exploring the role which visual concepts have in their lives. The task, however, is very arduous. That is because we are not used to the type of thinking involved. It calls for a level of reflection which is rarely present in the exercise of visual concepts themselves. In consequence we find that we fall on a first reflection into the strangest prejudices. A sighted person, for example, thinks of the blind as he would of a sighted person with

eyes shut. In fact, a sighted person with eyes shut is not blind at all. When he shuts his eyes, he sees darkness. But there is no darkness in the life of the blind. It would be truer to say, if we may adapt a remark from the *Tractatus*, that the world of the blind is different from that of the sighted. They differ at certain points in the form of their lives. Again, if you tell a sighted person that objects in the dark have no colour, he feels threatened. That is because he instinctively attributes to objects in the dark the colours they have when they appear in the light. Consequently he is inclined to brush aside the remark and not even to consider whether there may be a sense in which it is true.

The difficulties are especially acute in attempting to elucidate the difference between visual experience and object. Thus objects are characterized, in part, by the visual experience which reveals them. This is done by instinct, not through reflection. For in perception we attend not to our visual experience, but to what it reveals. Again, when a sighted person shuts his eyes, or is in the dark, he still thinks of objects as they would appear in sight. Consequently there seems to him no difference between sight and object. In fact, he distinguishes them in many ways. But what he himself does is hidden from him on a first reflection. Moreover, when on further reflection he begins to note differences, he is then inclined to misconstrue them. Thus there is an almost universal tendency to treat visual experience as an object more immediately apprehended than a physical one. To say that visual experience is apprehended here means that visual experience is itself *seen*. The move is plainly incoherent; yet it is very difficult to avoid.

It is only by a complicated and arduous investigation that one can attempt to overcome these difficulties. It is such an investigation that Wittgenstein conducts in *Remarks on Colour*. He describes it (§§232–3) as a type of phenomenology or study of appearances: 'When psychology speaks of appearance, it connects it with reality. But we can speak of appearance alone, or we connect appearance with appearance.' We proceed through the study of visual concepts. In this way, we may hope to avoid the confusion between experience and object. 'The question is clearly: How do we compare physical objects – how do we compare experiences?' The aim of the study is not to *state* what the sighted person does not know but to *show* him what, in a sense, he knows already.

VII

Here we see that there is a real similarity between Wittgenstein's view of philosophy in the *Tractatus* and his view in the latest of his writings. But we

must now mention one important difference. His earlier view contains a serious defect. At the time of the *Tractatus*, he held that one cannot speak *about* language, for that would imply that one occupied some position *outside* language, which is unintelligible. Later he rejected this as a delusion. Statements about language are themselves part of language. He gave the analogy of a spelling dictionary, which spells, among others, the word 'spelling' itself. But in failing to grasp this point, at the time of the *Tractatus*, he was left with a view of the difference between sense and nonsense which is essentially positivist. Roughly speaking, a statement has sense only if it can fall within the language of science. Only what is contingent or accidental can be stated. A statement can be true only if it can be false, and whether it is one or the other can be determined only by observing what happens to be so. The view is entirely positivist. Wittgenstein's point is that *in* stating what is accidental, one can *see* what is permanent. The difference between sense and nonsense, between subject and object, the reality of the world, these show themselves; they do not need to be stated.

The trouble is that one cannot state, in any sense, *what* shows itself. The positivist has a ready phrase to turn this aside: it is mystery-mongering. Wittgenstein has tied his own hands. Yet this aspect of his view is surely bizarre. It is bizarre, for example to suppose that one cannot, *in any sense*, state that there is a difference between sense and nonsense. The point is evident in his *Lecture on Ethics*. After elucidating the difference between absolute and relative value, he next states that absolute value is nonsensical, though he has just elucidated its sense by contrasting it with relative value. He then states or implies that, although it is nonsensical, it is nevertheless of transcendent importance. Readers are left to puzzle out for themselves how what is of transcendent importance can be nonsensical, or, if it is nonsensical, how it can be of any importance at all. Yet what Wittgenstein is *trying to say* is not obscure. What he is trying to say is that absolute value would be nonsensical were we confined to the language of science or to a purely naturalistic view of the world. He cannot make this clear because he has already attributed all sense to the language of science itself. If we reflect, however, we shall find that the difference between saying and showing is not really the difference between what can be stated and what cannot be stated *at all*. Rather it is the difference between what can and what cannot be stated in the language of science, between that which has to be discovered because it is accidental and that which is presupposed in all our discoveries, which is permanent, not accidental, and which we therefore do not have to discover, because, if we reflect, we shall find we already know it.

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