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**Scott Soames: Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century,  
Volume 2: The Age of Meaning**

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# CHAPTER 1

## REJECTION OF THE TRACTARIAN CONCEPTION OF LANGUAGE AND ANALYSIS

### CHAPTER OUTLINE

#### 1. *Critique of the Tractarian Conception of Language*

The Augustinian picture vs. the conception of meaning as use  
Conceptual prerequisites of ostensive definitions  
Reference and analysis  
The meaning and reference of names  
Language games, family resemblances, and vagueness

#### 2. *Wittgenstein's New Conception of Language and Linguistic Analysis*

Ordinary language is not to be understood on the model of  
logical calculi; sentences have neither hidden logical forms  
nor unique analyses  
Language use is not to be explained by speakers knowing and  
being guided by linguistic rules, but rather by unthinking,  
socially-conditioned agreement

#### 3. *Wittgenstein's Deflationary Conception of Philosophy*

Roots of this conception in his identification of the philosophical  
with the necessary and apriori, of these with the analytic  
Doctrines of the Investigations as self-undermining because they  
lead to a conception of philosophy which they do not fit

### Overview of *The Philosophical Investigations*

There are three main topics in the *Philosophical Investigations*: (i) a critique of what Wittgenstein regards as the dominant referential conception of meaning, and a proposal to replace it with a conception in which to use language meaningfully is to master a certain kind of social practice; (ii) a critique of the previously dominant conception of philosophical analysis, and the substitution of a new conception of analysis to play the central role in philosophy; and (iii) the development of a new philosophical psychology in which what appear on the surface to be sentences that

report private sensations and other internal mental events or states are viewed as having meanings which license their assertion on the basis of public criteria having to do with behavior and external circumstances. The book's center of gravity is the discussion of what it is to follow a (linguistic) rule, and the lessons drawn from it about (i), (ii), and (iii). However, Wittgenstein does not start with this. Instead, he begins with preliminary critiques of his earlier, Tractarian conceptions of language and analysis. He then uses the discussion of rule following to strengthen his critiques, to illuminate his new conceptions of meaning and analysis, and to illustrate their consequences by applying them to psychological sentences. We will follow him in this. In this chapter we will deal with (i) and (ii); in the next chapter we will be concerned with (iii).

### The Critique of Tractarian Descriptivism

#### *The Augustinian Picture vs. the Conception of Meaning as Use*

We begin with Wittgenstein's critique of the central tenets of his earlier referentialism about language. The view under attack holds that the meaning of an expression is what it names or stands for, and the meaning of a sentence is a possible fact the actual existence of which would make the sentence true. Natural corollaries of the view stipulate that learning a language, and being a competent user of its expressions, is the result of recognizing correlations between words and the objects they stand for, and that being justified in accepting a contingent, empirical sentence S involves having reason to believe that the language-independent possible state of affairs which constitutes the truth conditions of S actually obtains.

Wittgenstein introduces this picture of language in section I of the *Investigations* with a quote from Augustine:

When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shown by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to

understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires.<sup>1</sup>

Wittgenstein's summary of the view is as follows:

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

Having presented this picture, Wittgenstein immediately challenges it with his example of the five red apples. He says:

Now think of the following use of language: I send someone shopping. I give him a slip marked “five red apples”. He takes the slip to the shopkeeper, who opens the drawer marked “apples”; then he looks up the word “red” in a table and finds a color sample opposite it; then he says the series of cardinal numbers—I assume that he knows them by heart—up to the word “five” and for each number he takes an apple of the same color as the sample out of the drawer.—It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words.—“But how does he know where and how he is to look up the word ‘red’ and what he is to do with the word ‘five?’”—Well, I assume that he *acts* as I have described. Explanations come to an end somewhere.—But what is the meaning of the word “five”?—No such thing was in question here, only how the word “five” is used.<sup>2</sup>

In explaining what it is to understand the expression *five red apples*, Wittgenstein here recounts what one would **do** with it. Mastery of the numeral ‘five’ is not explained by finding some unique object for it to name; rather, mastery is a matter of engaging in certain sorts of routine that govern its application. The shopkeeper recites a series of sounds—*one, two, three, four, five*—and correlates them one-to-one with a series of acts—each act involving taking an apple out of the drawer. Mastery of the numerals is mastery of routines like this. This is Wittgenstein's first example of the thesis that **meaning is use**.

<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, 3d edition (New York: Macmillan, 1958).

<sup>2</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, section 1.

In sections 2 and 6–21, he continues the theme of meaning as use with the example of the primitive language of a builder and his assistant. Here, the sentences—*Pillar*, *Slab*, *Block*, and *Beam*—are not used as descriptions; rather, they are used to give orders. Wittgenstein goes on to emphasize many different uses of sentences as a way of undermining the tendency to take describing, stating a fact, or asserting something as primary. The value of undermining this picture is that it allows him to concentrate on using language as participating in many kinds of social activity. In the elementary language game he describes, there is no referring to an object and predicating a property of it. There is only the coordination of words and actions. The moves in the language game are meaningful in so far as they contribute to the coordination of the actions of the builder and his assistant.

### *Conceptual Prerequisites of Ostensive Definitions*

One case study for the thesis that meaning is use is provided by names. At section 26 Wittgenstein starts talking about proper names, common nouns like *cat*, *red*, and *round*, and ostensive definitions. He has already pointed out that many parts of language are not names. Now he emphasizes that even when we introduce a name with an ostensive definition, the definition requires background assumptions in order to work. For example, suppose I point to one of the buttons on my shirt and say *This is red*, in an attempt to convey to you the meaning of the word *red*. In order for you to understand my intention, you need to know what I am pointing at—at myself, at my chest, at my shirt, at the button?—and you also need to know which aspect of the thing I am pointing at is the one I am characterizing—its size, its shape, its color, its price? This is where the needed background assumptions come in; it is only by relying on them that I can get my meaning across.

It is certainly true that these background beliefs are necessary in order for an ostensive definition to work; however, Wittgenstein appears to go beyond this, and suggest something stronger—namely, that ostensive definition (in the sense of the Augustinian picture discussed in section 1) makes sense only if one has already mastered a significant part of language in advance. For example, if you are not sure how to interpret my ostensive definition of *red*, I might clarify things by saying *The color of the buttons on my shirt is red*. But that presupposes that you have already understood the words *color*, *buttons*, and *shirt*.

Wittgenstein realizes that there are cases in which I could give my ostensive definition, *This is red*, and you would get the idea without my having to use any further words, because you would correctly guess that I was pointing to one of my buttons and talking about its color. In light of this, one wonders whether further **language** is always needed to understand an ostensive definition after all. Wittgenstein addresses this point in section 32.

Someone coming into a strange country will sometimes learn the language of the inhabitants from ostensive definitions that they give him; and he will often have to *guess* the meaning of these definitions; and will guess sometimes right, sometimes wrong.

And now, I think, we can say: Augustine describes the learning of human language as if the child came into a strange country and did not understand the language of the country; that is, as if it already had a language, only not this one. Or again: as if the child could already *think*, only not yet speak. And “think” would here mean something like “talk to itself”.

There is something quite striking about this passage. Wittgenstein seems to equate (i) a child’s ability to have thoughts about what the words he has been exposed to stand for with (ii) the child’s already having a language in which to express those thoughts. Since it is presumably absurd to suppose that the child already has such a language, Wittgenstein seems to be casting doubt on the idea that the child can think at all prior to having learned his first language.

To this one is tempted to reply: *“Of course the child can think before he has learned to speak. Have you ever been around young children? It is obvious that they have thoughts before they can speak. Moreover, they would be in pretty bad shape if they couldn’t have such thoughts. How could they learn anything—let alone language—if they couldn’t do at least some thinking first?”* However, Wittgenstein would not accept this reply. One of the themes of the *Investigations* is that terms like *think* and *understand*, which appear to refer to private mental events or processes, should really be understood as standing for complex behavioral and social dispositions, standardly including dispositions to use language. Of course, if one takes thinking to be something that essentially involves dispositions to use language in certain ways, then the idea of a child being able to think before he has language will seem to be a non-starter. Now, I am not sure that, in the end, Wittgenstein really wants to go so

far as to claim that **all** thinking requires language use or linguistic dispositions, and hence to deny that non-linguistic creatures can have any thoughts at all.<sup>3</sup> However, he does seem to presuppose that they couldn't have the kinds of thoughts needed to understand ostensive definitions. Why, precisely, we should take this to be so is something that, regrettably, he is not terribly clear about (at least at this stage of the *Investigations*). Still, the import of his view is clear enough: since the thoughts required to interpret an ostensive definition cannot be had prior to mastering a significant amount of language, ostensive definition cannot be the foundation of all language learning and language use. And if it can't serve as the foundation of language learning and use, Wittgenstein seems to suggest, it is hard to see how the referentialist conception of language, with its emphasis on the importance of naming, can get off the ground. It is not that he is suggesting that we never succeed in naming anything ostensively, or in describing something once we have named it. Of course, we do. Rather, he is saying that naming and describing cannot constitute the essence of meaning, since in order to be able to name or describe anything, we must have a rich system of meaning already in place. To be sure, he hasn't established this, or even really argued for it yet. He has just raised the issue, and started to paint an alternative picture.

### *Reference and Analysis*

In sections 37 and 38, he attacks a different part of the descriptivist, or referential, conception of meaning. He indicates that it is not clear what we have in mind when we talk about the naming or reference relation.

What is the relation between name and thing named?—Well, what *is* it? Look at language-game (2) [the builder and his assistant] or at another one: there you can see the sort of thing this relation consists in. This relation may also consist, among many other things, in the fact that hearing the name calls before our mind the picture of what is named; and it also consists, among other things, in the

<sup>3</sup> See *Philosophical Investigations*, section 330, for what seems to be a suggestion that actions and behavioral dispositions alone, without linguistic actions (and perhaps even linguistic dispositions), may **sometimes** count as sufficient for thought. See also (i) of Part II of the *Investigations*, where Wittgenstein recognizes that certain beliefs are attributable non-linguistic animals, but suggests that the mental states and contents available to such animals are extremely limited. Thanks to Jeff Speaks for a useful discussion of this point.

name's being written on the thing named or being pronounced when the thing is pointed at.<sup>4</sup>

But what, for example, is the word "this" the name of in language-game (8) [Here Wittgenstein refers to an expansion of the primitive language game of the builder and his assistant] or the word "that" in the ostensive definition "that is called . . ."?—If you do not want to produce confusion you will do best not to call these words names at all.—Yet, strange to say, the word "this" has been called the only *genuine* name; so that anything else we call a name was one only in an inexact, approximate sense.

This queer conception springs from a tendency to sublime the logic of our language—as one might put it. The proper answer to it is: we call very different things "names"; the word "name" is used to characterize many different kinds of use of a word, related to one another in many different ways:—but the kind of use that "this" has is not among them.

. . . This is connected with the conception of naming as, so to speak, an occult process. Naming appears as a *queer* connection of a word with an object.—And you really get such a queer connection when the philosopher tries to bring out *the* relation between name and thing by staring at an object in front of him and repeating a name or even the word "this" innumerable times. For philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*. And *here* we may indeed fancy naming to be some remarkable act of mind, as it were a baptism of an object. And we can also say the word "this" *to* the object, as it were *address* the object as "this"—a queer use of this word, which doubtless only occurs in doing philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

The object of Wittgenstein's ridicule here is (in part) our inclination to think that there is just one relation which all names bear to their referents. Wittgenstein thinks that this idea is obviously incorrect. We can say, if we like, that the numeral '5' names or refers to the number five, but only if we do not take the naming or reference relation that we appeal to in this case to be the same as the relation between someone's name and the person named, for example. In section 38, he indicates that he thinks that the philosophical problem of discovering the nature of **the** naming or reference relation falsely presupposes that there is just one such relation. He dismisses this idea with the general remark

<sup>4</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, section 37.

<sup>5</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, section 38.

about philosophy, “For philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*.”

It is less clear what relevance his dismissal of the idea that there is a unique reference relation has for his overall attack on the referentialist conception of meaning. Perhaps the idea is this: the referentialist is inclined to think that the relation of reference is basic, that by taking it as our starting point we can give a general account of meaning and understanding, and by employing it in the philosophical analysis of language we can achieve a level of clarity and exactness not obtainable in any other way. By contrast, Wittgenstein thinks that talk about reference is something that stands in as much need of analysis and clarification as anything else. In certain cases we mean one thing when we talk about the reference of a word, and in other cases we mean something else. Since talk about reference is subject to the same sorts of ambiguity and unclarity as the ordinary talk it is supposed to be used to analyze, he seems to suggest, claims about reference can’t provide the basis of, or starting point for, all philosophical analyses of meaning and understanding.

This point, though arresting, is telling only if supplemented with something further. Consider the view that to understand a word is to know what it refers to (which, we may suppose, includes, in the case of a predicate, what it applies to). It is one thing to be told that by *reference* we mean different things in different cases; it is quite another to be told that what we mean by *reference* in at least some of these cases is such that understanding a word **cannot** be explained as knowing what it refers to. Maybe the thought is that for any specific disambiguation of ‘refers’, the general claim that to understand any word is to know what it refers to in that specific sense must be false, since, at a minimum, for different words, different reference relations will be required. However, even if that were to turn out to be so, it would still leave open the possibility that understanding a word is always a matter of what it refers to, in the relevant sense of ‘refers’. To rule even this out, one might argue that in at least some cases—e.g., the terms ‘5’, ‘Uranus’, and ‘neutrino’—we don’t understand these terms **because** we know that ‘5’ refers to an object iff it is the number 5, that ‘Uranus’ refers to an object iff it is Uranus, and that ‘neutrino’ applies to an object iff it is a neutrino; rather, we know these elementary truths about reference **because** we understand and accept the sentences that express them, which in turn presupposes that we already understand the expressions ‘5’, ‘Uranus’, and ‘neutrino’ themselves. If such an argument could successfully be made, it would show that understanding an expression is at least sometimes conceptually prior

to knowing what it refers to, in which case the latter cannot be the explanation of the former.<sup>6</sup> Although Wittgenstein seems to have believed this, he did not explicitly argue in this way, and his argument at this stage of the *Investigations* is left inexplicit and incomplete.

### *The Meaning and Reference of Names*

In sections 39 and 40, he continues his assault on the referential conception of meaning with an argument that the meaning of a name can't be its bearer. Here is section 39.

But why does it occur to one to want to make precisely this word [the word “this”] into a name, when it evidently is *not* a name?— That is just the reason. For one is tempted to make an objection against what is ordinarily called a name. It can be put like this: *a name ought really to signify a simple*. And for this one might perhaps give the following reasons: The word “Excalibur”, say, is a proper name in the ordinary sense. The sword Excalibur consists of parts combined in a particular way. If they are combined differently Excalibur does not exist. But it is clear that the sentence “Excalibur has a sharp blade” makes *sense* whether Excalibur is still whole or is broken up. But if “Excalibur” is the name of an object, this object no longer exists when Excalibur is broken in pieces; and as no object would then correspond to the name it would have no meaning. But then the sentence “Excalibur has a sharp blade” would contain a word that had no meaning, and hence the sentence would be nonsense. But it does make sense; so there must always be something corresponding to the words of which it consists. So the word “Excalibur” must disappear when the sense is analyzed and its place be taken by words which name simples. It will be reasonable to call these words the real names.

This is essentially one of Russell's old arguments that ordinary names are not real, or *logically proper*, names, since ordinary names can have meanings even when they lack referents, whereas the meaning of a real (logically proper) name is nothing other than its referent. Unlike ordinary

<sup>6</sup> An argument of this sort is developed in the section “Semantic Competence and ‘The Augustinian Picture’” (pp. 587–91) of my “Semantics and Semantic Competence,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 3 (Philosophy of Mind and Action Theory), 1989, 575–96. It is discussed further in my “Facts, Truth Conditions, and the Skeptical Solution to the Rule-Following Paradox,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 12 (Language, Mind, and Ontology), 1998, 313–48.

names, Russell thought, at least some uses of the demonstrative ‘this’ conformed rather well to this criterion. If one says, pointing at nothing in particular, *This is a fine red one*, then it is plausible to suppose that since one hasn’t identified any object to which the predicate is supposed to be applied, one’s sentence lacks content, and one hasn’t meaningfully asserted anything. For reasons like this, Russell was inclined to say that the word ‘this’ functions as a genuine name, whereas ordinary proper names do not.

Although Wittgenstein at one time accepted essentially this argument, by the time of the *Investigations*, he no longer did. Here is section 40:

Let us first discuss *this* point of the argument: that a word has no meaning if nothing corresponds to it.—It is important to note that the word “meaning” is being used illicitly if it is used to signify the thing that ‘corresponds’ to the word. That is to confound the meaning of a name with the *bearer* of the name. When Mr. N. N. dies one says that the bearer of the name dies, not that the meaning dies. And it would be nonsensical to say that, for if the name ceased to have meaning it would make no sense to say “Mr. N. N. is dead”.

In this passage, Wittgenstein turns the Russellian argument around and uses it to refute the contention that the referent of a name is its meaning. In addition, we get an anticipation of his rejection of “old-style” philosophical analysis (which assigned abstract logical forms to sentences). Russell and the early Wittgenstein would have said that the fact that a sentence containing an ordinary name would remain meaningful even if its referent ceased to exist, shows that what looks like a name really doesn’t function logically as a name; hence the whole sentence must be given a complex analysis. For Russell and the early Wittgenstein, genuine names must have referents the existence of which is somehow guaranteed. For Russell this meant that names could refer only to things that one could not be mistaken about, like private sense data, or the abstract objects with which one was directly acquainted. For the early Wittgenstein it meant that names must refer to indestructible metaphysical simples that could not fail to exist. Either way, sentences containing ordinary names had to be analyzed in terms of complicated logical forms, which, if they contained genuine, logically proper names at all, were construed as talking about a certain philosophically revealed subject matter. The Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* rejects the idea that sentences have analyses of this sort. In the sections following 40, he demolishes his old Tractarian view that there are indestructible, necessarily existing simples in the world

that cannot be described but can only be named by the corresponding linguistic simples—i.e., by expressions satisfying Russell’s idealized conception of genuine names. The significance of this demolition is rather limited, however, since the views about metaphysical simples in the *Tractatus* were always seen to be implausible, and never had much of a following. Undermining them was not a great advance.

A more interesting question is whether Wittgenstein’s argument in these sections really shows that the meaning of an ordinary name can’t be its referent. I am not convinced that it does. Certainly the sentence *Socrates is dead* continues to be meaningful even though the man Socrates no longer exists, and the name *Socrates* does not refer to any existing thing. However, is it so clear that *Socrates* fails to refer to anything at all? If it did fail to refer, then it would be hard to see how the sentence *Socrates is dead* could be true—since the subject expression wouldn’t refer to anything that had the property expressed by the predicate. So perhaps names can continue to refer to things that once existed but no longer do. If the things they refer to are their meanings, then names may remain meaningful, even when the things that are their meanings cease to exist.

If this seems surprising, consider what the alternative might be. Suppose one thought, with Russell, that the meaning of a name like *Socrates* was given by a description associated with it by speakers. Suppose, for example, one took the name to be short for the description *the philosopher who was convicted of corrupting the youth of Athens*, and then applied Russell’s theory of descriptions. The result would be problematic in at least two respects. First, if

1. Socrates is dead

meant the same as

2. There exists an  $x$  such that (i)  $x$  is identical with an individual iff that individual was a philosopher convicted of corrupting the youth of Athens, and (ii)  $x$  is dead,

then (1) would entail

3. There exists an  $x$  such that  $x$  is identical with an individual iff that individual was a philosopher convicted of corrupting the youth of Athens,

which, according to the analysis, means the same as

4. Socrates exists.

But it is absurd to suppose that *Socrates is dead* entails *Socrates exists*. Second, the descriptive counterpart (5) of (1) seems to be true, despite the fact that its most natural Russellian analysis, (2), is false.

5. The philosopher who was convicted of corrupting the youth of Athens is dead.

Thus, the orthodox Russellian analysis is in trouble.

Nor will it do to claim that *so and so is dead* has the logical form *it is not the case that so and so is alive*; it is not the case that the largest prime number is alive, but that doesn't mean that the largest prime number is dead. There is, however, a different, more complicated analysis of (5) that is more congenial to the Russellian.<sup>7</sup> In giving the analysis, one begins by paraphrasing (5) as (7).

7. The philosopher who was convicted of corrupting the youth of Athens was once alive but no longer is.

Next, one assigns (7) the logical form (8).

8. In the past it was the case that [there existed an  $x$  such that (i)  $x$  was identical with an individual iff that individual was a philosopher convicted of corrupting the youth of Athens, and (ii)  $x$  was alive but it is now the case that  $x$  is not alive)].

This sentence is true at the present time  $t_{\text{now}}$  iff for some earlier time  $t_{\text{then}}$  (i) there was (at  $t_{\text{then}}$ ) an  $x$  such that  $x$  was identical with an individual iff that individual was a philosopher convicted of corrupting the youth of Athens, and (ii)  $x$  was alive (at  $t_{\text{then}}$ ), but at  $t_{\text{now}}$   $x$  is not alive. If this analysis is legitimate, then the Russellian can, in principle, account for (5). However, in order for the analysis to work, it must now be the case that the formula  *$x$  is not alive* is genuinely both meaningful and true relative to an assignment to the variable 'x' of an individual who once existed but no longer does. This is significant since, whatever may be true of other parts of language, the meanings of variables (relative to assignments) are simply the objects they are assigned as referents. Thus, if variables can be meaningful by virtue of referring to no-longer-existent objects, and if formulas containing them can be both

<sup>7</sup> The analysis is derived from Russell's suggestion, "To say that a person is dead is complicated. It is two statements rolled into one: 'Socrates was alive' and 'Socrates is not alive'" (p. 78, of the *Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, La Salle, IL: Open Court; 1985; originally published in 1918). Thanks to Ali Kazmi for a discussion of this point.

true and meaningful when the variables are taken to so refer, then the fact that Socrates no longer exists is no argument (a) that the name *Socrates* doesn't refer to him, (b) that the referent of *Socrates* is not the meaning of *Socrates*, or (c) that if the meaning of *Socrates* is its referent, then sentences containing it cannot be meaningful.

In light of this, the best thing to say about Wittgenstein's example in section 40 seems to be that the name *Mr. N. N.* refers to someone who once existed, but no longer does. But then, the name **does** refer, even though its referent no longer exists. If this is right, then the name still has a referent, and Wittgenstein's remarks do not show that its referent can't be its meaning. The proponent of the view that Wittgenstein opposes may simply maintain that the name **does** mean something, even though the thing it means is something that no longer exists.<sup>8</sup> Of course, the proponent of this view has not conclusively established his position either—for, as Wittgenstein might well insist, the view that the meaning of a name is its referent has other counterintuitive consequences. For example, if the meaning of the name *Saul Kripke* is the man Saul Kripke, then someone who has spoken to Saul Kripke should be able to correctly report, *I have spoken with the meaning of the name 'Saul Kripke'*. But that sounds extremely odd—in a way that *I have spoken to the bearer (or referent) of the name 'Saul Kripke'* does not. Presumably, the two sides in this dispute would view the significance of this observation differently. Whereas Wittgenstein would see it as supporting his contention that the referent of a name is not its meaning, the defender of the view that they should be identified would take it to show only that we are not ordinarily accustomed to thinking in these terms (correct though this view may be).<sup>9</sup>

### *Language Games, Family Resemblances, and Vagueness*

We will return to the issue of whether the meaning of a name is its referent when we discuss Wittgenstein's remarks in section 79. Before doing that however, we take up his comparison of different uses of language to

<sup>8</sup> See the appendix to chapter 3 of my *Beyond Rigidity: The Unfinished Semantic Agenda of Naming and Necessity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) for a sketch of this view, which is derived from Nathan Salmon. For more details, see Salmon, "Existence," in J. Tomberlin, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. 1, *Metaphysics* (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1987), 49–108; and Salmon, "Nonexistence," *Noûs* 32 (1998): 277–319.

<sup>9</sup> See the section "Meaning, Semantic Content, and Speakers' Intuitions," of chapter 3 of *Beyond Rigidity* (pp. 67–72), for an explanation of how and why facts about meaning may sometimes diverge from the judgments of meaning given by ordinary competent speakers.

different games. He develops the comparison in the sections numbered in the middle sixties, where his main point is that just as there is no one thing unique to games that is common to them all, so there is no one thing unique to different uses of language that is common to them all. Here is the last paragraph of section 65.

And this is true.—Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,—but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all “language”.

In sections 66 and 67, Wittgenstein amplifies this idea by considering the concept of a game.

Consider for example the proceedings that we call “games”. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all?—Don’t say: “There *must* be something common, or they would not be called ‘games’”—but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all.—For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.<sup>10</sup>

I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than “family resemblances”; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, color of eyes, gait, temperament, etc., etc., overlap and criss-cross in the same way.—And I shall say: ‘games’ form a family.

And for instance the kinds of number form a family in the same way. Why do we call something a “number”? Well, perhaps because it has a—direct—relationship with several things that have hitherto been called number; and this can be said to give it an indirect relationship to other things we call the same name. And we extend our concept of number as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.

<sup>10</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, section 66.

But if someone wished to say: “There is something common to all these constructions—namely the disjunction of all their common properties”—I should reply: Now you are only playing with words. One might as well say: “Something runs through the whole thread—namely the continuous overlapping of those fibres”.<sup>11</sup>

This talk about games and families is brought up in the context of illustrating the contention that there is no essence of language or language use. There is no one thing that is common to all uses of language, one pattern that all must fit, but rather a system of overlapping similarities—just as in the case of games. To understand a particular use of language one must examine it on its own terms, not assume in advance that it must fit some single preconceived conception of meaning.

At 69 and 70 we get the view that the concept of a game, like most other concepts, is vague. But that doesn’t make it defective or in need of any precisification by philosophical analysis. Similarly, the concept of a language is vague, but that doesn’t mean that there is anything wrong with the concept; nor does it mean that the way to understand ordinary language is to describe the relation it bears to some fully precise logical ideal. Sections 71 through 75 are concerned with how one masters an ordinary vague word or concept. It is not by grasping the thing common to all its instances; there is no such thing. Rather, to master a vague word is to be able to apply it in agreement with others. This idea of applying a word in agreement with others is central to Wittgenstein’s general approach to meaning and understanding, and is something he returns to again and again.

### *The Use and Meaning of Names*

In section 79, Wittgenstein applies his idea that often there is no one thing common to different uses of the same expression to proper names. Here is the first paragraph of that section.

Consider this example. If one says “Moses did not exist”, this may mean various things. It may mean: the Israelites did not have a *single* leader when they withdrew from Egypt—or: their leader was not called Moses—or: there cannot have been anyone who accomplished all that the Bible relates of Moses—or: etc. etc.—We may say, following Russell: the name “Moses” can be defined

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., section 67.

by means of various descriptions. For example, as “the man who led the Israelites through the wilderness”, “the man who lived at that time and place and was then called ‘Moses’”, “the man who as a child was taken out of the Nile by Pharaoh’s daughter” and so on. And according as we assume one definition or another the proposition “Moses did not exist” acquires a different sense, and so does every other proposition about Moses.—And if we are told “N did not exist”, we do ask: “What do you mean? Do you want to say . . . . . or . . . . . etc.?”

Let us construct a gloss for this passage. Take an arbitrary proper name N. In discussing this example, we will abstract away from the fact that different individuals can share the same name, and when we consider different uses of N we will always have in mind cases in which N is used to refer to the same individual. Even when this idealization is presupposed, it is clear that different speakers may associate different descriptive information with N, and a single speaker may associate different descriptions with it on different occasions of use. Because of this there is no one thing that **speakers mean** by *N is F*, or by *N doesn’t exist*, on different occasions. The information a hearer gathers from such an utterance depends on the descriptive information the hearer associates with the name. The information a speaker wishes to convey by an utterance depends on what descriptive information he thinks that he and his audience jointly associate with the name. All of this seems clear and at least roughly correct—to which I would add the following: anyone who is familiar with a name, and who is competent to use it, can be expected to associate some descriptive content with it. Nevertheless, there is no single description, or disjunction of descriptions, that anyone who is competent to use the name must associate with it in order to be competent. At least, there is no such description or disjunction of descriptions that picks anyone out uniquely.

We may now consider what Wittgenstein has to say in the rest of the section.

But when I make a statement about Moses,—am I always ready to substitute some *one* of these descriptions for “Moses”? I shall perhaps say: By “Moses” I understand the man who did what the Bible relates of Moses, or at any rate a good deal of it. But how much? Have I decided how much must be proved false for me to give up my proposition as false? Has the name “Moses” got a fixed unequivocal use for me in all possible cases?—Is it not the

case that I have, so to speak, a whole series of props in readiness, and am ready to lean on one if another should be taken from under me and vice versa?—Consider another case. When I say “N is dead”, then something like the following may hold for the meaning of the name “N”: I believe that a human being has lived, whom I (i) have seen in such-and-such places, who (ii) looked like this (pictures), and (iii) has done such-and-such things, and (iv) bore the name “N” in social life.—Asked what I understand by “N”, I should enumerate all or some of these points, and different ones on different occasions. So my definition of “N” would perhaps be “the man of whom all this is true”.—But if some point now proves false?—Shall I be prepared to declare the proposition “N is dead” false—even if it is only something which strikes me as incidental that has turned out false? But where are the bounds of the incidental?—If I had given a definition of the name in such a case, I should now be ready to alter it.

And this can be expressed like this: I use the name “N” without a *fixed* meaning. (But that detracts as little from its usefulness, as it detracts from that of a table that stands on four legs instead of three and so sometimes wobbles.)

Should it be said that I am using a word whose meaning I don’t know, and so am talking nonsense?—Say what you choose, so long as it does not prevent you from seeing the facts. (And when you see them there is a good deal that you will not say.)

(The fluctuation of scientific definitions: what to-day counts as an observed concomitant of a phenomenon will to-morrow be used to define it.)

One of the things that Wittgenstein seems to be saying here is that on any particular occasion on which I make a statement using a particular name, what I mean and attempt to convey by my utterance is to a certain extent vague, because the descriptive information I associate with the name is to a substantial extent vague, and open-ended (as is the information I associate with ‘game’). This fits his overall picture of ordinary language use as perfectly meaningful, and in order as it stands, even though it may appear inexact when compared to the kinds of ideal calculi to which previous philosophers, himself included, sometimes tried to assimilate it. This observation about our use of names is unobjectionable, and even platitudinous, as are most of his other observations in the section. However, I doubt that they should be read as

constituting any sort of theory of the meaning of proper names, as they sometimes are. A better interpretation is to see them as laying down some obvious facts that any adequate theory must accommodate. As for the question of what such a theory would look like, I believe that Wittgenstein's observations could be accommodated and extended in at least three different ways.

Way 1: On this view, names have different meanings for different speakers at different times. The meaning of a name for a speaker at a time is something like an open-ended set of descriptions that the speaker associates with the name at the time (and, perhaps, takes to be common ground between himself and his audience). Roughly speaking, the meaning of *n* for a certain speaker is given by a vague description—*the unique individual  $x$  who satisfies a sufficient number of the following descriptive claims:  $x$  is *F*,  $x$  is *G*, and so on*. This is a theory that is often associated with Wittgenstein, though it is rather more specific than anything he said.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, there are different versions of the theory, depending on whether the vague description associated with a name is built from specific descriptions commonly associated with the name throughout the linguistic community, or whether it varies from speaker to speaker, being constructed in each case from particular descriptions that the speaker in question associates with the name. Either way, there are difficulties to be surmounted. On the more social version of the theory—which, given Wittgenstein's general conception of language as a social institution, one might expect him to favor—one confronts the problem that for some names the associated descriptive information may vary so much from speaker to speaker that there is little commonly shared information—in which case the vague but allegedly meaning-giving description may fail to pick out any unique referent at all. On the individualized version of the theory, names are expressions the meanings of which change from speaker to speaker, and time to time; moreover, it may well be that the meaning of a name for one speaker is never exactly the same as its meaning for another speaker. This being the case, it is a problem for the theory to explain how I can report what you believe when you assent to a sentence containing a name *n*. In most cases I won't know exactly which descriptions you associate

<sup>12</sup> For a defense of a view of roughly this sort, see John Searle, "Proper Names," *Mind* 67 (1958): 166–73.

with *n*, and it seems likely that whatever those descriptions turn out to be won't completely match the ones I associate with *n*. But surely when I say *you believe that n is F*, after hearing your utterance of *n is F*, what I am saying is that you believe the content of *n is F* as I use it in my belief report—and that content will depend on the descriptions I associate with the name.<sup>13</sup>

Way 2: This way of building on Wittgenstein's remarks differs from the first in distinguishing **what a speaker means by an expression at a time** from **what the expression means**, considered as part of the common language—say, as part of English. On this view, what a speaker means (and asserts) when he says *n is F* on some particular occasion may include the claim that the individual who satisfies most of a certain set of descriptions (associated with *n* by the speaker) has the property expressed by *F*. However, this is not what the sentence means as part of our common language. Roughly speaking, what a sentence *S* means in English consists of information that any competent speaker who is familiar with it and understands it would both associate with *S* and use it to assert and convey in different circumstances. In other words, the meaning of *S* is information that must be grasped by any competent user of *S*, and that would be part of the information asserted and conveyed by any normal use of it. On this view, the meaning of a name in the language often won't be any uniquely identifying description or set of such descriptions at all.

Way 3: This way of extending Wittgenstein's remarks is just like the second, with the addition of a positive claim about what the meaning of a name in the language is—to wit, its referent. Although Wittgenstein would not himself have welcomed this claim, I think it can be made compatible with his main observations in section 79. The justification for taking the meaning of a name in the public language to be its referent is that if we ask *What information is common to the information asserted and conveyed by competent speakers by normal utterances of the sentence n is F in different contexts?*, the answer seems to be that it is information that a certain individual—the one the name in fact refers to—has a certain property—the one expressed by *F*. To see this, imagine that some competent speaker, Ralph, assertively utters the sentence in some arbitrary context. No matter what descriptive information

<sup>13</sup> Extensive arguments against views of this sort will be considered in chapter 14, when we discuss Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*.

Ralph may associate with the name, normally I can correctly report his assertion by saying *Ralph asserted that n is F*. Further, if there is an individual that n refers to, it will follow that *there is a certain individual such that Ralph asserted that he/she is F* expresses a truth. This just says that Ralph asserted some singular proposition that attributes the property expressed by F to a certain individual, where the proposition in question doesn't include any further description of that individual. Ralph's assertive utterance may result in the assertion of other propositions as well, but the bare, singular proposition that predicates the property expressed by F of the referent of n will always be one of the propositions he asserts (assuming that the context is normal and that n has a referent). Arguably, it is the only proposition both asserted by utterances of the sentence in all normal contexts, and reasonably related to the meanings of the individual words and phrases of the sentence. For this reason, it qualifies as the meaning of the sentence in the language.

In my opinion, this third view is more or less correct.<sup>14</sup> Of course, in order to develop the view, something has to be said about the special case of negative existentials, like *Moses did not exist*, that Wittgenstein makes so much of. Suffice it to say that although these sentences do present serious problems for the view, there appear to be promising strategies for dealing with them.<sup>15</sup> However, details aside, the point to be emphasized is that once the meaning of a sentence in the common language is distinguished from the information that the sentence is used to assert or convey on a particular occasion, the view just outlined is largely in harmony with Wittgenstein's remarks in section 79. This point has been obscured by the fact that Wittgenstein himself often wrote as if he was oblivious to, or didn't care about, the distinction between speaker meaning and sentence meaning. Indeed, it was many years after the *Philosophical Investigations* before philosophers and linguists, led by Paul Grice, developed the conceptual tools needed to make the distinction.<sup>16</sup> Hence, in articulating the second and third views about the meanings of names, we have gone substantially beyond Wittgenstein's text.

<sup>14</sup> See chapter 3 of my *Beyond Rigidity*.

<sup>15</sup> See the references given in n.8 above.

<sup>16</sup> See Paul Grice, chapters 5, 6, and 14 (originally published as "Utterer's Meaning and Intentions," "Utterer's Meaning, Sentence-Meaning, and Word-Meaning," and "Meaning," respectively) of his *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1989).

With this in mind, let us sum up a few lessons about Wittgenstein's discussion of names, and the general referentialist conception of language. First, his genuine insight that sentences containing names are often used to convey descriptive information that is open-ended, vague, and somewhat changeable, is **not** obviously incompatible with the view that the meaning of a proper name in the common language is simply its referent. Second, no matter what one concludes about that view, nothing in Wittgenstein's remarks in section 79 takes us away from the general descriptive paradigm of language use—provided that we are willing to recognize that descriptions can be vague. Third, in understanding Wittgenstein's critique of the descriptivist and referentialist paradigms, one must recognize that his arguments against specific theses about meanings of certain expressions—such as the thesis that the meaning of a name is its referent—are conceptually separable from his arguments against the view that understanding an expression is always to be explained as the result of knowing what it refers to, and understanding a sentence is always to be explained as the result of knowing the conditions under which it would be true. One could accept the latter arguments, even if one rejected the former.

It is these arguments that are most important to Wittgenstein's critique. His most central points are (a) that the real roots of linguistic meaning—the socially conditioned coordination of linguistic and non-linguistic behavior—are conceptually prior to naming and describing, (b) that these roots must be in place prior to the introduction of either names or descriptive predicates, (c) that different instances of naming and referring do not always come to the same thing, and that because of this, talk about naming and referring requires as much analysis as other kinds of talk, and (d) that knowing that an expression refers to an object often presupposes the very linguistic competence that some descriptivists want to use it to explain. His fundamental positive thesis is that mastery of an expression is at base the mastery of a set of social practices by which speakers coordinate their activities. There may be some cases in which this mastery involves the independent recognition first of an object, then of a word, and finally of the fact that the community uses the word as a name of the object. But this is not always so—and not just because words can be meaningful without referring to anything. Even in cases in which a word does refer, there may be no such thing as identifying the object to which it refers, or of recognizing the naming relation, independently of understanding some word for the referent. In such cases, this prior understanding has to be

explained without presupposing any prior apprehension of the object, and intention to correlate it with an expression. This point concerning the foundations of meaning and understanding is independent of Wittgenstein's rejection of the more specific semantic thesis that the meanings of ordinary proper names in English are their referents.

### Wittgenstein's New Conception of Language and Linguistic Analysis

At this stage in the *Investigations*, around section 81, Wittgenstein turns from the rejection of his old Tractarian conception of language, and directs his attention to how changing his view of language affects his conception of philosophy. He continues to believe that philosophical problems are linguistic problems, and that philosophical analysis is a kind of linguistic analysis—but it is a new kind of linguistic analysis that no longer is seen as a species of logical analysis. In the sections between 81 and 133 he announces an interconnected set of what he takes to be obvious truths about meaning, the nature of philosophy, and the kinds of analyses it should try to provide. These would-be truisms are mostly negative in character, and are aimed at ruling out alternative views of meaning and analysis.

In explicating these theses it is useful to consider them slightly out of order. We begin with what I will call *thesis 1*, which is discussed in sections 90 through 92.

#### THESES 1

Natural language is not an incomplete realization of a linguistic ideal—a formalized calculus—nor do the sentences of ordinary language have meanings that are more revealingly expressed by sentences of such a calculus. There is no such thing as the logical form of a sentence (given by some sentence in the language of a calculus).

In these sections we also find an indication of the kind of linguistic analysis that Wittgenstein endorses, and a warning about the illusion we fall into if we start thinking in terms of **the (unique) analysis** of a word or sentence. According to Wittgenstein, we do not give an analysis of a sentence because there is anything wrong with the sentence as it stands that demands clarification. Rather, we give an analysis when

something about the sentence leads us into philosophical confusion. Conceivably, a sentence might receive different analyses if people become confused about it in different ways. Each analysis may be aimed at clearing up a particular confusion, even if no analysis clears up all confusions.

This brings us to thesis 2.

#### THESIS 2

We don't give the analysis of a word, phrase, or sentence by giving the linguistic rules that guide and govern our use of that expression. In using the words that we understand, we are not invariably guided by rules that we introspectively grasp, and that determine the correct application of our terms. Typically, we simply apply a word instinctively to a previously unconsidered case. What makes such an application correct is its agreement with applications made by the larger linguistic community. In some cases, we may be guided by rules, tables, or internal instructions. But even then, what we are guided by is something that could, in principle, be interpreted in different ways. In the end, such interpretations cannot themselves always be guided by further rules, tables, and instructions. Hence, our interpretations of many symbols must simply be instinctive and unthinking.

This thesis is illustrated by the following passages drawn from sections 82, 83, 84, and 85.

What do I call 'the rule by which he proceeds'?—The hypothesis that satisfactorily describes his use of words, which we observe; or the rule which he looks up when he uses signs; or the one which he gives us in reply if we ask him what his rule is?—But what if observation does not enable us to see any clear rule, and the question brings none to light?—For he did indeed give me a definition when I asked him what he understood by "N", but he was prepared to withdraw and alter it.—So how am I to determine the rule according to which he is playing? He does not know it himself.—Or, to ask a better question: What meaning is the expression "the rule by which he proceeds" supposed to have left to it here?<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, section 82.

Doesn't the analogy between language and games throw light here? We can easily imagine people amusing themselves in a field by playing with a ball so as to start various existing games, but playing many without finishing them and in between throwing the ball aimlessly into the air, chasing one another with the ball and bombarding one another for a joke and so on. And now someone says: The whole time they are playing a ball-game and following definite rules at every throw.<sup>18</sup>

I said that the application of a word is not everywhere bounded by rules. But what does a game look like that is everywhere bounded by rules? whose rules never let a doubt creep in, but stop up all the cracks where it might?—Can't we imagine a rule determining the application of a rule, and a doubt which *it* removes—and so on?<sup>19</sup>

A rule stands there like a sign-post.—Does the sign-post leave no doubt open about the way I have to go? Does it show which direction I am to take when I have passed it; whether along the road or the footpath or cross-country? But where is it said which way I am to follow it; whether in the direction of its finger or (e.g.) in the opposite one?—And if there were, not a single sign-post, but a chain of adjacent ones or of chalk marks on the ground—is there only *one* way of interpreting them?<sup>20</sup>

In these passages, Wittgenstein is telling us that our use of words and other symbols is not always guided by rules; sometimes it is simply automatic. Moreover, even when we do have a rule in mind that we are attempting to follow, the rule itself is something that, in principle, might be subject to different interpretations. As a matter of simple empirical fact, our interpretations are often instinctive and unthinking, in the way that our interpretation of a directional sign with a finger pointing in one direction is. But even if, in some cases, our interpretation of one rule requires another rule to guide us, at some point the appeal to rules to interpret symbols has to give out, and we will find ourselves using words without thinking. These are cases in which we use words without following rules at all. This carries a lesson for the conception of philosophy as the analysis of language; just as the philosophical analysis

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., section 83.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., section 84.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., section 85.

of language is not a matter of giving the logical form of sentences, so it is not a matter of articulating the rules that we follow when we understand words. This leads Wittgenstein to a new and highly deflationary conception of philosophy.

### Wittgenstein's Deflationary Conception of Philosophy

Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy is summarized in thesis 3.

#### THESIS 3

The philosophical analysis of language does not aim at, and cannot issue in, theories of any kind. Philosophy (as Wittgenstein says in section 109) "is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language." It is the untangling of linguistic confusions achieved by examining our words as they are ordinarily used, and contrasting that use with how the words are misused in philosophical theories and explanations. If philosophy were properly done, there would be no philosophical theories or explanations, since there is nothing for philosophy to explain. Its task is essentially therapeutic—to untangle particular confusions.

This thesis is illustrated by sections 109, 116, 119, 124, 126, 127, and 128.

It was true to say that our considerations could not be scientific ones. It was not of any possible interest to us to find out empirically 'that, contrary to our preconceived ideas, it is possible to think such-and-such'—whatever that may mean. (The conception of thought as a gaseous medium.) And we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: *in spite of* an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always

known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.<sup>21</sup>

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

What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.<sup>22</sup>

The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language. These bumps make us see the value of the discovery.<sup>23</sup>

Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it.

For it cannot give it any foundation either.

It leaves everything as it is.

It also leaves mathematics as it is, and no mathematical discovery can advance it. A “leading problem of mathematical logic” is for us a problem of mathematics like any other.<sup>24</sup>

Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.—Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us.

One might also give the name “philosophy” to what is possible *before* all new discoveries and inventions.<sup>25</sup>

The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose.<sup>26</sup>

If one tried to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them.<sup>27</sup>

We have in these passages a relentlessly deflationary view about philosophy, and what it can tell us about language, or anything else. However,

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., section 109.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., section 116.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., section 119.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., section 124.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., section 126.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., section 127.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., section 128.

there is something odd, even paradoxical, about Wittgenstein's general theses. His broad negative theses are interesting and arresting; unlike most analytic philosophers, however, he gives little or no argument for them. One could say that in proceeding in this way he was being consistent. To argue for his theses would be to treat them as unobvious—as surprising and informative theoretical claims about language and philosophy. But that would be inconsistent with his claim that there are no genuine philosophical theories, and that all philosophical remarks are reminders of things we already know, yet sometimes disregard when we get confused. So there is a curious consistency in his not offering much in the way of argument for his philosophical views.

His deflationary conception of philosophy is also consistent with, and even derivative from, his new ideas about meaning plus a set of unquestioned philosophical presuppositions he brings to the enterprise. The philosophical presuppositions include the then current and widespread assumptions (i) that philosophical theses are not empirical, and hence must be necessary and apriori, and (ii) that the necessary, the apriori, and the analytic are one and the same. Because he takes these assumptions for granted, he takes it for granted that if there are any philosophical truths, they must be analytic. To this he adds his new conception of meaning—with its rejection of abstract logical forms, its deflationary view of rule-following and algorithmic calculation, and its emphasis on social conditioning as generating agreement in our instinctive applications of words. Having jettisoned his old conception of meaning as something hidden—to be revealed by translating sentences into an idealized calculus of logical forms—and replaced it with a conception of meaning that sees it as arising from unquestioning but socially conditioned agreement, he has little room in his conceptual universe for surprising philosophical truths. Genuinely philosophical truths, if there should be any, can only be necessary and apriori, and so true in virtue of meaning. But how are the analytic truths of interest to a philosopher to be established, if they are not to be translated into the formulas of a logical calculus, and demonstrated by being given rigorous, but sometimes also innovative and insightful, logical proofs? For the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations*, the answer is that they don't need to be established, since they are already accepted as beyond question by competent users of the language. To be sure, they may sometimes need to be brought into focus by assembling examples drawn from ordinary use that bring out the constitutive role they play in our language; but there is little room here for the discovery of genuinely

surprising philosophical truths. Thus, there are clear doctrinal reasons underlying Wittgenstein's deflationary conception of philosophy.

However, there is also an evident problem. His general theses about language and philosophy are not, by any means, obvious or already agreed upon; nor are they the sorts of things that one can just see to be true, once they are pointed out. On the contrary, they seem to require substantial explanation and argument, if they are to be accepted at all. Since Wittgenstein himself doesn't, and for consistency's sake can't, always take on the task, the best we can do is to try to construct the needed arguments and explanations from what he gives us. Often, this requires going substantially beyond what is explicit in the text. It also makes the task of interpreting him treacherous. What, then, are we to make of his general remarks about philosophy and its relation to language? As I understand these remarks, we have no choice but to view them as, to some extent, self-undermining. As in the case of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein's central philosophical theses in the *Investigations* lead to a view of philosophy at variance with the theses themselves. When this happens, something has to be wrong. It is certainly debatable what the chief source of the trouble is. However, it is hard not to see the double identification of the philosophical with (a subset of) the necessary and the apriori, and of these with the analytic, as central to the problem. Like so many other analytic philosophers in the twentieth century, Wittgenstein comes to grief over assumptions about these different modalities that he takes to be obvious. This theme, developed in volume 1, is one we will continue to trace as we discuss the philosophers covered in this volume—until we reach the point at which we have the conceptual tools to challenge the assumptions directly.

As for the immediate historical impact of Wittgenstein's strongly antitheoretical approach to language and philosophy in the *Investigations*, it was certainly felt by the ordinary language philosophers who followed and took much of their inspiration from him. Not surprisingly, we will find a similar disconnect in some of them—between the ambitious, and sometimes revisionary, philosophical theses they defended, and the officially modest and conservative methodology they claimed to practice. On the positive side, there certainly were successful cases in which careful examination of the ordinary use of philosophically significant words resulted in philosophical illumination. However, as we shall see, the ordinary language philosophers also suffered from the lack of a systematic theory of meaning and language use. However, before moving directly

to that story, we need to examine what is arguably the core of the *Investigations*, namely, Wittgenstein's discussion of rule following, and the contentious and revisionary doctrines about psychological language known as *the private language argument* that he derives from that discussion.