

Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* Lecture 2 (continued)

1. We have seen Wittgenstein attacking certain philosophical mythologies that arise in connection with language: hypnotized by the uniformity of language we tend to treat all expressions as names (*PI* 12, 14); hypnotized by the idea that when you point at the shape it is *then* that you are meaning the shape, we postulate a concurrent mental process that makes it so (*PI* 36; cf. *PI* 184). Next he turns to the philosophical mythology surrounding the naming relation itself. Two doctrines are of special concern: (i) that ordinary English proper names are not real names (ii) that real names are names for 'simple' objects.
2. Doctrine (i) had been common to Wittgenstein (the general attitude is well expressed at *TLP* 4.002, 4.0031) and Russell (for whom the only *real* name was 'this': *Logic and Knowledge* p. 201). In *PI* he considers two arguments for it. The first (*PI* 39) is that (P1) Real names lose their meaning when their bearers are destroyed; (P2) An ordinary name (e.g. 'Excalibur') does not lose its meaning when its bearer is destroyed; therefore (C1) Ordinary names are not real names. Wittgenstein's immediate retort (*PI* 40) is to deny (P1) since it confuses the bearer of a name with its meaning. When a man dies his name does not lose its meaning but it does lose its bearer. What non-question-begging reason is there to deny this?
3. A second argument for distinguishing a special class of real names from those ordinarily so-called, one that would answer the last question, comes from the idea (expressed in the final sentence of the quote from Plato *PI* 46a) that real names are the *simple* elements of language. This furnishes the first premise of the following argument: (P3) Real names are not further analysable; (P4) Ordinary names *are* analysable; therefore (C2) real names are not ordinary names. What motivates (P4) in turn is the thought that ordinary names refer to complex objects (e.g. a broomstick): statements involving them can therefore be analysed into ones containing terms referring to their constituents (e.g. the brush and the broomstick). This conception of analysis was prominent in the *Tractatus*: and it is supposed to terminate in names for simple objects (*TLP* 2.0201; see also *PI* 87a).
4. But Wittgenstein rejects that motivation for (P4) (*PI* 60). He denies that what you are saying when you say 'The broom is in the corner' is revealed more clearly by such an analysis as 'The brush is in the corner and the broomstick is in the corner and the broomstick is attached to the brush'. The point is not that they mean different things, for he concedes that they may mean the same (*PI* 61); the point is that there is no special reason to think that one of them is more *fundamental* i.e. that it puts the same thing in essentially *simpler* terms (*PI* 63). Now you might argue that he is wrong about this because the supposed analysis corrects (or is at least on the way to correcting) the vagueness of what it replaces. Wittgenstein discusses that somewhat later (see *PI* 88).
5. Moving on to doctrine (ii): again Wittgenstein considers two arguments for it. The first (*PI* 46a) is from Plato: names, being the simple elements of language (the things that are combined to make sentences) cannot by themselves describe any situation in reality. So (P5) It cannot make sense to say 'A exists'

or 'A does not exist' when 'A' is a real name. But (P6) it always makes sense to say 'A exists' if 'A' refers to a complex (e.g. 'London exists'), because you are saying that the components of the complex are connected in a certain way. Hence (C3) a real name can only refer to something simple.

6. But Wittgenstein denies (P6): his reason is based on an analogy with the standard metre rod (*PI* 50). This is something of which (he thinks) it makes no sense to say either that it is or that it is not 1m long. Why? Not because there is anything special about that rod but simply because it plays a certain role in the practice of measurement i.e. that it is the final arbiter. Similarly, those things of which, *in a given language*, it makes no sense to say that they exist or that they do not, have no special properties. It is simply that they play a certain role in *that* language: they are the things whose names in that language have no further explanation (e.g. names for the kings on a chess board in a language for describing the disposition of the pieces). 'What looks as if it *had* to exist, is part of the language'. (Kripke has objected to what Wittgenstein says here about the metre rod: *Naming and Necessity* pp. 56ff. But as far as I can see this criticism has no bearing on Wittgenstein's use of the analogy.)
7. But now we are going to object that a language of which (P6) is false is one that somehow fails to match up to reality. For it *presents* as simple what is *really* complex and so in a sense misleads us as to the structure of reality. So could we not at least say that in the *ideal* language the names refer to simples? Wittgenstein denies this on the grounds that there *is* no absolute notion of 'simplicity' or 'composition'; there is therefore no saying absolutely whether a language approaches more or less closely to such an ideal. 'Is the colour of a square on a chessboard simple, or does it consist of pure white and pure yellow? And is white simple, or does it consist of the colours of the rainbow?—Is this length of 2cm. simple, or does it consist of two parts, each 1cm. long? But why not of one bit 3cm. long, and one bit 1cm. long measured in the opposite direction?' (*PI* 47e).
8. The other argument for (ii) is that (P7) It is possible to describe a situation in which everything that can be destroyed has been; (P8) The names in that description must refer to things that exist in that situation; therefore (C4) The names in that description must refer to what is indestructible and hence simple. This argument appears in the *Tractatus* (*TLP* 2.022); here Wittgenstein makes two responses to it (*PI* 55b). The first implicitly points out that (P8) need not be true: from the assumption that names that are meaningful *at some possible world* must refer to something in *that* world in order to describe it, it does not follow that when those terms are used at the *actual* world to describe a possible world they must refer to something in the latter. (Consider the temporal analogue of this argument.) The second point simply repeats the simple-minded objection to (P1): the meaning of e.g. a personal name can easily survive the destruction of its bearer.