Philosophical Investigations
Introduction

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Philosophical Investigations

- We’re using Elizabeth Anscombe’s translation of *Philosophical Investigations* (PI).
- My quotes come from the 4th ed. but others are fine (3rd ed. has different page numbers).
- Lectures: 1pm Mondays, 9am Wednesdays
- Part II Philosophical logic: weeks 1-4; Part II Wittgenstein: weeks 1-6
- Anthony Kenny’s *Wittgenstein* is an excellent guide to the whole text.
Talk outline

Background

Tractarian themes

The Augustinian Picture
After the *Tractatus*

- Wittgenstein finished the *Tractatus* (TLP) in 1918 and it was first published in 1921.
- It was an attempt to say the unsayable.
- Having written it, Wittgenstein abandoned philosophy.
- From 1920 to 1926, he took up teaching in various remote Austrian villages.
- Unfortunately, he hit a boy and had to leave.
After the *Tractatus*

- In 1926, he started working as a monastery gardener, living for a while in a tool shed.
- He was invited by the architect Paul Engelmann to help design a house for Wittgenstein’s sister Margarete.
- The Modernist building now houses the Bulgarian Embassy in Vienna.
- Wittgenstein was especially interested in the door handles, designing an unpainted, tubular model that remains popular.
Door Handle
After the *Tractatus*

- During this time, he met Moritz Schlick.
- He discussed philosophy with Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, Friedrich Weismann and Herbert Feigl.
- Interested in philosophy again, Wittgenstein returned to Cambridge in 1929.
- He submitted TLP as a PhD dissertation, had a *viva* with Russell and Moore and became a research fellow at Trinity.
- Wittgenstein’s work on PI began in Cambridge in the 1930s.
- He completed PI in 1948 in Dublin.
By this time, Wittgenstein’s health was deteriorating.  
In 1949, he was diagnosed with an incurable cancer.  
He died in Cambridge on 29th April 1951 and is buried at the Ascension Burial Ground.  
PI was published posthumously in 1953.
Philosophical Investigations

Four major ideas dominate PI:

1. Meaningful sentences are combinations of names
2. What can be said at all can be said precisely
3. Meaning and understanding are mental processes that accompany speech and writing
4. We can discuss our inner lives independently of the rest of the world
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The *Tractatus*

- The single most influential text on PI is undoubtedly TLP.
- The first 100 or so sections are an attack on TLP.
- Let’s consider the three TLP doctrines that are most important to understanding PI:
  1. logical atomism
  2. the picture theory of meaning
  3. the saying/showing distinction
Idealism

- Idealism derives from Kant’s *transcendental* idealism.
- Roughly, it’s the view that direct access to reality – unmediated by experience or thought – is impossible.
- Idealism was probably the dominant view in late nineteenth century British philosophy.
- Russell hated it (see *The Problems of Philosophy*, 1912).
- For Russell, direct *knowledge by acquaintance* is possible, but of *sense data* and *universals*. 
Russell also wanted to account for *intentionality*: the *aboutness* of entities like propositions and beliefs. Acquaintance again gave the answer. Propositions are composed of the objects of our acquaintance. So intentionality is *identity*.
Problem: surely propositions can be about entities with which I'm not acquainted, e.g. Socrates
Answer: theory of descriptions
In this way, propositions about Socrates only include objects of acquaintance.
Wittgenstein called this process ‘analysis’ (TLP, 3.2-3.201).
Logical atomism

- Some names are *logically proper*.
- These are the names for entities that cannot have failed to exist.
- The logically proper names refer to the indestructible and simple components of the world.
- This view is *logical atomism*. 
The Context Principle

- At the start of his *Grundlagen* (1884) Frege commits himself to the principle:
  
  never to ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition

- Wittgenstein (TLP, 3.314) similarly endorsed the principle:
  
  an expression has meaning only in a proposition

- He therefore needed to account for how names can combine to form sentences.
The Picture Theory

- His answer was the picture theory of meaning.
- A proposition *pictures* the world as being a certain way.
- This is the way the world has to be for the proposition to be true.
- The entities making up the propositions are not the real-world objects but linguistic proxies.
- Hence the possibility of false propositions
- This is a sort of *identity* theory: names combine in the same way as their worldly correlates.
The Picture Theory

- Obvious question: what is *picturing*?
- Wittgenstein thought that propositions partition possible worlds.
- There are those worlds in which the proposition is true and those in which it is false.
- If the actual world is amongst the first group, the proposition is plain true.
- Tautologies and contradictions fail to partition in this way.
- They are *senseless*. 
A *sign* is a word or arrangement of words.

A *symbol* is what a sign becomes when it is read as saying something.

That the sign ‘cat’ refers to cats is a contingent fact of English.

But that the symbol refers to cats is not contingent.
“The symbol ‘p’ says that p” is necessary.
It doesn’t partition possible worlds.
Is it senseless?
Consider ‘it is Monday or it isn’t’.
That’s a tautology, and so senseless, but we can get close to its meaning with sensible propositions:
  - It’s Monday or it’s Tuesday
  - It’s Monday or it’s Tuesday or it’s Wednesday
  
The same process cannot work with the original example.
It is *nonsense*: it doesn’t have the right shape to have sense.
Nonsense

- Now consider ‘torturing puppies is wrong’.
- This turns out to be necessary for Wittgenstein.
- But it’s not a tautology: clearly its truth is not a matter of logic.
- So it’s nonsense.
- Hence the dissolution of traditional philosophical questions
Saying and Showing

- On this view, language cannot *say* what its terms denote.
- But it can *show* various important things.
- E.g. it can show the object-property structure of the world.
- That there are limits to what can be said is a crucial theme of TLP.
- We’ll see that this view only becomes more radical in PI.
The Tractatus

- Of course, the whole of TLP is an attempt to talk about just this.
- Hence the book is, strictly, nonsense.
- Nevertheless, it can show.
- On this view, philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity.
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The Augustinian Picture
The Augustinian Picture

When grown-ups named some object and at the same time turned towards it, I perceived this, and I grasped that the thing was signified by the sound they uttered, since they meant to point it out. This, however, I gathered from their gestures, the natural language of all peoples, the language that by means of facial expression and the play of eyes, of the movements of the limbs and the tone of voice, indicates the affections of the soul when it desires, or clings to, or rejects, or recoils from, something. In this way, little by little, I learnt to understand what things the words, which I heard uttered in their respective places in various sentences, signified. And once I got my tongue around these signs, I used them to express my wishes. (St Augustine, Confessions, quoted in PI, 1)
The Augustinian Picture

- The Augustinian picture:
  1. names mean what they denote
  2. language consists of arrangements of names
  3. names are introduced by ostension
- This sort of picture was accepted by Locke.
- At least 1 and 2 are present in TLP.
- The picture offers a uniform treatment of language.
- Grasping the meaning of a word is a cognitive achievement.
- We have entities pointed out to us.
Wittgenstein spends sections 1–64 of PI arguing against this picture.

Before we consider his arguments, let’s set some terminology.

Lots of the arguments involve toy languages, e.g. a language consisting wholly of orders, or a colour grid.

These simple languages, along with the associated linguistic behaviour, are language-games.