

*Philosophical Investigations*  
Family resemblance

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## Last lecture

- ▶ We considered two thoughts about naming:
  1. ordinary names are not real ones
  2. real names name simple objects
- ▶ Wittgenstein looked at arguments for both and found them wanting.
- ▶ In PI 65, he began to question the methodology of language-games.

# Talk outline

Games

Rules

Logic and philosophy

## Games

*Consider, for example, the activities that we call “games”. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, athletic-games, and so on. What is common to them all? – Don’t say: “They must have something in 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 won’t see something that is common to all, but similarities, affinities, and a whole series of them at that. (66)*

# Games

- ▶ He suggests various candidate properties in common:
  - ▶ entertainment?
  - ▶ winning and losing?
  - ▶ skill?
  - ▶ luck?
  - ▶ gambling?

*And the upshot of these considerations is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: similarities in the large and in the small. (66)*

## Family resemblance

*I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than “family resemblances”; for the various resemblances between members of the family – build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth – overlap and criss-cross in the same way. – And I shall say: ‘games’ form a family. (67)*

## Response

- ▶ A possible response:

*But if someone wanted to say, “So there is something in common to all these constructions – namely, the disjunction of all their common properties” – I’d reply: Now you are only playing with a word. One might as well say, “There is a Something that runs through the whole thread – namely, the continuous overlapping of these fibres”.  
(67)*

- ▶ This response seems hopeless.
- ▶ When we are trying to characterise a *game*, we want to pick out one common theme.
- ▶ This point is lost if we take the disjunction.

# Talk outline

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## Family resemblance

- ▶ What else can we say about family resemblance concepts?
- ▶ They have vague boundaries: there will be borderline cases. (68)
- ▶ There may be precise concepts in the vicinity: he gives the example of *number*, understood as the sum of cardinals, ordinals, reals, etc.
- ▶ Likewise, we may find precise notions of e.g. *card game*.
- ▶ But, borderline cases aside, there are clear exemplars of games and non-games.

# Vagueness

- ▶ We should be careful to keep vague concepts and family resemblance concepts apart.
- ▶ The number concepts offered may be a case of family resemblance.
- ▶ And 'number' may be *ambiguous* between cardinal, ordinal, etc.
- ▶ But each of these is precise.
- ▶ So vagueness isn't *necessary* for family resemblance.
- ▶ Also consider the concept *baldness*: it admits of a simple analysis.
- ▶ But it is clearly vague.
- ▶ So vagueness isn't *sufficient* either.

# Learning

- ▶ How would you *explain* the notion of a game?
- ▶ You'd probably point to clear-cut cases and say 'things like that'.
- ▶ Of course, you could be misunderstood, but this could always happen. (70–1)
- ▶ Part of the point is that games are *mundane*.
- ▶ We aren't tempted to think there is some inaccessible, Platonic ideal of *game*.
- ▶ And so with language.

## Seeing what is in common

- ▶ Perhaps I can introduce you to a colour by providing samples.
- ▶ You can then build a mental image of the colour:

*Suppose I show someone multi-coloured pictures, and say: "The colour you see in all these is called 'yellow ochre'." – This is an explanation that another person will come to understand by looking for, and seeing, what is common to the pictures. Then he can look at, can point to, the common feature. (72)*

## Seeing what is in common

- ▶ But is there a single idea to grasp?

*What shade is the 'sample in my mind' of the colour green – the sample of what is common to all shades of green? "But might there not be such 'general' sample? ... a sample of pure green?" Certainly! ... for a snippet of pure green to be understood as a sample of all that is greenish, and not as a sample of pure green – this in turn resides in the way the samples are applied. (73)*

# Samples

- ▶ This procedure doesn't remove the vagueness in 'green'.
- ▶ Instead, it seems to have relocated the vagueness.
- ▶ The problem becomes 'does this colour match the colour of the sample?'
- ▶ And that will admit of borderline cases too.
- ▶ This idea – of a mismatch between mental image and meaning – will be crucial in the rule-following considerations.

# Shape

- ▶ Further, Wittgenstein draws an analogy with shape:  
*Ask yourself, what shape must the sample of the colour green be? Should it be rectangular? Or would it then be a sample of green rectangles? – So should it be 'irregular' in shape? And what is then to prevent us from viewing it – that is, from using it, only as a sample of irregularity of shape? (73)*
- ▶ What in the *sample* shows me that I should attend to colour and not shape?
- ▶ Nothing: only my *use* can show this.
- ▶ And so with language.

# Rules

- ▶ It seems that language isn't everywhere governed by *rules*.
- ▶ Does this point to a *deficiency* of language?
- ▶ What is 'the rule by which he proceeds' (82)?
- ▶ Often observation will not reveal a rule.
- ▶ And nor will asking.

## Rules and games

- ▶ A further analogy with games:

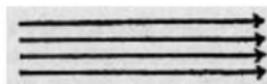
*Doesn't the analogy between language and games throw light here? We can easily imagine people amusing themselves in a field by playing with a ball like this: starting various existing games, but playing several without finishing them, and in between throwing the ball aimlessly into the air, chasing one another with the ball, throwing it at one another for a joke, and so on. And now someone says: The whole time they are playing a ball-game and therefore are following definite rules at every throw. And is there not also the case where we play, and make up the rules as we go along? And even where we alter them – as we go along? (83)*

- ▶ Games sometimes don't everywhere define rules.
- ▶ And there is sometimes room for improvisation.

# Rules

- ▶ Recall the builders' language from Lecture 2.
- ▶ Is this not fully governed by rules?
- ▶ Imagine the language-game represented by a table, associating words with pictures.
- ▶ There is still room for misinterpretation (86):

Suppose different ways of reading a table were now introduced; one time, as above, according to the schema:



another time like this:



or in some other way.—Such a schema is supplied with the table as the rule for its use.

# Learning

- ▶ We could a rule for how to read the arrows.
- ▶ But *that* could be misinterpreted.
- ▶ How could we know if the rule has been misinterpreted?

*The signpost is in order – if, under normal circumstances, it fulfils its purpose. (87)*

# Talk outline

Games

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## Tractatus

- ▶ The picture we are developing is radically different to that of TLP.

*logic seemed to have a peculiar depth – a universal significance. Logic lay, it seemed, at the foundation of all the sciences. – For logical investigation explores the essence of all things. It seeks to see the foundation of things, and shouldn't concern itself whether things actually happen in this or that way. – It arises neither from an interest in the facts of nature, nor from a need to grasp causal connections, but from an urge to understand the foundations, or essence, of everything empirical. Not, however, as if to this end we had to hunt out new facts; it is, rather, essential to our investigation that we do not seek to learn anything new by it. We want to understand something that is already in plain view.*

(89)

## Tractatus

- ▶ The concern had been: how can propositions reflect reality?
- ▶ How can a *mere sentence* express something of the world.

*'Remarkable things, propositions!' Here we already have the sublimation of our whole account of logic. The tendency to assume a pure intermediary between the propositional sign and the facts. Or even to try to purify, to sublimate, the sign itself. – For our forms of expression, which send us in pursuit of chimeras, prevent us in all sorts of ways from seeing that nothing extraordinary is involved. (94)*

# Tractatus

- ▶ We become dissatisfied with the *signs* of English.
- ▶ We want to describe the nature of reality.
- ▶ And we are seduced by the clarity of logic.
- ▶ So we use logic's forms as an *abstract* intermediary between natural language and the world.
- ▶ We will see that Wittgenstein ultimately dismisses this methodology as just another *spiritual* mechanism.

# Logic

- ▶ In light of this, Wittgenstein wants to bring logic back down to Earth:

*The sense in which philosophy of logic speaks of sentences and words is no different from that in which we speak of them in ordinary life when we say, for example, 'What is written here is a Chinese sentence' ... We're talking about the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language, not about some non-spatial, atemporal non-entity. ... But we talk about it as we do about the pieces in chess when we are stating the rules for their moves, not describing their physical properties. (108)*

# Philosophy

- ▶ Wittgenstein goes on to consider philosophy more generally.
- ▶ He takes many philosophical problems to be nonsensical:

*When philosophers use a word – “knowledge”, “being”, “object”, “I”, “proposition/ sentence”, “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 in which it is at home? –*

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

- ▶ The task of the philosopher, on this view, is to remind those pondering metaphysical questions of the everyday meaning of their words.

# Philosophy

- ▶ Consider the discussion of ostension.
- ▶ It *seems* like there is a fact in virtue of which I mean *chair* when I point to a chair, and not its colour.
- ▶ We say 'I meant *this* and not *that*' but here there is a confusion.
- ▶ We are misled to think that these are names.  
*philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday. And then we may indeed imagine naming to be some remarkable mental act (38)*

*Our inquiry is therefore a grammatical one. And this inquiry sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away. Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, brought about, among other things, by certain analogies between forms of expression in different regions of our language. (90)*

# Philosophy

- ▶ Certainly, when someone says 'all words are names', the meaning of 'name' has been stretched beyond its usual meaning.
- ▶ Why should we then dismiss the claim as *nonsense*?
- ▶ Not just *any* meaning can be given to 'name'.
- ▶ And the more precise, philosophical meaning is clearly a *development* of the original.

# Philosophy

- ▶ What is wrong with this conception of philosophy?
- ▶ Wittgenstein seems to think that it renders philosophy too empirical (109).
- ▶ E.g. if I sharpen the thesis that 'all words are names' to 'all words are learnt by ostension', that gives the endeavour an empirical shape.
- ▶ Similarly, philosophy should not change the way we speak (124).
- ▶ It should also not allow us to deduce anything new:  
*Philosophy just puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. – Since everything lies open to view, there is nothing to explain. (126)*

# Philosophy

- ▶ How plausible is this view of philosophy?
- ▶ Wittgenstein's conception is roughly: philosophy is an *a priori* process of reminding ourselves of the ordinary use of words so we do not ask confused questions.
- ▶ This is surely an important pursuit.
- ▶ But it also seems too limited.
- ▶ Many theories we would want to call philosophical have had empirical import.
- ▶ And the task of sharpening everyday notions has proved fruitful.

# Lessons

- ▶ *Language* is a family resemblance concept, like *game*.
- ▶ Like a game, language is not everywhere governed by *rules*.
- ▶ This view departs radically from TLP.
- ▶ Unlike the TLP, logic now has no special status.
- ▶ But like TLP, philosophy is a therapeutic process.