

WITTGENSTEIN *PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS* LECTURE 3

1. *PI* 36 concludes the early material on ostensive definition. Ostensive definition had seemed (for instance to Russell) to make the essential connection between a name and what it names; and from the late 30s onwards there is an extended discussion of this and associated delusions. But first (*PI* 37) Wittgenstein sketches his own view of what that connection is. The most important things to understand about it are (a) that the basic phenomenon is not reference but linguistic use; (b) there is no one pattern of use underlying the cases in which a name refers to a thing.
2. The meaning of (a) is that 'Jones's referring to this person doesn't explain the way we use the word 'Jones'; it is rather *because* we use the name Jones in such and such a way that we say "'Jones" refers to this person'. This is the point of 43b: typically the meaning of a word is its use in the language, and this meaning – this use – can in the case of a name be explained by pointing at a particular object. "'Jones" refers to this person' does not explain or underlie but sums up, in an elliptical but useful way, what we do with that word.
3. Well, what *do* we do with it? 'Among many other things, this relation may also consist in the fact that hearing a name calls before our mind the picture of what is named; and sometimes in the name's being written on the thing named or in its being uttered when the thing named is pointed at'. This *and many other things* are what we call 'reference'. The vagueness and open-endedness of 'and many other things' brings us to point (b). There just is no one thing in which the relation of reference consists. Contrast this with (for instance) Kripke's 'causal theory of reference' (see Lecture II of *Naming and Necessity*).
4. Wittgenstein moves on to discuss other superstitions about names and the things that they name, the most important of these being connected with his motivations for logical atomism in the *Tractatus*. One of these is the idea (*PI* 46a) that real names are *simple* elements of language that refer to *simple* elements of reality. One of the thoughts behind this is the characteristically Tractarian idea that whatever can be said at all can be said with *complete clarity*. This in turn led him to the quasi-Russellian doctrine that sentences of ordinary language could be analyzed in a way that made their logical connections fully explicit. This analysis terminates in names for simple objects (*TLP* 2.0201; cf. *PI* 87a). But Wittgenstein rejects that (*PI* 60). He denies that what 'The broom is in the corner' says is revealed more clearly by its analyzed form: as it might be, 'The brush is in the corner and the broomstick is in the corner and the broomstick is attached to the brush' (*PI* 63).
5. Another argument that names refer to simple objects (*PI* 46a) is from Plato: names being simple cannot by themselves describe any situation in reality. So (a) it cannot make sense to say 'A exists' or 'A does not exist' when 'A' is a real name. But (b) 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

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connected. Hence names must refer to the simple, indestructible elements of reality.

6. But Wittgenstein denies (b) by 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, if *in a given language* it makes no sense to say that X exists or does not, this doesn't mean that X has any magic powers: it is just that 'X' plays 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'.
7. You might object that a language of which (b) is false 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 not the names of an *ideal* language denote 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 (*PI* 47).
8. At *PI* 65 Wittgenstein raises the objection that his former self would have wanted to make from around section 19. The discussion so far has looked at many 'languages': ones whose terms do not refer (1), whose sentences do not represent (2, 8, 15), whose names can be meaningful without referring (41) or whose sentences are complexes of names (48). But why are *these* activities more properly called 'language' than e.g. monetary transactions? Doesn't language have an essence? So what is it? (cf. *TLP* 6)
9. Here we reach the famous comparison with games, implicit all along in the term 'language-game' (*PI* 7). One reason for *that* term was to emphasize that words only become a language if connected with human activities (*PI* 23). But another reason was to bring out this similarity between languages and games: *no one thing makes us use the same word for all* (*PI* 65). 'Language' like 'game' is a *family resemblance concept*.
10. Thus there are different similarities between games. As Wittgenstein says (*PI* 66b) these can be criss-cross: some games resemble one another in respect of being played with cards (like poker and snap), others in respect of involving a gambling element (poker and backgammon). And they may overlap: snakes and ladders resembles backgammon in that they are both board games *and* both dice games. So no one thing makes us apply 'game' in all cases. If you reply that the *disjunction* of all these makes us apply 'game' in every case, then that defeats the whole point of distinguishing between cases in which and in which there isn't *one* thing (*PI* 67c; cf. 14).

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