WITTGENSTEIN *PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS* LECTURE 1

1. Much of *PI* either directly criticizes or somehow develops W.'s earlier work. It is therefore worth briefly sketching those three *Tractatus* doctrines that have the most relevance to it. These are: logical atomism, the picture theory of meaning and the saying/showing distinction.

2. The *Tractatus* drew what its author always considered an inevitable consequence of a conception of language that the early W. shared with Russell (and which Russell developed in *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*). It has two components: (i) that meaning is not contingent (ii) that the meaning of a name is its reference. Claim (i) can itself mean either that one is *certain* of what one's words mean or that their meanings cannot have failed to exist. Russell took the first line; W. took the second. In conjunction with (ii) this means that the genuine names of a language (not the ordinary ones: *PI* 39a) refer to the indestructible and therefore simple basic components of the world (*TLP* 2.02-2.023; cf. *PI* 46). This is logical atomism.

3. Now the primary vehicle of meaning is not the word but the sentence (this was Frege's famous *context principle* to which W. adhered consistently: *TLP* 3.3; *PI* 49). Accordingly the theory of meaning as so far described is inadequate: we need to be told how names can combine to make sentences. In the *Tractatus* W.'s answer was the picture theory. A sentence represents a fact by *being* a fact: 'John is tall' is the fact that the object *'John'* has the property of *being to the left of 'is tall'*; and this represents the fact that the object *John* has the property of *being tall*. In the depicting fact the object and the property stand respectively for the object and the property in the depicted fact.

4. According to this pictorial theory of meaning a language can never *say* what its terms denote without presupposing another; and if thought is itself in a language ('that language which alone I understand'—*TLP* 5.62) then the formal similarity between my language and the reality it describes can never be explicitly grasped. However language is itself a signal of that form: it reveals the nature of the world (see *TLP* 6.124): for instance (cf. the example above) it reveals the 'object-predicate' structure of reality. But this can only be *shown*. It cannot be *said*. It is evident how this doctrine contributed to the mysticism for which the *Tractatus* is famous; perhaps also that Schopenhauer is here exerting a strong influence on W.—by no means for the last time. And that there are limits to what can be said was a theme that haunted W. throughout his career. In the later work it re-emerges in the treatment of ostension (*PI* 28-36) and of rule-following (*PI* 85-7, 138-201). What was mysterious in the earlier work was located in the hidden nature of reality as revealed by language. But in the later work—and this is why it is so disorienting—it is the everyday that begins to seem mysterious.

5. The first 100-odd sections of *PI* criticize the picture theory and logical atomism. Perhaps the best way to sum up their drift is as follows: it is a

mistake to believe in a *single* philosophical account of *all* language.

6. Returning to doctrine (ii) of no. 2 above: we see it and much else in the passage from St Augustine with which *Philosophical Investigations* begins. We may begin with these three points: (a) that names mean what they denote, (b) that language consists of arrangements of names (both present in the *Tractatus*: see *TLP* 4.0311, 3.203), and (c) that names may be introduced into language by means of ostension. This last was not a doctrine of the *Tractatus* but it was one of Russell's; one of its instances is the target of the 'private language argument' (*PI* 258). The picture is certainly attractive: it looks on the face of it as though grasping a word is *some* kind of cognitive achievement i.e. that it involves a grasp of some *thing*. And what could that be other than the reference of the word? And how could we grasp it other than by having it pointed out to us?

7. W. doesn't explicitly argue against this line in the sense of presenting counterexamples. Instead he looks at the way we *use* words and asks just what that has got to do with the meaning that St Augustine identified. In this lecture I consider the conjunction of (a) and (b) from no. 6 above. Look at the 'grocer' example (*PI* 1d). Here we are not told that 'five' or 'red' means something *other* than what it denotes. The point is rather that our actual operations with these words continue in total indifference to *what* they denote. (It might occur to you to wonder why W. chooses this highly unrealistic as well as slightly mechanical example. The answer—see S. Mulhall: *Philosophical Myths of the Fall*—is that the passage has a second and hidden meaning.)

8. The next three sections (*PI* 2-4) expand on *PI* 1c: the Augustinian picture is more appropriate to some kinds than to others. There is no reason to think it applies to all (or none) of them. Thus compare the first 'builders' example (*PI* 2b) with the 'grocer' example. There is some point in attributing to the word 'block' what Augustine thought was its meaning i.e. blocks: for it is blocks that the second builder picks up when he hears the word 'block'. Does any analogous point about the customer's operations with the word 'five' motivate saying that it refers to what Augustine would have called *its* meaning (i.e. the number five)?

9. None of this can *compel* us to deny that the meaning of an expression is in all cases its reference. We *could* say that however it is *used*, each word refers none the less to *something* (including 'five', 'not' and so on). But what is the point? The question is not whether that doctrine can be defended through thick and thin but whether it was worth proposing in the first place. And here W. thinks we are misled: we take the apparent uniformity in the *form* of our words to indicate a real uniformity in their meaning (cf. the 'locomotive' example: *PI* 12). And if we *do* insist that all words stand in a relation called 'reference' to some bit of extraverbal reality then 'reference' becomes so exiguous that so far we have said *nothing* (cf. the 'tools' example: *PI* 14).