WITTGENSTEIN *PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS* LECTURE 3

1. We have seen Wittgenstein attacking philosophical mythologies of 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 returns to the naming relation. 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 name was 'this': *Logic and Knowledge* 201; *PI* 38a). *PI* considers two arguments for it. First (*PI* 39): (P1) Real names lose their meaning when their bearers are destroyed; (P2) An ordinary name ('Excalibur') does not; therefore (i). Wittgenstein retorts (*PI* 40) that (P1) confuses the bearer of a name with its meaning. When a man dies his name loses its bearer but *not* its meaning. What non-question-begging reason is there to deny this?

3. A second argument for distinguishing real names from 'apparent' ones, that would answer the last question, comes from the idea (*PI* 46a) that real names are *simple* elements of language. Thus: (P3) Real names are not further analysable; (P4) Ordinary names *are* analysable; therefore (i). What motivates (P4) is that ordinary names refer to complexes (e.g. a broomstick): statements involving them can therefore be analysed into ones containing terms for their constituents (e.g. brush and broomstick). This analysis terminates in names for simple objects (*TLP* 2.0201; cf. *PI* 87a). But Wittgenstein rejects that motivation for (P4) (*PI* 60). He denies that what 'The broom is in the corner' says is revealed more clearly by e.g. 'The brush is in the corner and the broomstick is in the corner and the broomstick is attached to the brush' (*PI* 63).

4. Moving on to (ii): Wittgenstein considers two arguments for it. The first (*PI* 46a) is from Plato: names being simple 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. Hence (ii).

5. But Wittgenstein denies (P6) 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'.

6. You might object that a language of which (P6) 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).

7. The other argument for (ii) is that (P7) You can describe a situation where everything destructible has been destroyed; (P8) If you can do so then the names in that description must refer to things that exist in that situation; therefore (ii). This argument appears in the *Tractatus* (*TLP* 2.022); here Wittgenstein makes two responses (*PI* 55b). The first is that (P8) need not be true: we must distinguish the *actual* capacity of language to describe all possibilities from its necessary meaningfulness. 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.

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 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).