

WITTGENSTEIN *PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS* LECTURE 4

1. *PI* 68 suggests that family resemblance concepts have this *additional* feature: one can possess such a concept without grasping any clear line between what does and what doesn't fall under it i.e. the concept has no sharp boundary. But then why say that we possess the concept at all?—or that it *is* a concept? Wittgenstein doesn't separate these questions. There is for him *no* difficulty in possessing a genuine concept even if its boundaries are vague. You understand what you know in *most* cases how to use—perhaps excluding *borderline* cases (*PI* 69-70; cf. 'stand roughly here' at *PI* 71, 88).
2. But if nothing is common then how did I learn 'game'? Well, how would *you* explain it? By giving examples of games and saying 'games are things like that' etc. And here you aren't *merely gesturing* at the essential thing within your breast that for some reason cannot be said but to which these words somehow point. For your words *could* be misunderstood—but then so could any definition of anything (*PI* 70-1). And here we see a third reason why 'game' was apt: its mundanity. There is no temptation to think that there is a true form of *game*, accessible to the mind but not to verbal description. Whereas philosophers since Plato *have* thought this about such concepts as 'language', 'proposition'—e.g. W. himself (cf. *PI* 97).
3. At *PI* 72-3 Wittgenstein drives home the point against the 'secret inner meaning' at which examples can only gesture. He considers the case where it is most plausible: the idea you associate with e.g. 'green'. I can give you examples of green things: but in order to get what I mean, don't you have to 'see what they have in common'? So Locke thought (*Essay* III.iii.6-7). At *PI* 73a Wittgenstein raises Berkeley's objection: how can a single idea of green have the colour of all its shades? Instead what we have, if anything, is a perfectly determinate shade that we *use* in a certain way (*PI* 73b).
4. But then he undermines the whole idea that grasping a concept can be modelled on *perception* at all ('*seeing* what is common'). If grasping 'green' *consists* in seeing a sample of it (in my mind or in my pocket) then why isn't its *shape* as relevant to my use of 'green' as its colour (*PI* 73c)? What *in the sample* can show me this? And if nothing can, then what generates my ability to *use* the sample properly? And then why can't my ability to use *the word* properly come from there too?
5. But isn't it a deficiency of our language that its use is not everywhere governed by rules? *PI* 82-3 asks what it is for such applications to be governed by a *rule*: what do we call 'the rule by which he proceeds'? And at *PI* 83 he mentions a fourth point of comparison with games. It is possible to play a game in which rules do *not* everywhere bind one's activities (*PI* 83a); also the possibility that one makes up or alters the rules as one goes along (*PI* 83b).
6. But now he makes the further point that the 'clarity' requirement is not only unsatisfied but incoherent. Perhaps the clearest example in this

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connection is the addition to the first language game of the builders (*PI* 2b) of a table relating each expression to a picture of what it denotes (*PI* 86a). Wittgenstein points out that even here there is a sense in which everything is still open: for the table can itself be read in many different ways. Nor would it help to add a schema consisting of arrows telling you how to read *it*. In *that* sense a rule *cannot* cover all possibilities; but in the *other* sense of 'bounded by rules' (*PI* 85—it 'leaves no room for doubt') wouldn't it be true to say that the original language *was* completely so bounded? 'The sign-post is in order—if, under normal circumstances, it fulfils its purpose' (*PI* 87).

7. There now begins (*PI* 89) a lengthy soul-searching: Wittgenstein asks himself how he could have got into the position from which language, logic and reality appeared as described in the *Tractatus*. There the problem had been how propositions can represent reality: how any such thing as an ordinary sentence could achieve the miracle of sense i.e. of being able to say *this—is—so* (*PI* 95, 435; for the contrast with Russell see *PI* 441, 460).
8. The result was the *sublimation* of logic (*PI* 94): dissatisfied with the ordinary signs themselves we seek a pure *abstract* intermediary to be the thing that reaches right out to reality (*PI* 94; cf. the postulation of a *spiritual* mechanism lecture 2 no. 8). He rejects this at *PI* 108: the philosophy of logic treats of the natural and spatiotemporal phenomenon that we meant by 'language' all along.
9. He takes this to raise a question about philosophy itself. For in these sections he introduces his conception of philosophy problems as essentially grammatical phenomena and their resolution as therapeutic activity. The preceding discussion of ostension illustrates the idea. It seems as though there must be something going on *when* you point at a man in virtue of which you mean *him* and not e.g. his colour; and it seems this way because we say 'I meant him *then*' (see lecture 2 no. 9). Here we have a 'misunderstanding caused... by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language' (*PI* 90b; cf. *TLP* 4.003, *PI* 38, 195).
10. The source of the problem dictates its solution. Wittgenstein agrees with his earlier self that philosophy cannot be or involve *scientific* enquiry (*TLP* 4.111; *PI* 109). So philosophy does not force us to change what we say (*PI* 124). Nor does it even *deduce* anything from what we say (*PI* 126b) but only lays the latter clear to view: *PI* 125 illustrates how he applies this to mathematics. It is difficult to square this view of philosophy with anything other than a very limited view of its history e.g. one that takes it to have begun in Cambridge at the start of the twentieth century. Perhaps more to the point it is difficult to square with a great deal of what Wittgenstein himself says and does.