Saying and Showing and the Continuity of Wittgenstein's Thought

By Marie McGinn

1. WITTGENSTEIN'S REJECTION OF THE IDEA THAT PHILOSOPHY RESULTS IN PHILOSOPHICAL doctrine is a central element in his thought from the very outset. In the Preface to the *Tractatus*, he stresses that the work is "not a textbook" (*TLP*, p.3). He describes the aim of the book as one of "draw[ing] a limit to thought" or "to the expression of thoughts" (*TLP*, p.3). In *TLP* 4.112, he remarks that "a philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations" and that it "does not result in 'philosophical propositions'." And in the penultimate remark of the work, after characterizing his propositions as "elucidations," he glosses what he means by this as follows: "anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)" (*TLP* 6.54). It seems clear from this that, however we understand the philosophical activity of "elucidation," nothing substantial—nothing that could be viewed as a philosophical answer to a philosophical question—should survive at the end of it. What remains unclear is exactly what the activity of elucidation amounts to or what exactly its purpose is. The word suggests that something is illuminated or clarified, but are we to understand this process of clarification as leading to a form of philosophical understanding or insight? If so, does that mean that there is a kind of philosophical understanding that cannot be expressed in the form of a philosophical doctrine about what is the case? The idea may strike us immediately as problematic. It seems to threaten to turn philosophy into something mystical or irrational.

James Conant and Cora Diamond have argued very persuasively that any attempt to preserve the idea that Wittgenstein intends the philosophical activity in which he is engaged to lead to a distinctive sort of insight or understanding—one whose "unsayability...precludes its being said, [but] which we can nevertheless grasp"[1]—fails to do justice to the radical nature of his thought. If we take seriously Wittgenstein's claim that he eschews philosophical doctrine, then the only end of the philosophical activity in which he is engaged must, they argue, be the realization that there are no philosophical insights—expressible or otherwise—to be had:

> The aim is to undo our attraction to various grammatically well-formed strings of words that resonate with the aura of sense. The silence [Wittgenstein] wishes to leave us in at the end is one in which nothing has been said and there is nothing to say (of the sort we had imagined there to be)....The silence we are left with is not a pregnant silence that comes with

Marie McGinn is a senior lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the University of York. Her most recent work is the Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Wittgenstein and the *Philosophical Investigations.*

a conscious posture of guarding the sanctity of the ineffable.[2]

Diamond and Conant's "austere conception" of Wittgenstein's philosophical aims certainly provides a way of reading the *Tractatus* that succeeds in making the image of the ladder in 6.54 a persuasive and plausible description of the book's intended achievement. On this reading, nothing is left standing at the end of the work: all philosophy, including the remarks that make up the *Tractatus*, have been revealed as nonsensical. As Conant puts it, Wittgenstein is using "one piece of nonsense...[to] show that another less self-evidently nonsensical piece of nonsense is nonsense."[3] The idea that 6.54 must somehow serve as the key to the *Tractatus* is, I think, completely persuasive. Diamond and Conant seem to me absolutely correct in arguing that we must find a way of reading the text on which it is free of metaphysical or theoretical assertion. However, I do not find their particular way of achieving this aim entirely satisfactory. It seems to me that something is going on in the text other than the exposure of philosophical utterances (including those that make up the work) as nonsense. It is not only that this idea strikes me as inherently paradoxical, but it seems to me that there is a positive aspect to Wittgenstein's philosophical achievement in the *Tractatus* that is in danger of being lost in Diamond and Conant's preoccupation with the distinction between sense and nonsense. What I want to do in this paper is to defend a less austere interpretation of Wittgenstein's early work, which follows Diamond and Conant's avoidance of committing him to philosophical doctrines (including ineffable ones), but which sees him as doing more than showing that philosophical utterances fail to express determinate thoughts. My interpretation will also preserve Diamond and Conant's claim that there is a profound continuity between the early and the later philosophy.

Diamond and Conant seem to me absolutely correct in arguing that we must find a way of reading the text on which it is free of metaphysical or theoretical assertion. However...it seems to me that something is going on in the text other than the exposure of philosophical utterances (including those that make up the work) as nonsense.

2. It is reasonable to connect Wittgenstein's characterization of his remarks as "elucidations" with his view of the problems that his text deals with, namely the problems of philosophy. He expresses his view of these problems in the Preface to the *Tractatus* as follows: "The book deals with the problems of philosophy and shows, I believe, that the reason why these problems are posed is that the logic of our language is misunderstood" (*TLP*, p.3). He makes the same point at *TLP* 4.003 when he says that "most of the propositions and questions of philosophers arise from our failure to understand the logic of our language." This convic-

tion remains, of course, central to the later philosophy. It is for this reason that the questions of philosophy do not call for discoveries or for the construction of theories. Rather they call for a kind of investigation, the result of which is not that these problems are answered but that they are seen to disappear completely.

However, the idea that the questions of philosophy are not real questions but are based on some kind of misunderstanding might itself give rise to a question. Why, if he is so convinced that philosophical problems are illusory, does Wittgenstein concern himself with them? I think that this is an important question. And it is clear from Wittgenstein's remarks that his view that philosophical problems are nonsensical—that is, are incapable of receiving an answer—is not to be equated with the claim that they are trivial or uninteresting or plain silly. It is clear right from the beginning that Wittgenstein sees the problems of philosophy as touching on something "deep." Thus he writes, "And it is not surprising that the *deepest* problems are in fact *not* problems at all" (*TLP* 4.003). He expresses the same thought in the *Philosophical Investigations* as follows:

> The problems arising through a misinterpretation of our forms of language have the character of *depth*. They are deep disquietudes, their roots are as deep in us as the forms of our language and their significance is as great as the importance of language (*PI* 111).

If the interpretation of Wittgenstein's remarks is to fit with what he himself says in the text about the nature of philosophy and about the nature of philosophical problems, then it must reveal not only an absence of doctrine and the unintelligibility of philosophical questions, but also the way in which the latter touch on something "deep." What we want is an understanding that allows Wittgenstein's remarks to achieve something positive, something that is connected to the depth of the problems with which the work deals and yet that stops short of treating these remarks as putting forward a substantial philosophical theory. This might, I believe, be taken to characterize the central interpretative issue for the whole of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

The "austere interpretation" of the *Tractatus*, as we've just seen, places the emphasis on Wittgenstein's self-conscious use of nonsense to expose illusions of thought. The clarification that Wittgenstein achieves is to be understood entirely in terms of the exposure of the philosopher's failure to mean anything at all by the words he utters. By contrast, I want to focus on the distinctions that form the background for Wittgenstein's critique of traditional philosophy. This allows for a more positive, less paradoxical, interpretation of the *Tractatus*, which preserves Diamond and Conant's sense of a fundamental connection between the early and the later work. On the interpretation that follows, the central purpose of the *Tractatus* is aptly characterized by a remark that Wittgenstein uses to describe the philosophical aims of the *Philosophical Investigations*: "We want to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order with a particular end in view; one out of many possible orders; not *the* order" (*PI* 132). This description of Wittgenstein's philosophical purpose brings out the way in which his elucidations are directed, not only at exposing failures of sense, but at bringing a certain order to something—"our knowledge of the use of language"—of which we as readers of the work are already in possession. The suggestion of this more positive characterization of Wittgenstein's philosophical aims is that he is engaged in a form of reflection that is

intended to clarify our view of something of which we, as masters of language, already have a practical grasp.

If, as Wittgenstein believes, the problems of philosophy arise from a misunderstanding of the workings of our language, then all that we need to expose them as pseudo-problems is already in our possession, in the form of a practical mastery of the use of the sentences of our language. Recognizing these problems for what they are—unintelligible—does not require us to discover anything; rather, it depends upon our seeing in a new light what is involved in our mastery of language, that is, on our being brought to see "an order in our knowledge of the use of language" (*PI* 132). Uncovering this order is not a matter of our coming to know something we did not know before, of which Wittgenstein must inform us, but of our grasping in reflection distinctions or differences that we already grasp in practice. The value of the order that Wittgenstein brings to our reflections on our practical mastery of language is not, however, to be understood in terms of its corresponding with "the facts," but in terms of its freeing us from the confusions that lie at the root of philosophical puzzlement. The peace that Wittgenstein's elucidations are intended to bring does not depend upon the discovery of doctrines; nor is it merely a matter of our discovering that we have been prone to illusions of thought. Rather it is connected with a recognition of a certain order in our knowledge of the use of language, by which we see that the philosophical problem does not arise. On the other hand, it is precisely their connection with this order that gives the philosophical problems their "character of depth."

3. THE CENTRAL DISTINCTION IN THE ORDER THAT WITTGENSTEIN'S ELUCIDATIONS are concerned to bring to our knowledge of the use of language is, I want to claim, the distinction between saying and showing. This distinction, which I want to make central to Wittgenstein's philosophy, both early and late, is one that Conant believes "requires completely relinquishing."[4] Conant sees interpretations that make this distinction central to Wittgenstein's philosophy to be committed to what he calls "substantial nonsense." The substantial conception of nonsense distinguishes between two different kinds of nonsense: mere nonsense, which is simply unintelligible and expresses no thought, and substantial nonsense, which tries and (inevitably) fails to express a logically incoherent thought, that is, a thought that somehow conflicts with the logical structure of our language. Insofar as the proponent of the saying/showing distinction appears to accept the idea that there is something that a speaker can try but fail to say with words that in themselves express no determinate thought, Conant believes that this proponent is committed to the idea that there is a thought that we can grasp but cannot express, that is, to the idea of substantial nonsense. The distinction between saying and showing seems to Conant to amount to nothing more than the dubious idea that there are thoughts—for example, thoughts about the logical structure of language—that language itself prevents us from expressing. A speaker who attempts to put these unsayable thoughts into words inevitably finds himself violating the bounds of sense: the logical structure of language itself precludes the possibility of describing it in language without violations of logical syntax.

I find the idea of substantial nonsense, or of ineffable thoughts, very difficult to make sense of, and in defending the centrality of the distinction between saying and showing for Wittgenstein's philosophy, I do not mean to commit myself

to it. Indeed, I think that if the distinction between saying and showing is to do any work in our understanding of the order that Wittgenstein brings to our knowledge of the use of language, then there must be an alternative way to understand what the distinction amounts to. Very roughly, I want to connect the idea of what can be shown but cannot be said with what is essential to language—that is, with what limits or conditions its sense—and therefore is prior to thoughts that have sense and that are either true or false. What can only be shown and not said has nothing to do with thoughts (that is, with truths) that cannot be expressed without violations of logical syntax; rather, it concerns the conditions or limits of sense that are revealed only in our actual use of language, in the application that we make of it, that is, in our use of sentences with sense. It is this essential connection between what is shown and what reveals itself only in the use or application of language that makes it impossible to say what shows itself, and not that the thought that we are trying to express is somehow at odds with logical syntax. The idea of the saying/showing distinction is not that there are unsayable thoughts that lie beyond the limits of language, but that the limit of language—that is, everything that is essential to our using our language with sense—is something on which we have an essentially practical grasp, something that shows itself only in our actual use of words with sense, and something that is therefore itself unsayable.

4. THUS, FROM THE OPENING OF THE *TRACTATUS*, WITTGENSTEIN'S FUNDAMENTAL elucidatory purpose is to bring a certain order to our knowledge of the use of language. The order is intended to get us to see the distinction between the accidental or merely possible (what we describe in language) and the essential or a priori (the opposite of which cannot be conceived) in a new light, a light that connects this distinction to the distinction between saying and showing. We should not, on this understanding of the work, see the opening remarks as a series of metaphysical assertions about the nature of a language-independent reality—or even as a series of metaphysical assertions whose sense is later to be put in doubt—but as a material picture of our language, which Wittgenstein uses purely as a means of clarification. Thus, facts, states of affairs, and objects are serving merely as material correlates of linguistic distinctions between propositions, elementary propositions, and names, respectively. It is Wittgenstein's aim in these remarks not to say something about the constitution of the world conceived independently of language but to use the material correlates of linguistic distinctions to help us to see something more clearly. If we approach the distinction between the accidental (contingent, a posteriori) and the essential (necessary, a priori), between propositions and elementary propositions, or between propositions and names, directly through language, then we are inclined to miss essential distinctions. The superficial similarity between ordinary, contingent propositions and the propositions of logic, between propositions containing logical constants and those not containing them, between propositions and sub-propositional expressions, and so on, prevents us from perceiving the profound differences of which it is Wittgenstein's ultimate aim to remind us. What we can see much more clearly in the concrete myth of facts, states of affairs, and objects is that facts (propositions) are essentially complex, that objects (names) are their simple constituents, that the latter exist in any possible state of affairs (elementary proposition), that we grasp an object (name) only insofar as we grasp its possibilities for occurring in states of affairs (elementary propositions), and so on. Wittgenstein uses the material image of language to lead us to look at language as an indissoluble

whole; we can make distinctions within this whole, but none of these distinctions can be grasped independently of the others or of the totality within which they are discerned. From the very beginning, Wittgenstein is working in a way that is intended to acknowledge that our reflections are carried out from a position in the midst of language; we can reflect on our knowledge of the use of language and draw distinctions "for a particular purpose," but we cannot approach it piecemeal, from a position outside it; we cannot construct a route into it, but we must reflect on it as something already complete. What we are doing is, from the beginning, quite distinct from explanation.

It is from within this general approach that Wittgenstein works to change our view of the distinction between the accidental (what is the case) and the essential (the opposite of which cannot be described). What we can see much more clearly in the concrete myth of the world as the totality of facts is, first of all, that we need a distinction between the accidental and the essential, and second, that the essential is not just another fact about the world but that it represents the limit of possibility. The essential, the necessary, the a priori, which comes in with the idea of the possible, is not something alongside the possible or something that could exist independently of the possible. The essential is connected to the possible, not in the sense of being part of it, but in the sense of being the limit of it. It is not something that can be discerned *in* the world, but it is something that the world makes manifest in the limit of what is possible, that is, in the limit of what can be described.

Wittgenstein characterizes the distinctions I have just introduced in terms of the contrast between content (objects), structure (the arrangement of objects in states of affairs), and form (the limit of the possible arrangement of objects in states of affairs). He then goes on to use the latter distinctions in remarks that serve to elucidate, or provide a way of seeing, the manner in which a picture represents or models what it pictures. In particular, he applies these distinctions to pictures in a way that allows us to see the contrast between what is accidental in a picture—what could be otherwise while it remains a picture of a state of affairs—and what is essential to it—what could not be otherwise without its ceasing to be a picture—in a new way. We are brought to see that a picture must have something in common—an implicit horizon of possibilities for combining its elements in intelligible structures—with what it depicts. Wittgenstein calls what a picture has in common with what it depicts its "pictorial form." It is vital that we do not understand this idea of what is common to a picture and what it depicts as a contingent or external relation between two independent realities. The idea that the picture and what it depicts have something in common is essentially the idea of an internal relation between the picture and what is pictured. This internal relation expresses itself in the fact that what is the case if the picture is correct is precisely what the picture pictures: the correctness of the picture is not something to which we can point independently of the picture. Our grip on what is possible is not independent of our grip on what can be pictured.

Wittgenstein now goes on to draw our attention to the way in which this aspect of a picture—that is, its pictorial form—cannot be a subject of depiction. A picture depicts a particular state of affairs in virtue of the way its pictorial elements are combined in a determinate structure. We can see plainly that the picture's depiction of this possible state of affairs is completely independent of whether the state of affairs exists or not. Thus, we see that a picture depicts its subject correctly or incorrectly depending on whether or not things are arranged in the way it depicts.

Pictorial form, however, is what a picture has in common with what it depicts; it is that in virtue of which the articulation of the picture's elements into a determinate structure constitutes a representation of a possible state of affairs. Again, it is important to see that this is not an *explanation* of a picture's ability to represent but merely a reflection on the boundary between pictures and nonsense, that is, between pictures and those things that may look like pictures, which actually picture nothing. We can now see clearly that these two aspects of a picture—what it depicts correctly or incorrectly and what is essential to it *qua* picture of a possible state of affairs—are inimical to each other. If we could depict what is essential to a picture, what it has in common with what it depicts, then what we depicted would have to be something that the picture depicted either correctly or incorrectly, and that the picture and what it depicts could therefore lack. Thus, "[a] picture cannot...place itself outside its representational form" (*TLP* 2.174), for whatever a picture represents from a position outside is something that can or can not be the case, which the picture can therefore represent as being otherwise. This, I'm suggesting, is not to be seen as a theory of representation—that is, as an account that explains of what a picture's ability to represent consists—but as a process of making explicit distinctions or differences that, in some sense, we already grasp.

5. The importance of the above points begins to emerge fully when we begin to see an analogy between pictures and propositions. Wittgenstein uses our sense of an analogy here as a means to make something clear about propositions: propositions are complex; propositions describe possible states of affairs; whatever is pictured by a proposition is possible; a proposition agrees or fails to agree with reality; a proposition represents in virtue of its form (the form of a proposition is logical form); we cannot tell from a proposition alone whether it is true or false; there are no propositions that are true a priori. The upshot of the comparison between pictures and propositions is that we come to see logical form—the form in virtue of which a proposition describes a possible state of affairs—as the limit of possible depiction, that is, the limit of depiction of states of affairs. Again, no explanation of language's ability to depict states of affairs is being put forward. Rather, by reflecting on our use of language to depict states of affairs, we come to recognize the way in which logical form constitutes the limit of what can be expressed in language and thus the impossibility of describing logical form in language.

The distinction between what can be described in language and what the limits of language show is further developed in Wittgenstein's observations on the role of variables and on the status of the propositions of logic. Wittgenstein introduces the idea of a variable via the distinction between a sign and a symbol. A sign is simply the physical aspect of a symbol, the inscription or mark or sound; it is "what can be perceived of a symbol" (*TLP* 3.32). The symbol, on the other hand, is "the sign taken together with its logico-syntactical employment" (*TLP* 3.327). Thus, "In order to recognize a symbol by its sign we must observe how it is used with a sense" (*TLP* 3.326). The distinction between a sign and a symbol focuses attention on the connection between the sense of a sign and its use: it is in use that the sense of a sign (the essence of a symbol) is revealed or determined. Thus it is use that represents everything that is essential to a sign. What Wittgenstein is gradually getting us to see is that logical form—everything essential to the sense of a sign—cannot, as we've already seen, be described *in* language; rather, logical form makes itself manifest in the way that expressions are used with a sense. In the same way, we

grasp what is essential to the sense of a sign, not theoretically in the form of a piece of propositional knowledge but *practically* in our mastery of how to use a sign with a sense.

Formal concepts—the concept of a name, an object, a function, a proposition, and so on—are expressions that purport to describe the logico-syntactic category of an expression, that is, to describe what is essential to the sense of a sign. We can see that these concepts are not genuine concepts since the propositions containing them are not genuine pictures, that is to say, they do not describe a state of affairs that may either exist or fail to exist. A proposition of the form, "A is an object," is either a tautology or what it expresses is unimaginable (a contradiction). But this, Wittgenstein wants us to see, is equivalent to recognizing that these words express no thought at all: they lack a sense against which a state of affairs can be measured. As he remarks of such propositions in the *Philosophical Investigations*, "we say 'I can't imagine the opposite'. Why not: 'I can't imagine the thing itself'?" (*PI* 251). What we now see is that what we try to say by means of propositions containing formal concepts "instead is shown in the very sign" (*TLP* 4.126) or more accurately in its use with a sense. The proper description of the use of a sign is not, Wittgenstein now goes on, by means of a pseudo-concept, but by means of a variable whose values are all the expressions that belong to a particular logico-syntactic category: "So the expression for a formal concept is a propositional variable in which this distinctive feature [viz. the use] alone is constant" (*TLP* 4.126). What Wittgenstein now draws our attention to is that a variable is only introduced via the signs that are its values, never independently: "A formal concept is given immediately any object falling under it is given. It is not possible, therefore, to introduce as primitive ideas objects belonging to a formal concept ***and*** the formal concept itself" (*TLP* 4.12721). The variable gets its significance ***via*** the symbols it replaces; it has no independent meaning. Thus, a proposition in which all the signs have been replaced by variables says nothing but merely puts a particular form on show. The form itself—what is shown by the variable—cannot be grasped via the variable alone but only by a practical mastery of the logico-syntactical use of the symbols that the variable replaces.

We see exactly the same points emerge in connection with the propositions of logic; Wittgenstein shows in just the same way that the propositions of logic are not strictly speaking propositions at all. They do not picture states of affairs; they lack a sense that could be either true or false. In this case, Wittgenstein uses the formal device of truth-functions to display the tautologous nature of the propositions of logic. However, the important point here is not an identification of the propositions of logic by means of a purely formal feature but a recognition that what these propositions put on show—namely, the logical relations among genuine propositions—is something that is properly shown only in the actual use of language. The signs in a proposition of logic do not function as symbols but as propositional variables: "It is raining or it is not raining" really says no more and no less than "p v –p." As in the case of variables, we cannot grasp the significance of a proposition of logic directly, but only via a practical mastery of the logical relations among genuine propositions, which the propositions of logic put on show. The propositions of logic tell us nothing; our ability to recognize them as logical propositions depends entirely upon our prior, practical mastery of what these propositions articulate. Thus, the propositions of logic do not constitute a system of a priori truths, and they cannot provide an independent route to mastery of what is a priori in lan-

guage: the a priori is everything that the use of language shows, and it is necessarily mastered purely practically. Thus, the idea that the propositions of logic say nothing—are tautologies—is connected with the idea that they simply articulate or put on show the logical or inferential connections among the genuine propositions of our language, which are manifest in its use, and a practical grasp of which is essential to linguistic mastery. In understanding language we necessarily already grasp all that the propositions of logic articulate, but this grasp is practical not theoretical. Insofar as logic is everything that is essential to the sense of the sentences of our language, it must be grasped in a practical way *before* the question of the truth or falsity of any proposition with a sense can arise.

6. The order that Wittgenstein brings to our knowledge of the use of language is thus one that turns on the distinction between what is shown in the actual use of expressions and what is said in language, between what is grasped practically and what is known theoretically to be true. It is in seeing this order that we come to see that the philosopher's attempt to state what kinds of things exist, to treat logic as a system of truths in need of justification, to explain how language connects with the world, and so on is based on a misunderstanding. Philosophical questions are the "deepest questions" precisely insofar as, in their nature, they relate to what shows itself in the use of language. This is both what differentiates them from scientific questions and what renders them unintelligible or unanswerable. Thus, insofar as the question of justifying logic is concerned, we now see that logic does not consist of a system of truths for which the question of justification might arise. Rather, the whole of logic is co-eval with the phenomenon of language, and the logician is merely postulating a notation in which inferential relations among propositions, of which everyone who understands language already has a practical grasp, are put perspicuously on display. In the case of logical laws, their application is essentially prior to their formulation in the form of a law. Once we have language in use, we already have the whole of logic. We can see now that it makes no sense to ask whether the laws of logic are true or whether the world will conspire to make them usable: to think of the world is already to think according to the laws of logic. This is not to ground logic in something absolute that is outside language—it is not in any sense to *justify* logic—but it is rather to recognize the status that logic has for language. There is no conceiving of the world as something to which the logic of our language might or might not apply. The idea that "logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits" (*TLP* 5.61) is not, therefore, a metaphysical claim about the neces-

> *The order that Wittgenstein brings to our knowledge of the use of language is...one that turns on the distinction between what is shown in the actual use of expressions and what is said in language, between what is grasped practically and what is known theoretically to be true.*

sary correlation of two systems—the world on one side and language on the other—but it is a claim about the part of the order that we now perceive in our knowledge of the use of language. There is no proof that language necessarily fits the world, conceived independently of language: the world is mirrored in language; logical form is the form of reality.

What the reader of the *Tractatus* is gradually brought to see is that the use of language to state truths about the world rests on, or presupposes, a practical mastery of the use of expressions with sense, that is, of everything that is essential to the sense of a sign, which in the *Tractatus* is equivalent to its logical form. Nothing can be made the basis of my practical grasp of logical form: the practical grasp of what is essential to the sense of a sign is necessarily prior to the use of variables to describe it. What I come to see is that I cannot get outside logic and give it any foundation: I essentially already inhabit—that is, use—logic; my life with language entails that I am already in the midst of logic. All this, I've tried to show, is an expression of a particular way of looking at the distinction between the essential (a priori) and the accidental (a posteriori). What is a priori is what shows itself in the use of language, and what shows itself has to do not with something that we *know* (that is, not with something that is *true*) but with something that we *do*. What is shown is something that is grasped and lived rather than known. It follows from this that what is shown cannot be given any foundation. All explanation, description, justification, and so on take place within the limits of what shows itself in the application of language. Ultimately all we can say is: this is what we do.

7. THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN SAYING AND SHOWING THAT WITTGENSTEIN INTRODUCES in the *Tractatus* remains, I believe, central to his thought; it is clearly at work throughout the later philosophy. Thus, in *On Certainty*, a collection of remarks that Wittgenstein wrote in the last year and a half of his life, the distinction between the a priori, or what is shown in the use of language, and the a posteriori, or what is said in language, is fundamental to his diagnosis of philosophical scepticism and its dogmatic alternative. His critique of Moore's commonsense rejection of sceptical doubt is to be seen as an attempt to show that Moore—like the philosopher who sets out to justify logic—treats a question that concerns the sense (use) of our words as if it were a question concerning a matter of fact.

Wittgenstein tries to get us to see that we cannot understand Moore's claim to know, "This is a hand," as an empirical claim with true/false poles. Moore's words are shown rather to have the status of what Wittgenstein now calls a "grammatical remark:" they are in themselves empty (they say nothing about the world), but, like the propositions of logic in the *Tractatus*, they bear a distinctive relation to our practice of using language. These so-called propositions have a peculiar role insofar as they are an attempt to articulate something that is presupposed in our ordinary use of language, something that manifests itself in that use, that is essential to the sense of our words, and that, as masters of language, we already grasp practically. The shift that takes place in Wittgenstein's critique of Moore is one that mirrors the shift in our understanding of the status of the propositions of logic in the *Tractatus*. The shift is from a question of truth—"Does Moore know that this is a hand?"—to a question of sense—"Does it make sense to doubt that this is a hand?" What we're brought to see is that it is not a question about whether Moore knows something for certain but about how certainty in the use of expressions belongs to the essence of the language game.

This question does not, therefore, simply address the matter of Moore's (or our) being under an illusion that his words succeed in expressing a determinate thought, but it addresses the way in which the precise nature of Moore's failure to mean anything by his words shows us that the illusory dispute between Moore and the sceptic touches on something "deep." The sort of certainty that Moore tries, but necessarily fails, to express with the claim, "I know that this is a hand," is not a kind of certainty for which we can imagine an opposite; rather, it represents a limit on our use of words. The role of this certainty in our language game means that we cannot place it against a background of other attitudes; it is essential to our mastery of our language and therefore prior to our assertion of anything as true or false. When we see it in this light, we begin to recognize that the certainty Moore tries to articulate in words cannot be expressed in propositions with true/false poles. What we have here is something that serves as a foundation of our thought in a quite different way from something that I assume to be the case but that might turn out to be false and that I might replace with a different assumption. I've tried to show how, in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein tries to get us to recognize that, insofar as the so-called propositions of logic touch on what is essential to the sense of our words, our mastery of what they articulate is essentially practical and prior to the formulation of the laws of logic in (pseudo-)propositions. In the same way, he tries to get us to see that the certainty that Moore attempts to express in the form of a claim to know something is essentially a form of practical certainty, which we necessarily acquire in grasping what is essential to the sense of expressions, namely their use. The certainty that Moore has that "this is a hand" is a practical certainty regarding the use (that is, the sense) of words; it is quite distinct from the epistemic certainty that arises in connection with the acquisition and justification of beliefs about the world.

It is important to see that, on this view of Wittgenstein's philosophical purpose, nothing that he says provides, or is intended to provide, either a justification of the certainty that belongs to the essence of the language game or a refutation of the scepticism of the idealist. We are rather brought to see that the realist and the idealist each attempt to answer a question that is unintelligible, a question about whether we are justified in our belief that our language applies to the world. To speak or think about the world is already to apply or use language, already to inhabit the language game in which language is functioning as a going concern. Like our practical mastery of logic, our practical certainty in our use of language, which is the essence of our life with language, has a role in our understanding of language that cannot be expressed *in* language, for it determines the sense of expressions and is not expressible as an employment of them. Insofar as our certainty belongs to the essence of (is presupposed by) the language game, the idea of justifying it by appeal either to a rule or to what is the case is unintelligible. On the one hand, this certainty in how our language is used is prior to the formulation of a rule, the use of which has not yet been determined by application; on the other, there can be no question of justifying our certainty by appeal to the facts, for description of the facts already presupposes the certainty that is a condition of the sense of the description. Only what could conceivably be otherwise can be justified by an appeal to what happens to be the case; in the current case, however, we cannot imagine the opposite. By the same stroke, nothing about what is the case follows from our practical certainty about the use of language. All we can say is: this is what we do.

8. I HOPE WE CAN NOW SEE WHY WITTGENSTEIN CALLS HIS REMARKS "ELUCIDATIONS" and why he thinks of his philosophy as a form of activity that does not result in answers to philosophical questions. Wittgenstein's philosophical purpose vis-à-vis traditional philosophical problems depends upon his bringing us to recognize the way that we inhabit language, the way that we are already in the midst of it and cannot get outside of it or give it a foundation in truths. We do not learn anything new from the philosophical journey on which Wittgenstein takes us, but we are brought to a realization of what constitutes the essential background of our ability to describe the world (truly or falsely) in language. It is by bringing us to recognize the distinction between the determination of sense and the employment of sense—and its connection with the distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge, or between saying and showing—that Wittgenstein diagnoses the misunderstanding of the logic of our language, which lies at the root of philosophical problems. The philosopher's error is to suppose that what determines sense—everything essential to language—can be described in a series of true propositions, when in fact what determines sense shows itself in the use of language, in the limits of what can be said. Wittgenstein brings the philosopher in us peace by showing that what the philosopher had wanted to assert, unintelligibly, as a piece of information, is essentially a matter of the grammar of our language, that is, a question of sense rather than truth. What the philosopher tries to say is something that shows itself only in our actual use of words. φ

Wittgenstein's philosophical purpose vis-à-vis traditional philosophical problems depends upon his bringing us to recognize the way that we inhabit language, the way that we are already in the midst of it and cannot get outside of it or give it a foundation in truths.

Abbreviations

The texts of Wittgenstein have been referred to in the text by the abbreviations given below, followed by section numbers for Part I of the *Investigations* and the *Tractatus* and page numbers for Part II of the *Investigations*.

PI — *Philosophical Investigations.* Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees. Oxford: Blackwell, 1963.

TLP — *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.* Translated by B. F. McGuiness and D. F. Pears. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961.

Notes

1. Cora Diamond, "Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's Tractatus," in *Bilder der Philosophie*, ed. R. Heinrich and H. Vetter, vol. 5 of Wiener Reihe (Wien: R. Oldenbourg

Verlag, 1991), 69.

2. James Conant, "Throwing Away the Top of the Ladder," in *The Yale Review* 79 (1991): 344.
3. Conant 345.
4. Conant 341.

Bibliography

Conant, James. "Throwing Away the Top of the Ladder," *The Yale Review* 79 (1991): 328-64.

———. "The Search for Logically alien Thought: Descartes, Kant, Frege and the *Tractatus*," *Philosophical Topics* 20 (1991): 115-80.

———. "The Method of the *Tractatus*." In *From Frege to Wittgenstein*, edited by E. Reck. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Forthcoming.

Diamond, Cora. "Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," in *Bilder der Philosophie*, edited by R. Heinrich and H. Vetter. Vol. 5 of Wiener Reihe. Wien: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1991: 55-90.

———. "Throwing Away the Ladder: How to Read the *Tractatus*," in *The Realistic Spirit*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995.

McGinn, Marie. "Between Metaphysics and Nonsense: Elucidation in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 49 (1999): 491-513.

———. "What Kind of Senselessness is This? A Reply to Conant on Wittgenstein's Critique of Moore," in *Interpretation and Scepticism*, edited by J. Conant and A. Kern. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Forthcoming.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *On Certainty*. Translated by G.E.M.Anscombe and Denis Paul. Edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Oxford: Blackwell, 1977.