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**Wittgenstein on Grammar:
The Significance and Authority of Rules**

by

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis examines the notion of 'grammar' and, in particular, the notion of 'rules of grammar' in the context of the Ludwig Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Despite the prominence that the latter notion seems to have in Wittgenstein's philosophical practice, one might doubt whether it can bear the kind of burden that Wittgenstein seems to place upon it – dissolving philosophical problems. This thesis separates out some of the reasons for doubting that 'rules of grammar' can be used to dissolve philosophical problems, in order to see which have a sound basis and which not. Chapter 1 presents Wittgenstein's distinctive understanding of 'grammar' and its relation to philosophical problems. I present an initial simple account of 'grammar' and two different conceptions of Wittgenstein's idea of a 'grammatical investigation'. Chapter 2 examines the idea that language is rule-governed. I argue that the centrality of 'rules of grammar' in Wittgenstein is compatible with several reservations that one might have against the idea of rule-governedness. Chapter 3 interprets Wittgenstein's concepts of 'language-game' and 'form of life'. I show that the former concept stresses the importance of rules but also points to other significant aspects of our language use. The concept of 'form of life' brings out the importance of attending to the broader practical settings in which we pursue our linguistic and other activities. Chapter 4 outlines the phenomenon of 'projection'. I argue that the possibility of intelligible projective uses of a word undermines the idea that the rules of grammar authoritatively decide in advance which uses of a word are meaningful. Chapter 5 discusses Wittgenstein's understanding of nonsense and offers a view of the role that the rules of grammar play in identifying nonsense and removing philosophical problems. I also present cases that throw doubt on the persuasive power of citing such rules in philosophical disagreements. Chapter 6 examines further the role of rules of grammar in Wittgensteinian philosophical criticism. I argue that what might seem to be two substantially different views of that role are in fact very similar. On this basis, I identify several general difficulties that a Wittgensteinian critical practice faces in attempting to solve philosophical problems, but also show that such a practice can be retained. Chapter 7 points to two outstanding issues that are relevant to assessing the later Wittgenstein's idea of a grammatical investigation.

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Declaration of Authorship

Name: Felix Hagenström

Title of thesis: *Wittgenstein on Grammar: The Significance and Authority of Rules*

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

23/09/2019

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Despite the vast support which I have received from many sides, I am all too aware of the imperfections, gaps and shortcomings that remain – and they are, of course, all mine.

List of Abbreviations

Below are the abbreviations used in referring to works by Wittgenstein. In the text, all references to *Philosophical Investigations* are to sections (e.g. PI §1 or, if to what was formerly known as *Part II*, PPF §365).¹ References to other printed works are either to numbered remarks (e.g. TLP 6.54) or to sections (e.g. Z §123; PG §5); in all other cases references are to pages (e.g. LFM 21 = LFM, page 21). References to the *Nachlass* are by manuscript (MS) or typescript number (TS) followed by page number (*Wittgenstein's Nachlass: The Bergen Electronic Edition*, ed. The Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

- AWL *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1932-35, from the Notes of Alice Ambrose and Margaret MacDonald*, ed. A. Ambrose. Oxford: Blackwell, 1979.
- BB *The Blue and Brown Books*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1958.
- BT *The Big Typescript: TS 213*, ed. and tr. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005.
- EPB *Eine Philosophische Betrachtung*, ed. R. Rhees, in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Schriften* 5, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1970.
- L *Wittgenstein's Lectures Cambridge 1930-32*, ed. D. Lee. Oxford: Blackwell, 1980.
- LFM *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics, Cambridge 1939*, ed. C. Diamond. Sussex: Harvester Press, 1976.
- OC *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, tr. D. Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1969.
- PG *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. R. Rhees, tr. A. J. P. Kenny. Oxford: Blackwell, 1974.
- PI *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. P. M. S. Hacker and J. Schulte, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and J. Schulte, 4th, rev. edn. Oxford: Blackwell, 2009.
Philosophical Investigations. ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1953.
- PPF *Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment* [previously known as 'Part II' of the *Philosophical Investigations*], in PI (2009).

¹ When quoting the *Investigations*, I will generally use Hacker and Schulte's revised translation of Anscombe's translation; it has been criticised for a number of reasons but it strikes me as generally adequate. Sometimes, however, I will use the original Anscombe translation instead, because it seems superior in places. Another reason I think it is advisable to use the older translation is that some of the most famous remarks of Wittgenstein's are known to the English speaking reader by Anscombe's phrasing.

- PR *Philosophical Remarks*, ed. R. Rhees, tr. R. Hargreaves and R. White. Oxford: Blackwell, 1975.
- RC *Remarks on Colour*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, tr. L. L. McAlister and M. Schättle. Oxford: Blackwell, 1977.
- RFM *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, ed. G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees and G. E. M. Anscombe, rev. edn. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978.
- TLP *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, tr. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961.
- Z *Zettel*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1967.

Introduction

Mapping a path through Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy is no easy task; not only because of Wittgenstein's ambitious and thought-provoking ideas and his notoriously peculiar writing and presentation style, but also because of the vast amount of commentary, interpretation and controversial debate that his work has sparked over decades. Within the discussions and disagreements about how to approach and interpret his philosophy, perhaps the one thing upon which readers of Wittgenstein's texts agree is: they are difficult to understand.

What I offer here is an interpretation of crucial themes in Wittgenstein's later work that revolves around the *Philosophical Investigations*. More specifically, this thesis explores Wittgenstein's later conception of philosophy as a grammatical investigation by examining the notion of 'rules of grammar'. Roughly speaking, Wittgenstein uses the term 'grammar' to signify the workings of language: 'grammar describes the use of words in the language' (PG §23); he characterises grammar as the 'rules for use of a word' (PG §133); a grammatical investigation is the study of the rules of grammar manifest in language use.

What motivates Wittgenstein's interest in 'grammar' is his conviction that descriptions of language use can help us solve philosophical problems. These problems, according to Wittgenstein, rest upon misunderstandings of the grammar of our words, misunderstandings that create 'grammatical illusions' (PI §110) and 'grammatical fictions' (PI §307). Wittgenstein's concern with 'grammar' is central to his philosophy, which he sees as reactive and destructive (PI §118): grammatical investigations are critical responses to misunderstandings. This understanding of philosophy is, in turn, bound up with Wittgenstein's opposition to substantial doctrines and theories in philosophy. He famously declares that '[i]f someone were to advance theses in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them' (PI §128), and says that philosophy is purely descriptive (PI §109) and 'only states what everyone concedes to it' (PI §599).

Given the prominence that the notion of 'grammar' and, in particular, the notion of 'rules of grammar' seem to have in the philosophical practice that Wittgenstein envisages,

they seem to carry a heavy burden. Wittgenstein characterises the aim of his philosophy as ‘clarity’ and goes so far as to say:

the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear. (PI §133)²

This promise to yield ‘*complete* clarity’ may strike us as extravagant and it may raise doubts about whether the notion of ‘rules of grammar’ – despite its apparent prominence – can bear the kind of burden that Wittgenstein seems to place upon it.

But importantly, one might have those doubts for various different reasons, some more plausible than others, and each with different implications. This thesis seeks to separate out at least some of those reasons, in order to examine them to see which doubts about the notion or significance of ‘rules of grammar’ might have a sound basis and which might not. All of the chapters of this thesis ask, each in its own way, what the role and significance of ‘rules of grammar’ is – and what other things might be important in the context of a Wittgensteinian critical philosophical practice. A related further theme throughout the thesis – something that the thesis wants to carve out – is the question of the ‘bite’ or ‘pay-off’ of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, a question connected to the issue of the kind of authority that attaches to the ‘rules of grammar’. While any kind of ‘metaphysical’ authority is out of the question, such rules derive their authority from capturing the correct use of words within our linguistic practices. The conclusion of this thesis is that although we must be careful not to misunderstand ‘grammatical rules’ as possessing some kind of ‘ultimate authority’ that one could appeal to in order to settle philosophical issues, they are a potentially powerful tool for detecting and removing philosophical confusion.

Chapter 1 gives an initial account of Wittgenstein’s distinctive understanding of ‘grammar’ and its relation to philosophical problems. For Wittgenstein, a main source of philosophical problems is the failure to understand the workings of our language; confusions are the source of philosophical problems; a grammatical investigation is suitable to understand these confusions and potentially remove them. I present crucial aspects of, and themes connected to, Wittgenstein’s idea of ‘rules of grammar’ (e.g. the notion of ‘language-games’) and illustrate Wittgenstein’s idea that philosophical problems

² All italics that appear in quotations in this thesis also appear in the quoted original, unless stated otherwise.

have their roots in misunderstandings of ‘grammar’ by giving examples of such cases. Central ideas in this context are the ‘arbitrariness of grammar’ and the distinction between empirical and grammatical propositions. I then sketch an initial ‘simple view’ of ‘grammar’ as a body of rules that delineates the ‘bounds of sense’ by determining the legitimate and illegitimate uses of words. Finally, I introduce two contrasting outlooks on Wittgenstein’s later philosophy: a ‘policing’ conception and a ‘diagnostic’ conception. The ‘policing’ conception sees a grammatical investigation in the business of appealing to ‘rules of grammar’ to determine authoritatively what it makes sense to say, whereas the ‘diagnostic’ conception criticises the appeal to rules as the ‘ultimate authority’ and stresses the importance of other factors in treating philosophical confusion. Both conceptions face problems, as later chapters demonstrate. But they help us articulate important issues about the ideas under discussion throughout this thesis; and, finally, sharpen our understanding of a ‘grammatical investigation’ as the kind of philosophical practice proposed by Wittgenstein.

Chapter 2 examines the idea of the rule-governedness of language. The centrality of the notion of ‘rules of grammar’ in a ‘grammatical investigation’ seems to presuppose that language is essentially rule-governed, but there are also themes in Wittgenstein that appear to suggest that it is not. I argue that a main point of Wittgenstein’s reflections is that we should resist philosophical sublimations of the idea of rule-governedness. Wittgenstein’s famous characterisation ‘meaning is use’ might seem to clash with the idea of rule-governedness. But it does not, because the rules only describe *correct* use. Similarly, the idea that language is governed by rules does not require that people actually cite them; the ‘rules of grammar’ can be, and often are, implicit. The idea of rule-governedness might also seem to imply that all words have definitions of a certain sort – fixed, determinate, exact – but it does not. I then present a plausible understanding of the idea of rule-governedness: a functional conception of rules. This conception can accommodate the main insights of the idea of rule-governedness. Nevertheless, I will also show that we should resist certain versions of the functional conception that operate with an implausibly broad concept of rules, because it blurs the important distinction between giving a rule and giving an example. I end the chapter by discussing issues around the

much-debated topic of rule-following and conclude that the idea of rule-governedness is a natural articulation of important aspects of the normativity of language.

Chapter 3 discusses the notions of 'language-games' and 'forms of life'. The 'simple view' of 'grammar' directs our attention to languages and games both being normatively-governed activities: there are rights and wrongs here, and often rules underpinning them. But a closer examination of Wittgenstein's texts also points to other insights. I demonstrate that taking Wittgenstein's interest in 'language-games' to be focussed on the idea of rule-governedness is to focus on only one aspect of it. I identify respects in which Wittgenstein's concept of a 'language-game' brings to our attention the importance of the 'interwovenness' of language use with our practical activities and the broader settings in which we pursue them: our 'form of life'. Wittgenstein's concern with 'language-games' and 'forms of life' exhibits a diversity incompatible with familiar conceptions of the nature of language, a diversity composing a continuous whole with some language uses extending other uses, as well as themselves being extended by others. This also gives us a perspective on Wittgenstein's anti-essentialist claim that 'language' is best understood as a 'family-resemblance' concept. I then offer an interpretation of 'forms of life' that emphasises the importance of the inter-play of cultural and natural factors in shaping our practices – and, finally, I consider what moral the idea of 'forms of life' holds for those who seek a 'grounding' or 'foundation' of language.

Chapter 4 further explores reasons to reject the 'simple view' of grammar set out in Chapter 1. On this view, philosophical problems are manifestations of a failure to conform with the rules for the use of a word. This view underpins a central assumption of the 'policing' conception, namely that deviation from common usage results in nonsense and can thus be criticised and corrected by reminding us of the rules of usage. This chapter argues that this 'policing' function of rules is unviable by showing that 'projection' is a pervasive feature of language: we project words into new contexts all the time and rules cannot, therefore, authoritatively decide in advance which projections are acceptable. I explain the idea of projection and defend it against objections to the kind of flexibility that it sees at work in our concepts. The workings of projections bring out a general mechanism that provides the basis for seeing the use of a concept in a particular context as the use of the established concept: seeing certain similarities and certain differences between

contexts of use. I show that that mechanism is a pervasive feature of language, yet a mechanism that is conditioned by established usage and aspects of our 'form of life' and thus does not allow for every projection. I end this chapter by arguing that the rules governing our use of words regulate projective uses to some extent but do not in all cases determine in advance which projections will be acceptable. The rules of grammar lack therefore the kind of authority that we might have thought they have. This seems to undercut the 'policing' conception of the role of grammatical rules.

Chapter 5 explores Wittgenstein's understanding of nonsense and how it informs his conception of a grammatical investigation as a critical practice. I discuss two criticisms of the idea that violating the rules of grammar results in nonsense; these criticisms have been offered by interpreters inspired by the so-called 'resolute reading' of the early Wittgenstein: (1) nonsense is not the result of combining otherwise meaningful words which can be identified by the rules of grammar; (2) philosophers have reason not to be persuaded that they are talking nonsense, because they are usually aware that they depart from ordinary usage. I argue that the 'resolute' reading's conception of nonsense is implausible. But there is an interpretation of that conception available that can accommodate the importance of rules of grammar in identifying combinations of words that yield nonsense. This interpretation suggests that there are overlaps between 'resolute' and 'non-resolute' readings regarding the role of rules of grammar in analysing and removing philosophical problems: the description of rules of grammar can help us establish whether (and if so, how) the use of a word involves conflating different patterns of use and thus leads to nonsense. I then address (2), the 'problem of persuasion', and present cases that challenge the idea that simply citing rules of grammar can persuade philosophers that they are talking nonsense: since philosophers know that their utterances break with ordinary usage, pointing out that fact cannot provide them (or anyone else perhaps) with compelling reasons to accept that their utterances are nonsense. That citing grammatical rules is hardly conducive to settling matters seems supported by Chapter 4's discussion of projection that shows deviations from common usage need not produce nonsense. This raises the question how the alternative to Wittgensteinian 'policing' might look.

Chapter 6 discusses the role of rules in philosophical criticism by examining themes in the 'diagnostic' conception of a Wittgensteinian critical practice. The approach that this conception proposes may look quite different from that to which it is meant to be an alternative, but I argue that the 'diagnostic' interpreters help themselves to much the same ideas. One crucial moral that emerges is that the 'diagnostic' conception collapses into a view with 'policing' elements. Another one is that no plausible account of a grammatical investigation might be able to escape difficulties in identifying uncontroversial criteria to decide whether a philosophical problem has been dissolved. But this need not be a failure on the part of such an account. In fact, to think that there is some uncontentious fact of the matter to be found may itself be an expression of a philosophical confusion that fails to recognise that there is no firmer ground than the one that is our form of life. I identify different themes in the proposals of those who argue for understanding a grammatical investigation as a 'diagnostic' task. When the 'diagnosticians' turn to the question of the role of the rules of grammar, they express misgivings about certain invocations of those rules. I show that it is not clear that all of them are valid. Significant overlaps between the 'diagnostic' approach and its rival raise doubts about the distinctiveness of the former; it ends up collapsing into a kind of 'policing conception'. I then present some general difficulties that a grammatical investigation as a critical practice faces. Perhaps the most important one I call the 'bite' worry: it seems hard to establish whether someone really is confused and, if so, to convince them that they are. But that does not mean that a Wittgensteinian critic cannot justifiably think that they might be right in their criticism. I conclude that although certain high expectations of what a grammatical investigation is able to achieve have perhaps to be buried, the rules of grammar are still an important critical tool for identifying possible cases of inconsistent language use and sources of philosophical confusion.

The final chapter looks at two further but related outstanding issues. Firstly, I note a theme that appears to emerge more and more in Wittgenstein's later work: 'natural history' (*Naturgeschichte*) (PI §415) and 'very general facts of nature' (PPF §365; cf. PI §142). This theme seems to indicate a certain diminished significance of rules of grammar, stressing the significance of other factors relevant to exposing and dissolving philosophical problems. Secondly, I point out that crucial questions of philosophical

practice cannot be solved by an exclusive focus on what might be called the ‘meta’ debate with which this thesis is mainly concerned and which also marks one of its limitations: the value of Wittgensteinian philosophy is to be assessed by the success of removing concrete philosophical confusions. I hope to clarify and defend the significance of ‘rules of grammar’ by showing that none of the doubts about them examined in this thesis undermines their centrality and usefulness. But whether the practice of a grammatical investigation, when employed in the way that the discussion of the outlooks considered in this thesis suggest, can bring ‘complete clarity’ (PI §133) – that is a crucial question that remains.

Speaking of limitations, it barely needs saying that any interpretation of an eminent philosopher’s work will inevitably emphasise certain themes at the expense of others. This thesis focuses on the notion of ‘rules of grammar’ and addresses only particular questions around Wittgenstein’s philosophical practice as a ‘grammatical investigation’. My discussion thus excludes certain issues about his later philosophy it could have treated instead, some of which concern the notion of ‘grammar’. For example, I do not provide a genetical-historical study of the concept of ‘grammar’ in Wittgenstein’s philosophical development.³ Another limitation of this thesis: I do not address the key idea in Wittgenstein’s philosophy of mathematics that mathematical propositions are rules of grammar. This idea is certainly one of the important applications of the idea of grammatical rules, but a proper treatment of it would require a work of its own.⁴

Note that the purpose of this thesis is not primarily to convince anyone that Wittgenstein’s grammatical investigations can actually dissolve philosophical problems. Rather, I wish to shed some light on how it *might* be possible, by performing some of the groundwork necessary for finding out whether it is. There is a lot that this thesis leaves unexamined; but I hope that it can offer some insights into the labyrinth of paths that is Wittgenstein’s philosophy.

³ Two insightful recent studies on this issue are Engelmann 2013 and Uffelmann 2018.

⁴ Dolby/Schroeder (forthcoming) offer an extended exploration of Wittgenstein’s philosophy of mathematics. One of the first and most influential studies of this part of Wittgenstein’s oeuvre is Wright 1980.

Chapter 1

Grammar and Philosophical Problems

This chapter will give an overview of Wittgenstein's distinctive understanding of 'grammar' and sketch the role it plays in his later philosophy. He identifies grammar with the 'rules for the use of a word' (PG §133); he speaks of 'rules of grammar' (PI §497), the 'grammar of' particular words (e.g. PI §§150, 187, 257) and characterises grammar as that which 'describes the use of words in the language' (PG §23). Philosophical problems and paradoxes, according to Wittgenstein, rest upon misunderstandings of the grammar of our words – these misunderstandings create 'grammatical illusions' (PI §110) and 'grammatical fictions' (PI §307). Wittgenstein also states in the *Investigations* that the kind of investigation he deploys is a 'grammatical one' (PI §90). So we can distinguish two senses of 'grammar': in the first sense, grammar is the object of a grammatical investigation, often presented as the rules governing our language-use; in the second sense, grammar is the activity of describing grammar in the first sense (PI §496). Without doubt then the notion of grammar and of grammatical investigation are crucial to his conception of philosophy.⁵

This chapter will give an initial account of Wittgenstein's concepts of 'grammar' and 'grammatical investigation' by presenting first some crucial aspects of, and themes connected to, these concepts. Section 1.1 will show that Wittgenstein's understanding of 'grammar' is distinct from traditional understandings of the term by outlining its specific connection to philosophical problems. It will also show how Wittgenstein articulates the rules of language through two different analogies: an analogy with a calculus and an analogy with games. This latter analogy fundamentally informs the later Wittgenstein's understanding of a grammatical investigation: as the concept of 'language-games' indicates, the comparison between language and a game becomes one of the leitmotifs of Wittgenstein's philosophy (this leitmotif will be further explored in Chapter 2, which discusses the idea that language is rule-governed, and Chapter 3, which examines the

⁵ Cf. e.g. McGinn (2011, 646): 'It is clear that [Wittgenstein] places the concept of grammar and grammatical investigation at the heart of his understanding of the aims and methods of his later philosophy'; and Mulhall (2014, 299): '[Wittgenstein's] view of what grammar is essentially conditions his sense of what philosophy is.'

notion of a 'language-game'). Section 1.2 will give three examples of philosophical problems and paradoxes that can be seen to have their roots in misunderstandings of the grammar of certain words. Section 1.3 will identify arbitrariness as a central feature of grammar and sketch how a grammatical investigation relates to Wittgenstein's criticism of metaphysics; a central idea in this context is the distinction between empirical and grammatical propositions. Section 1.4 will present an initial reading of 'grammar' which I call the 'simple view'. The Simple View construes 'grammar' on the model of a particular understanding of Wittgenstein's comparison of language to games: the rules of grammar are understood as delineating the 'bounds of sense' by determining the legitimate and illegitimate uses of words, just as the rules of chess determine the legitimacy of the moves in the game. Section 1.5 will introduce two different conceptions of Wittgenstein's later philosophy: a 'policing' conception which rests upon the Simple View and sees a grammatical investigation as dissolving philosophical problems by disclosing the rules of grammar that determine authoritatively what it makes sense to say, and a 'diagnostic' conception which criticises the appeal to rules as the ultimate authority in removing philosophical confusion and emphasises the importance of other factors in treating confusion and attempting to dissolve philosophical problems. A main claim of this thesis is that the 'policing' conception is flawed, though the 'diagnostic' conception faces problems of its own. The contrast between the two conceptions will provide us with a useful device for the discussion of Wittgenstein's ideas in later chapters. But ultimately these views collapse into each other.

1.1 Wittgenstein's Distinctive Understanding of 'Grammar'

A first step towards clarifying Wittgenstein's distinctive understanding of 'grammar' is to compare it to how linguists understand the term. Both linguists and Wittgenstein think of grammar primarily as a description of how language is used. But linguistics is interested in analysing and categorising the constituents of language (e.g. in morphology, syntax, phonology, etc.) and there a standard usage of 'grammar' denotes the syntactical

structures of language.⁶ By contrast, Wittgenstein's understanding of 'grammar' breaks with the broader linguistic distinction between syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Wittgenstein can be seen to sidestep this traditional triadic division: for example, he conjoins grammar with semantics: 'I want to say the place of a word in grammar is its meaning' (PG §23). This conjunction of grammar with semantics is in turn linked with pragmatic aspects: for example, the shopkeeper scenario (PI §1) at the beginning of the *Investigations* emphasises the importance of the notion of the *use* of words in reflecting upon meaning and thus the grammar of a word. Similarly, Wittgenstein famously states that 'meaning is use' (PI §43). These remarks show that Wittgenstein seems to doubt the usefulness of the traditional linguistic distinction between syntax, semantics and pragmatics for his philosophical purposes.

A crucial question that arises here is how Wittgenstein's approach, which aims to make 'our grammar' 'surveyable' and to achieve '*an overview* of the use of our words' (PI §122), can take so little interest in employing traditional grammatical classifications in trying to achieve such an overview. Perhaps the most important consideration here is that, in contrast to descriptions of language in linguistics, for Wittgenstein the description of language is not an end in itself. He is concerned only with those aspects that give rise to philosophical problems: a grammatical investigation, as Wittgenstein puts it, seeks 'to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order for a particular purpose, one out of many possible orders, not *the* order' (PI §132). Similarly, Wittgenstein's grammatical investigations do not aim at systematic treatment or completeness: 'In giving all these examples I am not aiming at some kind of completeness, [...]. They are only meant to enable the reader to cope with conceptual unclarities' (PPF §202). Wittgenstein is concerned with the removal of certain philosophical troubles; the 'particular purpose' Wittgenstein aims at is: 'that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear' (PI §133). What makes Wittgenstein's description of language distinctive is then that 'this description gets its light – that is to say, its purpose – from the philosophical problems' (PI §109).

⁶ Although there also are reports to the contrary, Wittgenstein clearly concedes that his use of the term 'grammar' differs from common usage (MS 110, 195; AWL 31). The principal difference is, as we will see, the *aim* of the investigation of language.

A philosophical problem, according to Wittgenstein, is a confusion, 'expressed in the form of a question that doesn't acknowledge the confusion' (PG §141). Such a question cannot be answered (EPB 156),⁷ but here '[t]he question contains a mistake' (PI §189); Wittgenstein's therapeutic approach to philosophy aiming instead to disclose that philosophical problems are nonsense (PI §119; cf. PI §§464, 524). A grammatical investigation is Wittgenstein's proposed method to dissolve such philosophical problems because they are specifically born of linguistic misunderstandings and confusions. Central to this method is Wittgenstein's distinction between 'surface grammar' and 'depth grammar' (PI §664): One could perhaps say that all competent speakers are aware of the surface grammar, whereas this is not true of the depth grammar. But it is exactly the latter which not all competent speakers are always able, or willing, to see and which a Wittgensteinian philosophical analysis or diagnosis aims to bring to light. For it is unearthing the depth grammar of an expression that helps us realise that a particular philosophical claim or use of words is confused.

Wittgenstein is a negative thinker⁸ in the sense that primarily he aims to show that we should not believe philosophical claims – but not because these are false, but because they are nonsense and the manifestation of confusion.⁹ In this sense, Wittgenstein can be seen as a 'demythologiser'. Insofar as philosophical problems arise 'through the misinterpretation of our forms of language' (PI §111), what Wittgenstein is attacking are chimera. However, those problems are, in another sense, quite real; and it would be mistaken to think that, by characterising philosophical problems as misunderstandings, confusions and nonsense, Wittgenstein wants to belittle philosophical problems:

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

Since it is in part the grammar of our words – i.e., roughly, how we use them – that generates these deep philosophical confusions, a grammatical investigation examining the

⁷ See Schroeder 2006, 154.

⁸ Cf. Schroeder 2006, 155-6.

⁹ See e.g. PI §110: "'Language (or thinking) is something unique'" – this proves to be a superstition (not a mistake!), itself produced by grammatical illusions.'

use of the relevant expressions can then potentially help end such confusions. There is also a sense in which Wittgenstein's philosophy might not be entirely negative: one could say that it attempts to offer a recipe (or at least ideas) of how to attain a certain kind of knowledge of the workings of our language in order to resolve confusion.¹⁰ But crucially, insofar as traditional philosophical problems in metaphysics are the product of confusion, Wittgenstein's negative philosophy does not attack and aim to bring down any substantial doctrines; as he puts it, 'what we are destroying are only houses of cards' (PI §118).

A central idea in Wittgenstein's thought, early and late, is the idea of rules of language. This idea finds expression in comparisons of language with a calculus and a game. I will now sketch the role of linguistic rules in Wittgenstein's philosophy and how it is linked to his notion of grammar. The *Tractatus* identified the essence of language with the general form of the proposition, encapsulated in a simple formula (TLP 6). According to this view, our language embodies a logical calculus precisely regulated by syntactical rules. The later Wittgenstein rejects this view and its ideal of linguistic precision as a 'preconception' or 'prejudice' (PI §108) and explicitly states that it is misleading to think that we are using words according to exact rules of a calculus (BB 25; PI §81). Yet he also writes that in philosophy we may nevertheless find it useful to adopt this 'very one-sided way of looking at language', '[w]e [...] constantly compare language with a calculus proceeding according to exact rules' (BB 25; cf. PI §81).

Indeed, far from abolishing the idea of rules of language entirely, Wittgenstein operates with this idea throughout his writings after 1929 (e.g. BT 196; PG §133; PI §497). The notions of grammar, use, meaning and rules constitute a conceptual nexus central to Wittgenstein's later philosophy. But a major innovation there is Wittgenstein's comparison of language to a game. Wittgenstein writes that grammar 'describes the use of words in the language', that 'the use of a word in the language is its meaning' – and he proposes: 'grammar' can be considered to have 'somewhat the same relation to the

¹⁰ A related, much-debated question in the literature is whether Wittgenstein was a 'quietist'. I will not discuss this question here but it may be useful to comment on it briefly. It strikes me as rather implausible to claim that Wittgenstein was totally quiet, as the kind of therapy he offers involves accepting arguments that refute certain views (e.g. the *reduction ad absurdum* argument that he entertains in the 'rule-following considerations'; see Section 2.6.4). This is not to deny that Wittgenstein regards philosophical claims not as false but as nonsensical, if nonsensicality can be exposed by arguments.

language as [...] the rules of a game have to the game' (PG §23). There are correct and incorrect 'moves' within our linguistic practice, just as in a game like chess where rules determine licit and illicit moves. The rules of chess govern the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate moves in a chess game; in the absence of mastery of the rules, one is not in a position to play. Likewise, knowing the grammar of an expression means that one is able to use the expression correctly. But the metaphorical use of the word 'game' in Wittgenstein's expression 'language-game' also emphasises that language use is essentially an activity. The term 'language-game' refers to the intertwinedness of linguistic and extra-linguistic activities, the embeddedness of operating with words in the broader surroundings of other human practices (cf. PI §§7, 23).¹¹

1.2 Examples of Philosophical Problems Resulting from Confusion

A central idea we get from Wittgenstein, which is almost endlessly echoed in commentaries of his work as well as in work inspired by him, is: in philosophy, we are often badly confused. As Bede Rundle puts it in the opening of his *Grammar in Philosophy: 'Philosophy may begin with wonder, but it soon ends up in confusion'* (1979, vii). A crucial feature of this confusion is, arguably, that philosophers are complacent in thinking that their problem is what they think it is. It is often claimed that this complacency is a main target of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. However, as we will see later, the details of this are contested, not to mention the contentious question of the success of Wittgenstein's treatment. But in order to give a first idea of (the relevance of) Wittgenstein's approach and how it is supposed to work, I shall give three relatively simple examples of philosophical problems that might be seen to come about and could be dissolved.¹²

i. Is it possible to step into the same river twice? Of course it is, and people do all the time. Heraclitus is nevertheless reported to have denied this for what might at first seem to be compelling reasons. A river consists of water and the water is constantly moving.

¹¹ The concept of rules and the idea of the rule-governedness of language will be the focus of Chapter 2. Chapter 3 will turn our attention to Wittgenstein's idea of language-games.

¹² The first two of the following examples are taken from Schroeder 2006; Schroeder gives a helpful list of more examples of philosophical confusions that can be dissolved by paying attention to how our language works (2006, 156-66). Schroeder also lists typical sources of philosophical problems resulting from linguistic misunderstandings in Wittgenstein's sense.

Because of the flow of water a river is subject to continuous change and never stays the same. Hence the impression that we cannot step into the same river at two different points in time. But this impression is the result of a prejudice of linguistic precision according to which the same word only denotes the same thing if that thing – or more precisely, the thing's essence – does not undergo any changes. So one might think that because the river's essence – the water that makes it up – does not stay the same, the river changes its 'identity'. But to think that is to misunderstand how language works: 'river' just means a stream of flowing water; otherwise it would be a lake. The point of Heraclitus's example is, crudely put, that some things are only what they are for their being in a process of constant change. It is also worth noting that, were the above ideal of linguistic precision to be actualised in our speaking, the concept of a river would turn out to be useless. For if we had to constantly come up with and use a new word for a constantly changing river, the communicative power of the word 'river' would break down due to an unmanageable ever-growing list of names for an ever-changing thing – and the very point of (having) the concept of a river would be completely lost.

ii. In a note from 1933, Wittgenstein writes:

Let us consider a particular philosophical problem, such as "How is it possible to measure a period of time, since the past and the future aren't present and the present is only a point?" The characteristic feature of this is that a confusion is expressed in the form of a question that doesn't acknowledge the confusion, and that what *releases* the questioner from his problem is a particular alteration of his method of expression. (PG 193)¹³

The question posed is one which cannot be answered but it is rooted in an unnoticed confusion. It is the manifestation of a confusion that, roughly, consists in an unrecognised conflation of different senses of 'measure'; it arises, as Wittgenstein puts it, from an apparent contradiction in the grammar of the word (cf. BB 26). We are inclined to think of 'measuring time' as analogous to measuring length with a measuring tape. However, measuring length in this way means measuring the distance between two things – which requires that both things be present, and it seems that neither the past nor the future are, and the present is only a point with no extension. The confusion is cleared away by calling to mind that we call a variety of different activities 'measuring' and that these different

¹³ This problem is famously discussed by Augustine in his *Confessions*, Book XI.

activities involve different types of objects. For example, we measure time by a clock, the length of a cupboard by a yardstick, force (the amount of pressure being exerted) by calculations, student learning by exams, and the cultural significance of books by conducting qualitative interviews in sociology. Some people even measure themselves against some ideal. These different types of measuring work differently, involve different procedures and instruments, and they have different purposes. By paying attention to what we mean by 'measuring' in different cases and how the corresponding actions are carried out, we can realise that it is a misleading assumption to think that these cases require the same conditions. Comparing these different meanings of 'measurement' helps 'release the questioner from his problem' by breaking the power that analogies between different activities referred to by the same word exert on us. This power, Wittgenstein admits, is sometimes hard to break, but: 'It is helpful here to remember that it is sometimes almost impossible for a child to believe that one word can have two meanings' (BB 26).

iii. Does time have a beginning or not? Yes, one might be inclined to answer, but also No, giving rise to a dilemma. On the one horn, whenever we give a more or less precise date of the beginning of time, there will be earlier points in time. In that case, the beginning of time can never be the first point in time, which seems implausible. But on the other horn, it seems equally implausible to think that time does not have a beginning, but rather that an infinite period of time has passed before any moment, and after each moment gets one moment longer. How then can we not take away from the series of moments to get to the first point?¹⁴ Infinity is unbridgeable.¹⁵

However, this problem about the beginning of time is just apparent. It arises because of a conflation of two different uses of 'time' that evoke two conflicting pictures. Wittgenstein repeatedly warns us of misleading pictures that have infiltrated our forms of language and captivated our thinking.¹⁶ At one point he calls this 'the *pictorial character* of the expressions' (EPB 156; cf. BB 107-9). Regarding the problem about the beginning of

¹⁴ This half of the paradox is of the same structure as Zeno's well-known paradox of motion which is famously discussed in Carroll's 1895 paper 'What the Tortoise Said to Achilles'.

¹⁵ This paradox resembles Kant's famous first antinomy of pure reason. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A426/B454. For an extended discussion of this paradox as an example of philosophical confusion see Gustafsson 2000, 35-40.

¹⁶ For example, in PI §191 Wittgenstein speaks of the problems with the idea that understanding a word seems like 'grasping the whole use of the word at a stroke' as 'a result of the crossing of different pictures'.

time we seem unable to reconcile the following pictures of time: (1) Time as something like ‘rails to infinity’¹⁷ and (2) time as a finite chain of points, imagined as something similar to the train line from Southampton to London made of a finite number of links with a first element. Let us look at both pictures in turn.

The first picture of time as ‘rails to infinity’ captures the first horn of our dilemma. The picture of an ‘infinitely long timeline without a beginning’ corresponds to the possibility that we can always come up with a greater number in a temporal specification to refer to an earlier point on the timeline; the construction of temporal specifications allows us to always insert an earlier point in time. This is why we might be tempted to think that the statement ‘Time has no beginning’ presents us with some kind of awe-inspiring metaphysical discovery. But instead the statement makes explicit how we use certain words – it states a rule of grammar for some constructions involving temporal specifications. The second picture of time, where time must have a beginning, captures the second horn of our dilemma. It concerns our uses of ‘time’ that suggest a picture of time as something finite. ‘Time’ in these uses refers to a particular process, comparable to a game of chess or a concert, i.e. something that has a starting-point and an end-point, and which cannot, therefore, be infinitely long.

Failing to see that these two pictures derive from different uses of ‘time’ leads to the apparent dilemma. As long as we do not conflate the two different usages, the dilemma does not arise. If we do conflate them, confusion prevails. It is key that we recognise the differences, keep them apart and do not fall for the intriguing idea that all uses of ‘time’ must be held or brought together by one monolithic meaning.

As indicated, some of these problems have ancient roots and long histories, some intertwining in hard-to-identify ways with substantive scientific questions.¹⁸ So the above

¹⁷ This picture features prominently in Wittgenstein’s discussion of rule-following (PI §218) and seems to be one of the typical pictures that might be evoked almost naturally when we think of infinity. Note that in the discussion of rule-following Wittgenstein focuses on a central inclination to think of the *beginning* of a number series as a visible section of rails which stretch to infinity, whereas my point here is that in the case of time such rails seem to stretch infinitely in two directions.

¹⁸ *Outside* philosophy, however, it is, and remains, a problem for scientists, especially cosmologists, to settle the *empirical* question of the details of the beginning of time and what is meant by that in theories of the beginning of the universe. But this problem is in an important sense separate from philosophical problems concerning our language use.

analyses of them may seem less than compelling. But I hope to have given a *prima facie* sense of how philosophical problems might be seen as the result of misleading analogies and pictures that are evoked by certain expressions. These analogies and pictures may produce in us bewilderment because they seem to be incompatible with some of our ordinary convictions. For example, we assume that what is called by the same word must retain the same physical constitution over time and this assumption (which is easily given up once pinned down) has led to the claim that we cannot step into the same river twice. Or we succumb to the idea that the same word has the same meaning on all occasions – and arrive at the odd conclusion that time cannot be measured. We mix up different rules for the use of a word and the corresponding aspects of the relevant concept – and we seem to face a puzzling paradox about time as being both finite and infinite.

1.3 Arbitrariness and Metaphysics

A particular set of philosophical confusions that are worth noting here arise when we mistake what are in fact descriptions of our use of words for statements of fact about how the world is. Indeed, Wittgenstein goes so far as to claim on occasion that this mistake is ‘the characteristic of a metaphysical question’ (BB 35). It is in light of such confusions that Wittgenstein proposes that the rules of grammar are arbitrary (e.g. PG §§27, 55, 68; Z §§320, 331; PI §497) in the sense that the rules of grammar cannot be justified or refuted by reference to reality (call this the Arbitrariness Claim):

Grammar is not accountable to any reality. It is grammatical rules that determine meaning (constitute it) and so they themselves are not answerable to any meaning and to that extent are arbitrary. (PG 133)

Peter Hacker summarises the Arbitrariness Claim as follows:

[Grammatical rules] are not rendered correct or right in virtue of reflecting the nature of reality. They are not accountable to any reality [...] there can be no question of whether the meaning of a word, as determined by the rules for its use, accords with the essential nature of the objects [...] the empirical investigation into the nature of the thing or stuff in question *presupposes* the meaning as given by the grammatical criteria for the application of the expression [...] there can be no such thing as justifying such grammatical propositions [...] by reference to reality. (2000, 176)

As Hacker indicates, the Arbitrariness Claim is first and foremost directed against a form of realism, against the idea that the rules of grammar could be justified by demonstrating that they are 'true' to, or reflect, the nature of things. The Arbitrariness Claim is based on a regress argument against the possibility of justifying grammar by reality: in order to justify grammar, we would have to make use of expressions that themselves have a grammar and thus stand in need of justification:

The conventions of grammar can't be justified by a description of what is represented. Any description of that kind already presupposes the rules of grammar. (BT 238)¹⁹

Wittgenstein's characterisation of the rules of grammar as conventions – and as in this sense arbitrary – is directed against (mis)understanding them as expressing metaphysical truths. Another way of expressing Wittgenstein's point here is to say that he rejects a particular understanding of 'grounding': that the rules of grammar are arbitrary is a rejection of the idea that the rules are determined by reality (or facts) as truth-apt descriptions of reality are determined by reality (or facts).²⁰ That is, the Arbitrariness Claim is directed against a certain philosophical confusion that consists in mistaking rules of grammar for matters of fact, that is, in mistaking grammar for that kind of thing which corresponds or fails to correspond to some reality.²¹

¹⁹ For another argument against the possibility of justifying grammar by reality, see Hacker 2000, 77.

²⁰ Note that the expressions 'grounded' and 'grounding' (and their cognates) are ambiguous. I will explicitly touch on the topic of arbitrariness again in Section 7.1.1; there I will also briefly return to the ambiguity just mentioned and suggest that there are other senses in which grammar *is* grounded in facts. Note also that the Arbitrariness Claim is related to a couple of issues about the authority of rules that I will discuss later (e.g. Sections 4.4, 6.3 and 6.5).

²¹ A whole chapter in an earlier version of this thesis was devoted to the question of whether this issue of 'grounding' leads to a form of realism or idealism. But due to considerations of length I decided to cut out my discussion of this very complex issue revolving around the idea that the rules of grammar have an underpinning that gives them their authority, a 'grounding' that might seem to make some of them the *right* rules. Roughly speaking, a central moral to be drawn from Wittgenstein is that it is not some metaphysical structure that endows our words with meaning; rather, it is within our practices that rules have evolved and can be said to constitute meaning. This is perhaps one of the most important points in Wittgenstein's philosophy: language does not reflect or fail to reflect the metaphysical structure of the world. Looking for such metaphysical facts is, according to Wittgenstein, chasing after chimeras; there is nothing *hidden* of this kind (e.g. the essence of language, the logical form of propositions) to be brought to light through philosophical analysis. Quite the opposite, Wittgenstein thinks that our view is obstructed by this metaphysical mode of approaching language and philosophical questions; the presupposition (and corresponding expectation) that there are metaphysical facts that our language tracks or fails to track is problematic. Philosophy should focus on our ordinary practice of language use, a practice that is governed by rules where these rules are precisely not understood as hidden but open to view, manifest in our linguistic practices (cf. e.g. PI §§91-2, 126, 129)

Indeed, this mistake is ‘the characteristic of a metaphysical question’ (BB 35). This view of metaphysics has its roots in Wittgenstein treatment of logic in the *Tractatus*.²² The later Wittgenstein’s concern with the distinction between empirical and grammatical propositions targets the same mistake that lies at the bottom of metaphysics; this distinction is key to understanding the idea of rules of grammar. An empirical proposition expresses a contingent truth or falsity about reality, whereas a grammatical proposition expresses a rule of grammar, a standard of correctness of use that is not answerable to reality in any way. For example, the statement ‘A drake is a male duck’ is not an empirical statement, not a ‘statement of fact’ (AWL 18).²³ The characterisation of necessary propositions too as rules of grammar is one of the important applications of the Arbitrariness Claim and directed against a form of metaphysical realism. Characterising not only ‘A drake is a male duck’ but also necessary propositions such as ‘There is no reddish green’ as rules of grammar is one of the ways in which Wittgenstein criticises traditional philosophy. The basic idea is that these propositions too do not describe how things are but are rather ‘norms of description’.²⁴ But when we succumb to philosophical confusion, we construe such nonempirical statements as metaphysical, as statements of a ‘super-truth’ or a ‘super-fact’ (cf. BB 54).²⁵

If this vision is correct, many issues with which philosophers have traditionally concerned themselves arise solely out of grammatical matters misunderstood. For example, one of the central questions of traditional metaphysics concerns the relation between language and world, thought and reality. In his post-*Tractarian* philosophy, Wittgenstein addresses this relation within the framework of the idea of a grammatical investigation: ‘Like everything metaphysical the harmony between thought and reality is to be found in the grammar of the language’ (PG §112; Z §55). Another of Wittgenstein’s

²² There he argues that logical propositions are not substantive claims that can be true or false, they are not ‘super-truths’, as it were; for which we might need a metaphysics of logic. Instead, according to the *Tractatus*, logical propositions articulate the syntax of our language. It should be noted that this interpretation of the *Tractatus* is far from uncontroversial. In contrast to the reading sketched here, some commentators see the early Wittgenstein as holding a form of metaphysical realism.

²³ Section 7.1.2 will briefly touch on this issue again.

²⁴ For an insightful discussion of this idea see Baker/Hacker 2009, ch. VII.

²⁵ As mentioned in the Introduction, one of the important applications of the idea of grammatical rules and their arbitrariness is in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy of mathematics. A crucial claim of Wittgenstein’s is that mathematical truths are rules of grammar; they do not describe empirical or metaphysical reality.

remarks also suggests that a grammatical investigation can give answers to, or at least provide us with methods to deal with, questions of the essential nature of things, which are traditionally at the heart of metaphysics: *'Essence is expressed in grammar'* (PI §371). So Wittgenstein sees his concept of grammar to have a bearing on these and other questions in metaphysics. This further underlines the key role of *'grammar'* in his philosophy.

1.4 A Simple View of *'Grammar'*

Section 1.2 sketched three examples of philosophical problems resulting from misunderstandings of the grammar of certain words. I will now present a *'simple view'* of grammar that has a certain understanding of how grammar relates to such philosophical problems. This Simple View will prepare the ground for the discussion of a couple of issues and debates about Wittgenstein's concept of grammar that I will address in later chapters. The Simple View construes grammar on the model of a particular understanding of Wittgenstein's comparison of language to games.

It is undisputed that Wittgenstein holds that grammar is normative: an important point of the comparison of language with games is to capture the normativity of language. As we have seen above, a natural line of thought here is that, just as the rules of chess determine what counts as a correct move in the game, the rules of grammar determine what counts as a correct use of a word. Baker and Hacker put this point as follows:

The use of a word is determined by the rules for the use of that word. [...] The rules for the use of a word are constitutive of what Wittgenstein called *'its grammar'*. [...] The grammar of an expression [...] specifies licit combinatorial possibilities of the expression, i.e. *which combinations make sense and which don't*, which are allowed and which are not allowed. (Baker/Hacker 2005, 145-6)

The suggestion is that the rules of grammar determine legitimate uses of words by specifying *'which combinations of words make sense and which don't'*. In other words, the rules of grammar determine what is correct, i.e. what it makes sense to say. This idea is often expressed by saying that the rules of grammar determine the *'bounds of sense'*: *'Philosophical questions commonly concern the bounds of sense, and these are determined by the rules for the use of words, by what it makes sense to say in a language'*

(Baker/Hacker 2009, 57). Similarly, Hacker also speaks of philosophy as ‘the guardian of the bounds of sense’ (Hacker 2000, 96).²⁶

According to the Simple View – which is modelled on the chess comparison and casts rules as determining the ‘bounds of sense’ – in order to be able to play certain language-games with a word, you need to learn the rules of the game; if you do not use a word in accord with the rules for its use, you break the rules of the game and speak nonsense. The rules of grammar provide standards of correctness in the sense that only if we use language in accordance with them do we say something meaningful; if we do not, we transgress the bounds of sense and say something nonsensical. On the Simple View, philosophical problems are the manifestation of failing to conform with the rules for the use of an expression. These rules are seen as somewhat elusive and that is why philosophers break them. Hence, the main task of a grammatical investigation is to document the rules. Such a documentation will provide us with all the resources required to criticise and correct misuses of expressions in philosophy.

While it is undisputed that Wittgenstein holds that grammar is normative, there are, as we will see later, convincing reasons to reject the Simple View. One of the main reasons is that what Wittgenstein himself makes of the comparison of language to a game seems rather different from the Simple View’s understanding of that comparison. To clarify this claim, the next section will present two different ways of accounting for the normativity of rules and their role in a grammatical investigation, exemplifying two different conceptions of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy.

1.5 The ‘Policing’ Conception and the ‘Diagnostic’ Conception

Commentators on Wittgenstein agree that his notion of grammar is normative. But there are conflicting interpretations of the kind of normativity that he attaches to the rules of grammar. This section presents two different interpretations of Wittgenstein’s conception of ‘grammar’: a ‘policing’ conception and a ‘diagnostic’ conception. The Policing Conception presupposes an impersonal authority of grammatical rules to definitively

²⁶ Later we will see that there is a lot of controversy around the relation between ‘sense’ and ‘nonsense’ (Section 1.5 and Chapters 5 and 6).

decide questions of sense and nonsense. By contrast, the Diagnostic Conception argues that the rules of grammar provide no ultimate authority to which we can appeal to decide such questions.

Mulhall gives the following description of the Policing Conception: It characterises

our uses of words as governed by their [...] grammar in such a way that a grasp of that grammar suffices to determine whether or not, in any given context of a word's use, that mode of deployment accords with or contravenes it. More or less straightforward grammatical reminders [...] are designed to recall us to what we always already knew – the rules which govern our practices of applying words. Such grammatical reminders therefore exercise a kind of impersonal authority over our uses of words; [...]. Hence, when we encounter uses of words which do not appear to accord with that everyday normativity, we must either reject them as aberrations or misuses, as instances of nonsense, or we must treat them as instantiating new uses of the term, [...]. (2002, 311-2)

Another way of expressing the main idea of the Policing Conception is to say that the point of Wittgenstein's comparison of language to a game is to show that philosophers are breaking the rules of the game and are therefore talking nonsense; by reminding philosophers of the rules for use of a word we can authoritatively criticise and definitively correct them. Hacker²⁷ – who could be seen as a famous proponent of the conception under discussion – argues that grammar is a powerful tool for demonstrating when philosophers talk nonsense:

By carefully scrutinizing usage from case to case, the philosopher may determine at what point he has drawn an overdraft on Reason, failed to conform with the rules for the use of an expression, and so, in subtle and not readily identifiable ways, transgressed the bounds of sense. (Baker/Hacker 2009, 59)

According to Hacker, talking nonsense is the result of using words in a way that violates the rules for the use of these words. Correspondingly, Hacker sees Wittgenstein's grammatical investigations as being concerned with the tabulation of grammatical rules:

The task of philosophy is to resolve philosophical problems, *inter alia* by describing the uses of expressions, tabulating rules for their use, delineating their relationships and ordering them in such a manner as will shed light upon the problems. (Baker/Hacker 2009, 257)

²⁷ Initially Baker and Hacker developed their interpretation of Wittgenstein in collaboration; many of their texts are jointly written. But I refer here only to Hacker, rather than Baker and Hacker, because Baker changed his interpretation of Wittgenstein – in particular with respect to the role of rules and the idea of tabulating rules in a 'surveyable representation' to decide questions of sense and nonsense (see Baker 2004, 70).

The suggestion is that tabulating the rules of grammar gives us a powerful tool for criticising philosophers as well as scientists who have been bewitched by philosophical confusions, because, as Hacker claims, we can invoke these rules to ‘restrain [science] within the bounds of sense, [...], [and] restrain scientists and philosophers who have been beguiled by their myth-making from metaphysical nonsense’ (Hacker 1996, 123). This tabulation of the rules can demonstrate, according to Hacker, ‘if and when they [scientists and philosophers] transgress the bounds of sense’ (Hacker 1996, 123).²⁸

As indicated above, in Section 1.4, this view requires that the rules of grammar, although possessed of an impersonal authority, are nonetheless elusive. Wittgenstein’s remarks that we lack ‘*an overview* of the use of our words’ and that ‘[t]he concept of a surveyable representation is of fundamental significance for us’ (PI §122) are to be interpreted, according to Hacker, as calling for mapping our conceptual landscape by tabulating the rules of grammar: ‘When one has attained an overview, when one has a clear grasp of the terrain, one can represent what is then in view in the form of a map’ (Baker/Hacker 2009, 310). This ‘geographical understanding’ of grammatical rules might seem to be an essential feature of the Policing Conception, suggesting that grammar is ‘prohibitive’.²⁹

The Diagnostic Conception can be seen as a response to issues that the Policing Conception raises. James Conant characterises the Diagnostic Conception of Wittgenstein’s philosophy in the following way (Conant ascribes this conception to Hilary Putnam who he is quoting in this passage):

(1) [Wittgenstein’s] philosophical practice is not exhausted by the activity of merely describing the differences between language-games; partly because (2) genuinely grasping what such differences come to itself requires an extensive positive effort of *understanding* (one of ‘trying to understand the life we lead with our concepts in each of these distinct areas’), and because (3) the achievement of such understanding is itself in service of an ulterior elucidatory aim – one of *enabling us* to see something about ourselves: that sometimes we mean nothing when we think we mean something (if ‘we try to state clearly what the problem is, it turns out to be a nonsense problem’); [(4); no number in original] this activity of elucidation itself presupposes an equally extensive task of *diagnosis* (‘trying

²⁸ Hacker emphasises the importance of grammar thus: ‘Its rules determine the limits of sense’ (Baker/Hacker 2009, 59). See also e.g. Baker/Hacker 2005, 145-6.

²⁹ Section 6.2 will briefly return to the notions of conceptual geography, ‘surveyable representation’ and tabulation of rules.

to see just what picture “holds us captive” – to find the roots of our conviction that we have a genuine problem’); thus (5) when a problem is made to disappear it is not because we succeed in averting our gaze from the problem, leaving it unaddressed, but because *the problem itself* is made to disappear; hence (6) we are not called upon to renounce anything (but rather to see that *there is nothing to renounce* where we thought that there was something); and, finally, (7) these twin philosophical tasks of understanding and elucidation never come to an end – each of us, necessarily always under the pressure of taking thought, will necessarily always provide the philosopher (in each of us and in each other) with plenty of unfinished business. (1997, 212-3)

Central to the Diagnostic Conception is (4) which in turn draws heavily on (2), the idea of *understanding* the differences between language-games in terms of what the role of certain concepts is within our life with language, and on (3), the idea that such understanding involves a kind of *elucidation* that is concerned with why and how we come to believe that what we think makes sense when it actually does not. My suggestion is that another way of making these points is to say that, on the Diagnostic Conception, it is not enough to describe the different rules of different language-games to achieve the kind of understanding that is needed to understand and perhaps ultimately dissolve philosophical problems.

The Diagnostic Conception argues that Wittgenstein’s own philosophical practice shows that it is problematic to think that when we encounter what might appear to be the misuse of a word, we can straightforwardly appeal to an authority in the form of grammatical rules to show determinately that what we have before us is a piece of nonsense. According to the Diagnostic Conception, the grammatical rules for a word do not always determine objectively or impersonally, one might say, whether the word is applicable in a particular case. Our understanding of the rules for the use of a certain expression, as Mulhall puts it, ‘offers us guidance, and determines what kinds of consideration will be pertinent to the question at stake’ (2002, 314); but whether in the relevant case the expression is used in accord with the rules for its use (and, if not, whether it really leads to nonsense) is a question that can only be answered by considering and attending to the contextual surroundings and – on a more general level – taking into account such factors as how we operate with the expression, what is involved in learning to use it, how it is bound up with our interests, the way its use is woven into our practices, etc.

All this reveals a complexity that is not exhausted by the Policing Conception's idea that philosophers are breaking the rules of the game and have merely to be reminded of the relevant rules. The Diagnostic Conception has a different focus: it is concerned with how and why we might have certain temptations to picture certain concepts and phenomena in ways that give rise to philosophical problems, and it is – as part of this diagnosis of the how and why – also concerned with the broader contexts in which we use words, embedding questions of philosophical confusion into considerations about our 'form of life'. A principal conviction of the Diagnostic Conception is, then, that philosophers do not know what they are doing when they are using certain expressions; the Diagnostic Conception doubts that the rules of grammar provide everything necessary and sufficient for determining whether what is said on a particular occasion is something of which we can make sense. Moreover, the Diagnostic Conception is sceptical of the prospects of the success of attempts to dissolve philosophical problems by merely pointing out the rules of grammar to those philosophers who are supposedly misusing words. The diagnostic task is to respond to the situation in which an expression is used in a way that appears to break with the rules of grammar by taking in facts about the occasions on which the relevant expression is used and wider facts about the world which we inhabit. On the view of the Diagnostic Conception, we face certain problems if we adopt the 'policing' view that sense and nonsense are determined exclusively by grammatical rules and that philosophical problems can be dissolved and confusions removed by stating the rules for the use of an expression.

Another way of bringing out the main difference between the two conceptions presented here is to look at another of Wittgenstein's famous remarks: 'The work of the philosopher consists in marshalling recollections [reminders] for a particular purpose' (PI §127). But what is it that needs to be recollected for the purpose of achieving clarity and resolving particular philosophical problems? What we have to be reminded of to remove philosophical confusion are the ways in which we use words. As Wittgenstein puts it in a related remark: 'To study philosophy is really to recollect. We remind ourselves that we really use words in this way' (BT 419). According to the Policing Conception, the reminders of how expressions are used come in the form of rules that tell us if and when the use of an expression fails to conform with the rules for its use and thus is a piece of

nonsense. By contrast, according to the Diagnostic Conception, the reminders of how expressions are used include, alongside rules, considerations about what we want to say with an expression, how we operate with it, how it is bound up with our interests, what its point is within our practices, etc.

Whether Hacker can himself be seen as advocating the Policing Conception, and nothing but that conception, is a tricky issue. He is certainly alive to the fact that philosophical problems are embedded in the broader contexts alluded to above and come about, for example, through certain 'pictures' 'holding us captive' (PI §115; Baker/Hacker 2005, 290). But as we saw above, when articulating a summary overview of what Wittgenstein's work does, the formulations to which he characteristically turns certainly do seem to invite construal as advocating the Policing Conception. My principal concern here has been to present the two conceptions, as they will help us understand several of the issues that we will confront in the discussion that follows; but how precisely they inform the views of the commentators we will discuss is a complex question to be considered as we progress.

In this chapter, I have given an initial understanding 'grammar' in the later Wittgenstein and a first gloss of the question of what philosophical work the concept of grammar is meant to be doing. The notion of 'rules of grammar' will get particular attention in Chapter 2 which discusses the idea that language is rule-governed. Chapter 3 looks at Wittgenstein's concept of 'language-games' and gives a first account of the notion of 'form of life'. Whether the kind of authority that the Policing Conception ascribes to the rules of grammar actually attaches to them, and should be attached to them, will be a focus of Chapter 4. Chapter 5 will present how rules of grammar can help us identify nonsense; but I will also show there that it seems doubtful whether citing rules of grammar can persuade in the way the Policing Conception seems presuppose they can. The Diagnostic Conception will be subject to further scrutiny in Chapter 6; as we will see, this conception faces difficulties that cast doubt on whether (and if so, how) different it can really be from the Policing Conception to which it is meant to provide an alternative. A main claim of this thesis is that the Policing Conception is implausible but the Diagnostic Conception faces difficulties of its own and makes itself use of ideas of 'policing'. However, both

conceptions are useful devices, as they help us articulate important issues about the ideas under discussion throughout this thesis.

Chapter 2

The Rule-Governedness of Language

The centrality of the idea of rules of grammar in Wittgenstein might seem to presuppose that language is essentially rule-governed, yet there are also themes in his work that seem to suggest that it is not. This chapter discusses the claim that language is rule-governed and considers reasons for and against it that emerge out of Wittgenstein's work. We have seen that idea of rules of grammar is a recurrent theme in Wittgenstein's texts and central to his reflections on our linguistic practices. The Simple View of grammar presented in the previous chapter underlines the centrality of rules by focusing on a particular aspect of the comparison between language and games: that in both cases there are rules that determine what is correct. But this chapter will demonstrate that the later Wittgenstein also expresses reservations against the claim that language is rule-governed and acknowledges that it can easily mislead us.

A main point of Wittgenstein's reflections is that we should resist *philosophical sublimations* of the notion of rules of language. Examples of such sublimations are the idea that language needs rules and idea that there is a complete system of linguistic rules that determines meaning and the correctness of any 'move' in advance. Against such sublimations, Wittgenstein suggests that the meaning of an expression is its use within a certain practice; such a practice gives words meaning, but this practice uses words according to certain rules. He writes, for instance, that an explanation of meaning 'is not an empirical proposition and not a causal explanation, but a rule, a convention' (PG 68).

Although Wittgenstein grew more and more wary of the importance of rules for language, he never really gave up the conviction that the notion of rules plays a crucial role and can help us clarify important aspects of the often philosophically perplexing phenomena of meaning and language. For example, in his last work, *On Certainty*, he repeats his famous 'the meaning of a word is its use' remark from the *Investigations*, and adds: 'That is why there exists a correspondence between the concepts "rule" and "meaning"' (OC §62). Quite how to understand the important connective nexus between

the notions of meaning, use and rules will be a central question in this and the next chapter.³⁰

The idea that language is rule-governed is crucial in this context – and there has been a lot of controversy about its place in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy. As we will see, the understanding of the idea of the rule-governedness of language crucially depends on how we understand the concept of ‘rule’ itself and what it means to follow a rule. Importantly for us, the idea that language is rule-governed has a significant bearing on the understanding of our overarching aim: Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘grammar’. This finds expression in the literature in various ways. Baker and Hacker, for example, remark: ‘in speaking (giving orders, asking questions, making statements, telling stories, etc.) we are following rules of grammar’ (2009, 156). Similarly, Glock writes about the purpose of the notion of grammar in relation to the thought that language is governed by rules: ‘The idea of grammar draws attention to the fact that speaking a language is, among other things, to engage in a rule-guided activity’ (1996, 151).

So how then are we to understand the idea that language is rule-governed? Section 2.1 will explain Wittgenstein’s famous characterisation ‘meaning is use’ that might seem to clash with the idea of rule-governedness. I will show that it does not and that there is a sense in which meaning and linguistic normativity are a matter of rules: the only use of significance is *correct* use and in describing correct use we are describing the rules governing that use. Section 2.2 will address further the ambiguity that attaches to the term ‘rules’. I will suggest that the rules of grammar can, and often are, implicit. The idea that language is rule-governed might seem to require that people actually cite them, but it does not. In Section 2.3, we will continue to work through how Wittgenstein’s remarks address certain worries about the idea that language is rule-governed, and the discussion will provide further qualifications of the concept of ‘rule’ as it informs Wittgenstein’s picture of language: rule-governedness might seem to imply that all words have definitions of a certain sort – fixed, determinate, exact – but it does not. Section 2.4 will show that, in the light of reservations that Wittgenstein expresses against the claim that language is rule-governed and the qualifications that he gives the concept of ‘rules’, a plausible

³⁰ Chapter 3 will further explore how this nexus of notions informs the important concept of ‘language-games’.

understanding of the idea of rule-governedness is available nonetheless: a functional conception of rules. This conception can accommodate some of the main insights of the idea of rule-governedness. Nevertheless, I will show that we have also reason to resist certain versions of the functional conception that operate with an implausibly broad concept of rules. Section 2.5 will look at how such a broad concept of rules invites misunderstandings. I will argue that it blurs the important distinction between giving a rule and giving an example (of the application of a rule). Section 2.6 will focus on issues around the topic of rule-following that are relevant to this chapter's discussion. One might think that the idea of rule-governedness implies that intentions play a certain problematic role here, but it does not. Or it might seem to require that a rule-follower must be able to 'adduce' the rules in a certain sense, but it does not. This section will end by identifying a central moral that the famous regress of interpretations in Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations holds for the idea of rule-governedness: knowledge of the rules and their correct application do not come apart.

2.1 Meaning and Use

This section will examine the concept of meaning and thereby make a first step towards clarifying the role of rules. The guiding question is here: What does one have to know in order to know the meaning of a word? I will suggest, with Wittgenstein, that the meaning of a word is its use and that 'use' needs to be understood in a normative way: not how a word happens to be used but how it ought to be used. The critical role of rules of grammar in Wittgenstein's philosophy might seem to clash with this idea that 'meaning is use'. But as we will see, to say that language is rule-governed is a natural articulation of the idea that there is *correct* use.

We find the following famous remark in the *Investigations*:

For a *large* class of cases of the employment of the word "meaning" – though not for *all* – this word can be explained in this way: the meaning of a word is its use in the language. (PI §43)³¹

³¹ Similarly, PI §560: "The meaning of a word is what an explanation of its meaning explains." That is, if you want to understand the use of the word "meaning", look for what one calls "an explanation of meaning". Note

This is meant to be a trivial reminder about the concept of meaning,³² a humdrum observation about the meaning of the word ‘meaning’ – the meaning of a word can in many cases be characterised as its use in the language. Wittgenstein’s remark is directed against a wide-spread view in philosophy: that linguistic meaning is something puzzling and that it therefore stands in need of an explanation in the form of a theory. But linguistic meaning is no puzzling phenomenon at all.³³ For example, the shopkeeper language-game in PI §1 shows that knowing the meaning of the words ‘five red apples’ is to know how to use them, how to operate and how to respond to them. Or consider how children learn the meaning of words, e.g. ‘hello’, ‘tired’, ‘toothbrush’; they learn how to use these words: to say ‘hello’ when they see someone; to understand when and why someone is called ‘tired’; to refer to that usually much-loved object that they are meant to use before going to bed. What the children thereby learn is to understand the usage of the words and master them: when, why, and where they are used, and how they can be combined with other words to form sentences which in turn are used on certain occasions and for certain purposes; for example, to give a description, to sing a song, to start an argument, to tell a joke, to ask for advice, and so forth.

So what one has to know in order to know the meaning of a word is the word’s use in the language. Crucially, ‘use’ is here to be taken normatively: one has to know how a word ought to be used. That is, rather than knowing how people happen to use a word, knowing the meaning of a word is to know what its *correct* use is. There are correct and incorrect ways of using words. Our linguistic practices are normative in this sense. As the next section will show, descriptions of correct use are naturally be regarded as articulations of the rules of grammar.

that the first sentence is a self-quotation of BT 29; i.e., Wittgenstein explains and specifies here what he meant by a claim he made earlier elsewhere.

³² Some see a ‘theory of meaning’ articulated in Wittgenstein’s remark (e.g. (perhaps most famously) Kenny (1973)). But it is not the central claim of a ‘theory of meaning’; it should not even be taken as a controversial philosophical claim. However, the discussion around ‘theories of meaning’ is very complex and here is not the place to engage with it.

³³ See Schroeder (2006, 169) for a brief and illuminating explanation of this.

2.2 The Ambiguity of 'Rules'

This section will examine the ambiguous term 'rule' and start to examine the question: Is the normativity of linguistic meaning that the previous section identified a matter of rules? Crucially, there are different notions of what it would take for normativity to be a matter of rules, I will discuss the ambiguous term 'rule' and argue that rules of grammar describe correct use but need not be explicit in a speaker's behaviour.

A certain ambiguity attaches to the idea of following linguistic rules. According to an extreme version of this idea, in speaking the speaker is 'operating a calculus according to definite rules' (PI §81). Wittgenstein clearly rejects this version of the idea. But the expression 'the rule by which [someone following a rule] proceeds' can also mean:

The hypothesis that satisfactorily describes his use of words, which we observe; or the rule which he looks up when he uses signs; or the one which he gives us in reply if we ask him what his rule is. (PI §82)

The remark presents three options of what can count as such a rule:

- (a) a description that someone external observing the situation would give of the relevant instance of language use;
- (b) that which is consulted by the speaker when or before he utters the words; or
- (c) a description that the speaker himself gives when he is asked which rule he followed.

(a) is a case where the rule is *implicit* in someone's behaviour; (b) and (c) are cases where the rule is *explicitly* present in the behaviour; when someone consults the rule or gives the rule when asked why he did something, the rule is *explicit* in what he does. The three options are not mutually exclusive; what the contrasts between them suggests is that Wittgenstein believes a speaker need not point to a rule before or during (as in b) or after (as in c) the utterance, but can still be said to be following a rule.

The rules of grammar in Wittgenstein's sense are largely implicit in language use: speakers do not normally look up the rules and they are rarely challenged to formulate such rules in their everyday use of language. Wittgenstein expresses this point about the implicitness of many grammatical rules as follows: 'Grammar is a description of language *ex post* [eine nachträgliche Beschreibung der Sprache]' (MS 110, 110). But words can be

said to be governed by grammatical rules independently of whether we describe those rules; the rules need not be (made) explicit – it is not required that we actually consult the rules nor that a speaker actually gives the rule that they are following. All that is needed for saying that language is rule-governed is that it be possible to use words correctly (or incorrectly) and to describe instances of language use with a rule.

However, we do need to distinguish two kinds of descriptions of language use:

- (i) Descriptions of how words are actually used, including all the mistakes we make in ordinary life. Such descriptions would constitute factual statements about language use. This is purely descriptive.
- (ii) Rules as descriptions of how in the relevant practice the words are used when used correctly. Such descriptions capture the normativity of language use. This is prescriptive to the extent that our descriptions of linguistic practice are descriptions of something normative.³⁴

One way of explaining the distinction (and its importance) between (i) and (ii) is by looking at the standard argument against psychologism about logic. One of its famous proponents, Frege, argues that the laws of logic could not be comprehended as psychological laws; if logic is the body of laws of valid inference, these laws cannot be regarded as identical to the natural or psychological laws which control how we think and form judgements (Frege 1884).³⁵ The reason for this is the simple fact that we sometimes make invalid inferences. Consequently, people's actual behaviour cannot tell us what is right. So there is a crucial distinction between the psychological and the logical.³⁶ What people actually do is only a flawed guide to the study of valid inference. The idea of Frege's argument against psychologism can be transferred to rules of grammar; the distinction between (i) and (ii) is in an important respect similar to that between the psychological and the logical: how people happen to use a word as in (i) is to be distinguished from the correct use of a word as in (ii). The only use of significance in

³⁴ This issue of descriptions of language as something normative is discussed, e.g., in Glock 2017, 19-20.

³⁵ Quite what exactly Frege's conception of logic was is a difficult question; for a discussion of this, see Conant 1991.

³⁶ An obvious question to ask here is, of course, the difficult question what logical laws are if not psychological laws. Here is not the place to discuss this question, however. See Chapter 5's discussion of Wittgenstein's conception of nonsense for a different perspective and use of the logical/psychological distinction.

descriptions of language use in a grammatical investigation is correct use; not all empirical use that also includes the errors speakers make (e.g. slips of the tongue).

We have seen that rules of grammar are normative descriptions of correct language use. In describing correct use we are describing the rules governing that use. Furthermore, we have seen that the rules of grammar need not be explicit in a speaker's behaviour. Instead, the rules of grammar can be, and often are, implicit in our linguistic practices.

2.3 Qualifications of the Role of Rules

However, some of Wittgenstein's remarks on rules call for further clarifications and refinements, as they may seem to suggest that there are no rules or otherwise appear to speak against certain understandings of the idea that language is rule-governed. For example,

not only do we not think of the rules of usage – of definitions, etc. – while using language, but when we are asked to give such rules, in most cases we aren't able to do so. We are unable clearly to circumscribe the concepts we use; not because we don't know their real definition, but because there is no real 'definition' to them. To suppose that there *must* be would be like supposing that whenever children play with a ball they play a game according to strict rules. (BB 25; cf. BB 27)

This section will discuss concerns to be found in Wittgenstein's texts that raise issues about the claim that language is rule-governed. I will argue that these concerns do not undermine that claim but require that it be qualified. More specifically, the discussion will show that we neither must think of the rules when following them nor have knowledge of our concepts' 'real' definitions (2.3.1) and that rules can be vague and do not determine all possible uses of a word (2.3.2).

2.3.1 'We don't think of the rules of usage' and the inability to give 'definitions'

The passage from BB 25 expresses two possible reasons against the view that language use is rule-governed. First, we do not think of rules when saying something; there normally is no set of rules running through our heads in such cases. Second, we often cannot give rules for the use of a word, i.e. we cannot always give definitions of the concepts we use –

at least not 'clearly circumscribed' ones.³⁷ The passage demonstrates that Wittgenstein recognises that there are certain issues about the claim that language is rule-governed. But, as we will see, the two reasons are no compelling objections against characterising language use as rule-governed in the sense that it be possible to use words correctly (and incorrectly) and to give normative descriptions of instances of that usage.

We can make short shrift of the first reason, as the following response is easily available on the basis of Wittgenstein's distinction in PI §82 (see Section 2.2 above). Of course, a competent speaker need not think about rules, just as a proficient chess player almost never thinks about, let alone cites, rules; yet chess is undoubtedly a game governed by rules. So that 'we do not think of the rules of usage' is no compelling objection against characterising language use as rule-governed. Rules of grammar need not be explicitly followed (speakers do not have to consult them all the time nor do they have to give the rule they are following). Indeed, rules can also be implicitly followed: the 'rule according to which a speaker proceeds' often means a description given by an external observer of an instance of language use.

Let us look then at the second reason. Wittgenstein says that we cannot clearly circumscribe our concepts because 'there is no real "definition" to them'. As Wittgenstein's use of inverted commas around 'definition' indicate, it is the very notion of 'definition' that is at issue. Wittgenstein is attacking the presupposition that there must be a 'real "definition"' of a concept, a definition that reflects a certain metaphysical nature prescribing strict rules of usage: 'To suppose that there *must* be would be like supposing that whenever children play with a ball they play a game according to strict rules'. But this kind of 'definition' is a fantasy. That is presumably why Wittgenstein uses inverted commas: the 'real "definition"' does not even deserve that name, as it were.

³⁷ This second point is a self-criticism, a criticism of the so-called calculus conception of language and linguistic rules that Wittgenstein developed after his return to philosophy in 1929. Rather than identifying the meaning of a sign with the object referred to (which was, roughly, his view in the *Tractatus*), this conception centres on the idea of a set of grammatical rules, a 'calculus' whose structure of rules determines the meaning of words. This conception of language as a calculus could be seen as having its correlate in the conception of speaking expressed and rejected in the above passage from the *Blue Book*: that certain mental processes *must* accompany the act of speaking. Wittgenstein's remarks in his 'middle-period' writings also show some awareness of the issues about the idea of a calculus and he 'softened' the idea by recognising that one can (and does) *compare* language to a calculus but needs to be careful not to misunderstand this comparison as 'revealing' some 'real' and 'fixed' structure of language.

According to Wittgenstein, the presupposition that there must be a something like an essence underlying the fluid and diverse use of a word is a problematic preconception that gives rise to philosophical confusion. Rather than being helpful in solving certain puzzles surrounding difficult questions such as ‘What is time?’ or ‘What is language?’, the idea that words must have an exact meaning that captures some metaphysical ‘nature’ actually creates the puzzles in the first place by clouding the grammar of the relevant expressions:

First the question is asked “What is time?”. This question makes it appear that what we want is a definition. We mistakenly think that a definition is what will remove the trouble. (BB 27)

For Wittgenstein, the task of philosophy is not the search for abstracta such as *the* definition of something; in fact, such a search – if it simply posits such ‘real “definitions”’ exist – will be chasing chimeras. Instead of assuming a once-and-for-all definition in the form of strict rules, Wittgenstein suggests we pay attention to how we actually use words. We can still give definitions. But these will not be of the kind that is sought after by philosophers. Wittgenstein does not claim that speakers will never be able to explain the meaning of the words they use, nor does he claim that there are no rules of grammar. After all, competent speakers will often be able to explain the meaning of the words they use, and such explanations can be called definitions. In fact, such explanations are ‘real definitions’ not just ‘real “definitions”’. So Wittgenstein does not deny that there are definitions of our words; his point is rather that we are misguided if we look for a certain *kind* of definition, namely *the* definition that gives a word a *fixed* meaning.

2.3.2 (In)determinacy of sense and rule-boundedness

Similar themes emerge in Wittgenstein’s discussion of the idea of the determinacy of sense and the related idea of the *rule-boundedness* of language, to which his understanding of language as governed by rules of grammar may seem to commit him, but which in fact he rejects. I will discuss them here in turn.

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein claimed that the sense of a proposition must be determinate (TLP 3.23). In the *Investigations*, he revokes this idea of the determinacy of sense as an unwarranted postulation that is at odds with how our natural languages work. Wittgenstein describes the confused attitude behind the ‘determinacy of sense’ claim as

follows: 'it seems clear that where there is sense, there must be perfect order. – So there must be perfect order even in the vaguest sentence' (PI §98). He continues:

The sense of a sentence – one would like to say – may, of course, leave this or that open, but the sentence must nevertheless have a determinate sense. An indeterminate sense – that would really not be a sense *at all*. – This is similar to: a boundary which is not sharply defined is not really a boundary at all. (PI §99)

However, most of our concepts lack sharp boundaries. The inexactness of concepts and vagueness of sentences do not impair their usefulness and as such they are nevertheless perfectly suitable for our purposes: for example, the request 'Stay roughly here' can be seen as vague but it is clearly not defective (cf. PI §§71, 88). Telling someone where to stay in millimetres would be absurd in most circumstances. Indeed, indeterminacy may even be what is desired and needed in a particular situation: for example, if one cannot say for sure when one is able to return a phone call, one might say 'I'll call you back this afternoon' (and, of course, calling back the next morning would not count as keeping one's word).

Wittgenstein's target is the preconceived idea that words must have an 'exact' meaning, that concepts have to have 'exact' boundaries (cf. PI §88). Wittgenstein urges us to recognise that this confused preconception stems from the comparison of language to a calculus which is 'a very one-sided way of looking at language' (BB 25). In the *Blue Book*, the point about the absence of certain exact rules is part of a discussion in which Wittgenstein explicitly criticises an understanding of rules pertaining to the notion of a calculus:

When we talk of language as a symbolism used in an exact calculus, that which is in our mind can be found in the sciences and in mathematics. Our ordinary use of language conforms to this standard of exactness only in rare cases. (BB 25)

The reason why we often cannot give any exact rules for the use of a word is not a deficiency on our part nor does it impair the functioning of language; in most cases there are no exact rules defining our concepts and need not be. Yet, as I will argue, one should not leap from vagueness in meaning to lack of rule-governedness.

The postulate of determinacy of sense and the ideal of perfectly sharp and determinate concepts poses the danger of misunderstanding the idea that language is governed by rules of grammar: they might mislead us into thinking that somehow all possible uses of

a word are determined by rules. However, this idea of rule-*boundedness* is different from that of rule-*governedness*. Wittgenstein strongly rejects the former, but not the latter:

[The use of a word] is not everywhere bounded by rules; but no more are there any rules for how high one may throw the ball in tennis, or how hard, yet tennis is a game for all that, and has rules too. (PI §68)

Wittgenstein explicitly remarks again in a later section: ‘the application of a word is not everywhere bounded by rules’ (PI §84). For Wittgenstein, there are rules for the use of a word – but just not for every aspect and every possible situation. That is, there are rules for the general use of a word, but not for each possible instance of use of the word; the use of a word is, in general, rule-governed but that this does not mean that for each and every instance of the application of the word that one could find a corresponding rule. Wittgenstein seems perfectly happy to talk of linguistic normativity as a matter of following rules, yet he is also wary and cautious of the talk of rules in some places – and for good reasons; his wariness and caution is perhaps best viewed as an awareness of certain ways in which such talk of rules might be misleading.

For example, Wittgenstein writes in the discussion and rejection of the idea that for a word to have meaning this meaning must be fixed by rules that can be applied in every possible instance of the word:

I say, “There is a chair over there”. What if I go to fetch it, and it suddenly disappears from sight? — “So it wasn’t a chair, but some kind of illusion.” — But a few seconds later, we see it again and are able to touch it, and so on. — “So the chair was there after all, and its disappearance was some kind of illusion.” — But suppose that after a time it disappears again – or seems to disappear. What are we to say now? Have you rules ready for such cases – rules saying whether such a thing is still to be called a “chair”? But do we miss them when we use the word “chair”? And are we to say that we do not really attach any meaning to this word, because we are not equipped with rules for every possible application of it? (PI §80)

The rules for use of words cannot anticipate all eventualities. And both are possible: that in a new context a word is found to have or to lack meaning. The chair scenario shows the implausibility of the claim that a word does not really have a meaning if we do not have rules for the application of the word in all possible contexts. Realising that we do not know what to say in the chair scenario seems to be an important ‘result’ of reflecting upon the scenario. But this result does not mean that we have discovered a problematic deficiency

of our concept of chair, or perhaps even of most of our concepts, because they cannot accommodate all conceivable contexts.³⁸ A crucial distinction here is between a notion of rules as exact and budgeting for all possible situations and a different and 'more relaxed' notion of rules that still captures the normativity of language use. To reject the former clearly does not mean that there are no rules governing our use of words.

The assumption that our concepts must have 'exact' boundaries can make it look as if we were somewhat cut off from our concepts – that they are in an important sense not *ours*, that we do not really possess them unless we know their 'real' definitions. Since we often are unable to clearly circumscribe the concepts we use, it might seem as if we lacked a kind of certainty that is needed for justifiably being said to understand and master a concept. Consider the following passage:

But what if observation does not clearly reveal any rule, and the question brings none to light? – For he did indeed give me an explanation when I asked him what he meant by "N", but he was prepared to withdraw this explanation and alter it. – So how am I to determine the rule according to which he is playing? He does not know it himself. – Or, more correctly, what is left for the expression "the rule according to which he proceeds" to say? (PI §82)

Even if we ask the speaker for an explanation of the meaning of his words and he then gives one, he might 'withdraw this explanation and alter it'. What Wittgenstein seems to imply here is that there are cases in which it simply is not clear what 'the rule according to which the speaker proceeds' means, or, more precisely, how this expression can do the work which we might take it to do, namely: telling us the rule which fixes the meaning of the relevant word. It is important to note that Wittgenstein does not make the claim here that the talk of rules is empty, he only asks the question 'what is left for the expression "the rule according to which he proceeds" to say'? None of this implies that there are no rules of language.

In response to the question 'what is left for the expression "the rule according to which he proceeds"?' (PI §82), Wittgenstein writes the following:

Doesn't the analogy between language and games throw light here? We can easily imagine people amusing themselves in a field by playing with a ball so as to start various existing

³⁸ Chapter 4 will return to this and further argue that what might appear as a problematic lack of imprecision could, in fact, be seen as indicating an important flexibility of our concepts that makes them fit for their job.

games, but playing many without finishing them and in between throwing the ball aimlessly into the air, chasing one another with the ball and bombarding one another for a joke and so on. [...] And is there not also the case where we play and – make up the rules as we go along? And there is even one where we alter them – as we go along. (PI §83)

Wittgenstein considers here a reason why sometimes no rule can be given. Just as the same ball is used to play various different games, the same expression can be used in various different ways; we play *different* language-games with the *same* word. Think of the different uses of 'know'. Singling out one of those uses might well allow us to produce something like a rule, but then this rule is not necessarily applicable to what we do with the same word in another context (Schroeder 2017, 259). So once we have given an explanation of what is meant by the word, we are 'prepared to withdraw this explanation and alter it'. Schroeder summarises this point as follows:

Our grip on linguistic normativity is essentially piecemeal, and the explanations that we can give manifesting our linguistic competence are always just provisional, read off from some language-game which could easily on another occasion shade into, or be developed into, a slightly different one. (2013, 159)

We find another reason why it we are sometimes unable to give rules for the use of a word in Wittgenstein's discussion of 'family-resemblance concepts' (PI §§65-7). Wittgenstein's example to introduce the concept of family-resemblance is the term 'game'; and the main idea is that not everything that goes by the same term (e.g. 'game') need share a specific feature (e.g. being about winning and losing). That is why we may not in all cases be possible to give a rule for all uses of a word (e.g. 'game'). Similarly, in many cases no determinate decision has been made about what falls under a given concept; we might decide for or against subsuming new phenomena and inventions under an established concept.³⁹

Some of our concepts are in a significant sense characterised by an essential openness, indeterminacy and 'inexactness'. These characteristics, however, do not in turn impair language in its functioning; an expression might lack a precise meaning, '[b]ut that impairs its use as little as the use of a table is impaired by the fact that it stands on four legs instead of three and so sometimes wobbles' (PI §79). Similarly, the ideas in the *Blue Book* passage presented at the beginning of this section and the others we have considered here do not

³⁹ I will return to the concept of language-games in the next chapter.

undermine the general idea that language is governed by rules. Wittgenstein does not claim that we can never give any rules or that there are none. He only argues against a particular interpretation of the talk of rules.

2.4 The Functional Conception of Rules

We have seen so far various issues about the concept of rules of grammar and the idea that language is rule-governed. Wittgenstein's reservations and qualifications show us that if one assumes certain (misleading) conceptions of linguistic rules, one runs into serious problems. This section will examine a conception of rules that can be seen as a response to issues about the idea of the rule-governedness of language: the 'functional conception of rules' (hereafter: FCR). This conception partly succeeds in giving a plausible understanding of the 'language is rule-governed' claim by accommodating the issues raised in this chapter and capturing Wittgenstein's reservations and qualifications. The FCR is prominently articulated in Baker and Hacker's interpretation of Wittgenstein. The basic idea is: what counts as a rule is captured by its *function*.^{40, 41} This leaves us with an understanding of 'rules of grammar' that is very liberal, indeed arguably artificially broad and thus problematic, as we will see.

Baker and Hacker characterise the category of rules of grammar as follows:

[Grammar's] rules include *all* forms of explanations of meaning, not merely formal definitions but also ostensive definition, explanations by examples or paraphrase, gestures, etc. (2009, 45)

⁴⁰ Cf. Baker/Hacker: 'The generality of a rule lies in its use as a standard of correctness [...] and need not be manifest in its form' (2009, 50).

⁴¹ This point is frequently made in, e.g., the essay 'Rules and Grammar' in Baker/Hacker 2009. Similarly, Glock explicitly characterises Wittgenstein's conception of rules as 'a functional one' (1996, 151). Mulhall generally shares Hacker's functional and liberal conception of rules. In a discussion of Cavell's views, he claims that some idea of rules must be employed to understand Wittgenstein's views on language (Mulhall 2003). That Mulhall is less adamant than other commentators when it comes to rules – he only argues that a rule-centred view of language is *compatible* with what Wittgenstein says (cf. also Mulhall 2014) – has to do with the observation that Wittgenstein appears rather cautious not to assign too much importance to the notion of rules and, perhaps most importantly, that the notion of rules might not only be useful but also misleading, as it might be taken to support the main idea behind what I have called the Policing Conception of Wittgenstein's philosophy (introduced in Section 1.5) – a conception Mulhall opposes. According to Mulhall, although it can rightly be said that in speaking we are following rules (in some sense) and that language is rule-governed, we should be careful not to be misled by this into thinking that the relevant rules (if there are any clear ones at all) can in all cases be straight-forwardly appealed to in order to decide questions about sense and nonsense. Later chapters will return to this.

According to the FCR, rules of grammar include a vast array of things: dictionary definitions, concrete samples, charts, etc. All these things can be and are used to explain and justify our language use to others, and are, by the above definition, rules of grammar or parts thereof. However, the FCR departs from certain intuitions one might have about grammar as a 'body of rules' for the use of words because of grammar's then extensive scope.

As Baker and Hacker emphasise: 'Since explanations of meanings of words are standards for their correct use, *all* explanations of word meaning fall into grammar' (2009, 61). They write that the samples used in ostensive definitions are 'instruments of grammar', in that they are part of a rule for the use of a word (Baker/Hacker 2009, 63).⁴² Samples belong to grammar in this sense. Because of their belonging to grammar 'the samples employed in ostensive definition are themselves a part of the means of representation' (Baker/Hacker 2009, 44; cf. 62).

This idea can be explained by remarks of Wittgenstein's that might seem to justify ascribing to him a version of the FCR and a broad conception of grammar. Wittgenstein suggests that we may call a sample used in an ostensive definition an 'instrument of language':

We can put it like this: This sample is an instrument of the language, by means of which we make colour statements. In this game, it is not something that is represented, but is a means of representation. – And [...] in so doing we have given that object a role in our language-game; it is now a *means* of representation. (PI §50)

In line with this, Wittgenstein also says that samples are plausibly regarded as 'tools of the language' (PI §16). And it is in response to the fact that it can be misleading to think of samples as belonging to *language* – since they do not belong to 'spoken language', i.e. they are not words – Wittgenstein proposes we understand samples as tools or instruments:

What about the colour samples that A shows to B: are they part of the *language*? Well, it is as you please. They do not belong to spoken language; yet when I say to someone, "Pronounce the word 'the'", you will also count the second "'the'" as part of the sentence. Yet it has a role just like that of a colour sample in language-game (8); that is, it is a sample

⁴² Danièle Moyal-Sharrock (2004, 50) also suggests such a broad understanding of 'grammar', which she sees only fully articulated in Wittgenstein's last work *On Certainty*.

of what the other is meant to say. It is most natural, and causes least confusion, if we count the samples as tools of the language. (PI §16)

This appears to be in keeping with the FCR, capturing the specific normative dimension of the use of samples in our linguistic practices. If grammar consists of rules, and if these rules involve samples, then the samples are, in this particular sense, part of grammar.⁴³



But I think we should resist ascribing Baker and Hacker's version of the FCR to Wittgenstein. Not only is there no mention of rules in the passages from Wittgenstein that I have just quoted. Wittgenstein also says that, when samples or charts are used as a paradigm, they can be called 'the *expression* of a rule of the language-game' (PI §53; my emphasis). Note that he does not speak of samples and charts *as rules*. Wittgenstein seems to be aware of, and to point to, the problems with broadening the concept of a rule to cover *all* explanations of meaning. These problems will be further looked at in the next section.

2.5 Rules (Implicit and Explicit) vs. Examples

We saw earlier that for something to function as a rule, it need not be explicit; language use is clearly normative, but speakers do not normally follow rules of grammar *explicitly* in the sense of consulting or formulating them. The FCR is compatible with rules being implicit. Given that rules are by and large implicit in language use (as I suggested above in Section 2.2), it is enough that an explanation of meaning *would* or *could* be given by either the speaker when challenged to explain their use of an expression or by an external observer. The point that the FRC captures accurately is that whether something is a standard of correct use is not determined by its form but by its function. But, *pace* Baker and Hacker's version of the FRC, not all explanations of meaning are standards of correct use; rather, they exemplify, or illustrate, rules.⁴⁴ Accordingly, Wittgenstein writes that 'it can be said that what we call a rule of a language-game may have very different roles in the game' (PI §53).

⁴³ Section 7.1.2 will briefly return to the issue of the scope of grammar.

⁴⁴ Sometimes Baker and Hacker seem to come close to concede this by distinguishing between rules and expressions of rules; for example: 'It is not merely the form of words, but the use we make of it that renders [a certain utterance] an expression of a rule.' (Baker/Hacker 2009, 53) But they still think that all explanations of meaning function as (read: are) rules, which I argue is implausible.

Baker and Hacker advocate an implausibly broad concept of a rule that blurs the distinction between employing a rule and ways of illustrating a rule by giving examples. Furthermore, Baker and Hacker's account of rules seems, in fact, to overstretch the ordinary meaning of the word 'rule' and thereby invite misunderstandings. For example, they write about the ostensive explanation 'This  is black': 'The ostensive explanation functions as a norm of correct use, inasmuch as anything which is *this*  colour is correctly said to be black' (Baker/Hacker 2009, 63). But, contrary to what Baker and Hacker suggest, ostensive explanations and explanations by examples are not rules in the ordinary sense of the word.⁴⁵

To see this, consider that, outside philosophy, we distinguish between two different ways of teaching: (a) by giving a rule or (b) by giving an example.⁴⁶ The difference between the two is that (a), unlike (b), is not a 'move in the game'. Consider teaching someone a dance: (a) by producing a diagram with the correct steps or (b) by giving them a demonstration. Now, dancing a waltz is *not* what one would call 'giving a rule for how to dance the waltz' – it is more plausibly regarded as giving an example. Dancing a waltz – even if it is for demonstration purposes – is a 'move in the game' and therefore to be distinguished from drawing a diagram of the dance that explains the correct steps.

Now, the word 'rule' marks this very distinction between giving a rule and giving an example. Baker and Hacker's broad concept of a 'rule' blurs that distinction by re-defining 'rule' to mean 'example', 'sample' or 'standard'. For instance, Baker and Hacker want to call ordinary ostensive explanations and explanations by examples 'rules' (see above); but

⁴⁵ For this reason, Schroeder (2017) proposes the distinction between 'grammatical norms' and 'grammatical rules'. This distinction is not just a matter of terminology. Schroeder understands 'rules' as 'general formulations' or 'definitions'; this understanding does not include examples and implicit standards of correctness, for which Schroeder reserves the term 'grammatical norm' (Schroeder 2017, 263). Both Schroeder's and Baker and Hacker's account involve some distinction between implicit and explicit rules, thereby capturing a general point about linguistic normativity: for a word to have a meaning and it be possible to use and explain the word correctly (and incorrectly) the rules for its use need not be made explicit. However, Schroeder's distinction between norms and rules brings out the important point that standards for the correct use of a word are often taught by examples and need not be (and in most cases are not) explicitly formulated. Schroeder's point that 'for a grammatical norm to be operative, it need not be made explicit' (2017, 263) indicates that his distinction between norms and rules is a specific way of capturing the distinction between implicit and explicit rules. But my suggestion is that although Schroeder is right in criticising the implausibility of a broad concept of a rule, all that is needed to avoid Baker and Hacker's broad concept is the distinction between implicit and explicit rules.

⁴⁶ I follow Schroeder in this; the following example is also his (2013, 156-7).

these are not even norms or implicit rules. Someone's utterance of a sentence such as 'This book is black' is *not* a standard of correctness. English learners do not come to that person's house to check their use of the word 'black'. The ostensive explanation is neither a rule, nor a norm; it is rather a correct use of a word that *illustrates* or *exemplifies* a norm or implicit rule. Just as giving a demonstration of a waltz is not what one would call a rule (but giving an example of how to dance the waltz), 'This book is black' is best regarded as an instructive example of a correct use of a word; not itself a rule or norm. But it can be said to illustrate a rule that is implicit in its utterance.⁴⁷

Another way of making the critical point against Baker and Hacker is to consider learning one's native language. Children do not learn to use the words of our language by means of rules. When someone is 'taught' their mother tongue, this teaching need not employ rules (though it can) and, for the most part, does not. Children are normally given examples of how a word is to be used. Moreover, the meaning of a word need not be explicitly taught at all, but is, as a matter of fact, often simply picked up. It is a mistake to think that language-learning goes on more or less in the manner of scientific terminology learning: as if a mother teaches her child to speak by pointing at various objects and naming them. No doubt she does this occasionally, but mostly we just chat to children, and one could say that what we teach are rules – but by and large we do not teach the rules by giving rules. Presumably Baker and Hacker do not want to deny this, yet they blur the distinction between rules and examples when they characterise their broad conception of rules by writing about what they call the 'the instructional aspect of rules': 'We typically teach a rule-governed activity by citing rules, i.e. by using sentences as formulations of rules' (2009, 50). Despite the hedging 'typically', this claim is problematic when applied to language. In fact, we typically do *not* teach words by such citing of rules but by giving examples.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Rundle (1990, 66-7) presents a case that illustrates vividly the issue under discussion. He notes that competent speakers may not be able to explain the difference between the meaning of 'bottle' and 'jar' by giving a verbal definition; but his example shows that, even in the absence of any verbal definitions of certain words (be it, e.g., because of no interest in or need of such formulations or because of the lack of words to formulate such definitions), these words still have a meaning and their meaning can still be explained (e.g. through gestures). Such explanations of meaning can count as explanations of rules, but they are not themselves rules.

⁴⁸ If we accept the FCR, the 'i.e.' in the passage from Baker and Hacker just quoted should be replaced by 'e.g.': using sentences as formulations of rules is *one* example of how we teach a rule-governed activity.

Accordingly, while Wittgenstein clearly says about language-games that a rule can be ‘an aid in teaching the game’ or ‘a tool of the game itself’, he also says that it is possible that ‘a rule is employed neither in the teaching nor in the game’ (PI §54)⁴⁹. Likewise, what is learned is not necessarily how to apply a rule, but how to use a word correctly.⁵⁰ This (among other things) is why it is no coincidence Wittgenstein stresses the significance of training or drill (*Abrichtung*) regarding the teaching and learning of language (e.g. PI §§5, 6, 86, 189, 206, 223, 441, 630).⁵¹

Therefore, not only does Baker and Hacker’s account involve a re-definition of ‘rule’ to mean ‘standard or sample or example’, it thereby also blurs the distinction between our ordinary notions of ‘giving a rule’ and ‘giving an example’. Blurring this distinction has consequences for how one might see the crucial issue under discussion in this chapter. Indeed, the debate about the rule-governedness of language can be seen as largely being concerned with whether language *needs* rules. I would suggest that we can describe linguistic normativity by giving rules, but language does not need rules (in the ordinary sense of the term).⁵²

Nevertheless, we have seen that textual evidence indicates that Wittgenstein has a broad understanding of ‘rules of grammar’. And the FCR captures important aspects of this broad understanding: it sees grammar as the rules according to which we use language. Grammar, as Baker and Hacker put it, consists of ‘the grammatical rules we employ as explanations of meaning and standards of correct use’ (Baker/Hacker 2009, 337)⁵³. We have also seen that the rules need not be explicit – they can also be implicit and still function as standards of correctness. For Wittgenstein, grammar is not some fixed

⁴⁹ See also BB 97: ‘We see that the expression “A game is played according to the rule so and so” is used [...] even in cases where the rule is neither an instrument of the training nor of the practice of the game.’ Cf. Z §295.

⁵⁰ Someone who masters a word knows how and when to use it. The talk of knowing how to apply a rule can be misleading, since it makes it look as though knowing a rule and knowing how to apply the word can come apart, which is a confused view that John McDowell coined the ‘master thesis’. I shall return to this below in Section 2.6.4.

⁵¹ A further and related point is this: For teaching a word by giving rules for the use of the word to be successful, the learner must already possess a certain (linguistic) understanding (cf. PI §§30-1). But here is not the place to explore this topic.

⁵² A seeming advantage of Schroeder’s distinction between norms and rules (see n.45) is that it makes very clear that language does not *need* rules. But the talk of norms instead of implicit rules only pushes this issue back to the level of norms (Does language need norms?), while the very issue (whatever the terminology) is the result of confusion. (*This*, I suspect, all sides in the debate would accept.)

⁵³ Cf. also Hacker 1986, 161.

antecedent system of rules, but we can still give a more or less systematic description of how language works; such a description may give examples of applications of words and make explicit the rules that govern our normative linguistic practices.

2.6 Rule-Following

In the background of all of our discussion here, of course, is the set of remarks that have become known as ‘the rule-following considerations’ and the huge literature that these have generated. I cannot hope to discuss these considerations or this literature in depth here. But in this last section, I will pick one issue that is directly relevant to our discussion of the topic of rule-governedness in this chapter. I aim to illuminate the idea that ‘in speaking [...] we are following rules of grammar’ (Baker/Hacker 2009, 156). We will see that the notion of intention plays a central role in this (2.6.1). I will then argue against a certain problematic understanding of ‘intention’ (2.6.2), examine the idea that a rule-follower must be able to ‘adduce’ the rule (2.6.3), and, finally, consider what moral these discussions hold for those who want to ascribe to rules an ambitious explanatory force (2.6.4).

2.6.1 The explanatory role of intentions

In this sub-section, I will briefly outline the significance of the notion of intention in the context of discussions of rule-following. It seems that owing to the concept of intention we can draw the crucial distinction between ‘acting in accord with a rule’ and ‘following a rule’. This distinction is important because just *happening* to act in accord with a rule is not the same as doing something *in light of* a rule. A speaker’s use of an expression can be brought into accord with enumerable different rules. So it seems that the speaker requires be guided by a particular rule. In order to establish this connection between a speaker’s use of an expression and a particular rule via the idea of guidance, one may appeal to the speaker’s *intentions*: the speaker is following a particular rule if he *intends* to follow that rule.

Wittgenstein himself in the 1930s discussed explicitly the idea of appealing to intentions as a way of securing the distinction between following a rule and merely acting in accordance with a rule:⁵⁴

By 'intention' I mean here what uses a sign in a thought. The intention seems to interpret, to give the final interpretation; which is not a further sign or picture, but something else, the thing that cannot be further interpreted. But what we have reached is a psychological, not a logical terminus. (PG §98)⁵⁵

Although Wittgenstein clearly is suspicious of the work the idea of intention can do, he also thinks that this idea, if correctly understood, can contribute to an explanation the connection between a rule (or an order) and an action. For example, he writes: 'If you exclude the element of intention from language, its whole function then collapses' (PR §20). Wittgenstein then explains: 'It may look as if, in introducing intention, we were introducing an uncheckable, a so-to-speak metaphysical element into our discussion' (PR §21). He argues that a plausible conception of intention connects thought and fact (orders and action, or rules and rule-following) *not* via a third event or entity but instead by establishing a direct, internal link: 'The causal connection between speech and action is an external relation, whereas we need an internal one' (PR §21). Wittgenstein is aware of the issues about both the 'final interpretation' and the 'uncheckable [...] metaphysical element' connecting rules and actions; and he rightly treats these notions as confused.⁵⁶ He nevertheless thinks that the concept of 'intention' has a place here as potentially doing some important philosophical work – but *not* as a 'final interpretation' of a rule or a 'third thing' making an external connection between a rule and an action.

Baker and Hacker in their discussion of what it is to follow a rule do, accordingly, assign an important role to the concept of intention in distinguishing 'following a rule' and 'acting in accordance with it' (2009, ch. IV): following a rule means that the relevant

⁵⁴ E.g. PG §58: 'If I intend to play the piano from written music, it is experience that will show which notes I actually play and the description of what is played need not have anything in common with the written notes. But if I want to describe my *intention*, the description must be that I wanted to reproduce *these* written notes in sounds. – That alone can be the expression of the fact that intention reaches up to the paradigm and contains a general rule. An expression of intention describes the model to be copied; describing the copy does not.'

⁵⁵ Wittgenstein discusses the concept of intention in regard to rule-following in various places in his middle period texts (see e.g. PG §§50-61, 95-9).

⁵⁶ Section 2.6.4 will return to this kind of confusion that is at the centre of the *Investigations'* well-known discussion of a regress of interpretations (the so-called rule-following paradox).

rule must be the reason for the person's acting as he or she does. Applied to language use, this means that a speaker must follow the rules for the use of words, not only in the sense of conforming to them but in the stronger sense of *intentionally* following them.⁵⁷

Here is how Baker and Hacker spell out the contrast between 'following a rule' and 'acting in accordance with it' through the concept of intention:

An infant, a monkey or a robot might move pieces on a chessboard, and we could intelligibly say of any such move that it was in accord with a rule of chess. But it would be misconceived to describe such acts as *following* the rules of chess. The concept of following a rule is applicable only to beings who possess two-way abilities, who can act for reasons, can apprehend actions as in accord or in conflict with rules, and can intentionally act in accordance with rules. (Baker/Hacker 2009, 136)

According to Baker and Hacker, rule-following requires 'two-way abilities'. Baker and Hacker refer back here – if only implicitly – to Anthony Kenny's analysis of abilities; Kenny characterises abilities (in contrast to dispositions) as 'two-way powers' whose possessors can make use of them or refrain from doing so at will (1975, 52-3 and 123-4). For present purposes, let us simply note that *following* a rule requires that one can intentionally act in accordance with rules or intentionally refrain from doing so. That is, merely moving pieces on a chessboard (monkeys do *that*) or merely uttering words (parrots do *that*) is not enough for following a rule, as a further ability is necessary: reason-responsiveness. And this implies being able to intentionally ignore the relevant rules. With respect to linguistic skills in particular this means, roughly, that the rules of grammar are reasons for using words in a certain way, reasons that one can also intentionally disregard.

Crucially, Baker and Hacker's stress on intentions is part of a web of four interwoven features by which they characterise rule-following behaviour (2009, ch. IV): (i) The agent is *intentionally* following a rule. The relevant rule must be the reason for the person's acting as he or she does. (ii) The agent must *understand* the rule, and this understanding is manifest in their mastering a technique. (iii) It is only within a broader network of regular actions, *practices*, that agents can be said to grasp the difference between following a rule and acting against it. (iv) The rule-follower has the ability to see regularities *as regularities*:

⁵⁷ Section 2.6.3 will return to this and discuss the idea that this means that the speaker must be able to adduce the relevant rules.

What is crucial about a regularity exemplifying following a certain rule is that the agent not only acts in a regular fashion (a bee or bird does *that*), but also sees a certain pattern *as* a regularity and intends his actions to conform to this pattern. (Baker/Hacker 2009, 143)

For our discussion in the next sub-sections, it is important to bear in mind that, far from being the only feature of rule-following behaviour, intentionality is related to, and intertwined with, the features (ii)-(iv), which shows that it would be a mistake to look at the feature of intention in isolation.

2.6.2 'Intention' and a regress of rules

Kathrin Glüer criticises Baker and Hacker's interpretation by arguing that two of its elements are problematic when combined: a view of rule-following that emphasises the rule-follower's intention and the idea that meaning is constituted by rules. Glüer argues that the combination of these two elements leads to a regress. I will argue that her argument fails because it rests upon an implausible understanding of both the notion of 'intention' and the claim 'rules constitute meaning'. She does not provide a convincing reason against Baker and Hacker's interpretation nor against idea that language is rule-governed.

Glüer's argument is concerned with a view of rule-following which she and Åsa Wikforss call the 'intention-reason view' (or 'IR view') (2010, 157-8), and which they ascribe to Baker and Hacker.⁵⁸ The IR view argues that two necessary conditions must be met:

For any agent S , any type of action Φ , and any rule R :

(I) S follows R in Φ ing only if S intends to follow R in Φ ing, and

(R) S intends to follow R in Φ ing only if R is (part of) S 's reason for Φ ing.

Glüer and Wikforss say that they agree with this view insofar as rule-following behaviour is to be explained by the relevant rule and that any such explanation is an explanation in terms of reasons. They characterise this kind of explanation as one that 'rationalizes Φ ing from S 's point of view by showing how R provided S with a reason for Φ ing' – and they state: 'we think that the IR view is true of uncontroversial cases of rule-following' (158).

⁵⁸ See also Wikforss 2017, 53.

Indeed, the IR view, as minimal as it is, and if one reads it as a theoretically unambitious explication of what it is to follow a rule, certainly is true of uncontroversial cases of rule-following. If (I) is not met, any action that just happens to be in accord with *R* would count as following *R*. The second necessary condition, (R), can be treated (I think) as equally uncontentious: for *R* to be the rule *S* intends to follow in his action, *R* must be a part of *S*'s reason for his action – otherwise there would be no clear connection of the relevant kind (i.e. one which involves the rule as the reason) between *S*'s action and the rule.⁵⁹

My present concern lies with an argument presented by Glüer (2002). Glüer argues that if the IR view is combined with the claim that meaning is constituted by rules, it leads to a regress. Her target is Baker and Hacker who she thinks are committed to both the IR view and a certain understanding of the idea that meaning is constituted by rules. More specifically, she argues that the intention condition (I) gives rise to a problem when it is applied to linguistic rules,⁶⁰ i.e. the rules of grammar which, according to Baker and Hacker, are being followed in speaking and constitutive of concepts.⁶¹

Glüer's argument is roughly this: if it is assumed that rules of grammar constitute concepts in the first place, then one cannot presuppose any concepts in explaining what it is to follow a rule. And if concepts cannot be presupposed, she argues, that leads to a regress of rules, because the rules constituting those concepts which are required to be able to follow a rule must also have been followed.⁶² According to Glüer, any account of rule-following that holds both that rules constitute concepts and that intentional action is a necessary condition of rule-following gives rise to this regress. (And that, in turn, would mean that on any such account rule-following is impossible. To be sure, Glüer does not

⁵⁹ My suspicion is that (R) might not even be a distinct condition, but just condition (I) in other words. For 'S intends to follow *R* in Φ ing' just seems to say that '*R* is (part of) *S*'s reason for Φ ing'. But I will not explore this question here any further.

⁶⁰ It is not completely clear if Glüer thinks that Baker and Hacker's model is problematic in general or only when it is applied to rules of grammar, but she presumably does: 'The here interesting problem about this model becomes clear when we consider the model's application to linguistic rules, the so-called "rules of grammar"' (Glüer 2002, 165; my translation).

⁶¹ Glüer describes Baker and Hacker's idea that rules constitute meaning like this: 'Yet meanings are not something ready-made that awaits being expressed by signs; rather, grammatical rules determine meaning in a much stronger sense, they constitute meaning in the first place. One can also put this as follows: "they fix concepts" (Baker und Hacker 1985, 269)' (2002, 165; my translation). Unfortunately, Glüer does not provide more references than the three-word quote from Baker and Hacker's 1985 book and some paraphrases without references.

⁶² Cf. also Glüer/Wikforss 2010, 152-3.

want to say that it is, just that Baker and Hacker's view entails that it would be.) Before criticising Glüer's conception of 'intention' as well as her understanding of the claim that rules constitute concepts (or meaning), I will first take a closer look at her argument and how she understands the relevant notions.

Glüer thinks that intentions are propositional attitudes (mental states held by an agent) towards a proposition (here: the relevant rule). Crucially, she claims that the *intention* to follow a rule *R* is itself constituted by rules, because otherwise the content of the propositional attitude – the concepts it involves – would not be determined. She argues that, therefore, the intention to follow *R* presupposes further rules the agent *S* must be following and must do so intentionally. This is why Glüer thinks that, on Baker and Hacker's account, in order to follow a rule one has to follow the rule that one is to follow the first rule, and so on, *ad inf.*⁶³

Glüer's presentation of the regress argument is very brief and conducted at a high level of abstraction. Regrettably, she does not illustrate her argument by an example. It remains rather nebulous which other rules the agent *S* must also be following! But I think Glüer might have something like the following in mind. Speaker *S* utters 'I have a dog'. The rules of grammar constitute the concept *dog*, and also determine that 'dog' means *dog*. That the speaker *S* wants to say something about a dog requires that he have the intention to follow the rules for the use of the word 'dog'. But *this* intention is constituted by further rules, namely those which constitute the concept of having the intention to follow the rules for the use of 'dog'. Those rules that constitute the concept of having the intention to follow the rules for the use of 'dog' can only be said to have been followed if our speaker had the

⁶³ Glüer (2002, 165-6; my translation): 'On Baker and Hacker's account, the intention to follow rule *R* is itself something that that is constituted by rules. That is, the intention presupposes further rules that the agent must follow. And he must again do so intentionally. And so on, *ad infinitum*.' These sentences appear at the end of a passage that I will fully quote here in the German original. 'Wenn nun aber grammatische Regeln Begriffe überhaupt erst konstituieren, dann kann das fragliche Modell das Verfügen über Begriffe nicht schon voraussetzen, wenn es uns erklärt, was es heißt, Regeln zu folgen. Können keine Begriffe vorausgesetzt werden, können auch keine propositionalen Gehalte vorausgesetzt werden und folglich auch keine propositionalen Einstellungen. Das Baker und Hacker-Modell aber erklärt Regelfolgen nicht nur beim Verstehen der Regel unter Rekurs auf ziemlich klar begriffliche Vermögen, sondern vor allem auch unter Rekurs darauf, daß der einer Regel folgende Handelnde sich absichtlich daran orientiert. Er handelt in der *Absicht*, der Regel zu folgen. Absichten aber sind propositionale Einstellungen. Die Absicht, Regel *R* zu folgen, stellt in diesem Modell selbst wieder etwas dar, was regelkonstituiert ist. Sie setzt also weitere Regeln voraus, denen der Handelnde folgen muß. Das aber muß er auch hier absichtlich tun. Und so weiter *ad infinitum*.'

intention to follow them too. And *this* intention is, in turn, constituted by rules which also have to be intentionally followed, and so on, ad inf.

The step from *the speaker having the intention to follow a particular rule* to *this intention is constituted by further rules* marks exactly the point at which, I think, things go awry. On the basis of this step, Glüer claims that Baker and Hacker's conception is flawed because it attempts to secure the distinction between 'acting in accord with a rule' and 'following a rule' in linguistic practices via the idea of intentionally following grammatical rules. She thinks that, if one accepts that rules are constitutive of concepts, her regress argument shows that the notion of intentionally following a rule cannot provide a workable criterion for distinguishing 'mere behaviour which can happen to be in accord with a rule' and 'following a rule'.

According to Glüer, if intentionality is taken as the decisive criterion for this distinction, the regress is inevitable. She thinks the regress is not just a conceptual circle. The problem is *not*, she says, that in analysing what it is to follow a rule we are led to more and more concepts which can only be explained by means of the concept of rule-following. Instead, according to Glüer, the problem is that every rule generates an infinity of different rules, all of which must already have been followed in order for the very first rule to have been followed. Glüer claims that the problem is *not* that Backer and Hacker's explanation of rule-following makes use of the concept of intention which in turn can only be understood in terms of following a rule (2002, 166). Rather, she claims, the problem is that, on Baker and Hacker's account, for there to be a rule that has been followed, an infinite number of further rules must have been followed previously.⁶⁴

The problem with Glüer's argument is her understanding of 'intention' and her understanding of 'rules constitute meaning'. I will now discuss these (mis)understandings in turn. Glüer's argument rests upon what one could call a *mentalist* conception of 'intention' and 'intentionally following a rule'. According to this conception, having the intention to follow a rule requires not just being in a particular mental state, i.e. having a particular propositional attitude in virtue of which a person can rightly be said to be

⁶⁴ Glüer (2002, 166; my translation): 'Rather, here, every rule produces an infinity of additional and distinct rules which must have been followed in order for the first one to have been followed.'

following a rule; the rule must in a much stronger sense be represented in the person's mind: it is *the* separate, independent entity through which a person's grasp of a rule can be explained. But none of that is required, and, as we have seen above, Baker and Hacker are not committed to such a problematic mentalist conception.

Glüer gives the term 'intention' a rather theoretical-technical spin that does not match how Baker and Hacker understand the term – and, as I shall argue, how it is normally understood. For it to be true that *S* has the intention to follow the rule *R*, it suffices that when *S* is asked he can give *R* as his reason. This *is* what it is to possess the relevant mental state. Compare: a chess-player and a footballer can be said to hold a propositional attitude toward a rule or a set of rules. But that need not (and should not) be understood as saying that such propositional attitudes are prior to, and separable from, an agent's behaviour. All they must be able to do is to give an explanation why they did something when asked; such an explanation or justification need not be sophisticated or precise.⁶⁵ In normal cases, we have no problem to discern whether a person masters a concept or a certain technique, and, in this sense, follows rules. Problems arise only if intentions (and propositional attitudes in general) are seen as separate, independent entities (or indeed mental acts) that explain our grasp of rules.

Glüer has an equally implausible understanding of the claim that rules constitute concepts. She argues that Baker and Hacker's commitment to that claim commits them also to the view that for a speaker to be using a particular concept the rule constitutive of that concept must be present in his mind.⁶⁶ But, *pace* Glüer, the claim that rules constitute meaning only says that a certain regular use of a word within a practice creates meaning and concepts, and nothing outside that practice. Moreover, the meaning of the word and its use cannot be neatly separated; the claim that rules constitute concepts does not amount to the claim that 'rules alone' constitute meaning and concepts; in fact, the claim that rules constitute meaning is inextricably bound up with the idea that concepts evolve in human

⁶⁵ The next sub-section will discuss this issue of being able to cite a rule.

⁶⁶ To intend something does not mean to have what one intends before one's mind or to represent it in one's mind. Wittgenstein explicitly attacks this form of Cartesianism: 'Someone says to me, "Show the children a game." I teach them gambling with dice, and the other says, "I didn't mean that sort of game". In that case, must he have had the exclusion of the game with dice before his mind when he gave me the order?' (PI §70) The implied answer is, of course, 'No'. What he meant was just a different sort of game from gambling with dice.

practice. Glüer is correct in pointing out that 'rules alone' cannot account for what it is to follow a rule. But she is wrong that Baker and Hacker are guilty of this mistake.

For Glüer, the problem lies with the idea that concepts and intentions are constituted by rules. But, as we have seen, it is only on the mentalist understanding of what it means to respond to reasons in speaking that we encounter a regress. Baker and Hacker suggest instead that we understand 'having the intention to follow *R*' as something that may be established after the action by the rule-follower giving certain explanations of the action. Note also that Baker and Hacker characterise the rules that are constitutive of our concepts as follows: 'explanations of what a word means constitute a *rule* correlative to a regularity in a practice' (2005, 140). Understood in this way, there seems to be nothing problematic about the combination of the IR view with the claim that meaning is constituted by rules.

2.6.3 'Adducing' a rule

One way in which an agent may demonstrate his intention to follow a rule is by citing the rule they are following. The fact that speakers appear to not always be able to do this has been taken as an objection against the idea that language is governed by rules that speakers follow. I will argue that this objection does not withstand scrutiny because it depends on a misleading understanding of what 'being able to cite a rule' amounts to.

Glüer and Wikforss present this objection in arguing against a particular and stronger version of the IR view (see above) that they ascribe to Baker, Hacker, and, in particular, Glock. According to this stronger view, IR*, (R) is to be replaced by the following condition:

(R*) *S* intends to follow *R* in Φ ing only if *S* could cite *R* as her reason for Φ ing.

Glock indeed subscribes to the IR* view:

If an agent follows a rule in Φ ing the rule must be part of his reason for Φ ing, and not just a cause. He must intend to follow the rule. However, this intentionality is only virtual. He does not have to think about or consult the rule-formulation while Φ ing, *it is only required that he would adduce it to justify or explain his Φ ing*. This excludes the idea of rules which are completely unknown to the agent. (Glock 1996, 325; emphasis mine)

It is important to note that Glock stresses that having a reason is not identical to consulting or consciously processing reasons in one's mind. Glüer and Wikforss acknowledge this, yet they criticise the italicised statement and maintain that

according to the IR* view it is necessary that *S* be able to *cite R* as his reason. *That, we take it, amounts at least to being able to formulate R, and presumably also to being able to produce this formulation of R when asked why he Φ ed.* This strikes us as too strong a requirement in general, but it seems particularly doubtful when applied to language. (2010, 158; second emphasis mine)

According to Glüer and Wikforss, what is problematic about the IR* view of rule-following is that it claims that rule-following does not only involve having the intention to follow the relevant rule in the sense that the rule is (part of) the reason for Φ ing, but also that having the intention to follow the relevant rule involves being able to *cite* or 'produce a formulation of' the rule. That is why they think that, on the IR* view, 'there are substantial requirements on rule-following' (2010, 157).

As far as I can see, Glüer and Wikforss only mention *one* such 'substantial requirement' they take issue with, namely that *S* must be able to cite *R* as a reason for action. They present the following reason to think this requirement is problematic:

If there are rules of meaning, they clearly do not have the kind of psychological role for the speakers that is required by the IR* view. Such rules simply would not be accessible in the same way as our reasons typically are. Typically, we have a fairly good grasp of our own reasons, but when it comes to the 'rules' of meaning, quite the opposite is true. Here, we mostly would be hard-pressed to come up with anything specific enough to even be a candidate for a (meaning determining) rule of language. Indeed, given that having reasons is something we usually consider within the subject's special first-person access, it is hard to imagine how there could be any of the philosophical controversy we in fact see not only about the exact formulation of the 'rules' of language, but even about their very existence. (2010, 158)

If we understand Glock as making the strong claim that a rule-follower must be able to give an 'exact formulation' of the relevant rule in an explanation of the action, that would certainly be too strong a requirement.⁶⁷ However, Glock does not speak of such an 'exact formulation'. He (rightly) emphasises that we ought to exclude 'the idea of rules completely unknown to the agent' in rule-following behaviour. Such 'knowledge' of the

⁶⁷ Cf. also Section 2.3 above.

rules need not be formulated verbally, let alone in any 'exact' way. All Glock claims is that only someone who is able to adduce the relevant rule in explaining why she did something can be said to have followed a rule. Glock's view is compatible with the fact that in some cases there might be no rule⁶⁸, that rules can be vague and implicit, and that an agent might sometimes only be able to manifest their 'knowledge' or mastery of a rule through other (non-linguistic) behaviour such as giving examples.

However, Glüer and Wikforss's criticism does point us to the misleading way in which Glock expresses the point that following a rule requires the ability to refer to the rule. His way of expressing the requirement clouds the compatibility just mentioned: the talk of 'adducing' makes it seem as if a rule-follower must be able to *formulate* or *verbalise* the rule. I will suggest that the requirement is weaker: a rule-follower only must be able to refer to the rule and that this can be done indirectly, for instance, by giving examples.

There are indeed aspects present in Glock's account of rule-following that seem problematic and call for clarification and qualification. For example, when Glock makes the above claim about the rule-following agent ('it is only required that he would adduce it [the rule] to justify or explain his Φ ing'), he seems to have a competent adult speaker in mind. It might, then, be objected to Glock's account that young children cannot give rules and that it would therefore appear that they never follow rules. I would suggest that we can respond that these children just have not (yet) mastered terms such as 'meaning' and 'reference'. They may not (yet) fully understand the concept of meaning and for this reason cannot give rules in the form of 'The word "x" means such-and-such'. However, children can still demonstrate their understanding of a rule without having to verbalise the rule itself.

It seems plausible to say that children give very primitive explanations or justifications for the use of a word if they can answer questions such as 'Is *this* an X? Is *that* an X?'. Say, we have taught a child the word 'dog' by pointing to various dogs in the park and now it can correctly identify dogs when it sees one. But the child's understanding may still be limited to being able to distinguish dogs from other things, e.g. trees. It will be able to answer simple questions like 'Is that a dog?'. Consequently, children whose linguistic and

⁶⁸ Cf. Wittgenstein's 'disappearing chair' scenario in PI §80, quoted in Section 2.3.2.

other abilities are not (yet) fully developed can also be said to be following rules, despite their inability to adduce a sophisticated verbal formulation of those rules.

Another way of expressing this point is to say: linguistic understanding comes in grades. We can perhaps reasonably expect an adult competent speaker – but not the child – to be able to give a very minimal and mundane definition of ‘dog’, for example something like ‘A dog is an animal and has four legs’ – the child, by contrast, may only be able to point to examples. So, on a certain understanding of ‘explanation’, the child is not (yet) able to give an ‘explanation’ of the meaning. But exhibiting one’s knowledge of the meaning of ‘dog’ in unsophisticated ways, for instance, by pointing to dogs should be regarded as referring to the rule. This reference to the rule may count as an explanation of meaning (though not as an explanation by a rule but by an example).⁶⁹

Glock’s requirement that a speaker *S* be able to cite a rule might indeed *seem* too strong, but only on a very particular understanding of rules as general verbal formulations. Sometimes one might only be able to give examples (e.g. in the case of family-resemblance concepts or words like ‘the’) or one is simply not expected *S* to be able to formulate a rule, since the rule – if there is one – is complicated (think of the difference between ‘almost’ and ‘nearly’). At the same time, a speaker *S* must be able to give *some* adequate explanation (in a very loose sense). Such an explanation of the meaning need not come in the form of a verbal formulation but can, for example, consist in being able – repeatedly, on various occasions – to answer questions about whether the relevant word (or rule) is applicable, or give sufficient many examples to demonstrate mastery of the relevant concept.

It is interesting that Glock explicitly accepts that examples count as adequate explanations (see e.g. 1996, 71). His emphasis on *rules to be cited* gives rise to an issue only if it is taken to require the rule-follower give a *general verbal formulation of the rules*. Is the latter Glock’s understanding of ‘rule’, Glüer and Wikforss are right in saying that there is a problematic ‘substantial requirement’ in his account. But their criticism rests upon a certain strong reading of ‘rule’ and ‘adducing a rule’ – they have a much narrower

⁶⁹ The following question remains an open one: *Exactly* at which point does a child learn to explain the meaning of a word? The answer will depend on how we wish to fix the concept of ‘explanation’ in this context.

understanding of these terms than Wittgenstein and Glock seem to envisage. Their criticism does not apply, but it certainly stresses the need for careful qualification.

2.6.4 The regress of interpretations and the 'master thesis'

In this sub-section, I will present and reject another potential reason against the idea that language is rule-governed. This reason is rooted in a confused picture of rule-following that makes it seem as though we encounter a regress of interpretations. Wittgenstein examines this picture in the *Investigations*.

Perhaps one of the main lesson to be drawn from Wittgenstein's famous rule-following discussions and the difference between acting in accord with a rule and in light of a rule is: specifying a rule is not enough to describe what it is to follow a rule. Such a specification might appear to leave rule-following underdetermined because a rule does not say unambiguously how it is to be applied: it can be interpreted in various ways. In other words, 'rules alone' cannot explain a person's behaviour because no rule says how it is applied correctly.

Wittgenstein shows that we are inclined to adopt such a confused picture of rule-following according to which knowing a rule and knowing how to apply it come apart. This picture leads to the well-known regress of PI §201: if it is assumed that following a rule requires interpreting the rule, we need another rule for interpreting the first one, etc., ad inf. Since this would mean that rule-following, meaning, concepts, and ultimately language are impossible, such an account has absurd consequences and must be mistaken. Indeed, Wittgenstein's *destructive* response to the account sketched that leads to the regress is a *reductio ad absurdum*. Any account of rule-following that involves an understanding of rules according to which these rules are in an important sense separate from how to apply them goes wrong,⁷⁰ because otherwise rule-following would be impossible – which clearly is not the case. Wittgenstein's *constructive* response to the confusing picture is: 'That's why "following a rule" is a practice' (PI §202). An essential

⁷⁰ Saul Kripke's famous interpretation of Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following, however, disagrees with this (Kripke 1982). In fact, it is premised on the very idea that Wittgenstein rejects: the idea that rules and their application can become separate from one another.

aspect of understanding following a rule as a practice is: grasping a rule *is* comprehending how to apply it.

John McDowell aptly captures the implausible consequences of rejecting the idea that to know a rule is to be able to apply it by a notion that he calls the ‘master thesis’:

[T]he thesis that whatever a person has in her mind, it is only by virtue of being interpreted in one of various possible ways that it can impose a sorting of extra-mental items into those that accord with it and those that do not. (McDowell 1993, 270)

McDowell wants to show is that it is absurd to think that if a person knows a rule (has that rule ‘in her mind’), she also needs to know another rule for applying the first one – and that this is what mastery of a rule really consists in. So what McDowell’s says underscores that rules and their application do not come apart in the way we might be inclined to think they can. This links back to our above discussion of ‘intention’ that showed the absurdity of what I called the ‘mentalist conception’. According to this conception, having the intention to follow a rule requires the relevant rule be represented in one’s mind in the sense set out by the ‘master thesis’: as the ‘third’ thing through which a connection is established between the intention to follow rule *R* and actions that accord with *R*. Wittgenstein points out the danger of (mis)construing rules as separate entities which stand in need of being connected to actions: “‘He grasps the rule intuitively.’ – But why the rule? Why not how he is to continue?’ (Z §303) To grasp the rule *is* to grasp how to apply it, how to continue. Hence, the case of grasping a rule is perhaps best regarded as one in which a person learns a skill, the practical ability to do something.

Insofar as speaking is understood as following rules of grammar, Wittgenstein’s remarks about rule-following apply to language too. Wittgenstein’s general point that rule-following is a practice (cf. PI §202) equally holds true for language use and rules of grammar: it is problematic to conceive of rules as in a significant sense separate from their application.⁷¹ The point to be taken from the discussion of the interpretation regress argument relevant to our concerns here is thus a reason against thinking that rules can play a *particular* role in explaining language use. It is not a reason that undermines the idea under discussion in this chapter – the rule-governedness of language. But it is a

⁷¹ Of course, this insight is, in some sense, already contained in Wittgenstein’s central idea with which this chapter began: meaning is use – to know the meaning of a word is to know how it ought to be used.

reason against a certain ambition for what this 'governing' might amount to: that linguistic understanding might somehow be encapsulated in rules as the 'master thesis' portrays them – independently of our capacity to apply them.

In summary, this chapter discussed some possible roles of the concept of rules in Wittgenstein's view on language. I have defended the idea that language is rule-governed against several worries, most of which have their source in misunderstandings of the relevant claims and concepts and cast these in ambitious explanatory roles that overlook the work they are actually meant to do. We have seen that the centrality of the idea of rules of grammar in Wittgenstein does not imply any of those things that one might think it does and which I have examined here. In fact, the idea of rule-governedness allows us to quite naturally articulate and capture important aspects of the normativity of language. Herein lies the significance of rules in Wittgenstein's idea of a grammatical investigation. Later we will see that there is a worry about the justificatory and persuasive power of rules in settling philosophical disagreements. A main reason for worrying about such significant limits to the power of rules is that, roughly speaking, there are only so many aspects of our dynamic and diverse language use that we can capture with the notion of rules. This issue ultimately concerns the authority of rules and is perhaps the main worry that drives what I have called the Diagnostic Conception introduced in Chapter 1. But, as the next chapter will demonstrate, the notion of rules of grammar is embedded within a broader framework of notions that also point us to other aspects of our linguistic practices.

Chapter 3

Language-Games and Forms of Life

This chapter will discuss Wittgenstein's concepts of 'language-game' and 'forms of life', two of the crucial innovations in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. It will point out some of the key ideas surrounding those concepts, and offer clarifications about their relation to rules of grammar. The very concept of language-games and how it is put to use indicates important features of Wittgenstein's method of grammatical investigation, his understanding of grammar and language. Stanley Cavell neatly summarises the central role of language-games by relating it to other fundamental ideas of Wittgenstein's:

what Wittgenstein means when he says that philosophy really is descriptive is that it is descriptive of "our grammar," of "the criteria we have" in understanding one another, knowing the world, and possessing ourselves. *Grammar is what language games are meant to reveal*; it is because of this that they provide new ways of investigating concepts, and of criticizing traditional philosophy. (2002, 52; my emphasis)

Cavell does not only briefly mention here Wittgenstein's general conviction that philosophy is non-revisionary and descriptive and ought to be understood as a call for investigating and describing grammar, he also points out that language-games are essential to investigations of this kind: language-games are meant to reveal grammar. Quite how to understand this idea will be a central question in what follows.

Taking as a lead Cavell's idea that language-games are designed to reveal grammar, I will offer an interpretation of 'language-games' that emphasises the manifold bundle of aspects of language which the notion of 'language-games' takes in. The complications of 'language-games' reflect the complications of 'grammar' and 'grammatical investigation', and the complexity of the former carries over to the latter, making these concepts potentially adaptable to various kinds of philosophical problems – but at the same time hard to pin down in a general definition.

Section 3.1 will identify respects in which, in his use of the concept of a 'language-game', Wittgenstein's aims differ from those of the presentation of a conventional philosophical account of language use. He focuses our attention on what he calls 'primitive' uses of language, as well as on fictional uses, with the overarching aim of

dissolving philosophical problems. Section 3.2 will examine Wittgenstein's idea of language-games as 'objects of comparison' and argue that descriptions of language use through 'language-games' (and, in turn, 'rules of grammar') are truth-apt; for such descriptions to get a grip on philosophical problems they have to be correct in the sense that they get us to see certain facts about how we use words. In Section 3.3, we will then begin to work our way further through what Wittgenstein's invocations of 'language-games' seem to tell us. The Simple View of grammar that Chapter 1 identified directs our attention to languages and games both being normatively-governed activities: there are rights and wrongs here, and often rules underpinning them. But a closer examination of Wittgenstein's texts also points to other insights. In fact, taking Wittgenstein's interest in language-games to be focussed on the idea of rule-governedness is to focus on only one aspect of it and possibly obscure other ideas that are less hospitable to that idea (and to the Policing Conception). Section 3.3 will focus on what one might call the 'interwovenness' of language use with our practical activities and the settings in which we pursue them, the concept of 'form of life' here finding a place (this concept will be looked at in more detail in Sections 3.7 and 3.8). Section 3.4 will then demonstrate Wittgenstein's concern with the *diversity* that language-games and forms of life exhibit, a diversity incompatible with familiar conceptions of the nature of language. But this is not a sheer diversity, as Section 3.5 will show in examining Wittgenstein's depiction of language-games as making up an overlapping, continuous – one might say, 'organic' – whole with particular language uses building on and extending others, as well as themselves being built upon and extended by yet others.

This also gives us a perspective on Wittgenstein's claim that 'language' is best understood as a 'family-resemblance' concept, there being no single underlying essence in which all instances of it partake (Section 3.6). I will consider what moral the latter insight might have for those who seek to establish a precise definition for 'language-game' itself. Section 3.7 will relate the idea of 'language-games' to Wittgenstein's famous notion of 'forms of life' that imports considerations about human agreement into reflections on our linguistic practices. We will see the importance of the inter-play of cultural and natural factors in shaping forms of life. Returning to the idea of language as rule-governed (set out in Chapter 2) and presenting a picture that Cavell uses to capture Wittgenstein's idea

of 'forms of life', the final section of this chapter (3.8) will briefly consider what moral the discussion so far has for those who seek a 'grounding' or 'foundation' of language and linguistic normativity.

3.1 Describing Language and Dissolving Philosophical Problems

Wittgenstein's use of the term 'language-game' is multifaceted. Loosely speaking, it signifies a localised activity of employing words in a certain way, and in some of its uses, Wittgenstein might seem to be contributing to a conventional philosophical description of language. The term 'language-game' sometimes signifies fragments of *actual* practices of ours. Wittgenstein mentions some examples of the form 'the language-game we play with the word "X"' (e.g. with 'game' (PI §71), 'proposition', language', 'thought', 'world' (PI §96), 'read' (§156), 'pain' (PI §300)). Wittgenstein also speaks of language-games to describe practices that involve typical linguistic expressions, for example, giving orders and obeying them, describing the appearance of an object, giving its measurement, reporting an event (PI §23), lying (PI §249), telling (PI §363). Sometimes Wittgenstein uses the term 'language-game' to designate more intricate practices that involve certain linguistic activities but go beyond them, for example, solving a problem in applied arithmetic, constructing an object from a description, presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams, etc. (PI §23) Baker and Hacker additionally observe about Wittgenstein's use of 'language-game': 'Occasionally, the term is used even more generously, e.g. the language-games with physical objects and with sense-impressions (PPF §34).' (2005, 63) All these instances of 'language-game' referring to actual linguistic practices show that Wittgenstein sometimes describes natural languages as involving language-games. But any notion that Wittgenstein's aim is a conventional and systematic and comprehensive account of language sits uncomfortably with two important foci of his discussions of language-games, namely, on *primitive* language use and on *fictional* language-games.

Language-games often present *primitive uses of language*:

[Language-games] are ways of using signs simpler than those in which we use the signs of our highly complicated everyday language. [...] The study of language games is the study of primitive forms of language or primitive languages. (BB 17)

But why engage in such a study? Wittgenstein claims that

It disperses the fog if we study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of use in which one can clearly survey the purpose and functioning of the words. (PI §5)

More specifically, Wittgenstein proposes that by looking at the workings of language, i.e. the use and role of words, in simple scenarios we will reach a better understanding of *our own* concepts. The builders' language in the famous scenario of PI §2 (I shall turn to this in the Section 3.3) is designed to serve as an 'object of comparison' which is to be used to see in what respects it is similar and dissimilar to our actual language use. Wittgenstein also describes other fictional language-games to draw our attention to certain features that are relevant to the philosophical problems he is addressing. For example, he sometimes mentions imaginary language-games that are set in circumstances radically different from those in which our linguistic practices are at home (e.g. PI §142; PPF §366; RFM I §§5, 149).

Wittgenstein uses language-games to isolate particular aspects of our linguistic practices in order to illuminate those aspects which may otherwise be hardly noticeable because of their matter-of-course familiarity. Wittgenstein writes that

the language-games stand there as *objects of comparison* which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language. (PI §130)

Primitive and fictional language-games stand to our complex linguistic practices then in a relation of resemblance or illuminating contrast; they typically pick out and exclusively focus on an aspect in isolation – an aspect which we find in our language, but mixed up with lots of other things and therefore less obviously. In this way, primitive and fictional language-games are meant to bring into view something that is easily overlooked in the hurly-burly of our ordinary language use. They are designed to reveal how much is tacitly going on in our practices and how intricate these are. They thereby shed light on the reasons for the discrepancy between descriptions of the primitive and fictional language-games, on the one hand, and the complicated and ramified ways in which we actually use words, on the other. For example, as we will see, we can give a succinct and 'surveyable' (or 'perspicuous') description of the builders' language-game from the opening of the *Investigations* with only four nouns, all of which denote a particular building material and are called out to tell someone they should bring the respective material. Moving away from this primitive language-game, we will be confronted with 'several cases where the

question arises “Will that description do or not?” The answer is: “Yes, it will, but only for this narrowly circumscribed area, not for the whole of what you were purporting to describe” (PI §3). Wittgenstein invokes language-games then as invented ‘objects of comparison’ to shed light on fragments of our language and particular facets of its use (I will discuss this idea of ‘objects of comparison in the next section).

Rush Rhees makes clear how *not* to understand the role of simple and primitive language-games by linking it to the idea of logical analysis:

The whole idea of a logical analysis of language, or the logical analysis of propositions, is a queer and confused one. And in setting forth his language games Wittgenstein was not trying to give any analysis at all. If we call them ‘more primitive’ or ‘simpler’ languages, that does not mean that they reveal anything like the elements which a more complicated language must have. (Rhees 1958, ix)

I agree with Rhees that Wittgenstein does not intend his language-games to uncover any hidden and basic elements in the sense of a logical analysis of language which dominates the *Tractatus*. Nor does Wittgenstein think that there is such a thing as a ‘final analysis’ of linguistic expressions (cf. PI §91). However, the idea of analysis, as Wittgenstein observes in PI §90, can be conceived of differently.⁷² There is a sense in which simple language-games which isolate certain facets or aspects of language or a linguistic expression ‘analyse’ the logic or grammar by abstracting from and disassembling ramified uses of expressions in order to bring those isolated facets into focus. The builders’ language-game and perhaps more so the shopping language-game of PI §1 (which I will discuss below) exemplify a sense in which one might speak of language-games as tools of grammatical analysis. Both (and the variations of the former) enable us to see specific facets of the functioning of certain expressions by presenting them as detached and self-contained units. But to what end?

Crucially, Wittgenstein disavows any claim to be offering a systematic or comprehensive account of language. Instead, language-games serve as *correctors of philosophical misconceptions*. Wittgenstein presents language-games with the purpose of pointing out the flaws of certain philosophical conceptions. For example, as we will see, the language-game of the builders in §2 may, by and large, be appropriately described by

⁷² Kuusela (2008, 170) also makes this point.

the Augustinian picture of language, according to which words stand for objects. But as soon as we shift our attention to the various different ways in which we actually use words, we see how flawed and inept a conception the Augustinian picture provides of linguistic meaning and language generally: the idea that the meaning of a word is an object fails to capture the richness and complexity of the workings of our language. The language-game of the builders is an object of comparison that presents us with a language which consists only of orders and whose speakers do not use words to represent facts.⁷³ The scenario shows (among other things) that the Augustinian picture of language, according to which words in language stand for things in the world, is misleading because it fails to accommodate certain vital aspects of language (e.g. its non-representational uses such as '[r]equesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying' (PI §23)). Relatedly, the Augustinian picture may create puzzling questions about the ontological status of certain 'things' some words supposedly stand for, e.g. numbers. In response to this, Wittgenstein stresses that we use expressions as instruments to achieve an array of different purposes (cf. PI §421), and that it is, for instance, and as the shopkeeper scenario demonstrates, entirely irrelevant to the functioning of number words (and their meaning) whether these words denote abstract objects (whereas, according to the Augustinian picture, naming is the essence of language).⁷⁴

In this way, language-games, as Cavell puts it, 'provide' not only 'new ways of investigating concepts', but also 'of criticizing traditional philosophy' (quoted above). The method is meant to solve particular problems, that is,

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)

⁷³ Whether this 'complete primitive language', as Wittgenstein calls it, qualifies as a language at all has been subject to some debate. One influential voice in this is Rush Rhees (1970). He argues the builders cannot be said to have a language because their linguistic behaviour lacks the typical characteristic of being embedded in a broader practice with a certain complexity. I do not have room here to discuss this issue.

⁷⁴ It should be noted that the Augustinian picture becomes a problematic philosophical view *only if* it is taken to present a model to which reality *must* correspond. If the picture is not inflated to present such a theory of language, the description associated with Augustine may be seen to capture well certain aspects of our language; as I indicated above, that is exactly what Wittgenstein says: "'Will that description do or not?' The answer is: Yes, it will, but only for this narrowly circumscribed area, not for the whole of what you were purporting to describe.' (PI §3)

To this end – which, as PI §133 makes clear, is the elimination of troubling difficulties we encounter in philosophy – language-games capture certain aspects of our fluid language use; but establishing this ‘order in our knowledge of the use of language’ can be done through depiction of language-games with which our use of language also *contrasts*. However, this point can be overstated, as the next section discusses.

3.2 ‘Objects of Comparison’ and the Question of Truth-Aptness

Wittgenstein introduces the idea of ‘objects of comparison’ to characterise a central role of ‘language-games’:

Our clear and simple language-games are not preliminary studies for a future regimentation of language – as it were, first approximations, ignoring friction and air resistance. Rather, the language-games stand there as *objects of comparison* which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language. (PI §130)

Wittgenstein’s aim of presenting language-games is not to change the way we speak by suggesting a more precise or refined language⁷⁵; instead of providing models of how one ought to use words in some ‘improved’ language, language-games, as I indicated in the previous section, serve as some kind of illuminating vignettes with which we can compare our use of words, thereby understanding certain aspects of our language and clarifying our concepts; ultimately with the purpose of dissolving philosophical problems. Rather than straightforwardly presenting how things are or must be, presenting ‘clear and simple language-games’ is a potentially useful tool for seeing similarities and dissimilarities. From this perspective, Wittgenstein’s characterisation of language-games as ‘objects of comparison’ tells us something crucial about their status and methodological function, and indicates a certain distance and independence from actual language use.

In Wittgenstein’s introduction of the idea of ‘objects of comparison’, Oskari Kuusela sees articulated ‘Wittgenstein’s turn’, ‘a methodological shift away from philosophical theses’ (2008, 120), which, according to Kuusela, finds exemplary expression through the famous metaphor of ‘turning our whole examination around’ (PI §108). Kuusela describes

⁷⁵ Cf. also PI §133: ‘We don’t want to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of our words in unheard-of ways.’

Wittgenstein's turn as directed against a form of dogmatism – he views the later Wittgenstein as offering an anti-dogmatic philosophy centring precisely on the idea of 'objects of comparison'. Kuusela sees textual evidence of this in the following section:

For we can avoid unfairness or vacuity in our assertions only by presenting the model as what it is, as an object of comparison – as a sort of yardstick; not as a preconception to which reality *must* correspond. (The dogmatism into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy.) (PI §131)

According to Kuusela, what Wittgenstein says here about how to avoid dogmatism is not limited to language-games. Kuusela argues that Wittgenstein's conception of models as objects of comparison not only includes language-games but also philosophical statements and philosophical conceptions such as the calculus conception of language (Kuusela 2008, 128-31). For example, Kuusela comments on PI §131: 'The word "model" in the remark is intended to apply to philosophical conceptions more generally' (131). Furthermore, and crucially for our purposes, Kuusela writes that 'rules of grammar' as articulated in a grammatical investigation are to also be regarded as 'objects of comparison' (140).⁷⁶ For Kuusela, all these different ways of describing language use fall under the category of 'objects of comparison'.

Kuusela strongly emphasises that 'objects of comparison' are characterised by their above-mentioned independence of our actual language use. For example, Kuusela writes that '[...] statements of a rule are not true or false about anything and do not constitute theses. Such statements [...] do not tell us anything about *actual* language use' (2008, 119). This interpretation gets support from a crucial point that the previous section presented: two foci of Wittgenstein's descriptions of language are on primitive language use and on fictional language-games.

However, I will argue that for statements of rules of grammar and other grammatical descriptions to do any work they must capture our language use, either by correctly describing actual use or by bringing us to understand truths about our actual use ('through similarities and dissimilarities'). I will argue that Kuusela's interpretation has trouble allowing for there being truth in a grammatical investigation's descriptions of language

⁷⁶ Kuusela also writes that 'an example should be comprehended as an *object of comparison*' (2008, 124) and speaks of 'Wittgenstein's conception of rules as objects of comparison' (2008, 145).

use. To be sure, he does not deny that language-games and rules of grammar can describe our language use and concepts; but he seems to overstate the point that such descriptions do not capture truths about our actual practice. For as we have seen, Wittgenstein uses the term ‘language-games’ in two ways: there are the invented scenarios such as that of the builders (PI §1), but he also uses the term for parts or aspects of our actual language use (e.g. PI §§249, 654). Only language-games in the first sense are characterised by the above-mentioned independence of our actual language use. Language-games in the second sense describe our actual practices of language use. In what follows, I will discuss how this two-fold inflection of ‘language-game’ relates to Kuusela’s conception of Wittgenstein’s philosophy as therapy.

Any interpretation of the idea of ‘objects of comparison’ must accommodate Wittgenstein’s talk of our actual language use as involving language-games. When Wittgenstein uses the term ‘language-game’ to refer to our actual uses of language does, he often explicitly says so or it is clear from the context. This, after all, is a main point of Wittgenstein’s language/game analogy. So the term ‘language-game’ sometimes denotes activities in which we engage and in which we then, arguably, actually use certain words in certain ways. The prime instance of this is perhaps the list in PI §23 – this section explicitly invites us to ‘[c]onsider the variety of language-games in the following examples’ – and all the examples given there are examples of activities people actually engage in (I will quote just part of it here and it in full in Section 3.4):

- Giving orders, and acting on them –
- Describing an object by its appearance, or by its measurements – [...]
- Reporting an event –
- Speculating about the event – [...]
- Cracking a joke; telling one – [...]
- Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.

Thus, language-games are sometimes actually played.⁷⁷ Even if Wittgenstein does in places describe other forms of language use we *might* but *do not* engage in, there is no

⁷⁷ Cf. also what Wittgenstein says in PI §71: ‘*This*, after all, is how we play the game. (I mean the language-game with the word “game”.)’ To give yet another example, Wittgenstein also clearly refers to our actual uses of words in the context of certain situations by speaking of ‘our normal language-games’: ‘And if things were quite different from what they actually are – if there were, for instance, no characteristic expression of pain, of fear, of joy; if rule became exception, and exception rule; or if both became phenomena of roughly equal

evidence that Wittgenstein doubted the possibility to describe how we use words – indeed, if a grammatical investigation were unable to describe actual language use, his method would be a non-starter, as treating language-games as entirely non-descriptive would make them vacuous. Without a doubt, grammatical statements are meant to describe language use for the purpose of clearing up philosophical confusion; but, as will argue in the next sub-section, such statements can be truth-apt; they can be correct or incorrect. Language-games and rules of grammar are not always just objects of comparison.

I have shown that language-games describe language use. Chapter 2 showed that rules of grammar describe language use. These are the two sides of the same coin; those actual uses of language Wittgenstein refers to as ‘language-games’ are – in virtue of being characterised as ‘games’ – governed by rules. Rules of grammar are sometimes actually followed.

3.2.1 Grammatical statements as truth-apt statements

Using the example of statements of rules, this section will demonstrate that there can be *truth* in grammatical statements. While *rules* themselves are not accountable to reality in the sense of being ‘falsifiable’ by it, *statements of rules* with which we describe our practices are accountable to a particular reality – the reality of our linguistic practices; and it is indeed this reality and how it is embedded within broader human practices that a grammatical investigation looks at in order to dissolve philosophical problems. *Rules* are not truth-apt; they can only be more or less useful or useless, practical or impractical. But *statements of rules* cannot only be practical or impractical but also true. In fact, their practicality for a clarification of language seems to require that they are true or get us to see what is true. (This latter idea of ‘getting us to see what is true’ is a main reason why one might say what Kuusela says but thereby overstate the case, as the next sub-section will argue he does.)

frequency – our normal language-games would thereby lose their point.’ (PI §142) As these examples show, there can be no doubt that Wittgenstein also talks of (segments of) our actual linguistic practices as ‘language-games’ (see Section 3.1). Something that might complicate matters is that Wittgenstein also sometimes speaks of something like objects of comparison (‘paradigms’, ‘samples’, ‘means of representation’, etc.) *within* those language-games that we actually play (see e.g. PI §§50, 57).

To see that statements of a rule can be true, consider, for example, that there is a sense in which the stick I use to define one unit of measurement is one unit long (and, similarly, the standard metre is 1 metre long). But one must be careful not to confuse the two roles the same sentence ('This stick is one unit long') may have. Once the definition is established, one can, of course, say that the stick that serves as the standard is one unit long. Saying that it is true that the stick is one unit long then indicates that the method of measurement based on the length of the stick is accepted, and thus, in some sense, made independent of it (we may have built measuring tapes on the basis of the length of the defining stick, thereby making it possible to use the same units of measurement without always using the original stick). This case is similar to that of rules of language in the following way. Just as 'This stick is one unit long' can be used to describe what in an existing practice of measuring counts as 'one unit' (when people measure correctly), the statement of a rule for the use of a word can be used to describe what in an existing linguistic practice counts as the correct use of the word. Both descriptions can fail to describe the existing practice they are meant to describe, and in this sense fail, i.e., be incorrect. That is, although rules themselves are not truth-apt, descriptions of rules in force in a given practice can be true or false.

Even though Kuusela thinks that grammatical descriptions 'do not tell us anything about *actual* language use' (quoted above), there are also points at which he is trying to accommodate the thought that there can be truth in grammatical descriptions. For example, Kuusela does not deny that rules of grammar can ever present aspects of how things actually are:

The point of Wittgenstein's introduction of his conception of clarificatory rules as objects of comparison is not that, according to him, it is impossible to describe the actual uses of language as they really are – and that one, therefore, must be satisfied with something less: mere comparisons, and so on. Although the uses of language may often be too complex to capture exhaustively in particular formulae, this does not imply that descriptions given for particular purposes would be inadequate. (2008, 145)

Kuusela is right with his broader point against 'mere comparisons'; we should reject the thought that it is impossible to describe language use by means of objects of comparison because the uses of language are 'too complex'; indeed, from finding ourselves unable to capture the complexity of language use exhaustively by our descriptions it does not follow

that these descriptions are insufficient for describing language use and for their purpose of dissolving philosophical problems. Nor does it follow that there can be no truth in grammatical statements. But in asserting that ‘statements of a rule are not true or false about anything’ Kuusela appears to run the risk of understanding statements of rules and other grammatical descriptions as ‘mere objects of comparison’. This would precisely be against his own intentions because he also claims that it is not ‘impossible to describe the actual uses of language as they really are’, i.e. he still wants grammatical statements to be descriptive of actual language use.

While Wittgenstein presents us with invented and contrasting cases of language use that are useful in getting us to grasp our actual use, Kuusela’s interpretation overstates the detachment of the rules from any actual uses of words – as if they always were descriptions only of possible uses. Descriptions of our language use employing rules are intended to indicate how certain words are to be used in our practice, in which case it must also be empirically true that correct usage is like that. This does not mean that invented cases cannot be useful in getting us to grasp how we actually use words. But for descriptions to get a grip on philosophical problems and to serve as a critical tool, it cannot be denied that there is a fact of the matter as to how we use certain expressions.

3.2.3 Correctness and philosophical therapy

Kuusela’s claim that descriptions of language use employing rules ought not to be understood as being ‘true or false about anything’ (quoted above) is motivated at least in part by his conception of a successful grammatical investigation. I will argue that Kuusela does not realise that there are two criteria of a successful grammatical investigation at work in his conception: (1) a purely therapeutic criterion – it dissolves problems – and (2) another criterion that says that this dissolution of problems takes place through correct description of language use. So Kuusela runs the risk of inconsistency; on the one hand, he thinks that rules of grammar must be correct to meet the therapeutic criterion (via (1)), but, on the other hand, he thinks that rules of grammar need not describe our language use correctly (via (2)). Although Kuusela is right that rules of grammar need not describe

our language use correctly but only need to get us to see what is true,⁷⁸ I will argue that he overstates the case.

If a grammatical rule can describe or fail to describe actual use, certainly this describing can be done correctly or incorrectly. As we have seen, there is a sense in which stating a grammatical rule is making a truth claim. Kuusela acknowledges that for the statements of rules to do any work they must get us to see certain aspects of our concepts; and he also acknowledges that statements of rules can describe our concepts correctly, that it is possible 'to describe the actual uses of language as they really are' (quoted above). But he then rapidly connects this latter point to the idea that descriptions of language use are meant to successfully help us deal with philosophical problems. Kuusela thereby overstates the point of 'getting us to see certain aspects/truths' and argues for a particular understanding of 'correctness' in the sense of criterion (2):

a clarificatory statement or a model is to be understood as correct insofar as it can dissolve those problems it was meant to dissolve. This is what it *means* for a philosophical account to be correct. Consequently, it only makes sense to talk about the correctness of grammatical remarks in the context of actual philosophical problems, not in the abstract [...]. (256)

Kuusela is right to emphasise that for Wittgenstein a grammatical investigation is meant to solve particular actual problems and is therefore not concerned with 'correctness in the abstract', i.e. outside of contexts of any such problems or even with 'correctness' in some metaphysical sense. But there is a sense in which Kuusela seems to generally question that grammatical remarks are meant to correctly describe our language use because his answer to 'what is the criterion for the correctness of a philosophical description of language with the help of a grammatical rule?' (252) identifies a *purely therapeutic criterion*: dissolving philosophical problems. So here Kuusela conflates the two criteria by making (2) bound up in (1).

This purely therapeutic understanding of correctness faces an objection: 'If slaps in the face made our philosophical problems disappear, we would have to acknowledge slaps in the face as instances of philosophical clarification.' The problem here is that there is in such a case no *internal relation* between the problems and their solution (Glock 1991,

⁷⁸ Think, for example, of fictional cases such as the shopkeeper scenario of PI §1.

84; cf. Kuusela 2008, 257). Kuusela responds to that by arguing that this internal relation is secured in his interpretation: the problems, he argues, consist in a misleading construal of how an expression is used and their solution is 'the articulation of an alternative mode of presenting language use [...] that allows one to get rid of the problems and confusions one fell into' (257). But this does not seem to be sufficient, because Kuusela's purely therapeutic criterion (1) conflates correctness with achieving an intended aim, with usefulness or relevance. Must an 'alternative mode of presenting language use' not get some aspect of our language use *right* in order to secure the aforementioned internal relation? To shed further light on this, we need to hear more from Kuusela about correctness and to better understand how he thinks the 'internal relation' is secured.

Kuusela explains his understanding of correctness by drawing on a distinction between two different roles that rules may play in a (language-)game (cf. PI §§53-4): (i) rules are explicitly formulated and such formulations play a role in the game (either as 'an aid in teaching the game' or 'a tool of the game itself'), or (ii) such rule-formulations plays no role in the game ('a rule is employed neither in the teaching nor in the game itself; nor is it set down in a list of rules'). Kuusela argues that philosophical clarification is only concerned with the second kind of cases in (ii), because it is only concerned with expressions whose use is not clear, i.e., with cases in which there are no explicit rules. Accordingly, Kuusela writes that the philosopher's statement of a rule '*gives expression* to a rule implicit in language, thus making it explicit'; but he adds: 'The philosopher's object of description when she states a rule [...] is not a rule of language' (254). Here, we can already see a serious inconsistency emerge: how can giving an expression to a rule implicit in language *not* be a description of a rule of language? Kuusela suggests that

the statement of a rule *articulates* an organizational principle according to which instances of language use are ordered in the sense that out of the numerous regularities that language use exhibits, it brings a certain regularity to the fore and to our attention. (254)

But again, the question arises why we should not say that the 'organizational principle' is correct in the sense that it correctly captures how we use a certain expression.

Addressing the question of how correctness of the statement of a rule is decided, Kuusela writes that the correctness of such a statement 'is *not* judged on the basis of whether it corresponds to a [...] rule implicit in a linguistic practice. Rather, its correctness

is decided on the basis of how the *instances of language use* fit it' (254). This formulation of the criterion of correctness in terms of a question of 'fit' appears to only relocate the 'internal relation' problem. The reason for this is that it could be said that instances of language use *fit* a stated rule only insofar as the rule is implicit in language. In other words, insofar as instances of language use fit the statement of a rule, they show that this statement correctly describes (an aspect of) the use of the relevant expressions – and insofar as the statement is correct in this sense, it can be said to 'correspond' to a rule implicit in our language use or at least identifies an order/regularity that is really there in our linguistic practice. So criterion (2) for correctness – a successful grammatical investigation dissolves philosophical problems *through correct description of language use* – also seems to be at work here. If this second criterion is ignored, it seems almost impossible to make sense of all the preciousness about describing language-games and rules of grammar in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Such descriptions must capture our linguistic practices to get a grip on philosophical problems and have any persuasive power.

To say that statements of a rule can correctly describe language use presupposes that there are rules implicit in our use of expressions. By articulating rules of grammar, we can get a handle on the fluctuating linguistic practices and identify regularities in these practices. We need not reject that statements of rules correspond to implicit rules in language use and claim instead that cases of language use fit a stated rule. These things are one and the same: language use fits a stated rule because the rule is implicit in our language use. Statements of grammatical rules give expression to implicit rules and, in this sense, make a truth-apt claim about correct usage.

Kuusela seems to be trying to accommodate this thought that grammatical descriptions state something that is implicit in language:

although logical or grammatical descriptions are not factual (nor superfactual) statements, what they describe is not a fiction. Logic, that which the logicians try to capture, is there *in the use of language* to be described correctly or incorrectly, and it is in this sense something real and concrete. (2008, 148)

The first of these two sentences shows that what Kuusela says in the second one about logic also applies to grammar. We can thus reformulate: 'Grammar, that which grammatical investigations try to capture, is there in the use of language to be described

correctly or incorrectly, and it is in this sense something real and concrete.’ But that seems to suggest that there are rules implicit in our use of language, and that statements of these rules tell us how a word is to be used if one wants to adhere to established usage, i.e. to the rules of grammar in force. If grammar is real and not just a fiction, and if grammatical descriptions can be correct or incorrect, it follows that statements of the rules of grammar by means of which we describe language can be correct or incorrect. And, as I have argued, Kuusela does also concede, albeit far from explicitly, that an account of a grammatical investigation needs some conception of correct description of language use. The conflation of the correct with the useful blurs the difference between two ways in which descriptions of language use can be successful in their intended role: by *getting us to see* or by *capturing correctly* a certain aspect of our grammar. Kuusela is right that descriptions *need* not necessarily be *correct descriptions* – they can also *get us to see* the truth – but Kuusela overstates the idea of *getting us to see* at the expense of the possibility of *capturing correctly*. Therefore, his conception inevitably runs the risk of inconsistency.

3.3 The Interwovenness of Language

We have seen in the previous section, that Wittgenstein’s grammatical descriptions are designed to get us to see certain facts about our linguistic practices. In this section, we will start to look at the various insights that the notion of language-games point us to. As already mentioned in Section 1.1, one purpose that the metaphorical use of the word ‘game’ in ‘language-game’ is to highlight language’s normative dimension: there are correct and incorrect ‘moves’ within a language-game, just as in a game like chess where rules determine licit and illicit moves. In other words, language-games qua games have rules according to which they are played. These rules determine what counts as correct, what it makes sense to say. The Simple View, as set out in Chapter 1, focuses on this aspect of the concept of a ‘language-game’ and interprets the central idea of normativity imported by the ‘game’ metaphor in a way that might seem to suggest that mastery of language exclusively consists in knowing the rules of the game. But taking Wittgenstein’s interest in language-games to be focussed on the idea of rule-governedness is to focus on only one aspect of it and possibly obscure other ideas that are less hospitable to that idea,

the Simple View and the Policing Conception. This and the following three sections identify some of these ideas.

This section will look at a particular aspect of those practices that the notion of language-games brings to light. Throughout his discussions Wittgenstein stresses a feature of language-games which one may call their *interwovenness*. Consider Wittgenstein's perhaps most famous example of a simple language-game that is introduced right at the beginning of the *Investigations*:

A is building with building stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass him the stones and to do so in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they make use of a language consisting of the words 'block', 'pillar', 'slab', 'beam'. A calls them out; B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call. (PI §2)

A couple of sections later, Wittgenstein writes about the scenario of the builders that 'I will sometimes speak of a primitive language as a language-game' (PI §7). The builders' language-game is (among other things) introduced primarily as an illustration of the so-called Augustinian picture of language, 'a primitive idea of the way language functions' (§2), according to which words stand for objects in the world. Yet the builders' language-game can be seen as already pointing beyond the primitive picture of language it is supposed to illustrate, because the words fulfil a practical purpose that is not limited to referring to things – the utterances of the words for the different building materials are commands that blocks, pillars, slabs and beams be brought. In this sense, the words do not just describe or pick out objects. They have a particular function in the practical context of building.

In speaking we are *doing* something⁷⁹ and what is so done is in significant ways bound up with other activities in the relevant context – and, perhaps most importantly, in speaking we are often doing other things than describing reality. Wittgenstein characterises a language-game as a nexus of language and activities, the former (language) being 'woven' into the latter (activities) (PI §7). The meaningful use of words is situated or contextualised in surroundings within which they serve a practical purpose and within

⁷⁹ Herein lies a parallel to the speech-act theory that was first sketched by J. L. Austin and later developed by John Searle. However, unlike speech-act theory, Wittgenstein's grammatical investigation does not aim at a systematic account of linguistic utterances (see also Section 1.1).

which we pursue practical purposes. If we want to understand the meaning of a word, we have to look at how we employ the word in our practices.

Thus, language-games bring to light the role and purpose of words and sentences, as well as instruments that are integral parts of our linguistic activities. Wittgenstein emphasises the *use* we make of expressions (as opposed to their *form*), by regarding words and concepts as tools (PI §569) and things such as colour samples (PI §16), drawings (PI §291) and gestures (BB 84) as instruments of language.⁸⁰ Wittgenstein's language-games also emphasise the significance of the circumstances in which we use certain expressions. The surroundings of our linguistic activities may be important to render the purpose or point of our speech activities plain. For it can in some cases be crucial not to overlook the conditions under which we use certain expressions. Such conditions can be specific, for example, that people take an interest in and engage in building with slabs and blocks (PI §2), or they may point to general natural facts about human biological make-up (e.g. that we possess certain perceptual abilities and lack others) or about the world (e.g. the behaviour of solid objects or the fact of gravity).

Relatedly, Wittgenstein explicitly links the notion of 'language-games' to his famous notion of a 'form of life'. He states that 'to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life' (PI §19) and adds a few sections later: 'The word "language-game" is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life' (PI §23). These remarks occurring at the beginning of the *Investigations* highlight that with the terms 'form of life' and 'language-game' Wittgenstein aims to direct us toward the broader context of our linguistic practices, which is (in part) constituted by the interwovenness of language and behaviour, of speaking and other activities, and of speaking *as doing* in language-games. To put it roughly, a form of life encompasses language and speaking as well as non-linguistic behaviour that is associated with language and speaking.⁸¹

⁸⁰ See also my discussion of the functional conception of rules in Section 2.4.

⁸¹ I shall briefly return to this in Section 3.7, where I also say more on the idea of 'forms of life' (and its relation to 'language-games'), a central idea to which we will also frequently return in later chapters.

3.4 The Diversity of Language Use

In a key section of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein brings the idea of ‘language-games’ explicitly to bear on the multifaceted and complex character of our natural language, which one may call the *diversity* of language-games:

But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question and command? – There are *countless* kinds; countless different kinds of use of all the things we call “signs”, “words”, “sentences”. And this diversity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. [...]

The word “language-game” is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.

Consider the variety of language-games in the following examples, and in others:

Giving orders, and acting on them –

Describing an object by its appearance, or by its measurements –

Constructing an object from a description (a drawing) –

Reporting an event –

Speculating about the event –

Forming and testing a hypothesis –

Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams –

Making up a story; and reading one –

Acting in a play –

Singing rounds –

Guessing riddles –

Cracking a joke; telling one –

Solving a problem in applied arithmetic –

Translating from one language into another –

Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.

– It is interesting to compare the diversity of the tools of language and of the ways they are used, the diversity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language. (This includes the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.) (PI §23)

This famous long list that reaches from giving and obeying orders to greeting and praying is a reminder that the intricate structure of our language extends over and encompasses innumerable activities. There is a vast array of things we do with language, and this diversity is ever-changing; we bring about new linguistic practices and others die away. Crucially, the diverse ways in which we make use of language – Wittgenstein repeatedly compares words to tools and instruments (e.g. PI §§11, 14-7, 360, 569), and points out that we ‘operate’ with them (cf. PI §449) – show how impoverished and limited those

perspectives on language are that cut out these ways of using language and focus on the alleged primary function of language to represent (as Wittgenstein himself once did, hence his self-criticism in brackets at the end of PI §23 just quoted).

Language is not just words and sentences to represent the world; rather, the utterances of words and sentences fulfil a variety of particular functions in particular circumstances. (This is another crucial insight to which the idea of language-games points us; here we come to see, once again, that taking Wittgenstein's interest in language-games to be focussed on the idea of rule-governedness is to focus on only one aspect of it.) Indeed, we do the most various things with our sentences (cf. §27) and the simple language-game of naming is perhaps best understood instead as a preparatory step to the mastery of fully fledged natural languages:

One thinks that learning language consists in giving names to objects. For example, to human beings, to shapes, to colours, to pains, to moods, to numbers, etc. To repeat – naming is something like attaching a name tag to a thing. One can call this a preparation for the use of a word. But *what* is it a preparation *for*? (PI §26)

Wittgenstein does not deny that one can understand naming as a preparation for using words, but he immediately goes on to show that this understanding can easily mislead us. In response to the question 'But *what* is it a preparation *for*?', his interlocutor suggests the following answer in the next section: 'We name things and then we can talk about them: can refer to them in talk.' And Wittgenstein counters: 'As if what we did next were given with the mere act of naming' (PI §27). Once more, Wittgenstein emphasises the vital practical side of language; he does so by giving the example of exclamations ('Water! Away! Ow! Help! Splendid! No!'). This example is meant to show how limited the idea is that words are names for objects, for it is plain that the words in exclamations serve a purpose different from or beyond that of naming objects.

Compare also the famous shopping language-game in the opening section of the *Investigations*:

I send someone shopping. I give him a slip of paper marked "five red apples". He takes the slip to the shopkeeper, who opens the drawer marked "apples"; then he looks up the word "red" in a chart and finds a colour sample next to it; then he says the series of elementary number-words – I assume that he knows them by heart – up to the word "five", and for

each number-word he takes an apple of the same colour as the sample out of the drawer.
– It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words. (PI §1)

This scenario is primarily meant to throw doubt upon (if not disprove) the idea that meaning of a word is some-*thing*, that a word *names* objects, properties, events, actions, etc. As Wittgenstein points out, the shopping language-game can show ‘how much the general concept of the meaning of a word surrounds the working of language with a haze which makes clear vision impossible’ (PI §5); that is, the shopping language-game shows how construing meaning as reference and taking the function of all words to be to name or signify something may distort how our language functions. For it illustrates three different ways of using words: the use of the noun ‘apples’ differs from that of the colour word (adjective) ‘red’ which in turn differs from the use of the numeral ‘three’. The shopkeeper’s different reactions to these words illustrate those different ways of using words. The language-game is designed to precisely stress these differences in the functioning of the relevant words. This explains why the scenario might seem so ‘extraordinary’; it is not intended first and foremost to give an empirically accurate description of our linguistic practices, but it rather is an illuminating fictional language-game that brings into focus particular characteristics of the expressions in question.⁸²

There would seem to be multiple further morals to be drawn from these discussions. For example, when Wittgenstein asks us to imagine what our language-game around weighing cheese would look like if lumps of cheese suddenly changed their size all the time (PI §142), such scenarios would seem to demonstrate that other concepts are possible and that ours do not have the privilege of being the only correct ones. Natural facts about the world we inhabit, our biological make-up, and what comes natural to us, condition the concepts we have and the language-games we play.⁸³ But in the rest of this chapter, I want to focus on three particular morals.

⁸² One might argue that the shopping language-game of PI §1 is a rather bizarre and odd fictional scenario we will probably never encounter in reality; so, for example, Mulhall remarks: ‘Surely nothing could be more extraordinary than this scene of supposedly ordinary life’ (2001, 44). This is an overstatement; the only oddity is that ‘red’ and ‘apple’ are such common words that we would not need any samples. Consider the name of some rare fruit of a very specific shade and the whole becomes perfectly natural.

⁸³ I shall return to this issue in Section 7.1.

3.5 Language as an Organic Whole

Wittgenstein writes in the *Brown Book*: ‘When the boy or grown-up learns what one might call special technical languages, e.g., the use of charts and diagrams, descriptive geometry, chemical symbolism, etc., he learns more language games’ (BB 81). According to this description, people at first learn simple and basic language-games – and then they may learn more (and more sophisticated) language-games. In this way, Wittgenstein uses the term ‘language-game’ to refer to particular sections of language use: the language-game with the word ‘pain’ (PI §300), the ‘language-game of communicating something’ (PI §363), the mathematical language-game (PPF §332), the language-game of ‘lying’ (PI §249). But in doing so, he also stresses that they emerge through the *gradual extension* of primitive and simple examples of language use.⁸⁴ The gradual extension allows to start with an isolated facet of language use and then gradually add others, thereby complicating the scenario step-by-step, so to speak, and extending the language-game in order to illuminate the complex use of certain words or kinds of words:

When we look at such simple forms of language, the mental mist which seems to enshroud our ordinary use of language disappears. We see activities, reactions, which are clear-cut and transparent. On the other hand we recognize in these simple processes forms of language not separated by a break from our more complicated ones. We see that we can build up the complicated forms from the primitive ones by gradually adding new forms. (BB 17)

This is in fact how Wittgenstein proceeds – one of his lines of action – in the first 50 or so sections of the *Investigations*. He introduces the idea of a language-game through the extremely limited and simplified scenario of the builders in PI §2. Subsequently he adds more and more new aspects to the builders’ ‘world’ and their interaction with it. Each of these stages can be seen as a simplified stand-alone and self-contained scenario that makes it possible to look at particular aspects of language and corresponding philosophical questions. The builders get number-words, indexicals and colour samples (§8), which raises the question about how each of these work, how they enrich the previously existing

⁸⁴ Kuusela observes that Wittgenstein’s following remark (drafted in 1939-40) was incorporated into a typescript from 1945 (the year in which Wittgenstein completed the first part of the *Investigations*) and can therefore be regarded ‘as aptly capturing the method of language-games in that work’ (2019, 155, n.118): ‘The advantage of the examination of language-games is just that they let us see *gradually* what otherwise we only see as a *whole*, and that is, as a tangled clew [verworrenen Knäuel].’ (TS 228, 177; cf. MS 162b, 52v, 53r)

language-game (of which they are an extension), what purpose they serve, etc. PI §15 introduces tools that 'bear certain marks' signifying the respective tools; Wittgenstein says later (in §41) that §15 introduced proper names. Then the builders get to ask questions and give answers about the number, location and colour of their building material (§21); they learn to give verbal explanations of words (ostensive definitions) in §27. And in a further expansion of the builders' practices in §§41 and 42, Wittgenstein's concern is with the question of 'empty names'; he discusses the case of a word that used to refer to a tool 'becoming meaningless' because of the tool no longer existing or being broken. Finally, Wittgenstein describes a situation in which the builders use a name that has never been used for a tool and he says that one could imagine the builders amusing themselves by using the obviously referenceless name. The main point of this latter scenario illustrates how a word can be meaningful without having a reference, but it also shows how a joke may come about as a response to a new situation, how a broken tool or the intentional misuse of words can spark humour.

The gradual extension of a language-game by adding more and more facets is meant to make possible a better understanding of the uses of a word, be it by adding different words (or word classes) or by adding further uses of the same word. Wittgenstein extends particular language-games and gradually builds up a more nuanced and complicated situation, with a view to clarifying more and more aspects of our intricate use of certain words. According to this feature of gradual extension as well as the feature of picking out primitive uses, a language-game presents a 'basic centre of variation' or a 'simplified core' of the use of an expression, around which the complex use ramifies.⁸⁵

3.6 Family Resemblance

Chapter 2 examined an essential aspect of the language/game analogy upon which the Simple View naturally focuses: the idea that language is rule-governed. This chapter's

⁸⁵ Cf. Baker/Hacker 2005, 59. – Wittgenstein explicitly mentions this idea of 'centres of variation' [*Zentren der Variation*] in the context of his introducing the notion of family-resemblance and his criticism of essentialism (e.g. MS 115, 221). Baker and Hacker hint at (but do not discuss at any length) how this idea can be made illuminating use of in connection with language-games and wordhood as such. This will be examined further in Chapter 4 which discusses the notion of 'projection' as a general linguistic phenomenon under which this idea can be subsumed.

discussion of 'language-games' has developed this discussion by showing that Wittgenstein offers a much richer picture of our linguistic practices. We have already seen that there are other aspects that the language/game analogy brings out. The remaining sections in this chapter will demonstrate that a crucial intention behind introducing the notion of language-games is indeed to register aspects of our linguistic practices that are less hospitable to the idea of the rule-governedness of language, aspects that the Policing Conception might seem not to be able to accommodate. Before turning to Wittgenstein's notion of 'forms of life', this section will show how family-resemblance concepts are directed against a form of essentialism and how they exemplify that our concepts are part of a web of interconnected concepts held together by similarities.

In the *Investigations*, it is as early as in section 3 that Wittgenstein compares language to games for the first time.⁸⁶ He does so, however, to point out how easily both are mischaracterised: any general definition of 'language' and 'game' in terms of one single feature excludes other things we call 'language' and 'game'. In a later section Wittgenstein coins a specific term for this: both 'language' and 'game' are *family-resemblance concepts* (PI §67). Such concepts are characterised by the fact that the things subsumed under them do not necessarily have one feature in common – an *essence* – in virtue of which we call them by the same name. There is nothing common to all phenomena we call 'language'; they do not all share one and the same feature that makes us use the same word for them; rather, there is a variety of 'affinities' between them (PI §65). Wittgenstein's nearby comments on 'game' are clearly meant to carry over to 'language', as the compound 'language-game' makes almost explicit. And there is, according to Wittgenstein, nothing common to all activities we call 'games'; instead, if we look at them, 'we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: similarities in the large and in the small' (PI §66). There are board-games, card-games, ball-games, athletic games, singing and dancing games, and so on.

Wittgenstein's claim is a strong one: it is about things that fall literally and without ambiguity under the same concept and, in this sense, as Wittgenstein says, 'form a family' (PI §67). The similarities between all parts of our natural language(s) are like 'family

⁸⁶ The analogy between a language and a game already began to become more and more prominent in Wittgenstein's thinking from the early 1930s on.

resemblances’ – ‘the various resemblances between members of a family – build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth – overlap and criss-cross in the same’ (PI §67).⁸⁷ In a later section of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein accordingly remarks: ‘I want to say: it is *above all* the apparatus of our ordinary language, of our word-language, that we call “language”; and then other things by analogy or comparability with it.’ (PI §494) This remark underlines not only the family-resemblance idea, it also stresses the significance of a focus on ‘our ordinary language’ in resisting the temptation of undertaking a metaphysical investigation into the ‘essence’ of language.

We could draw sharp boundaries around the concepts of game and language; however, as a matter of fact, there are no such sharp boundaries (cf. PI §68).⁸⁸ That some concepts have ‘blurred edges’, as Wittgenstein puts it, does not make them unusable:

Is a photograph that is not sharp a picture of a person at all? Is it even always an advantage to replace a picture that is not sharp by one that is? Isn’t one that isn’t sharp often just what we need? (PI §71)

Even a blurred photo is a photo, a vague boundary a boundary. Criticising Frege, who compares a concept to a region and maintains that a region without clear boundaries cannot be called a region, Wittgenstein emphasises that concepts with blurred edges may still perfectly suitable for our purposes:

But is it senseless to say “Stay roughly here”? Imagine that I were standing with someone in a city square and said that. As I say it, I do not bother drawing any boundary, but just make a pointing gesture – as if I were indicating a particular spot. And this is just how one might explain what a game is. (PI §71)

The absence of any exact definition of a concept need not impair its usefulness. In fact, an ‘unsharp’ explanation may even be what is desired and needed, because, for instance, a sharp or exact one could in some cases only be given at the expense of how the word in question is used – indeed, Wittgenstein thinks that, for example, our (family-resemblance)

⁸⁷ It may be worth noting that Nietzsche uses the term ‘Familien-Ähnlichkeit’ in section 20 of *Beyond Good and Evil* in which he explicitly discusses the interconnectedness of concepts (Nietzsche 1980). Nietzsche’s application of the term in reflecting on relations between concepts might be a significant forerunner of Wittgenstein’s use of the term in his later philosophy. Whether Wittgenstein was directly influenced by Nietzsche in this respect, I do not know. For some general remarks on this question, see Brusotti 2009.

⁸⁸ See also Section 2.3.1 that discusses the (implausible) ideas of rule-boundedness and determinacy of sense.

concept of a game is to be explained by exemplification, not by giving a general explanation. The same goes for the concept of a language.

Note also that there is no implication in Wittgenstein's discussion that the items falling under a family-resemblance concept have *no* features in common. Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblance is directed against the essentialist idea that there *must* be a common feature, an essence. Rather than insisting (as the essentialist would) that there *must* be a clear and determinate definition for every word, Wittgenstein merely says that there *need* not be one – and this leaves open the possibility that a common feature may or may not be found.

Accordingly, Wittgenstein clearly rejects the notion that the idea of language-games must provide a definition of 'language' and a foundation of his method:

Here we come up against the great question that lies behind all these considerations. – For someone might object against me: "You make things easy for yourself! You talk about all sorts of language-games, but have nowhere said what is essential to a language-game, and so to language: what is common to all these activities, and makes them into language or parts of language. So you let yourself off the very part of the investigation that once gave you the most headache, the part about the *general form of the proposition* and of language." And this is true. – Instead of pointing out something common to all that we call language, I'm saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common in virtue of which we use the same word for all – but there are many different kinds of *affinity* between them. And on account of this affinity, or these affinities, we call them all "languages". (PI §65)⁸⁹

Wittgenstein then introduces the idea of family-resemblance to argue that concepts such as language, game and number do not stand in need of unifying common essential features of the items falling under these concepts. Wittgenstein suggests instead that, generally, we cannot give a definition of family-resemblance concepts by citing common features, but that they can only be explained by examples and 'affinities'. That is why he abandons the *Tractatus* idea of a definition of language in terms of a general form of the proposition (i.e. language as the totality of true/false representations).

This point also gives us an interesting perspective on the fact that the fluidity of Wittgenstein's use of 'language-game' makes it hard (or perhaps impossible?) to pin down any exact definition of 'language-game' or a principle of classification for language-games.

⁸⁹ The significance of 'affinities' and 'similarities' that our discussion of family-resemblance concepts has touched upon as a crucial feature of our linguistic practices will resurface later in Chapter 4.

Wittgenstein characterises a vast array of different activities as language-games, and does not provide a taxonomy to classify language-games. Yet this is no problematic defect. As we have seen, the two components the term 'language-games' are family-resemblance concepts. Hence, what he says about 'language' and 'game' respectively is meant to carry over to the compound word (though the compound word involves only a metaphorical use of 'game'). Accordingly, the things subsumed under 'language-game' need not have any one feature in common in virtue of which they are called 'language-games' and that the concept of a language-game is explained by examples, rather than a general definition.

3.7 Forms of Life

This section will present Wittgenstein's famous concept of a 'form of life' and how it relates to the concept of 'language-games'. Having already shown in the previous sections of this chapter that the concept of 'language-game' signifies not only normative activities with rules, rights and wrongs, but also brings in aspects such as interwovenness, diversity, 'organicalness'/gradualness, in what follows I will indicate further points that suggest that Wittgenstein envisages a much broader picture of our linguistic practices than the Simple View suggests. As a result, a grammatical investigation seems to have to recognise and consider a variety of factors that are characteristic of our linguistic practices and may be relevant to exposing philosophical confusion.

Wittgenstein's language-games open up a perspective that focuses on the multiplicity of our linguistic activities, how these – and the grammar of the words they involve – are in various ways anchored in natural facts about us and the world we inhabit, bound up with our interests and abilities, and central to (an understanding of) our practices in general. Indeed, language-games are (at least partly) constitutive of our 'form of life'. Unlike the term 'language-game', the term 'form of life' only rarely appears in Wittgenstein's texts (only three times in the *Investigations*). But that these terms are in an important way connected is plain from PI §23: 'The word "language-game" is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.' The concept of a language-game, that is, gets its importance also from Wittgenstein's broader vision of language. The term 'form of life' articulates what is essential to precisely

this vision by reminding us that language is situated in, and in complex ways interwoven with, a broader range of activities as well as cultural and natural factors. Both ideas ('language-game' and 'form of life') undergo reciprocal illumination throughout the *Investigations*.

While the term 'language-game' signifies a localised practice of employing certain words, the term 'form of life' denotes the comprehensive surroundings of our lives within which linguistic and other activities are embedded. It is important not to conflate the two expressions. Earlier I spoke of the interwovenness of language-games and said that Wittgenstein characterises a language-game as a nexus of language and activities. So the idea of language-games already encapsulates that speaking is a kind of doing and that it embedded in other, non-linguistic behaviour.

The term 'form of life' appears in key passages. Wittgenstein puts particular emphasis on the close intertwinement between language and the wider context of human practices by pointing out the mutual interpenetration of these two factors: 'to imagine a language', he writes, 'means to imagine a form of life' (PI §19). The way *not* to understand this remark is by taking it to say that 'language' is a 'form of life' (whatever that would mean). Instead, language is *part of* a form of life (cf. PI §23, quoted above).⁹⁰ Wittgenstein's remark about imagining a language as imagining a form of life appears in the discussion of the builders' language and other ('primitive' or 'impoverished') languages, e.g. a language 'consisting only of orders and reports in battle', or one 'consisting only of questions and expressions for answering Yes and No' (PI §19). The main point to be taken from that remark seems that because of the inextricable connections between language and what people do generally (how they live), the words people have and use and what they do with them – i.e. which language-games they play – are in a significant way bound up with these people's lives. That is why to imagine a language and the corresponding linguistic activities is to imagine the general ways and characteristics of the life of those using the language – to imagine a form of life. Language-games constitute then, in part, a form of

⁹⁰ Similarly, *are* language-games forms of life? No. The use of words takes place in language-games in which that use is part of an activity (e.g. asking for five red apples at the grocery store); and language-games are in turn embedded in a form of life (e.g. one in which there is such an activity as buying apples at the store).

life. Sharing a form of life with others means to master certain language-games that are part of that form of life.

The third of three occurrences of the term 'form of life' in the *Investigations* marks another key passage of the book. In PI §§240-2, Wittgenstein discusses the central notion of agreement ['*Übereinstimmung*']. He says that human agreement about certain basics 'belongs to the scaffolding from which our language operates' (PI §240). He characterises this agreement as an agreement 'in language' and this in turn as an agreement in 'form of life' (PI §241). While the occurrences of 'form of life' in PI §§19 and 23 primarily emphasise that our linguistic activities are an integral part of a broader variety of activities characteristic of our lives, PI §§240-2 are concerned with bringing to the fore a related but different point: a shared language involves an undisputed agreement on what counts as a correct use of expressions. Wittgenstein says that this agreement in form of life is 'not only agreement in definitions', but also 'agreement in judgements' (§242). The idea is that a shared language involves not only agreement in concepts, i.e. what an expression means and is used, but also (to some extent) agreement on the truth of statements involving those concepts. For if such agreement in judgements did not obtain, the agreement in the meaning of the expressions we use would fall apart. There must be, for the most part, agreement on whether certain statements are true. Otherwise the agreement in definitions, i.e. in the use of an expression, would break down. It seems impossible to agree on the use of words (i.e. their meaning) and never agree on the truth of any statement. The far-reaching and deep agreement in our practice of using words is what Wittgenstein calls 'agreement in form of life'.⁹¹

It has often been noted in the literature that the phrase 'form of life' was rather widespread in intellectual and academic discourse in the early 20th century.⁹² It is quite a rich, complicated and multifaceted notion that has been discussed extensively in Wittgenstein scholarship.⁹³ Generally speaking, the term of a 'form of life' in Wittgenstein

⁹¹ I will return to the discussion of the notion of agreement in Section 6.3.

⁹² Note that 'Lebensform' has also been used in the rather technical biological sense of 'form of living organism' or 'life form', which has nothing to do with Wittgenstein's concept. Bacteria *are* (rather than have) a low form of life (i.e. of living beings).

⁹³ See e.g. the recent 'Special Issue' of the *Nordic Wittgenstein Review* entitled 'Wittgenstein and Forms of Life' (Moyal-Sharrock/Donatelli 2015).

invites two main readings; it can be argued that, whether deliberately or not, Wittgenstein's uses 'form of life' in a way that is ambiguous between a *natural* and a *cultural* understanding of the term. This ambiguity between a biological and an ethnological sense, or a 'vertical' and 'horizontal' sense (Cavell 1996), allows for the distinction between the human form of life and other forms of life, as well as socio-cultural differences within a form of life. The natural dimension of *Lebensform* captures the ways in which the human form of life is biologically distinct from other forms of animal life; but it does not merely point out the distinctiveness of the human animal compared to other animals but especially the distinctiveness of the way the animal lives. The cultural dimension signifies the differences between human communities within which language and other practices are embedded; it captures the ways in which one social formation differs from others. The natural dimension of 'form of life' is evident, for example, in Wittgenstein's remarks that characterise human language-games as an extension of primitive non-linguistic behaviour (see e.g. PI §244, Z §545, OC §475).

Both dimensions (or inflections) of the idea of 'form of life' – the cultural and the natural – are equally important in understanding the *human* form of life. Cavell is particularly clear on this by characterising Wittgenstein as conceiving 'the human as irreducibly social and natural' (1996, 353)⁹⁴. According to this conception, the human form of life includes both natural and nurtured elements: humans are cultured animals. The bilateral understanding of 'form of life' makes room for the complexity of our species' practices and life with language. We can thereby acknowledge the conventionalist aspects of language (meaning is the product of human practices, no metaphysical reality dictates how we speak about it, etc.), while also doing justice to the biological facts about the world and us with which it is essentially bound up.

Favouring one of the two dimensions of 'form of life' (and thus of language, which emerges within and is part of the human form of life) over the other results in a distortion a phenomenon that is essentially characterised by both the natural and the cultural – and by both in relation to each other. Indeed, speaking and talking are part of the complex

⁹⁴ Moyal-Sharrock (2015) gives a convincing argument against favouring one of these aspects over the other.

overlap and inter-play of nature, second nature⁹⁵ (a term, which perhaps marks aptly a somewhat grey area in the middle between nature and culture, and their merging into one another) and culture.

The talk of 'nature' and 'the natural' here is to be understood very broadly. It is important to note that the natural facts relevant to the human form of life are not limited to natural facts pertaining to the natural make-up of human beings. It would even be a mistake to think of the human form of life as only including general facts of human nature. Unlike, say, crabs, humans are capable of speaking; this is a fact about human nature that is similar to the fact that dogs, unlike fish, can be trained to fetch a stick. But, alongside such facts, the human form of life also includes and is responsive to *the natural conditions of the world* which we inhabit. Wittgenstein gives a vivid example of this:

The procedure of putting a lump of cheese on the balance and fixing the price by the turn of the scale would lose its point if it frequently happened for such lumps to grow or shrink for no obvious reason. (PI §142)

The procedure of cheese-weighing, which is part of our form of life, is thus dependent not only on our interests but also in an important sense dependent on natural facts of the world.⁹⁶

Our linguistic practices are shaped by natural facts, human interests, etc.; the rules that govern our language use have evolved within human practice. *We* make the rules, *we* give meanings to words – not some independent structure of the world (cf. BB 28). But ontogenetically, as well as phylogenetically, we did not adopt rules *as rules*. At first it is no matter of choice; it is a matter of certain responses to the world. We no more invented human language than we invented walking on two legs.⁹⁷ Concepts, meanings and rules have *evolved*; thinking and talking, Wittgenstein reminds us, are 'as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing' (PI §25). That is why the concept of

⁹⁵ The idea of second nature I have in mind here is borrowed from and features prominently in John McDowell's discussion of the relation between mind and world in his same-titled book (1996). McDowell uses the notion of second nature to an effort to reconcile nature, conceived of as the 'realm of law', with normativity (i.e., roughly, our ability to wield concepts and develop normative attitudes towards them), thereby carving out what he takes to be distinctively human.

⁹⁶ Section 7.1 will return to the issue of the significance of 'natural facts'.

⁹⁷ This very important point was reportedly made by Wittgenstein in a conversation with Friedrich Waismann, as Hacker notes (1996, 256).

'rules of grammar' might seem to be oversimplified and prone to invite misunderstandings because it can appear to lend itself to a kind of static picture of 'grammar' as a fixed structure. But a guiding idea in Wittgenstein's later philosophy is to take seriously that the object of study – language – is a dynamic, historical and situated phenomenon embedded within our broader form of life, something that is constantly changing.

3.8 'All the Whirl of Organism'

The final section of this chapter will briefly consider what moral the discussion in the previous sections as well as in the preceding chapter has for those who seek a 'grounding' or 'foundation' of language and linguistic normativity. I will present a picture with which Cavell attempts to capture important features of the idea of 'forms of life' and upon which I will draw in later discussion – the picture of forms of life as 'all the whirl of organism'. This section will also return to the idea of the rule-governedness of language and show that this idea finds its place within the broader horizon of the notion of forms of life that the previous section explicated. In light of this, we can see that the analogy between a language and a game is in multiple respects fruitful, some of which the Simple View highlights, others it fails to consider.

Cavell argues that a main point of the later Wittgenstein's reflections upon rules is that Wittgenstein 'wishes to indicate how inessential the "appeal to rules" is as an explanation of language' (2002, 48). This is directed against a particular understanding of the claim that language is rule-governed according to which rules play some 'foundational' role. What Cavell says can be seen as a response to philosophical worries about the groundlessness of our practices; and he seems indeed to fuel them by claiming that it is 'inessential'⁹⁸ (or even futile?) to appeal to rules to give our 'going on in the same way' and our certainty that we know what 'going on in the same way' means a foundation or ground. Why? Cavell argues that if one wants to explain language

⁹⁸ Another sense in which the appeal to rules is 'inessential' is the one discussed in Section 3.6: as the idea of family resemblance is designed to show, Wittgenstein thinks the question of the *essence* of language is confused (cf. PI §92).

what has to be 'explained' is, put flatly and bleakly, this. We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humour and of significance and of fulfilment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation – all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls 'forms of life'. Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying. (Cavell 2002, 48)

First of all, note that Cavell uses quotation marks to signal his distance from the idea of an 'explanation of language'. Presumably Cavell wants to resist philosophical expectations and aspirations to give the phenomenon of language any theoretical basis: language is not grounded in some metaphysical reality or 'mythic' rules; it lacks this kind of an ultimate justification; and it does not need one. Furthermore, note that Cavell takes issue with particular understandings of 'rules': grasping some metaphysical 'universals' or books of rules is not, according to Cavell, what mastery of language consists in and what makes mutual understanding in language possible. This is compatible with the idea that rules – understood more broadly as explanations of meaning – are constitutive of a word's meaning. But it also indicates the explanatory limits of the concept of a rule.

The passage above also sketches the richness and complexity of our practices Cavell takes Wittgenstein's notion of 'forms of life' to signify. He then makes a connection of that thought with Wittgenstein's general vision of language ('Human speech and activity [...] rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this'), only to finally say what effect this simple *and* difficult vision might have on us: it might be 'terrifying'. And precisely this reaction to Wittgenstein's vision, according to Cavell, can make it so difficult. But why *terrifying*? McDowell comments on Cavell's above remark:

The terror of which Cavell writes at the end of this marvellous passage is a sort of vertigo, induced by the thought that there is nothing that keeps our practices in line except the reactions and responses we learn in learning them. The ground seems to have been removed from under our feet. (2000, 42)

One could understand this as a mere capitulation to the vastness and impenetrability of 'all the whirl of organism'. But Cavell speaks instead of the terrifying *difficulty* of

Wittgenstein's vision. This difficulty consists in understanding what might appear to be a rather unsettling point: our agreement in language, in what we accept as a meaningful use of words and a successful projection of words into further contexts, is no more than a matter of fact.⁹⁹

If we take on board Cavell's critical remarks on the role of rules, one might well wonder what becomes of the idea of describing language by giving rules of grammar. How can the rejection of rules as being 'essential' to language be reconciled with the importance of some notion of rules in a grammatical investigation? The short answer is: we can describe language by giving rules but have to recognise that there is all the other 'stuff' surrounding these rules. We must acknowledge the complexity of the phenomena. This is done, *inter alia*, by recognising that 'rules of grammar' are best understood liberally and functionally (within the limits that Section 2.5 identified). But it also requires us to take into account how a given expression fits into our practices and how these are in turn shaped by non-linguistic facts about us and the world. Accordingly, *part* of Wittgenstein's concern is to show how limited rule-centred explanations of language and speaking are. A rule can tell us nothing unless one has understood it correctly; unless one knows how to apply it, 'how to go on'.¹⁰⁰ This practical ability is crucial to understanding a rule and linguistic competence.¹⁰¹

Crucially, it would be mistaken to understand the idea of rule-governedness as saying that rules are the basis for normativity. We can formulate rules to codify our language use, but our language use is not ultimately based on such rules.¹⁰² Without rules, understood very broadly as standards for the use of a word, there cannot be any meaningful talk of correct and incorrect. But this does not make rules prior to the concept of correctness. In learning a rule-governed activity such as speaking, we learn what counts as correct. Learning the meaning of a word is to learn its correct use. This learning takes place against

⁹⁹ For a discussion of the important and difficult notions of projection and agreement, see esp. Chapter 4 and Section 6.3.

¹⁰⁰ This seems, roughly, what Cavell means in the above-quoted passage where he says that Wittgenstein demonstrates (among other things) 'how inessential the "appeal to rules" is as an explanation of language' (2002, 48).

¹⁰¹ See also Hanfling (2002, 62-3) on this point.

¹⁰² Cf. Rundle 1990, 5-8.

the background of various other activities such as repeating what others say or do, obeying orders, and it involves training and repeated exposure.

One could plausibly suggest that language use and other of our rule-governed practices are rooted in something like the anthropological ability to recognise regularities. As Schroeder puts it: '[U]ltimately, our mastery of rules has to be grounded in an ability to continue in what we regard as a regular manner that is *not* guided by any rule, but can only be taught by examples' (2017, 261-2). In contrast to the problematic view that attempts to base normativity on rules, the general point to be taken from Wittgenstein is: our concepts emerge in and from certain practices with which they form an inextricable whole. Wittgenstein's response to conceiving of rules as the basis for normativity is the emphasis on the practical skill to use words, apply rules, and, more generally, know how to go on.¹⁰³ We have to bring in practical surroundings, considerations about the purpose of certain uses, etc. to account for the complexity of the issue. But, as Chapter 2 showed, that is clearly not to say that there is no sense in which our use of words is rule-governed.

This chapter has shown that language-games describe language use. The notion of language-games – a crucial innovation in Wittgenstein's philosophy – points us to the rules by which our use of words is governed but also to other aspects of our linguistic practices. To return briefly to the idea with which this chapter began – the idea that grammar is what language-games are meant to reveal – I would suggest that the different insights, to which the notion of language-games points, show that the rules for the use of a word – its grammar – is to be situated within a complex 'whirl' of activities, cultural and natural facts. But to say that there are limits to the explanatory role of rules – it cannot be rules all the way down! – does not mean that rules have no role to play. Within the framework of a grammatical investigation, the concept of a rule helps us clarify language use. As Chapter 2 argued, rules of grammar denote standards of linguistic correctness, which for the most part are implicit, and the idea that language is rule-governed – if qualified appropriately in the way Sections 2.4 and 2.5 demonstrated – can be defended and has a crucial place in reflections upon language use.

¹⁰³ Cf. Section 2.6.4's discussion of rule-following and Wittgenstein's characterisation of rule-following as a 'practice' (PI §202).

We have seen in this chapter that what Wittgenstein makes of the analogy between language and games – pointing to language’s interwovenness, diversity and its character as an organic whole – suggests a richer picture than the one provided by the Simple View (introduced in Chapter 1) which focuses on their being correct and incorrect ‘moves’ within a language-game. We have also looked at other key ideas that add to Wittgenstein’s vision of language unpacked through the comparison of language to games: family resemblance and form of life. The former of these exemplifies Wittgenstein’s anti-essentialist understanding of language and concepts; it also stresses the importance of affinities and similarities between things falling under the same concept. This motif of ‘interconnectedness’ through similarities will be of particular importance in the next chapter. The idea of forms of life will be a central one throughout this thesis, one to which we will frequently return.

Chapter 4

Projection

This chapter further explores reasons to reject the Simple View of grammar set out in Chapter 1. According to this view, our use of words is governed by rules that determine what counts as a correct use of a word; the rules of grammar are understood on the model of the rules of a game like chess. On the Simple View, philosophical problems are manifestations of a failure to conform with the rules for the use of a word. As has already been sketched in Chapter 1, the Simple View might also underpin a Policing Conception of the role of grammar in Wittgenstein's philosophy. According to this conception, violating the rules of grammar results in nonsense. A central assumption of this conception is that the rules determine authoritatively whether a given use of a word is a piece of nonsense; correspondingly, a philosopher's aberrant use of a word is thought to be criticisable and correctable by reminding them of the rules for its use. This chapter will demonstrate that this policing function of rules faces difficulties by arguing that 'projection' is a pervasive feature of language: we project words into new contexts all the time and rules cannot authoritatively decide in advance which projections are acceptable.

Section 4.1 will give an initial presentation of Cavell's notion of 'projection' that undermines the idea that all language use is governed by rules fixed in advance by showing that we extend our language use all the time. Section 4.2 will further explain how projection works by defending Cavell's understanding of 'projection' against two variants of a general objection to the kind of flexibility that Cavell finds in our concepts. The workings of projections bring out a general mechanism that provides the basis for seeing the use of a concept in a particular context as the use of the established concept: seeing certain similarities and certain differences between contexts of use. Section 4.3 will argue that that mechanism is a fundamental and ubiquitous feature of language and that language can thus be said to be pervaded by projection. This section will also address the question of what holds our concepts and language together in the face of the fact that there are always differences between contexts: our concepts are characterised by an 'intolerant tolerance' and a 'flexible inflexibility' (Mulhall 2014), which is why not every projection is acceptable and projections are 'deeply controlled' (Cavell 1979) by aspects of our 'form of

life'. Finally in this chapter, Section 4.4 will explore some implications of the discussion in previous sections for the claim that language is rule-governed. I will argue that the rules governing our use of words regulate projective uses to some extent but do not in all cases authoritatively determine in advance which projections will be acceptable. The phenomenon of projection thus seems to undercut the Policing Conception of the role of grammatical rules in Wittgenstein's philosophy.

4.1 Cavell on the Possibility of 'Projective' Uses

Cavell criticises the idea that speaking is a matter of applying rules that are fixed in advance and which determine what it makes sense to say. He insists that 'language does not, in fact or in essence, depend upon such a structure [...] of rules' (2002, 48).¹⁰⁴ Instead, Cavell claims, 'what can be said in a language is not everywhere determined by rules' (1979, 180)¹⁰⁵. Note again that this is no outright rejection of the general idea that language is rule-governed.¹⁰⁶ Cavell rejects the idea that language depends on a pre-determined set of rules determining what it makes sense to say. Cavell's remarks further indicate the need for care with the idea that language is rule-governed discussed in Chapter 2.

Cavell attacks certain understandings of rules of language by bringing to our attention a characteristic feature of language which he calls *projection*. One of Cavell's examples are projections of the verb 'feed':

¹⁰⁴ It should be noted that this quotation comes from Cavell's devastating discussion of David Pole's book on Wittgenstein (Pole 1958). I believe that there are good reasons to think that Pole sees Wittgenstein as a 'police' philosopher in the sense of the Policing Conception used in this thesis. (Hence, Cavell's discussion shows that the Diagnostic Conception does not criticise a mere straw man.) Cavell thinks Pole's interpretation is a prime example of how *not* to understand the later Wittgenstein's vision of language. According to Cavell, Pole ascribes the following conception to Wittgenstein:

1. The correctness or incorrectness of a use of language is determined by the rules of the language, and "determined" in two senses:

a) The rules form a complete system, in the sense that for every "move" within the language it is obvious that a rule does or does not apply.

b) Where a rule does apply, it is obvious whether it has been followed or infringed. (Cavell 2002, 44)

These are, Cavell insists, *not* Wittgenstein's views but ones he actually opposed. Section 4.4 will consider another misunderstanding Cavell sees articulated in Pole's book.

¹⁰⁵ This claim echoes a remark of Wittgenstein's in PI §68.

¹⁰⁶ See Section 2.3.2; Section 4.4 will show that there is an understanding of this general idea Cavell could accept.

We learn the use of 'feed the kitty', 'feed the lion', 'feed the swans', and one day one of us says 'feed the meter', or 'feed in the film', or 'feed the machine', or 'feed his pride', or 'feed wire', and we understand, we are not troubled. (1979, 181)

The notion of projection is meant to capture that we *extend* our language use all the time, and it is meant to thereby counter the tendency to understand 'grammar' as an inflexible network or fixed structure of rules that determine authoritatively the 'bounds of sense'.

The communicative power of projections is not independent of the non-projective use of the relevant word; rather, it is in some sense parasitic on it. However, projections hang on the meanings of words *and* simultaneously extend them. That 'feed the meter' conveys a message is because of the earlier use of 'feed' in sentences like 'feed the kitty' and 'feed the swans'. There is not merely a similarity in sound between 'feed the kitty' and 'feed the swans' on the one hand and 'feed the meter' and 'feed his pride' on the other. Rather, the phrases 'feed the meter' and 'feed his pride' involve some innovation at the conceptual level: they are creative extensions of earlier uses of 'feed'. These extensions rest upon certain similarities between the contexts and cases of the use of the word. Providing something that is needed to keep 'running' or 'growing' is seen to be an important similarity between feeding babies, animals, plants, machines, pride.

Mulhall gives a brief but clear statement of one of the main points in Cavell's discussion of projection: while being projectable into various new contexts – having the quality of 'essential flexibility' – concepts also have the quality of 'essential inflexibility', 'that which allows us to say that what has been projected into the new context is the same old concept' (2014, 308). This feature of throwing an 'old' concept into new contexts concisely captures how projection works: projective uses track similarities; certain things of the context into which we project a word are the same, others are different.

Projections can be seen as extending concepts. They do not invent new objects and, in this sense, no new facts either; but the new uses of a word bring out certain features of the situations in question, and they make us see certain similarities between things. When one day one of us says 'feed the bicycle chain', we do not discover a hitherto never-grasped fact by suddenly 'realising' that we feed bicycle chains. Nor do bicycle chains become living organisms. However, there is a significant similarity between bicycle chains and organisms, of the kind that is characteristic of projections: the chain will 'suffer' if we do

not supply it with what it needs; the chain corrodes if it is not 'fed' oil. And feeding data into a computer is a teleological process just as feeding a baby or a bicycle chain.

The possibility of intelligible projective uses seems to count against the idea that all use of language is governed by rules fixed in advance because it shows that we extend our use of words all the time in ways that do not appear to accord with established rules. Crucially, no new rule needs to be explained to us for projective uses to be intelligible. How we are to account for the phenomenon of projection that involves registering and exploiting similarities between contexts will be a central question in what follows. What role the concept of rules may play, nonetheless, in an explanation of projection is an issue I will return to later in Section 4.4.

4.2 Objections to the Notion of 'Projection'

This section will further discuss how projections work by considering two objections against Cavell's idea of projection: firstly, that the phenomena that Cavell talks about actually *are* cases of new concepts; and secondly, that the phenomena that Cavell talks about are subsumable under a literal/metaphorical distinction. I will argue that both of these objections fail because we cannot draw the sharp lines that these objections want to draw: the mechanics of 'projective' uses are essentially the same as those of 'non-projective' uses. Indeed, a crucial point of Cavell's discussion is that it brings out the depth of a certain continuity between various cases of language use by laying bare an essential flexibility of our concepts that makes it possible and plausible to conceive the use of a concept as 'the same old concept' across contexts on the basis of certain similarities. The two objections can thus both be seen to argue that there is no such flexibility in our concepts: that meanings lack the quality of being 'stretchy' in the way Cavell claims.

In other words, the objections under discussion in this section propose a view of 'projection' that emphasises the *discontinuity* between earlier and new uses. By contrast, the Cavellian view, for which I will argue, emphasises the *continuity* between projective and non-projective cases. The Discontinuity View argues for discontinuity between 'feed' in, for example, 'feed the kitty' and 'feed the meter': 'feed the meter' is a case of a new concept; or there is a clear difference between what we may call the 'literal' (or

'established') concept of feeding in sentences such as 'feed the kitty' and what is conveyed in sentences such as 'feed the meter', and it is argued that the latter depends on the former but conveys something beyond the literal concept of feeding. The Continuity View is that differences between earlier and new uses *do not* amount to a sharp distinction between an old and a new concept, or a literal and a metaphorical use.

4.2.1 Objection 1: Projections are cases of new concepts

The first objection denies that projections involve 'the same old concept' and argues that they involve a new concept instead. But it seems that we cannot draw the clear line between cases that is required to show that. We can project 'feed' from 'feed the kitty' to 'feed the meter' because of certain similarities between both contexts of application; these similarities seem to allow us to say that when we say 'feed the meter', 'what has been projected into the new context is the same old concept' of 'feeding'. To invalidate this, one would have to show that the use of 'feed' in 'feed the meter' involves a concept different to the one involved in the use of 'feed the kitty'. But there do not seem to be definitive criteria for what constitutes such a significant difference.

The Continuity View offers a more plausible way of capturing the phenomenon of projection: projective uses do not involve the construction of a new concept but rather the development of an existing concept. For example, if the concept 'to feed' has the contexts in which it can be used 'built into it' (another projection?), then when these contexts change there is a change or an extension in the concept. We could say then that the same, though expanded, concept is used in new instances of 'feed'. So we do not use a new concept in the projection case but a modified version of the same old concept, yet in a very specific sense: an expanded version of the concept. To insist that the new instance of 'feed' in 'feed the meter' involves a new concept is to disregard the close connection of, and the natural transition from, the old to the new uses.

However, we find a remark in Wittgenstein that might at first appear to support the objection under discussion here and to be incompatible with the Continuity View:

When language-games change, then there is a change in concepts, and with the concepts the meanings of words change. (OC §65)

This remark could be seen as speaking against the idea that projections involve ‘the same old concept’: the projective use of a word might seem to change a language-game which we play with a word in such a fundamental way that we would have to speak of a new concept. However, it is not clear whether a projective use constitutes such a fundamental change in the concept that we are required to speak of it being such a new concept. The Continuity View does not deny a change in the concept nor the meaning of the word. It only argues that such a change is continuous, that projections depend on the meanings of words and simultaneously extend them, and that we are therefore unable to draw a definitive line between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ concept.¹⁰⁷ Wittgenstein’s remark is then compatible with the Continuity View: projections change the language-game we play with a word and they change the meaning of a word through extension, but such changes can be regarded as gradual and due to the stretchiness and flexibility of our concepts. These changes need not imply that a projective use must involve a new concept: for example, the very point of extending the language-games we play with the word ‘feed’ to apply it to machines is that the word retains its meaning, that its meaning carries over into other contexts in which we then speak of feeding meters and computers.

In conclusion, projecting a word into a new context does not necessarily involve a new concept. I will now turn to another attempt to undermine the Continuity View and the idea that projections show that meanings are ‘stretchy’.

4.2.2 Objection 2: Projections are metaphors

The second objection is that what Cavell is talking about under the label of ‘projection’ is actually the metaphorical use of words. This objection argues that the expressions ‘feed the meter’ and ‘feed the pride’ are just metaphorical uses of the word ‘feed’ whose literal meaning is expressed in uses such as ‘feed the kitty’ or ‘feed the baby’. But I will argue that the phenomenon of projection cannot be subsumed under a literal/metaphorical distinction because we are not able in all cases to draw the kind of clear-cut and non-arbitrary distinction between literal and metaphorical that would be required.

¹⁰⁷ Moreover, as Section 3.5 showed, a significant point of Wittgenstein’s discussion of language-games is indeed to indicate the gradual extension of uses of language.

There are cases that undoubtedly show that projections cannot be subsumed under metaphorical uses of a word. One such case is Cavell's example with the verb 'turn down' (1979, 178): is 'turn down the light' the metaphorical use or is 'turn down the phonograph'? What is the verb's 'literal' meaning? Consider also the verb 'run': 'run on diesel', 'run one's fingers through one's hair', 'trains run to London every 30 minutes', 'run every morning', 'run dry', 'run short of time', 'run a temperature'. Which of these are literal uses and which are metaphorical ones? An answer would need to be presented by the 'discontinuist'.

Note, however, that there are overlaps between the categories of metaphorical and projective language use; metaphor is *one* kind of projection because a metaphorical use meets a general condition of projection: it is a transfer of a word into a new context that bears certain similarities and certain differences with earlier contexts of the word's application.¹⁰⁸ Yet it would be false to claim that all projections are metaphors: it is unclear *whether* some projections are metaphorical (e.g. 'turn down the phonograph'), and it is unclear *how* metaphorical particular uses are (e.g. 'run out of time').

The discontinuity thesis advocate might still want to insist that there is an important difference between 'feed the kitty' and 'feed the meter': putting coins into a meter is not *really* feeding, because a meter lacks certain essential features of something that can be fed *strictu sensu*. However, the point of Cavell's discussion is that we have to be cautious with such talk of 'really' and '*strictu sensu*'. These expressions are problematic in this context because they beg the question about the criteria for discontinuity, as we tolerate the projection because of significant similarities between the cases *despite* differences. It is also important to note that to tolerate projections and seeing these as uses of 'the same old concept' does not mean one would have to deny all differences. Teeth, metal and the economy are strengthened in very different ways.

This section's discussion has shown that projective and non-projective uses have the same basis: seeing, and attaching importance to, certain similarities amidst differences. We will later see that, because both kinds of uses share the same structure, projectability

¹⁰⁸ Presumably Cavell would disagree with this claim of an overlap. Cavell thinks there is an important difference between projection and metaphor: the contrast is between 'natural' and 'unnatural' transfers (1979, 189-90). Quite disappointingly, Cavell does not give any further explanation of what he means by this.

seems ineliminable (Section 4.3.1). It is important to note again that this does not imply that there is no difference between cases of projection, nor that a distinction can never be drawn between non-projective and projective uses – but *where* we draw the line between old and new uses will depend on our specific purposes.¹⁰⁹

Projections are extensions of language use. They hang on the meanings of words and simultaneously extend them by projecting them into new contexts. I have argued for a Continuity View of projection according to which projective uses of words do not involve totally new concepts and do not necessarily constitute metaphorical uses. Finally, projecting or transferring words into different contexts is, according to Cavell, a fundamental and ubiquitous feature of our linguistic practices.

4.3 The Pervasiveness of Projection

The previous section has demonstrated that the workings of projection can be seen as in a crucial sense the same as that of the non-projective applications of words. Projection requires that we use the *same* (yet extended) concept in various contexts, which means that we ‘must be *willing* to call some contexts the *same*’ (Cavell 1979, 182) – and this is precisely also the basis for seeing ‘non-projective’ uses of words as uses of ‘the same old concept’. Cavell further emphasises the pervasiveness of projection by arguing that we cannot eliminate projections by paraphrase. Cavell writes:

Of course we could, in most of these cases, use a different word, not attempt to project or transfer ‘feed’ from contexts like ‘feed the monkey’ into contexts like ‘feed the machine’. But what would be gained if we did? And what would be lost? (1979, 181)

In response to these questions, Cavell considers replacing ‘feed’ (i) with a more general verb and (ii) with more specific verbs.

¹⁰⁹ As Gustafsson puts it: ‘The step from “feed the kitty” to “feed the meter” involves our seeing and attaching importance to similarities between the two different cases – but so does the step from “feed the kitty” to “feed the eel”’ (2011, 663). Both steps are characterised by the central feature of projection: there are significant similarities between the different instances of the use of the same word. In this sense, Cavell’s discussion of ‘projection’ shows an ‘*inter-dependence*’ (Gustafsson 2011, 663) between cases where there is only a small step (from ‘feed the kitty’ to ‘feed the eel’) and those where the step is bigger (from ‘feed the kitty’ to ‘feed the meter’). If we want to view ‘feed the eel’ as a use of the same old concept that we use in ‘feed the kitty’ (rather than viewing it as some metaphorical use), we encounter what may appear as an awkward fact: seeing ‘non-projective’ uses of concepts as uses of ‘the same old concept’ has precisely the same basis: there are similarities and certain differences.

(i) Replacing 'feed' with the more general verb 'put' is problematic because it obliterates differences and impoverishes the expressive powers of our language; for example, an important difference gets lost by using the phrase 'put new material into the machine' (instead of 'feed the machine'), for 'it does not discriminate between putting a flow of material into a machine and putting a part made of some new material into the construction of the machine' (1979, 181). Furthermore, the projective uses often are inextricably intertwined with the very concepts which are part of the projection: for instance, our concept of pride involves the idea that pride is something that can get bigger and that it grows in certain circumstances; that is why, Cavell writes, '[k]nowing what sorts of circumstances these are and what the consequences and marks of overfeeding are, is part of knowing what pride is' (1979, 181). Finally, the more general verb 'put' only exacerbates the initial problem of attempting to eliminate projection: in sentences such as 'put coins in the meter' the verb can only do its job because it has itself been transferred from other contexts such as 'put the plate on the table', 'put your hands over your head', 'put together the yellow and the blue paint', etc. If we understand projective uses as cases of inventing a new concept, we would lose an important way of registering the significant connections between contexts that inform a word's meaning in a particular context.

(ii) Substituting 'feed' with more specific verbs may appear to be a more promising way to eliminate projection. All that would be needed is to bring into use completely new words to replace the various uses of 'feed' so that there is a separate verb for each case: 'fod lions', 'fide pride', 'fad machines', etc. For these changes to be implemented a thorough and authoritative linguistic regulation of some kind would have to be established. However, even if such a regulation were successful, it would not prevent the possibility of projection. On the contrary, speakers could again use (or start to use) the expressions 'feed the machine', 'feed lions' – and they would be intelligible, since these expressions clearly are tenable projections, that is, we would understand them and see the point in using them, just as we do now. If this happened, Cavell's point would still stand: 'we understand, we are not troubled' (1979, 181). The ban could, therefore, only ever be a matter of etiquette, i.e., it could not render projection impossible. If we understand projective uses as introducing new concepts, we would face questions about the intelligible projections of the new concept. The significant connections between contexts

are thus better regarded as consisting in continuities, as argued above. In this way, we can still register the significant connections and need not make the futile attempt to escape the inescapable projectability of words: if we treat projective cases as involving new concepts, the question of intelligible projections resurfaces.

Moreover, it also seems impossible to determine which uses of a word need a projection-stopper. For there plainly are cases with regard to which it is unclear (and, presumably, undecidable) how to determine which uses of a word involve projections. Consider again Cavell's examples with the verb 'turn down': 'turn down the light', 'turn down the phonograph', 'turn down the offer' (1979, 178) – which one of these uses is the standard, non-projective, primary one? As we have already seen in the previous section, given the criterion for using 'the same old concept' – noticing certain similarities in the face of certain similarities – a criterion that captures precisely how projection works, no convincing answer is available to the question of where to definitively draw the line between these cases.

4.3.1 Similarities and their significance for language

In addition to the problem of identifying which uses are projective in some cases, there is the issue that any application of a word in a particular context involves finding the situation and time of the context fit for applying the word – there must be similarities to earlier applications of the word. Consequently, if one wants to eliminate the projection of, for example, 'feed' by replacing it in any case of projective use, would one not have to extend such replacements in such a way that we cannot use the same sentence in different situations or at different times? If I say 'fod the lion' on Mondays, would I not have to say 'frot the lion' on Tuesdays? If I say 'fawd the swans' at the Thames, would I not have to say 'fuwd the swans' at the Spree? If I give the swans rye bread, I would maybe say 'fawud the swans'; if I give them scones, would I not have to say 'fuwad the swans'? And so on. But if we allow blocking projections in this way, Gustafsson aptly points out,

we are on a slippery slope rapidly leading toward destruction of the very possibility of language. Not everything can be just different or unfamiliar; if nothing is the same, then nothing is different either. (2011, 663)

That is why, according to Gustafsson, Cavell gives us reason to doubt whether we really have a sense of a language which would be entirely devoid of any projection.

How significant noting and marking such similarities are for our understanding of language is something Cavell emphasises by writing about imagining people not seeing any of the relevant similarities:

What would we have to assume about them, their forms of life, in order to 'imagine' that? Presumably, that they saw no connection between giving food to eels, to lions, and to swans, that these were just different actions, as different as feeding an eel, hunting it, killing it, eating it. (1979, 182)

Although we may at first just be inclined to say that these people were 'primitive' compared to us since they do not see the connections, this situation, according to Cavell, is ultimately one of which we cannot make clear sense. How can all the similarities between the cases of feeding go unnoted and unnoticed in the language? To show that it is unclear what it would mean that those people do not have any sense for these similarities, Cavell points out that they may well think that giving food to eels is different to giving food to lions (there is, of course, also a difference between these two actions to us) – but, Cavell asks, would it then not be natural to think of these actions as being 'different in some regularized way, e.g., in the preparations gone through in gathering the "food", in the clothes worn for the occasion, in the time of day at which it was done, in the songs sung on each occasion ... ?' – And regarding these things (clothes, times, songs), Cavell continues, can we really imagine these things to be 'simply different again, different the way wearing clothes is from washing them or rending or mending them?' Cavell ends with the rather rhetorical question 'Can everything just be different?' (1979, 182) The implied answer is, of course, no. One could then perhaps say that, if people fail to see *any* similarities between activities such as feeding eels and feeding lions (and perhaps 'feeding machines' once the similarity has been explained), presumably too much would be lost to make clear sense of the thought that these people have a language. For taking away all similarities leaves us with nothing – 'if nothing is the same, then nothing is different either' (Gustafsson, quoted above). To put this point positively, making sense of human forms of life with language requires seeing similarities.

This leads us to a more general point in Cavell's idea of projection. Given that not everything can be different, it is neither coincidence nor just a matter of convention that

we use the same verb ‘feed’ in ‘feed eels’, ‘feed lions’ and ‘feed swans’ but also ‘feed the meter’ – *and* that we attach importance to the similarities between these cases. Seeing and marking similarities is a manifestation of, and is intertwined with, our interests, capacities and needs. We were and are interested, for various reasons (evolutionary, scientific, biological, cultural), in grouping together certain activities and other things as similar – this is not only something we are capable of doing but also something that is, as a matter of fact, woven into our engagement with the world. This is presumably why it is difficult to make sense of people not seeing *any* connections between certain actions (or for that matter, phenomena) but still having a language.

It is important to note that this does not amount to the claim that we should or even must have and use certain linguistic constructions because certain concepts are absolutely indispensable or the only possible ones (cf. PPF §366); the idea is *not* that it is somehow metaphysically necessary that we have the concepts of food and feeding and apply them as we do. But we do have them and they are important to us. To understand how the different uses of ‘feed’ are similar to one another, and why they are projections that communicate, is to understand something important about us and the workings of our language. We can learn something enormously important about language by realising that the mechanism of projection is ubiquitous in our linguistic practices and which similarities matter to us. To repeat, if our language did not allow, in principle, for projections of the kind we see in ‘feed the meter’, it equally would not allow for the transfer from ‘feed the kitty’ to ‘feed the swans’. And that would approach the situation where it is hard to see how a concept like ‘feed’ could have a use at all.

4.3.2 Differences: ‘Intolerant tolerance’ and ‘flexible inflexibility’

Section 4.2 argued that we must not overlook the continuity between ‘feed the kitty’ and ‘feed the meter’. For the (projective) mechanism connecting these uses of ‘feed’ equally obtains between seemingly uncontroversial and trivial cases of transferring the concept of ‘feeding’, such as ‘feed the kitty’ and ‘feed the swans’. Section 4.2’s discussion of how projection works also brought to light that the basis for understanding the uses of concepts as uses of ‘the same old concept’ is the same in cases of both non-projective and projective uses: there are certain similarities where there are also *always differences*. Hence, one might

well wonder: How does language *survive* the fact that there are ‘always differences’ between contexts of the application of a word? What binds concepts together? What provides what one may call the ‘glue of similarity’ which makes the use of a word the use of the same word in different contexts?

Cavell can be seen to give an answer to this – though only a quite general one – in the ‘all the whirl of organism’ passage (Cavell 2002, 48; quoted in Section 3.8). According to Cavell, ‘all the whirl of organism’, for which Wittgenstein reserves the term ‘form of life’, is the glue that holds together our practices and our seeing of certain similarities in the face of differences. As we have seen above, that concepts are projectable into new contexts demonstrates a certain quality of flexibility in our concepts; but, as we have also seen, our concepts are also ‘essentially inflexible’. Cavell writes accordingly about the significance of the projectability of words in explicating Wittgenstein’s vision of language and the notion of ‘form of life’:

I am trying to bring out, and keep in balance, two fundamental facts about human forms of life, and about the concepts formed in those forms: that any form of life and every concept integral to it has an indefinite number of instances and directions of projection; and that this variation is not arbitrary. *Both* the “outer” variance and the “inner” constancy are necessary if a concept is to accomplish its tasks – of meaning, understanding, communicating, etc., and in general, guiding us through the world, and relating thought and action and feeling to the world. (1979, 185)

That is, language is both essentially flexible *and* essentially inflexible; the projectability of words indicates the incompleteness, openness and creativity fundamental to our ways of using words, but to the extent to which language is interwoven with our practices, interests and natural facts, the flexibility of language is not arbitrary and is characterised by a certain stability. This is Cavell’s idea of the ‘outer variance’ and ‘inner constancy’ of our concepts. These two fundamental characteristics manifest in our uses of language pull us in two different directions in our philosophical reflections – played out in the tensions between exactness and inexactness, determinacy and indeterminacy, intolerance and tolerance. Crucially, the two apparently contradictory characteristics are not mutually exclusive, but are rather interdependent and complementary features of our concepts. This is not to say that a language that does not change is inconceivable. Rather, it is an observation about how our language works. Together openness and rigidity ensure that language is as flexible and constant as necessary.

This general line of thought is articulated in Mulhall's discussion of Wittgenstein's philosophy which he views explicitly through the lenses of Cavellian ideas. Mulhall takes up Cavell's above characterisation of concepts and explains what he takes to be some of its broader implications:

Since the criteria of any given concept locate it in a system or web of concepts that informs and is informed by human forms of life [...], its grammatical schematism possesses a flexible inflexibility, an intolerant tolerance. Its projections into new contexts must either show that its usual valences are carried over into it, or that they can be modified in acceptable ways, or that (and how) the context's inability to tolerate the projection of certain concepts to which the given concept is normally related can itself be tolerated. This is the concept's essential inflexibility, that which allows us to say that what has been projected into the new context is the same old concept. But there are no formulae that determine in advance how broad a field of the concept's related concepts must carry over, or what degree of modification of any given conceptual relation might be acceptable, or whether (and, if so, when and why) something about a given projection might compensate for the absence of a given conceptual relation; such judgments will be context-specific and dependent upon the reach of the speaker's understanding and imagination. This is the concept's essential flexibility, its capacity to elicit new reaches of significance from itself, from those who use it, and from the contexts it proves capable of inhabiting. (2014, 308-9)

Two concepts that Chapter 3 discussed resurface here. Mulhall develops Cavell's thought of concepts having an 'intolerant tolerance' or 'flexible inflexibility' in his original reading of Wittgenstein's idea of 'language-games'. According to Mulhall, this idea encapsulates the notion of 'play' in connection to the normative 'systematicity' of language, the 'openness of our words' in relation to the inescapability of rules and other normative constraints (2014, 309). But before turning to the question about the relation between the rules of language-games and projections, I will first note another important point, an idea that has frequently been touched upon in the discussion throughout this chapter: that although reveal tolerance and flexibility, they are 'deeply controlled' nonetheless. As we will see, the notion of 'family-resemblance concepts' can be seen to exemplify and stress the central idea of the 'inner constancy' and 'outer variation' of our concepts brought out by the phenomenon of projection.

4.3.3 'Deep control'

Cavell maintains that 'not just any projection will be acceptable' (1979, 182). Language does not depend upon a structure of pre-fixed rules: what can be said is not everywhere

bounded by rules and what it makes sense to say is not fixed in advance. But this does not imply that anything goes. When and why then is a projection acceptable? Cavell writes:

I might say: An object or activity or event onto or into which a concept is projected, must *invite* or *allow* that projection; in the way in which, for an object to be (called) an art object, it must allow or invite the experience and behavior which are appropriate or necessary to our concepts of the appreciation or contemplation or absorption [...] of an art object. (1979, 183)

What exactly are the conditions or criteria that 'invite or allow' a projection? Which contexts do not allow a projection? Generally speaking, the intelligibility of projective uses depends on the rules for the use of a word *but also* our interests and perceptions of salience that 'allow' a concept to carry over into a new context. Cavell describes the point that projections are 'deeply controlled' as follows:

While it is true that we must use the same word in, project a word into, various contexts (must be *willing* to call some contexts the *same*), it is equally true that what will *count* as a legitimate projection is deeply controlled. You can 'feed peanuts to a monkey' and 'feed pennies to a meter', but you cannot feed a monkey by stuffing pennies in its mouth, and if you mash peanuts into a coin slot you won't *be* feeding the meter. Would you be feeding a lion if you put a bushel of carrots in his cage? That he in fact does not eat them would not be enough to show that you weren't; he *may* not eat his *meat*. But in the latter case 'may not eat' means 'isn't hungry then' or 'refuses to eat it'. And not every case of 'not eating' is 'refusing food'. (1979, 182-3)

On the one hand, as we have seen, Cavell's idea of projections brings out that language is tolerant towards new uses of words and, to some extent, must be. But, on the other hand, projections of our words are also deeply controlled; not anything goes: 'Language is equally, definitively, intolerant' (1979, 182). For example, we cannot feed a lion by putting a bushel of carrots in its cage; the lion not eating them would not count as a refusal. The projections of 'feed' and 'refusal' fail in in this context, as they lose the attachment with the conceptual network within which they are embedded; the new context does not allow the projection because only an offer that one might also accept can be refused. The failure of the transfer of 'feed' and 'refusal' into this new context demonstrates the 'deep control' of our projections. This control is not arbitrary; it is due to the fact that a concept is part of a web of interrelated concepts that regulate whether a new context may or may not invite a concept's projection.

Discussing the tension between a concept's tolerance and intolerance, Cavell speaks of 'two fundamental facts about human forms of life, and about the concepts formed in

those forms': 'that any form of life and every concept integral to it has an indefinite number of instances and directions of projection; and that this variation is not arbitrary' (quoted above). As Cavell puts it, our concepts are characterised by the features of 'outer variance' and 'inner constancy', both of which are necessary for our concepts to be fit for their job. Cavell is concerned with showing that these features are interwoven with the rule-governed use of our words but also our perceptions of salience, interests, desires, purposes, natural reactions, and such like. The intelligibility of projective uses of words is fundamentally bound to maintaining a connection to these factors.¹¹⁰

Our concepts' features of 'outer variance' and 'inner constancy' can also be seen as finding exemplary manifestation in family-resemblance concepts (presented in Section 3.6). Indeed, there is a certain parallel between the functioning of projective uses of words and family-resemblance terms that underlines the pervasiveness of projection. Family resemblance and projection are in important ways related; similarities are central in both cases. When we look at what falls under the concept 'game', 'we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: similarities in the large and in the small' (PI §66). Likewise, significant similarities connect 'feed the swan' to 'feed his pride' or 'feed the meter'. We can trace the similarities between projective uses back to a 'core'; we can give a definition of 'feeding': 'to give food', 'to supply/provide with something needed or required'. The concept of 'game' – and this is, of course, a main characteristic of family-resemblance concepts – need not have one overarching definition (though it can be explained by giving various examples); all the things we call 'games' do not fall under this concept in virtue of a common feature, an essence. But we could still say that our uses of 'game' have multiple 'cores': something you play for fun, something rule-governed, something competitive, etc. These similarities and overlaps give the concept of 'game' its 'inner constancy'. In this way, family-resemblance concepts illustrate and encode the functioning of projection: they track certain similarities in the face of certain differences. They are subject to projection and prime examples of the 'intolerant tolerance' of concepts in general: they allow for projection into new contexts but not every projection is acceptable. For example, terms such as 'game' and 'sport' have been extended in recent

¹¹⁰ How to decide whether a projection is acceptable – a question wedded to the topic of philosophical criticism – will be a central issue in the remainder of this thesis.

decades to encompass video games and e-sports. And some consider video games to be a form of art – an example of the projection of the term ‘art’ into a new context (a context, by the way, which some would say invites this projection, whereas others would deny this). Because of the parallel between projection and family resemblance, it is not clear why one would want to insist on a significant difference between the two. (One *might*, but why?) Perhaps one can say instead: The notions of projection and family resemblance are hospitable to one another.

But do then rules play any role at all in accounting for projections, and what are the implications of my proposed reading of ‘language-games’ for the idea that language is rule-governed? As we will see, the projectability of words does not completely undercut the idea that language is rule-governed. But it does put in question a particular understanding of the ‘policing’ role of rules: that we project (or extend) expressions into new contexts, and that our language use is characterised by the multiplicity of features that the concept of language-game brings out, casts doubt on the notion that we can straightforwardly appeal to rules of grammar to determine whether someone is talking nonsense.

4.4 Rules and Projection

In this section, I will look at what role we can assign to rules in understanding projections and their acceptability. As noted earlier, the phenomenon of projection shows that how we use words and what it makes sense to say is not fixed in advance. Rather, language is subject to constant change and we (have to) adapt to that in an ongoing process of learning, mastering and exercising linguistic skills. Recall that the new uses of ‘feed’ in sentences such as ‘feed the meter’ and ‘feed his pride’ mark an extension of the old uses of that word. The new uses can readily communicate something successfully because of the earlier use of ‘feed’ in sentences like ‘feed the kitty’, and because of salient similarities between the contexts of earlier uses and new ones.

Crucially, we can plausibly say that projection involves a new rule: a projective use can be seen as introducing a new rule or a kind of caveat, or sub-rule, to an existing rule. For example, the rule of established usage of ‘feed’ can be roughly put like this: ‘You

“feed” organic creatures materials that contain nutrients in order to sustain their bodies.’ A caveat to this rule might be something like this: ‘You can also “feed” non-organic things (“creatures”) non-organic materials in order to “sustain” their mechanical operations.’ So the projection involves a kind of sub-rule that piggybacks the original rule – it is similar to the original rule in some ways but different in others. ‘Feed the meter’ can thus be said to be governed by the same rule as ‘feed the kitty’, except that a caveat is added to the rule. But it is important to note that such a caveat, or sub-rule, does not and need not exist before a projection takes place, in that intelligible projection does not require that a new rule be explained to us *first* in order to understand the projection. One might nevertheless say that a new rule is introduced and *used* by performing an acceptable projection, and that this rule might be given in an ex-post description, an explanation of the meaning of the expression used in the projection. The projective use does not create an entirely new meaning; rather, it is a creative and imaginative exploitation and extension of the meaning with which we are familiar. Our mastery of words enables us to extend language use and play extended language-games. This is part of what I take Wittgenstein to mean when he describes linguistic proficiency as a ‘technique’: ‘To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to have mastered a technique.’ (PI §199)

The rules for the use of words do *to some extent* restrict what it makes sense to say – they articulate current common patterns of use that a projection might or might not successfully extend. But Cavell’s considerations throw doubt on the idea that the rules fix the ‘bounds of sense’: that they determine what it makes sense to say *in advance*. This idea of rules that determine in advance which uses of words will be intelligible falls short of the phenomenon of projection because, as Mulhall puts it,

there are no formulae that determine in advance how broad a field of the concept’s related concepts must carry over, or what degree of modification of any given conceptual relation might be acceptable, or whether (and, if so, when and why) something about a given projection might compensate for the absence of a given conceptual relation. (2014, 309)

This does *not* imply that there is *no* connection between established rule-governed usage of words and which projections will be acceptable. The crucial question is instead: To what extent and in what way does established rule-governed usage determine which projections are acceptable and make sense? As we will see, Cavell’s considerations put

pressure on the idea that we can appeal to rules alone to decide whether a certain (projective) expression is meaningful. More precisely, he puts pressure on the idea that rules constitute *clear* and *definitive* criteria for deciding questions of sense and nonsense.¹¹¹

The discussion of ‘projection’ brings out two different roles in which rules of grammar might be cast with respect to the question of whether and how we can project the relevant word into other contexts (and into which ones): (i) the rules clearly and definitively determine whether a projection is acceptable; (ii) the rules allow or invite certain projections but do not solely determine which projections are acceptable. Both options view our use of words as governed by rules. But unlike (ii), (i) is committed to a certain *dichotomy*: new uses of words which do not appear to be in accord with established language use present us with a situation in which we must either view these uses as misuses, i.e. nonsense, or we must view them as introducing new rules yet to be explained or cases of new concepts. For example, according to Cavell, Pole (1958) ascribes the following view to the later Wittgenstein:

Where no existing rules apply, you can always adopt a new rule to cover the case, but then that obviously changes the game. (Cavell 2002, 44)

However, intelligible projections do not seem to fit this dichotomy: they go beyond established rules but they communicate something successfully, say something meaningful, without introducing new concepts. Cavell’s discussion gives us reason to reject (i) and the corresponding idea of grammatical rules as being fit for a policing role.

According to (ii), extending our language use through projection does not leave us with a problematically dichotomous understanding of rules; for according to (ii), whether a given projection is acceptable in a certain context is not decidable by considering only

¹¹¹ It is important to distinguish two different understandings of ‘being determined in advance’ (this distinction corresponds to the one I make in the next paragraph). It can mean the idea of a calculus with exact rules underlying the fluidity of our natural language; both Cavell and Wittgenstein reject this idea (though Wittgenstein does not deny its usefulness in reflecting upon some philosophical problems (cf. e.g. BB 25)). But ‘being determined in advance’ can also mean that there is an established (however fluid) rule-governed usage of words that restricts the ways in which we can meaningfully use words. This latter understanding seems unproblematic, unless ‘being determined in advance’ is here taken to imply that the established rules governing language use cover all cases of meaningful language use, because then it cannot accommodate intelligible projective uses, as these seem to undermine the very idea that established rules clearly and authoritatively determine what it makes sense to say. In what follows, I will focus on the rejection of this problematic understanding that takes established rules as determining in advance the acceptability of projections.

rules. We could then accept an understanding of the claim that language is rule-governed that concedes the rules an important yet limited role in determining which contexts allow a certain projection: the rules are not as authoritative as the Policing Conception requires. Rather, we seem to engage in and cannot escape engaging in (re-)locating where the ‘bounds of sense’ are in an ongoing, more or less open process of negotiating, confirming, and revising the domain of what it makes sense to say. This is a central moral of Cavell’s point that construing a sharp discontinuity between cases of non-projective and projective uses is misleading. The emphasis on continuity is meant to show that we extend our language use all the time in ways that undermine (i) as a basic assumption of the Policing Conception. In fact, intelligible projective uses seem to disprove exactly this assumption, that grammar is a system of rules that holds a definitive answer for questions of sense and nonsense by ‘formulae that determine in advance how broad a field of the concept’s related concepts must carry over’ (Mulhall, quoted above).¹¹²

Similarly, Conant describes the problem with a policing role of rules in Wittgenstein’s philosophy as follows:

Most commentators on Wittgenstein’s work [...] understand Wittgenstein’s deployment of ‘nonsense’ as a term of philosophical criticism to represent the conclusion of an argument to the effect that certain combinations of expressions – or the employments of certain combinations of expressions in certain contexts – are inherently nonsensical. If you are a scholar of his later work, you are likely to think [the trouble] is to be traced to violations of grammar [...]. But [...] what later Wittgenstein calls grammar is not the name of a grid of rules we lay over language in order to point out where one or another of its prescriptions are violated. (1998, 249)

This chapter’s discussion of the possibility of intelligible projective uses of words has shown that any *merely* rule-based view of deciding questions of sense and nonsense is a

¹¹² Note that Cavell’s idea of projections is compatible with the idea that language is governed by rules in the sense set out by the functional conception of rules (as introduced in Section 2.4). In fact, the functional conception can nicely capture the extension of language use involved in projections. For example, a typical explanation of the meaning of the expression ‘feed the meter’ would make clear, in one way or another, how the expression extends the meaning of ‘feed’ by projecting it into a new context. But crucially, the Policing Conception cannot appeal to the functional conception for its support because whether a given explanation of meaning, i.e. a rule, covers certain cases of projection and must be accepted is a question that cannot be settled by merely appealing to other rules – it is partly dependent on us and our willing to accept it. Whether a projection is acceptable is not something that can be decided solely by invoking existing rules, not least because the rules are not so much something *fixed* as something to *be fixed*.

problematic oversimplification. The Policing Conception of Wittgenstein's philosophy is therefore flawed: simply citing rules cannot settle what it makes sense to say.

Which projections will be accepted does partly depend on rules of grammar – but it is not exclusively a matter of rules. It also depends on our interests, perceptions of salience, etc., on all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls 'forms of life' as set out in our discussion of language-games and forms of life in Chapter 3.¹¹³ This in turn means that what will be accepted tells us something about the ways in which our willingness to accept some projections and not others is bound up with our self-understanding, how we see ourselves and the world, and how we wish to see them.

¹¹³ This point is linked to that of 'deep control' presented in the previous section. Mulhall continues the above-cited passage on our concepts' 'essential flexibility' and 'essential inflexibility' (see Section 5.3.2) as follows: 'Wittgensteinian criteria [i.e. rules (see Mulhall 2014, 295 and 301)] must be so characterized as to bring out the play in their systematicity [...] It is precisely because the grammatical schematism of a word locates it in a horizon of interrelated words embedded in human forms of life that our projections of those words are at once deeply controlled and creative[.]' (2014, 309) Wittgenstein's notions of 'depth grammar' (PI §664; see Section 1.1), 'forms of life' and his invoking of 'very general facts of nature' are meant to show (among other things) that our ways of using words are in an important sense responsive to, and limited by, such things as our shared routes of interest, our biology, and other 'facts of nature'. Sections 6.2 and 7.1 will touch on this issue again.

Chapter 5

Nonsense and the Problem of Persuasion

Given the later Wittgenstein's idea that philosophical problems are confusions and nonsense, this chapter's crucial task is to get clearer about Wittgenstein's conception of nonsense and how it informs his conception of a grammatical investigation as a critical practice. The Simple View and the Policing Conception (both first set out in Chapter 1) see philosophers as violating the rules of grammar and thus talking nonsense; correspondingly, it is thought by some Wittgensteinians that philosophers can be authoritatively criticised and definitively corrected by reminding them of those rules.

This chapter discusses two criticisms of these ideas that have been offered by interpreters inspired by the so-called 'resolute reading' of the early Wittgenstein: (1) nonsense is not the result of combining otherwise meaningful words which can be identified by the rules of grammar; (2) philosophers cannot be persuaded that they are talking nonsense by invoking rules of grammar, because they are usually aware that they depart from ordinary usage. Scrutinising these criticisms in turn, this chapter falls into two parts.

In the first part (Sections 5.1 and 5.2), I will examine the 'resolute' reading's 'austere' conception of nonsense. This conception is often understood as making the claim that nonsense cannot be a matter of combining words in illicit ways – ways which rules of grammar might be seen as helping us identify. I will argue that this claim is implausible. However, there is an interpretation of the 'austere' conception available that can accommodate the importance of rules of grammar in identifying combinations of words that yield nonsense. This interpretation (the 'equivocation' interpretation of 'austerity') will also suggest that there are overlaps between 'resolute' and 'non-resolute' (or 'standard') readings: firstly, both agree that the kinds of philosophical statements, with which a grammatical investigation deals, only ever produce an illusion of sense – nonsense – and, secondly, the description of rules of grammar can help us establish whether (and if so, how) the use of a word involves conflating different patterns of use and thus leads to

nonsense. So the first part will end with a certain view of the role that the rules of grammar play in analysing and removing philosophical problems.

The second part of this chapter (Section 5.3) will present what I call the ‘problem of persuasion’: given the possibility of intelligible projection that Chapter 4 described, and given that any competent speaker can justifiably lay claim to the ability to distinguish sense from nonsense, it seems doubtful that it is just by citing rules of grammar that philosophers can be persuaded that they are talking nonsense. I will illustrate this problem by presenting two different criticisms of the ‘policing’ approach, the approach which some see exemplified in moments of Hacker’s philosophical practice. These criticisms – which can be seen to trade on the possibility of intelligible projective uses of words as presented in Chapter 4 – throw further doubt on the force of the idea that rules allow us to adjudicate what is meaningful and what is not: persuading people – and rightly so – that they are talking nonsense does not seem possible by citing rules as supposedly uncontroversial facts that demarcate the ‘bounds of sense’. This may appear to threaten the understanding of a grammatical investigation as a *critical* tool. Yet it does not in fact undermine Wittgensteinian criticism as presented in the first half of this chapter and discussed further in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

5.1 ‘Austere’ vs. ‘Substantial’ Conception of ‘Nonsense’

According to a distinction commonly used in Wittgenstein studies, commentators on his philosophy fall into one of two camps: ‘resolute readers’¹¹⁴ and ‘non-resolute’ or ‘standard readers’¹¹⁵. Initially, the debate between these two readings centred on the interpretation of the *Tractatus*: resolute readers offered a radical new response to the apparently self-

¹¹⁴ Goldfarb (1997) first used this label. ‘Resolute’ readers (or readers at least sympathetic to ‘resolute’ readings) include e.g. Conant, Diamond, Kuusela, and McManus. Note also that Cavell is an influence on the ‘resolute’ reading (e.g. through Conant). As we will see later, McManus (2014) questions some of the distinctions at the centre of the ‘resolute/standard readings’ debate; as a result, he is much more hesitant in identifying as ‘resolute’. I will follow him in arguing that there is reason to think that the distinctions informing the debate obscure matters to an important extent and might make us blind to significant similarities and overlaps between the two readings.

¹¹⁵ This term is often used by ‘resolute’ readers to distance themselves from ‘traditional’, ‘orthodox’, or simply ‘non-resolute’ interpreters. Proponents of the ‘non-resolute reading’ include e.g. Glock, Hacker, Schroeder and Schönbaumsfeld. I am aware that the distinction used here can also be seen as a partisan one: drawn by those who call themselves ‘resolute’ and give a negative name to their opponents. I do not want to suggest that those who disagree with the so-called ‘resolute’ reading are insufficiently rigorous in their own reading.

contradictory claims at the very end of the book.¹¹⁶ But the debate has also gained some significance in the interpretation of the *Investigations*. Conant, for example, remarks: ‘issues parallel to those which arise in the interpretation of the *Tractatus* arise in connection with the interpretation of Wittgenstein’s later work as well’ (2004, 168). Taking this idea as a lead, Mulhall, for example, in his *Wittgenstein’s Private Language* (2007) argues for a resolute reading of the *Investigations*.¹¹⁷

This first section will discuss the notion of ‘nonsense’, a notion that looms large in the divide between standard and resolute readers.¹¹⁸ Mulhall’s idea of a resolute reading of the later Wittgenstein employs an ‘austere’ conception of nonsense which is directed against a ‘substantial’ conception. I will argue that a substantial conception is implausible. However, there seems reason to think that those who argue that nonsense is the result of combining otherwise meaningful words in illicit ways – which is a particular picture of how rules of grammar might have a bearing here – are not necessarily committed to a substantial conception. Likewise, rejecting such a conception does not necessarily lead to the view that we cannot identify the words (and the meaning they have in significant uses elsewhere) in an expression that is, as a whole, nonsensical; for all that is needed for a word to be identifiable is that it has a meaning, i.e. a use, *in other contexts*. The upshot of this section will be: rather than having to choose between what appear to be two equally implausible conceptions – a substantial conception of nonsense according to which there are, as Mulhall puts it, ‘determinately unintelligible’ propositions (2007, 8) and a particular understanding of the resolute conception according to which we cannot even identify the

¹¹⁶ TLP 6.54: ‘My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: 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.)’

¹¹⁷ Conant himself (1998) gives a ‘resolute’ reading of the later Wittgenstein in a paper that focuses on *On Certainty*. Witherspoon (2000) also presents a ‘resolute’ later Wittgenstein, as he develops his ‘resolute’ reading in relation to the notion of ‘rules of grammar’. I will return to some of the ideas developed in these papers later in the second half of this chapter. For other examples of ‘resolute’ interpretations of the later Wittgenstein, see Crary/Read 2000.

¹¹⁸ A question connected to the distinction between ‘resolute’ and ‘standard’ readings is whether Wittgenstein’s conception of nonsense stays the same throughout his work. Most ‘resolute’ readings claim that it does. By contrast, Hacker, for example, argues that Wittgenstein’s conception of nonsense underwent an important change (see e.g. Hacker 2003; cf. also Glock 1996, 258-64). This question is primarily concerned with Wittgenstein’s philosophical development and I will not attempt to discuss it here. Although I draw on the discussion around ‘resolute’ readings of the early Wittgenstein, I shall not say anything about the issue of a ‘resolute’ reading of the *Tractatus* specifically. My concern in this chapter is only the relation between grammar and nonsense in Wittgenstein’s later work and how it is presented by some of the main commentators.

expressions that are combined in a meaningless string of words – there might be more than these two interpretative options available. This matters to the discussion of the notion of grammar in this thesis because of how these options entail different views on the role of rules of grammar for Wittgenstein. As we will see, the third option secures the significance of rules without a commitment to either the substantial conception or the irrelevance of rules.

In his account of a resolute later Wittgenstein, Mulhall writes that a resolute reading is characterised by two features: first, there is only ‘one species of nonsense – mere gibberish; from the point of view of logic, mere nonsense is the only kind of nonsense there is’ (2007, 2) – this is known as the ‘austerity’ conception of nonsense¹¹⁹; and second, resisting ‘the idea that there is something we cannot do in philosophy’ (2007, 8). For Mulhall, these two features are connected in the following way: the first one is directed

[...] against the idea of substantial nonsense according to which pseudo-propositions are unintelligible, but determinately so; they therefore seem to specify a thought that we cannot think – an identifiable place in the region that lies beyond the limits of sense, something specific that exceeds our mental grasp. But of course, if the limits of sense are the limits of intelligibility, then nothing whatever lies beyond them; they are not boundaries fencing us off from a further determinate or determinable region, and so not limitations upon our capacity to think or speak. To recognize that the only species of nonsense is gibberish is, accordingly, to recognize that the limits of sense are not limitations; to acknowledge them as limits rather than limitations is precisely a matter of acknowledging that there is nothing (no specifiable thing, no conceivable task or activity) that we cannot do. (2007, 8)

Mulhall attacks here a ‘substantial’ conception of nonsense, the notion of pseudo-propositions that are ‘determinately unintelligible’ or that specify ‘a thought that we cannot think’. Mulhall summarises in this passage why such a conception falls prey to a certain incoherency; he points us to the distinction between limits and limitations, and the corresponding insight that the limits of sense are not to be construed as limitations. This insight can be seen to find expression in the following remark of Wittgenstein’s (which Mulhall implicitly quotes above):

The great difficulty here is not to represent the matter as if there were something one *couldn’t* do. (PI §374)

¹¹⁹ Schönbaumsfeld (2010, 650) calls this conception ‘nonsense monism’.

As many other resolute readers, Mulhall also takes the following remark to show that the later Wittgenstein advances an ‘austere’ conception of nonsense:

When a sentence is called senseless, it is not, as it were, its sense that is senseless. Rather, a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation. (PI §500)

As the surrounding sections in the *Investigations* of both PI §374 and §500 make plain, these remarks are concerned with a discussion of the notion of ‘grammar’. According to Mulhall, Wittgenstein argues here against a substantial conception of nonsense.

If we regard the notion of ‘grammar’ invoked in the later work as Wittgenstein’s way of recalling us to the distinction between sense and nonsense, and we disregard the words of warning I have just cited [PI §374 and PI §500], then invoking grammar in order to identify and reject certain philosophical utterances as nonsense might be thought to involve treating such nonsense as substantial. (2007, 9)

But as we will see, there is a sense in which ‘invoking rules of grammar in order to identify and reject certain philosophical utterances as nonsense’ need *not* involve ‘treating such nonsense as substantial’.

How should nonsense be characterised? How does ‘nonsense’ relate to ‘grammar’? What is the role of the rules of grammar? Mulhall characterises nonsense as follows: it occurs ‘when a sign has not been given a determinate meaning – even when it appears that it has been’ (2007, 7). Mulhall illustrates the ‘austere’ conception of nonsense by the following example:

Michael Dummett has offered “Chairman Mao is rare” as a piece of substantial nonsense, because he claims it attempts to conjoin a proper name (which can take only first-level functions as arguments) with a second-level function (which can take only first-level functions as arguments). But if it is essential to a symbol’s being a proper name that it take first-level functions as arguments, then we can treat “Chairman Mao” as a proper name in this context only if we treat “is rare” as a first-level function rather than a second-level function (say, as meaning “tender” or “sensitive”). And by the same token, if it is essential to a symbol’s being a second-level function that it take first-level functions as arguments, then we can treat “is rare” as a second-level function in this context only if we treat “Chairman Mao” as a first-level function rather than a proper name (perhaps on the model of “a brutal politician”). Either way of parsing the signs is perfectly feasible – we need only to determine a suitable meaning for the complementary component in each case; but each way presupposes an interpretation of the string as a whole which excludes the other. So treating it as substantial nonsense involves hovering between two feasible but incompatible ways of treating the string, without ever settling on either. (2007, 3-4)

Schönbaumsfeld identifies a ‘suppressed premise’ in this typical kind of argument endorsed by most resolute readers¹²⁰: ‘the thought that it is only possible to identify the meaning of a sub-propositional expression if it occurs within a sentence that has a sense’ (2010, 652). Schönbaumsfeld argues that this thought is ‘extremely implausible’, both for exegetical and philosophical reasons. She quotes the following remark from Wittgenstein to illustrate this:

What does it mean to say that the “is” in “The rose is red” has a different meaning from the “is” in “Two times two is four”? If it is answered that it means that different rules are valid for these two words, the retort is that we have only *one* word here. – And if I attend only to the grammatical rules, these do allow the use of the word “is” in both kinds of context. – But the rule which shows that the word “is” has different meanings in these sentences is the one allowing us to replace the word “is” in the second sentence by the sign of equality, and forbidding this substitution in the first sentence. (PI §558)

There can be no doubt that Wittgenstein thinks that the word ‘is’ is governed by grammatical rules that ‘forbid’ the construction ‘The rose equals red’. Thus, Mulhall’s rejection of the claim that ‘nonsensicality is a result of the speaker attempting to conjoin intelligible words in unintelligible ways’ (2007, 9) might be too quick. Schönbaumsfeld objects to Mulhall and maintains that ‘[w]e can combine intelligible words in unintelligible ways’, only that the result would not be ‘a proposition that is “determinately unintelligible”, since there is no such thing, but a meaningless string of words’ (2010, 653). Applied to Dummett’s example, this means that the expressions ‘Chairman Mao’ and ‘is rare’ are misused in ‘Chairman Mao is rare’, their combination leads to nonsense; and to say that they are combined in illicit ways does indeed not imply a commitment to a ‘substantial’ conception of nonsense; that is, we would not have to accept that the whole sentence ‘Chairman Mao is rare’ has a meaning – some peculiar ‘senseless sense’. Needless to say, such a (substantial) conception of nonsense is nonsensical.¹²¹

Another way of putting this point – a way that explicitly links this point to the notion of grammatical rules – is to say that speaking of the violation of the rules of grammar seems to imply committing to a substantial conception of nonsense. If grammatical rules

¹²⁰ Schönbaumsfeld (2010) and Hacker (2003) draw attention to similar arguments found in e.g. Witherspoon 2000, Conant 2001, and Diamond 2005.

¹²¹ This seems to be an important message of PI §500. I will assume the implausibility of the substantial conception, as the main disputants do.

determine how expressions are to be used, and if one can violate such rules – otherwise it would be unclear how there could be a distinction between the correct and incorrect use of an expression – then we encounter what might appear to be a problematic view; the worry is that there seems a tension between the following two claims: (i) The meaning of an expression is constituted by rules for its use; (ii) it is possible to use that expression in a way that violates the rules and thus yields nonsense. It seems that if (i) is true, (ii) cannot be. For if the rules for the use of an expression are not followed, it is not *that* expression that is being used. Instead, what is said would only be a concatenation of letters or sounds that only resemble the expression. So if one thinks that the very identity of an expression is determined by the expression being used according to the rules for its use, then it seems that one cannot misuse expressions – unless one thinks that it is possible to identify the meaning of the whole sentence and is then pushed towards the view that the illicit combination of intelligible component expressions has a sense that is nonsense, or, as Daniel Whiting puts it, ‘it appears to lead to the view that it is the *sense* of an uttered expression that is *senseless!*’ (2010, 128).

However, one might wonder why it should follow from the rejection of a ‘substantial’ conception that there is only ‘one species of nonsense – mere gibberish’. Schönbaumsfeld suggests that

[m]ore than the two interpretative options offered by resolute readers – ‘resolution’ or some kind of commitment to ‘substantial’ nonsense – are available here: [...] neither a ‘resolute’ nor a ‘substantial’ reading can in fact do justice to the complexities of Wittgenstein’s text. (2010, 650)

Similarly, in his discussion of the ‘austere’ conception, Whiting convincingly argues that it is perfectly reasonable to say that we can identify meaningful component expressions in a nonsensical whole by considering the rules governing the use of those expressions, because: ‘What is constitutive of the expression’s meaning is that in *general* its employment is *governed* by a rule, not that on a *particular* occasion it is employed in *accordance* with the rule’ (2010, 130). He illustrates this idea with the example ‘That drake is female’, a nonsensical sentence, and explains:

“Drake” as it occurs in [this sentence] is still subject to the pertinent principles, even though so using it fails to meet the standards they impose. One is therefore able to identify the meaning of “drake” as it occurs in [this sentence], not *per impossible* by making sense of the

whole in which it is found, but by determining what rule governs its use (which in this instance is breached). (130)

In other words, the sentence ‘That drake is female’ is the nonsensical combination of meaningful words. By contrast, a resolute reader would instead argue that it is better to characterise this case as one in which we do not settle on any one particular understanding of ‘drake’; rather than having settled on an understanding of the expressions ‘drake’ and ‘is female’ that we then attempt to combine, no clear sense has actually been assigned to them in this instance (which is not necessarily to deny that these expressions have a meaning, i.e. a use, in other contexts; I will return to this in Section 5.2.3 below).¹²²

At this point it may become apparent why it is important to note that there might be ‘more than two interpretative options available’ (Schönbaumsfeld, quoted above): a third option we could adopt, rather than having to choose between what appear to be two equally implausible conceptions – a substantial conception of nonsense according to which there are ‘determinately unintelligible’ propositions and a particular understanding of the resolute reading according to which we cannot even use rules of grammar to identify the expressions that are combined in the meaningless string. This latter understanding of the resolute reading seems indeed implausible because all that is needed for an expression to be identifiable is that it has a meaningful use elsewhere. But as we will see in the next section, the resolute reading’s ‘austerity’ claim can be interpreted in two different ways; and only one of the two interpretations seems committed to the implausible idea that the rules for the use of a word are of no help in determining whether words might be combined in illicit ways.

5.2 The ‘Intelligibility’ of Philosophical Nonsense

In this section, I will argue that resolute and non-resolute readings of the later Wittgenstein overlap in significant ways. I will do so by drawing on a distinction proposed by McManus (2014) between two interpretations of an ‘austere’ conception of nonsense: the ‘sheer lack’ interpretation and the ‘equivocation’ interpretation. In section 5.2.1, I will demonstrate

¹²² Note that on this account we could never criticise or reject a nonsensical sentence. We could only react to it as to a sentence in a foreign language that we do not understand: saying that we do not understand the signs.

that the 'sheer lack' interpretation is problematic because it is committed to 'psychologism' about philosophical confusion. Section 5.2.2 will begin to argue that the 'equivocation' reading – according to which a sentence has not been given a *determinate meaning* because of the conflation of different senses of an expression – accounts best for philosophical nonsense. Section 5.2.3 will give an explanation of why philosophical nonsense does not *seem* to be devoid of any sense and is characterised by a certain 'structure' and hence appears to be 'intelligible': the components of a nonsensical expression as a whole have – just as the opponents of the 'austere' conception claim – always a use in other contexts. This can explain why we are philosophically tempted by some claims (e.g. 'colours are sensations in the mind') and not others (e.g. 'piggle wiggle'): such temptation arises out of an equivocation that can make us think we have encountered a philosophical problem, while it is in fact unclear – because of a conflation of different things we might mean with our words – which of the things we can mean by our words we want to mean. I will submit that the 'equivocation' reading can reconcile two ideas that have hitherto appeared to be mutually exclusive; the idea that regarding a particular piece of philosophical nonsense '*in these contexts* [in which words that otherwise have a meaning are combined in illicit ways] no meaning has been assigned to these words or phrases (i.e., the combination is meaningless)' (Hacker 2003, 19) *and* the idea that there is really only one species of nonsense (as proponents of 'austerity' claim). But another issue will arise here: when someone makes a philosophical statement, who is then to decide whether they have or have not failed to assign a clear sense to the relevant words in this context? This issue will be examined in the second part of the chapter (Section 5.3).

5.2.1 'Sheer lack' and psychologism

This sub-section presents the first of two interpretations of the 'austere' conception of nonsense: the 'sheer lack' interpretation. I will argue that this interpretation leads to a form of implausible psychologism about philosophical confusion.

McManus identifies two interpretations of the resolute reading's 'austere' conception of 'nonsense': the 'sheer lack' interpretation and the 'equivocation' interpretation. He argues that both interpretations are prominent in the work of resolute readers such as Conant and Diamond; the 'equivocation' interpretation, however, 'has made significantly

less impact on the discussion of such readings' (2014, 163)¹²³. As McManus stresses, this is important because the 'equivocation' interpretation not only does the crucial philosophical work but also seems to cut across some of the central differences between resolute and non-resolute readings, demonstrating that these readings might in some respects be much closer to each other than has often been thought. I shall present the 'sheer lack' and the 'equivocation' reading in turn.

'The central idea of the austere view', Conant and Dain write, is 'that nonsense is only ever sheer lack of sense' (2011, 72). According to the 'sheer lack' interpretation of the 'austere' conception of nonsense, nonsense is just nonsense, 'real nonsense, plain nonsense' (Diamond 1991, 181); it 'expresses no thought [and] is mere gibberish' (Conant 2001, 14). But this 'sheer lack' reading faces a serious difficulty; it seems to involve a kind of *psychologism* about philosophical confusion.¹²⁴

Clearly, philosophical nonsense does not *seem* to be 'mere gibberish'. As a response to this, resolute readers often qualify their 'austere' conception of nonsense by emphasising a psychological/logical distinction. For example, Conant writes that 'mere nonsense is, from a logical point of view, the only kind of nonsense there is' (2000, 176-7). Similarly, Witherspoon declares that the difference between a nonsensical expression such as 'Absurrah'¹²⁵ and philosophical nonsense 'is a psychological rather than a logical difference' (2000, 324). Mulhall also sees all kinds of nonsense as being logically on a par but says about philosophical nonsense that it 'does [...] exemplify a distinctive psychological kind of nonsense, one that has a certain kind of appeal to us' (2007, 5).

But such insistence on a psychological/logical distinction seems to block satisfying explanations of wherein the distinctiveness of philosophical nonsense lies. For example, we clearly distinguish those who understand philosophical propositions from those who do not – the seasoned scholar of Kant, say, from the baffled first-year student – even if we think these propositions are ultimately nonsensical. Similarly, Kant's works have been

¹²³ Often commentators identify the 'austere' conception with the 'sheer lack' interpretation; Glock (2004, 222), for example, writes that, 'according to the austere conception, nonsense is always a matter of *privation*'.

¹²⁴ Another, closely related issue is that of a kind of *person-relativity* of philosophical confusions that Baker (2004) sees articulated in the later Wittgenstein and that he thinks shows a grammatical investigation to be an '*exclusively* therapeutic' and 'strictly patient-oriented' matter (2004, 152). I shall not attempt here to discuss Baker's position *en detail*, however.

¹²⁵ I.e. the kind of talk you are likely to hear at the local *Witherspoon's* (excuse the pun).

translated from German into other languages – which would not have been possible if they were ‘*mere gibberish*’ and only ever able to baffle people. If they really were, philosophical confusion would simply appear to be a psychological matter.

As McManus puts it, “[p]sychologism” about philosophical confusion would then seem to be the price one must pay to preserve the “sheer lack” claim’ (2014, 167). (A *very* high price.) As said, such a ‘psychologism’ is utterly diametrical to our experience of being presented with philosophical claims. It would turn any philosophical enterprise away from the examination of anything like contentful *views* that philosophers hold and the utterances they make, and instead turn it into the examination of a mere *alogical psychology* of confused ‘patients’. Most importantly, philosophical nonsense seems to resemble meaningful linguistic expressions in a way that, say, ‘piggle wiggle’ does not; a clear-cut and rigid psychological/logical distinction might not serve us well, because

a hard distinction between ‘the psychological’ and ‘the logical’ leaves us in need of some explanation of how philosophical illusions of sense [...] can be so distinctively marked by what at least appears to be a logical structure. (McManus 2014, 168)¹²⁶

In other words, philosophical nonsense seems essentially characterised by, and arises out of, what seems a particular impersonal, ‘logical’ structure. Note that this is not to deny that philosophical nonsense might also partly be a psychological matter; nor is it to deny that there is only one species of nonsense. Rather, it is to register that a hard-and-fast psychological/logical distinction runs the risk of blurring the undeniable difference between ‘mere gibberish’ and philosophical confusion. How then can we explain that the kind of nonsense we encounter in philosophy ‘can be so distinctively marked by what at least appears to be a logical structure’?

5.2.2 The ‘equivocation’ reading

As noted above, McManus distinguishes between the ‘sheer lack’ interpretation and another interpretation of ‘austerity’ which he calls the ‘equivocation’ interpretation. This interpretation can be seen as a response to the difficulties of the ‘sheer lack’ interpretation.

¹²⁶ The next sub-section will briefly return to the central issue of the psychological/logical distinction.

We find this interpretation of ‘austerity’, for instance, in the following passage from Conant:

According to resolute readers, this is what philosophical nonsense is for the author of the *Tractatus*: an unwitting wavering in our relation to our words – failing to make genuine determinations of meaning, while believing that we have done so. (2007, 46)

This idea, McManus argues, clearly is ‘closely related in the minds of resolute readers to that of nonsense as “sheer lack”’ (2014, 176); he refers to Conant and Diamond who write about the clarification of a sentence that shows the sentence to be nonsensical,

[Our clarification] brings out that no use has been fixed on for some or other sign, or indeed that we have been in an unclear way trying to run together two quite different sorts of use, wanting neither the one nor the other but both. (2004, 64)

McManus submits that Conant and Diamond ‘alternate between formulations that point us to these different aspects – or interpretations – of the notion of “austerity”’ (2014, 176): for example, Conant writes, on the one hand, that ‘[m]ere nonsense is simply unintelligible – it expresses no thought [and] is mere gibberish’ (Conant 2001, 14); but, on the other hand, he makes qualified claims such as ‘mere nonsense’ ‘strictly speaking [...] has no (fully) determinate logical syntax’ (Conant 2001, 19). Similarly, Diamond writes that, for Wittgenstein, ‘[a]nything that is nonsense is so merely because some determination of meaning has *not* been made’ (1991, 106). As McManus observes, ‘a “determination of meaning *not* being been made” could leave one either with no meaning at all or with several meanings between which one is undecided’ (2014, 176).¹²⁷ Mulhall’s characterisation of the resolute reading also points us to the ‘equivocation’ interpretation of ‘austerity’:

the ability to recognize the distinction between sense and nonsense [...] is simply the capacity to recognize when a sign has not been given a *determinate meaning* – even when it appears that it has been. (2007, 7; emphasis mine)

McManus gives several reasons why one might see a close relation between the idea of ‘equivocation’ and that of ‘sheer lack’: for example, equivocation might be seen to explain why no meaning has been given to a word, or one might argue that, since it is only possible to mean something *in particular*, the lack of a determinate meaning for a word equals it

¹²⁷ There is a third option: a meaning that is clear in standard cases, but unclear in others (cf. Wittgenstein’s vanishing chair in PI §80; see Section 2.3.2).

having no meaning at all (2004, 176). But McManus also gives reasons for stressing a distinction between the ‘equivocation’ and the ‘sheer lack’ reading:

Firstly, depicting philosophical claims as ‘*pure gibberish*’ – as involving a ‘*sheer lack*’ of sense – not only seems hopelessly false to the experience of reading philosophical claims, it also makes it very hard to understand how such a set of claims might ever have engaged a reader, or how we go about distinguishing those with a ‘grasp’ of such claims from those who are simply baffled by them. [...] Secondly, there seems to be good reason to think that, on Wittgenstein’s view, such an equivocation is at work in the cases of philosophical confusion he considers. [...] Thirdly, [...] all the work that needs to be done by the ‘austere conception of nonsense’ can be done through the ‘equivocation’ reading. (2014, 177)

As we saw above, philosophical claims cannot reasonably said to be ‘pure gibberish’, as that would be contrary to our experience that cannot be captured by reducing the difference between philosophical nonsense and ‘piggie wiggle’ to a psychological matter (e.g. we can translate philosophical claims into other languages, we distinguish Kant scholars who understand his philosophy from merely perplexed first-year students). This reason is also given by Schönbaumsfeld who writes that if we treat a philosophical claim merely as a nonsensical string of signs, ‘it remains mysterious how, exactly, the string manages to bring it about that one is philosophically tempted by it’, and she writes:

If this is not, in any way, a function of the string’s content or logical structure, it would seem to have to accomplish this feat by pure magic, for no one is so much as tempted by ‘piggie wiggle’ or ‘abracadabra’. (2010, 660)

The next sub-section will demonstrate that philosophical nonsense can indeed be said to have a kind of ‘content’ or ‘logical structure’. Moreover, I will argue that rules of grammar can help us identify such a structure.

5.2.3 The ‘structure’ of philosophical nonsense

Characterising the idea of ‘nonsensical elucidation’ (i.e. the idea that we can make illuminating use of a nonsensical string of signs), Mulhall in his resolute reading of the *Investigations* warns that

it is vital to note that what makes it [the austere nonsensical string of signs] illuminating is not anything about the nonsense [the string] itself – nothing intrinsic to it, as it were – since logically speaking it has no intrinsic structure. (2007, 5)

Nonsense may not, from a logical point of view, be ‘intrinsically structured’, yet it clearly is ‘structured’ in a certain way (cf. McManus 2014, 177). Indeed, this ‘structure’ of nonsense seems key to understand why ‘one is philosophically tempted’ by some nonsensical strings of signs but not others (e.g. ‘piggle wiggle’). Crucially, philosophical nonsense involves words that have a use in other contexts and it presumably is their meaning in those other contexts that misleads us (whereas an utterance such as ‘piggle wiggle’ does not).¹²⁸

So what then is the ‘structure’ of nonsense that can explain the ‘illusions of sense’ in philosophy? McManus presents and discusses a nice example from Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* to illustrate the point that nonsense possesses a certain kind of ‘structure’ that is perfectly naturally labelled a ‘logic’ that can be understood.

[T]he White King marvels at Alice’s eye-sight when she tells him that she saw nobody on the road: “Why, it’s as much as I can do to see real people, by this light!” (1992 [1872], 165), he declares. Then, when the Messenger is next to arrive, the King concludes that “Nobody walks slower than you”: “I do my best,” the Messenger said in a sullen tone. “I’m sure nobody walks much faster than I do!” To which the King replies “He can’t do that . . . or else he’d have been here first.” (166–67) Despite the fact that the arguments in question are also nonsensical – patently so to those who understand them – to “get” Carroll’s humor one must see how conclusions that his characters draw “follow” from their premises. There is an obvious sense in which the White King’s response to the sullen Messenger is the *right* conclusion to draw: it follows in that it would follow *if* ‘Nobody’ figured in these propositions as a name. The humor – and the confusion – arises because that is not what ‘Nobody’ is in English, though its ‘surface grammar’ can suggest to us that it is. What we see here are reasons to say that certain nonsensical claims naturally “follow” from others; the developing nonsense has what it is overwhelmingly natural to call a ‘logic’ that one might grasp. (2014, 178)¹²⁹

This example shows that there is no incompatibility between two things that, on the basis of a hard psychological/logical distinction, might appear to be incompatible: describing what we have before us as a piece of nonsense that we can grasp, that has a certain ‘logic’ and that can be part of an ‘argument’ – *and* also describing such a piece of nonsense as ‘real nonsense, plain nonsense’ (Diamond 1991, 181).

¹²⁸ One can add here another reason why being ‘taken in’ by philosophical nonsense is not just a matter of temptation or appeal: a philosophical claim is often the result of a rational *argument* for holding the claim true.

¹²⁹ Cf. also McManus 2006, 53–4.

The White King example demonstrates how nonsense can be said to have a structure and how philosophical confusion can arise because of mistakenly believing that an expression has a determinate meaning in a given context where in fact it does not. More specifically, such a confusion arises ‘through particular determinate confluences’ (McManus 2014, 178): we assimilate two different uses of a word (in the above example ‘Nobody’ as a name and ‘nobody’ as a pronoun). This running together of two different uses of a word is an *impersonal* and *non-psychological* aspect of philosophical utterances that constitutes the difference between philosophical nonsense and nonsense such as ‘piggle wiggle’. The equivocation reading can thus avoid the implausible psychologism that Section 5.2.1 presented.

There is textual evidence that Wittgenstein thinks that such equivocations create philosophical confusion.¹³⁰ To return to an example upon which we have traded already in Chapter 1, he presents the following philosophical problem as a manifestation of a confusion: ‘How is it possible to measure a period of time, since the past and the future aren’t present and the present is only a point?’ (PG 193). This problem arises if we fail to recognise the conflation of two different senses of ‘measure’ and thus assimilate measuring time to measuring length with a measuring tape. Since we use the same verb in both cases – this is a similarity in ‘surface grammar’ – we are misled into thinking that both expressions also function in the same way. But only the latter requires the physical object (or two physical objects whose distance to each other) we measure be present; measuring a period of time works differently. (It seems also plausible to suggest that there is a possible equivocation over ‘present’ at work here.)

In such a case, what happens when someone takes nonsense for sense is that they conflate (at least) two different uses of a word; equivocation produces their confusion.¹³¹ When the conflation is recognised, we realise that the confusion has a ‘quite *determinate*

¹³⁰ This paragraph briefly turns to the second reason McManus mentions (in the passage quoted in the previous sub-section) for distinguishing between the ‘sheer lack’ and the ‘equivocation’ reading of ‘austerity’. McManus (2014) presents another example of Wittgenstein’s (from his Cambridge lectures): ‘[w]e say time “flows”, suggesting an “analogy between time and motion”, and then ask where to and where from, and so on’ (L 60).

¹³¹ Note that this is only *one* kind of case. There are others. For example, we construe the use of a word (‘think’) along the lines of other words (‘see’, ‘hear’, ‘perceive’); or there is another (unnoticed) inconsistency at work or we have failed to assign a meaning to a phrase altogether. I will return to this at the end of Section 6.5.

structure' (McManus 2014, 179)¹³². This structure consists in assimilating two (or perhaps even more) uses of a word, thereby having produced, one might say, a confused fusion of different senses of a word. These different senses of a word can be said to correspond to different rules for the use of a word; the rules for the use of name such as 'Nobody' are different from that for the use of the pronoun 'nobody'. Crucially, then, for our overarching concerns here, describing rules of grammar – the rules for the use of a word – allows us then to detect the 'quite *determinate* structure' of a confusion. Articulating the conflated uses by articulating the relevant rules of grammar – of usage – help us grasp the conflation.¹³³

5.2.4 Overlaps between resolute and non-resolute readings

This sub-section will argue that there are overlaps between resolute and non-resolute readings: firstly, both agree that philosophical statements born out of confusion only ever produce what is ultimately nonsense; secondly, and relatedly, the description of rules of grammar can help us establish whether (and if so, how) the use of a word involves conflating two patterns of use and thus leads to nonsense.

Resolute readers often develop their interpretation in explicit opposition to Hacker's interpretation that they see as committed to a 'substantial' conception of nonsense; they charge Hacker with regarding nonsense as 'substantial' because Hacker takes nonsense to result from infringement of the rules that determine the combinatorial possibilities of otherwise meaningful expressions. But Hacker denies that he has 'ever suggested that a metaphysical nonsense expresses a proposition or thought with a sense that is nonsensical', and he adds that he rejects 'any conception of nonsense understood as a sequence of words that expresses a proposition that lacks a sense' (2003, 9). So ascribing to him a 'substantial' conception of nonsense is clearly a misreading. However, Hacker also accepts a particular understanding of the idea that metaphysical statements conjoin otherwise meaningful and intelligible words in unintelligible ways: '[W]e [Baker and

¹³² McManus (2014, 179) also suggests that it might even be better to say that '[the confusion's] structure is *overdetermined* in certain specific ways, as one might say some of Escher's drawings are'.

¹³³ For Kant, the paralogisms are equivocations (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A341/B399). The rationalist philosophers use 'self' in an acceptable logical sense in one premise of their arguments, and in an unacceptable, substantial sense in another. But here is not the place to discuss this issue (of equivocation as a philosophical topic with a long pedigree).

Hacker] do hold that philosophical nonsense results from the illicit combination of meaningful words' (Hacker 2003, 9). What Hacker is very clear about is that he does not think that some nonsense makes more sense than other nonsense; Baker and Hacker declare, for instance, that 'nonsense does not come in degrees' (2009, 61). Hence, there is a sense in which Hacker endorses the idea that philosophical nonsense contains meaningful words and another in which he rejects it. Herein lies an overlap with the 'equivocation' interpretation of austerity because both the resolute and the non-resolute reading see words as identifiable through the rules for their use that apply in contexts in which they are meaningful and both deny that these words are meaningful when occurring in nonsensical expressions.¹³⁴

Accordingly, Hacker points out certain differences between instances of nonsense – these differences, I would suggest, correspond to those between 'piggle wiggle' and an item of philosophical nonsense:

Neither a scribble nor an Escher etching represents a possible state of affairs, but there is all the difference in the world between an Escher etching and a scribble. The difference, however, is *not* that the etching depicts an impossible state of affairs. (2003, 9)

This remark makes a very important point almost certainly all Wittgensteinians would agree on: we must not succumb to the temptation to understand the nonsensicality of a string of signs as expressing a kind of 'super-falsehood', as depicting a state of affairs that is impossible owing to some metaphysical truth about the nature of things.¹³⁵

However, Hacker also argues that Wittgenstein takes the view that there are nonsensical sentences, the constituent words or phrases of which are not meaningless:

¹³⁴ Schönbaumsfeld criticises the 'resolute' reading but she also thinks that there is a sense in which nonsense is just nonsense: '[O]nce the philosopher has been brought to realize that a [philosophical claim] is nonsense, that is, that it can be discarded from the language because it is not a move in the game, the same thing follows from it as from "abracadabra" – to wit, nothing. *In this respect*, there is indeed no difference between the two strings. But this does not imply, as resolute readers seem to maintain, that therefore the two strings are the same in *every other way too*' (2010, 659; first emphasis mine). So Schönbaumsfeld agrees with 'resolute' readers that nonsense (whether philosophical or otherwise) says nothing but only appears to do so. Schönbaumsfeld also stresses here that it is important not to overlook that philosophical nonsense is not in every aspect the same as a nonsensical expression such as 'abracadabra'; philosophical claims have a certain 'content' and 'structure'. It should be noted, however, that 'resolute' readers do *not* think that 'the two strings are the same in *every other way too*'; as we have seen, they see at least a *psychological* difference between the two strings, but, as we have also seen, the 'austerity' view need not necessarily be committed to a problematic psychologism, as it can, on the interpretation I suggest, still accommodate that philosophical nonsense has a non-psychological and impersonal element.

¹³⁵ Cf. Schönbaumsfeld 2010, 659.

'Julius Caesar is a prime number' is nonsense, but the words 'Julius Caesar' and 'is a prime number' have a meaning because they have a use in other contexts. In the catenation 'Julius Caesar is a prime number' the respective rules for their use are violated. Hacker adds: 'If one wishes, one can express this by saying that *in these contexts* no meaning has been assigned to these words or phrases (i.e., the combination is meaningless)' (2003, 19). At the same time, Hacker claims that it would be 'exceedingly misleading' to say that 'Julius Caesar is a prime number' (or, to use Dummett's example, 'Chairman Mao is rare') is 'a meaningless combination of meaningless words' (2003, 10).

The decisive point in the debate is whether the meaningless and nonsensical combinations such as 'Julius Caesar is a prime number' are composed of meaningless words. While resolute readers such as Conant and Witherspoon hold that the problem with such combinations is simply that the relevant words have not been assigned a meaning in particular types of contexts (which could be done), Hacker believes that the rules for the use of the words entail that they have no meaningful application in those contexts unless one altered their meaning. So Hacker believes that there is a fixed meaning determined by the rules of grammar, and if one used the words contrary to these rules, their meaning would have been changed – one would be talking of something else – or this use would be meaningless. Hacker makes this clear when he warns us that although one can 'say[] that *in these contexts* no meaning has been assigned to these words or phrases (i.e., the combination is meaningless)',

[...] one should not therefore embrace Conant's conception of 'austere nonsense' and say that this meaningless combination of words is composed of meaningless words, and hence that all that is wrong with it is that we have given these words no meaning in such contexts. For, among other things, one should also note that if one were to assign to a significant word or phrase a meaning in contexts from which it is excluded, *then one would have changed its meaning*. So one would, as Wittgenstein noted, be talking of something else. (2003, 19-20)¹³⁶

Indeed, I agree with Hacker that there seems nothing wrong with saying that there are rules for the use of a word and that words can be 'misused' (2003, 9).¹³⁷ However, we can

¹³⁶ The last sentence alludes to PG §133 (cf. Z §320): 'if you follow other rules than those of chess you are playing another game; and if you follow grammatical rules other than such and such ones, that does not mean you say something wrong, no, you are speaking of something else.' See also Baker/Hacker 2009, 334.

¹³⁷ Though there is a worry that Hacker's phrasing of exclusion may, at least, be misleading, as it is far from clear that grammar ever is 'prohibitive'.

only speak of misuse if a speaker actually wants to use a particular word to express precisely that meaning which is constituted by the relevant rules; and in order to appeal to the rules that could demonstrate a misuse, we would have to make the assumption that we know what the speaker wants their words to mean. This assumption is problematic because the relevant use may be meaningless, i.e. the speaker may fail to mean anything in particular by their words. But we can point the speaker to what his words *can* mean, thereby putting the question to him what he means by them.

As the previous sub-sections showed, a particular interpretation of 'austerity' is compatible with (and might even account best for) this situation. According to the 'equivocation' interpretation, we have not given any determinate meaning to the words as they occur in a philosophical statement but are under the illusion that we have. But in addition, although philosophical nonsense lacks sense, it is 'structured' in a certain way that the rules of grammar can help us identify. Contrary to some resolute readers' claim that it is not even possible to recognise the possible constituents in a nonsensical combination of words, we are not only able to identify these constituent expressions by registering their uses in other contexts, but the grammatical rules governing these uses also have an important role in determining whether (and if so, how) nonsense happens; they can bring us to see the confluences of different uses that might have led to confusion. So if one wishes, one can express this by saying that such confluences are 'misuses' of words.

Moreover, a further consequence of the discussion in this section – the emphasis on the 'equivocation' interpretation and the importance of rules of grammar to determine the identity of an expression – is that a resolute reading seems equally committed to something that Witherspoon sees as a problematic commitment of the 'substantial' conception of nonsense,¹³⁸ namely the 'stipulat[ion]' of 'a realm of meaninglessness with a tremendously rich structure', a realm that 'has all the hallmarks of genuine meaning' and that allows us to speak of 'quasi-understanding' and 'quasi-logical roles' (Witherspoon 2000, 339-42). As Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 argued, if a resolute reading does not accept this commitment, it cannot give us a convincing story about (i) our identifying

¹³⁸ McManus (2014, n.23) also makes this point.

some people as understanding (nonsensical) philosophical propositions, while others do not, and about (ii) the translatability of philosophical claims.

In summary, we have seen that there are overlaps between resolute and non-resolute readings. Both agree that, firstly, philosophical statements only ever produce an illusion of sense; and, secondly, the description of rules of grammar can help us establish whether (and if so, how) the use of a word involves conflating two patterns of use and thus leads to nonsense. This second point provides us with a particular view of the role that the rules of grammar play in analysing and removing philosophical confusions.

These overlaps may now raise doubts about the idea of a distinctive 'resolute' reading; they indicate that crucial differences between resolute and non-resolute commentators might lie elsewhere. The next section will identify the authority of grammatical rules and their role in persuading others as a decisive and controversial issue in the dispute. This issue also marks the line between what I have called the Policing Conception and the Diagnostic Conception. How might we be able to determine whether deviating from the rules in a particular case leads to nonsense? What is the role of the invocation of rules in providing reasons to persuade someone that they are talking nonsense? I will demonstrate an important element of the Diagnostic Conception according to which moments in Wittgenstein's own philosophical practice indicate how fruitless it might be, when encountering what appears to be a misuse of a word, to appeal to an authority in the form of grammatical rules to show that what we have before us is a piece of nonsense. I will illustrate this issue by giving examples of disagreements over which projections are acceptable. This will provide us with a basis upon which I will draw in later discussion of what the role of the rules of grammar might be in deciding controversial cases, and exploring the question of retaining the possibility of a Wittgensteinian criticism of philosophical uses of language.

5.3 The Problem of Persuasion

This section presents a challenge to the Wittgensteinian who wants to persuade others – and rightly so – that they are talking nonsense. Mulhall articulates this challenge in his characterisation of a 'resolute' reading of the later Wittgenstein:

Such a reading will [...] attempt to understand grammatical investigation as simply deploying our everyday capacity to distinguish sense from nonsense in a philosophical context, and hence as depriving itself of any claim to expertise or authority that exceeds that form of practical ability – an ability that can equally well be laid claim to by any competent speaker, and hence by any philosophical interlocutor. (2007, 10)

Any competent speaker can claim to be a competent judge in distinguishing sense from nonsense. So, how, on the basis of this, might we persuade someone who is allegedly talking nonsense to accept that they are? The philosopher may well acknowledge that they are using words in ways that diverge from ordinary usage. But the crux is, that they may insist all the same that their novel usage (which they see as necessary to articulate novel and previously overlooked questions, problems and claims) is continuous with the ordinary usage in such a way that they can claim to be using these words in the same sense. That is why it does not seem sufficient for dissolving a philosophical problem to assume what it is that someone wants to say with their (apparently) nonsensical words, then tell them that they are violating the rules of grammar and thus speaking nonsense. However, as I will now show, it has been pointed out that the philosophical practice of some Wittgensteinians seems to do just that.

5.3.1 'Policing' as a 'fall-back criticism'?

Edward Witherspoon questions Baker and Hacker's conception of rules of grammar and their corresponding philosophical practice. Baker and Hacker argue that Wittgenstein is concerned with the delimitation of the 'bounds of sense' set by grammar. Taking up Wittgenstein's metaphor of an account book, Baker and Hacker characterise the role of the rules of grammar as crucial to determining and detecting nonsense and hence to criticising others:

Grammar, as Wittgenstein understood the term, is the account book of language (MS 109 (Vol. V), 129; PG 87). Its rules determine the limits of sense. By carefully scrutinizing usage from case to case, the philosopher may determine at what point he has drawn an overdraft on Reason, failed to conform with the rules for the use of an expression, and so, in subtle and not readily identifiable ways, transgressed the bounds of sense. (Baker/Hacker 2009, 59)

As Witherspoon summarises, according to Baker and Hacker,

[t]he task of the Wittgensteinian philosopher is to articulate the rules of grammar and then to scrutinize utterances (especially metaphysical utterances) for violations of those rules. They think that if you violate the rules of grammar, then you lapse into nonsense. (2000, 325)

I have given the name 'Policing Conception' to the conception of Wittgensteinian criticism that Witherspoon sees in play in Baker and Hacker's philosophical practice. Witherspoon's discussion, from which I will here quote at some length, gives the following example as a 'representative instance' of Baker and Hacker's method of criticism:

If someone claims that colours as we apprehend them are sensations in the mind [...], one should point out that he is misusing the words 'sensation' and 'colour'. Sensations in the brain, one should remind one's readers, are – if *anything* – headaches, and colours are not headaches; one can have (i.e. it makes sense to speak of) sensations in the knee or in the back, but not in the mind. It is extended things that are coloured. But *this* is not a factual claim about the world [...]. It is a grammatical observation, namely, that the grammar of colour licenses predicating 'is coloured' of things of which one may also predicate 'is extended'. But minds and sensations are not extended, i.e. it makes no *sense* to say 'This pain is 5 cm long' or 'This itch is 2 cm shorter than that', 'My mind is 2 ft² larger today than it was yesterday'. Such utterances are not empirically *false*, for then they *could* be true, and we would have some conception of what would have to be the case for them to be true. But we don't, and they couldn't. Rather, they are senseless. So sensations are not even candidates for being coloured (there is no such thing as a red sensation), let alone for being colours. (Baker/Hacker 2009, 56)¹³⁹

In Witherspoon's discussion of this passage, the person who claims that 'Colours are sensations in the mind' he calls 'the scientist', and he summarises Baker and Hacker's passage as follows:

Baker and Hacker's critical practice shows that on their view certain combinations of words are forbidden because of the categories to which they belong. They argue, for example, that sensation-phrases (like 'pain') may not be combined with extension-phrases (like 'is 5 cm long'). [...] According to Baker and Hacker's diagnosis, the scientist's words are themselves perfectly meaningful. He is using the word 'sensations' to mean sensations, for example; it is only because the word has its usual meaning that their rule [You may not say 'x is a sensation and x is extended'] gets any grip on the scientist's utterances. If the scientist were using one or more meaningless words, Baker and Hacker could not make an argument based on rules of grammar, which determine how concepts may and may not be combined. Because the scientist's utterance violates those rules, it is nonsense. (2000, 330)

¹³⁹ This and the next long quote from Baker and Hacker are the slightly modified versions of those passages as they appear in the second edition of their book (2009). Witherspoon quotes from the first edition (1985), but there are no substantial differences between the earlier and later versions of the relevant passages.

However, Witherspoon criticises Baker and Hacker's method of criticism on the grounds that it 'suffers from both polemical and philosophical defects' as such; this chapter's first half considered one of the latter; but:

The polemical defects emerge particularly clearly if we try to imagine how Baker and Hacker would carry on a dialogue with the scientist in their example. After Baker and Hacker have brought forward their rules of grammar and pointed out that 'Colors are sensations in the mind' violates them, how is the scientist supposed to respond? Is he to say, 'Oh dear! I forgot how we use the words "color", "sensation" and "mind". Sorry to have troubled you with my pseudothory?' Or perhaps, 'Yes, I never noticed it before, but you are right: there *is* a rule against my utterance'? If the scientist is willing to withdraw his words or to express his idea in words that conform to the rules of grammar, then the dialogue can end happily; a bit of dubious language will have been eliminated or cleaned up to everyone's satisfaction. (331)

'But', Witherspoon continues,

surely the interesting cases, the cases that have motivated philosophers to try to delimit sense from nonsense, are those in which the person who makes a problematic utterance insists on it. The [...] scientist-philosophers that Baker and Hacker attack make the utterances they do because they take themselves to have reasons for them. Metaphysicians feel compelled by their arguments to make their (apparent) claims, and they present these arguments to support conclusions that they themselves admit to be strange. Against someone who takes himself to have compelling reasons for his utterance, Baker and Hacker have little to offer. Their practice suggests that they think their rules of grammar are obvious and that everyone will recognize that they are binding. They proceed as though all who look will immediately recognize that 'it makes no *sense* to say "This pain is 5 cm long";' for example. But in the problematic cases the appeal to the obviousness of the rule will not move the metaphysician: he or she knows already that the utterance is problematic by the lights of ordinary usage. (332)

Metaphysicians and scientists are normally alive to the fact that what they say departs from established (everyday) language use. One particular philosophical defect that Witherspoon thus identifies in Baker and Hacker's account is the idea that 'the criticism of an utterance as violating a rule of grammar requires the critic to pretend to [know] what the speaker means by her words'. However, this requirement is problematic, as Witherspoon goes on to say, because 'it precludes any genuine interpretative engagement with the speaker' (2000, 333). Witherspoon identifies this problematic element in how Baker and Hacker's philosophical practice responds to the departure from ordinary usage:

If a speaker like the scientist in Baker and Hacker's example chooses to flout the supposedly obvious rule of grammar, Baker and Hacker rely on a fall-back criticism. They say that, if

you are not following their rules of grammar, then you are using words with different meanings; you are using a different grammar, and there is no interesting point of contact between what you say about 'colors' in your sense and what we call 'colors'. (332)

To illustrate this point, which trades, of course, on themes from Chapter 4 – projections as just new uses of these signs, not genuine extensions – Witherspoon quotes the continuation of Baker and Hacker's discussion of the scientist:

[The] scientist advancing such [...] views may insist that he is using 'colour' and 'sensation' in a special sense, a sense more useful for scientific purposes. But then we should elicit from him the new rules for the use of 'colour' and 'sensation' according to which he is proceeding, pointing out where they differ from received rules and why they determine a different *sense* for these words. We should make clear why what seemed a startling discovery (that colours are in the mind, or are sensations in the brain) is at best no more than a recommendation to adopt a new form of representation. (Baker/Hacker 2009, 57)

Witherspoon agrees with Baker and Hacker on the point that 'we should elicit from [the scientist] the new rules according to which he is proceeding'; but Witherspoon thinks that

they spoil this line of criticism by assuming that the scientist [...] is making 'a recommendation to adopt a new form of representation' [...]. Baker and Hacker rule out from the start the possibility that the scientist might actually have made a claim (albeit a claim that we do not immediately understand). That is exactly the possibility we ought to leave open if we want to try to understand him; yet leaving open that possibility is incompatible with declaring the scientist to have violated a rule of grammar. Baker and Hacker's invitation to the scientist to specify what he means can only be pro forma: they already know what he is trying to say and that it cannot be said without violating the rules of grammar. (332-3)

There are two points in this passage that will play an important role in the remainder of this thesis. Firstly, Witherspoon thinks 'we ought to leave open ... the possibility that the scientist might actually have made a claim'. This might be particularly important if the scientist really is confused and a thorough understanding of the confusion is needed to remove it, not just citing certain rules of grammar.¹⁴⁰ Secondly, Witherspoon's criticism also points us to an issue that one may call the problem of persuasion which I will develop further in the next sub-section. The problem of persuasion shows that when – in discussing

¹⁴⁰ Sections 6.1 and 6.2 will return to this issue. There I will argue that the practice suggested by Witherspoon and other 'diagnostic' commentators who see themselves as opposing Baker and Hacker's practice may turn out to be very much the same. But I will also briefly note here that it is not clear why Baker and Hacker's treatment should 'spoil' the point upon which Witherspoon agrees with them, yet they may overstate the point that deviations from common usage run the risk of being inconsistent or lacking sense.

whether a particular expression is nonsensical – we reach an impasse, the philosophical practice exemplified in the above passages from Baker and Hacker seems to leave us with very little to say and might make both sides in the disagreement dig in their heels. As I have noted above, the rules governing our concept of ‘sensation’ exclude certain combinations; and to possess the concept of colour means to know with which other concepts it can be combined. But it is far from clear why citing these rules should persuade someone who takes themselves to have good reasons not to be persuaded. Here we start to see an issue which the next chapter will address: one might think that an advantage of the Policing Conception over the Diagnostic Conception is that it has clear persuasive ‘bite’, because, on the Policing Conception, appealing to the rules is enough to determine what it does not make sense to say. But, as we will see in the next sub-section (and later in Section 6.4), the Policing Conception also seems to be rather toothless and to lack ‘bite’ in trying to persuade people that they are talking nonsense.

5.3.2 ‘Maps in the brain’

The issues that Witherspoon identifies not only point to abstract possible responses on the part of a philosopher subject to Wittgensteinian ‘policing’, as a recent debate illustrates these issues vividly. Paul Churchland writes that one of many criticisms that Hacker and Maxwell Bennett present in their book *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience* (2003) ‘addresses the common tendency of cognitive theorists to ascribe sundry *representations* to the brain, variously conceived of as “maps”, or “symbols”, or “images” of some kind’ (2005, 469). For Bennett and Hacker, Churchland says, ‘these are, at best, misleading metaphors’ (469).¹⁴¹ Churchland criticises Bennett and Hacker’s philosophical interventions in the field of neuroscience as uninformed and accuses them of a commitment to a form of ‘conceptual hygiene’ (473).¹⁴²

One of the cases Churchland discusses concerns the concept of a map. He quotes the following passage from Bennett and Hacker:

¹⁴¹ Bennett and Hacker write: ‘These alleged metaphorical uses are so many banana skins in the pathway of their user. He *need not* step on them and slip, but he probably will’ (2003, 80).

¹⁴² This also brings out how deep the disagreements are here, given that Bennett is one of the world’s leading neuroscientists.

[...] a map is a pictorial representation, made in accordance with conventions of mapping and rules of projection. Someone who can read an atlas must know and understand these conventions, and read off, from the maps, the features of what is represented. But the 'maps' in the brain are not maps, in this sense, at all. The brain is not akin to the reader of a map, since it cannot be said to know any conventions of representations [sic] or methods of projection or to read anything off the topographical arrangement of firing cells in accordance with a set of conventions. For the cells are not arranged in accordance with a set of conventions at all, and the correlation between their firing and the features of the perceptual field is not a conventional one but a causal one. (Bennett/Hacker 2003, 80)

This passage illustrates Witherspoon's above point that 'the invitation to the scientist to specify what he means can only be pro forma: they already know what he is trying to say and that it cannot be said without violating the rules of grammar' (Witherspoon 2000, 333). Churchland nevertheless defends the use of 'maps' in the neuroscientific account of animal cognition, and his defence can be seen as an attempt to respond to what Witherspoon calls 'a productive line of criticism' in Baker and Hacker: 'we should elicit from [the scientist] the new rules according to which he is proceeding'. Churchland writes: 'The explanatory point of invoking neuronally embodied maps, without thereby invoking a homuncular map-reader, is nicely illustrated in the case of the superior colliculus' (2005, 470). I will not attempt here to engage fully with Churchland's defence. But it may be useful to look at one particular point he makes about the maps that neurotheorists locate within the brain:

Such a map is not, to be sure, what you will find in a geographical atlas, or at your local AAA office. It has 80 dimensions rather than two, and the domain mapped is an *abstract* domain of possible *features* rather than a concrete domain of geographical places or city streets. But it is still a map in the literal mathematical sense, for there is a one-to-one projection of the map's internal elements and regions onto the abstract features being mapped, a projection in which the *similarity* relations between the objective abstract features are systematically reflected in the *proximity* relations between the map's internal elements. (471)

This passage could be seen as a representative example of trying to make the case for a new use of a word to be accepted as a successful 'projection' (in the Cavellian sense set out in Chapter 4). Churchland defends the use of the concept of a map by pointing to *similarities* between the maps you will find in a geographical atlas and the maps in the brain. He admits that there are differences between both cases (e.g. one is concerned with an abstract domain, the other with a concrete one) but he thinks that because of certain

significant similarities between both cases (e.g. a certain one-to-one projection of the map's internal elements with some objective features) the concept of a map can be used in neurotheory without falling into confusion and talking nonsense. As Churchland explains:

I sketch [the general approach to animal cognition] here primarily to illustrate that we are not doomed to empty metaphors and mushy meanings in deploying the notion of a map as part of an account of how cognitive creatures represent and navigate their environments. Such an account may turn out to be false, but it is not crippled by conceptual confusion from the outset. [Bennett & Hacker] need to try harder to understand what their neurotheoretic colleagues are trying to say. Even if the neuroscientific uses of terms such as 'map' are neologistic by the standards of the marketplace, they can still make perfect sense by some more informed standards. As science makes *conceptual progress* [...], this sort of thing happens all the time. (2005, 472)

However, Bennett and Hacker in the above-quoted passage object to neuroscientific uses of 'map' by insisting that 'a map is a pictorial representation, made in accordance with conventions of mapping and rules of projection' and that this rule is violated in neurotheoretic discourse. Furthermore, they deny that the neuroscientific uses of 'map' constitute a licit and meaningful extension of ordinary usage, and they think that neuroscientists simply play, at best, a different game. By contrast, Churchland's position seems to be that the relevant rules extend beyond some paradigm or ordinary cases – those of 'the marketplace'. That is why he thinks neuroscientists like himself do *not* play a different game, but rather that they use the term in just the same yet extended sense to make extraordinary discoveries.

Churchland maintains that Bennett and Hacker's objections to the theoretical proposals of modern cognitive neuroscience

do no more than highlight the independently obvious fact that the new theory violates some of the default conceptions of the average ten-year-old. But where is the crime in this? Why should we make those baseline expectations permanently criterial for the meaningful use of the terms at issue? Were we permanently to cleave to the standards of 'conceptual hygiene' thus imposed by [Bennett and Hacker], we would be doomed to only the most trivial of scientific advances. For our conceptual innovations would then be confined to what is currently taken, by the average ten-year-old, to define 'the bounds of sense'. (2005, 473)

Churchland's use of the word 'crime' here is reminiscent of what I have called the Policing Conception – indeed, Bennett and Hacker's practice as presented by Churchland can be seen as an attempt at policing: whenever an established rule of grammar is apparently

being violated, i.e. a crime being committed, they will see it as the task of the philosopher to tell the delinquent that the relevant expression ought not be used in this way by invoking the rules for its use.¹⁴³

Churchland takes issue with the idea that, whenever someone extends the rules of the game beyond that played by a 'ten-year-old', we face a case of misuse. Churchland sees Bennett and Hacker's criticism characterised by exactly the kind of problematic element that Witherspoon identifies in Hacker's critical practice: they 'rule out from the start the possibility that the scientist might actually have made a claim (albeit a claim that we do not immediately understand)' (Witherspoon 2000, 333). He seems to presume that Bennett and Hacker's reaction in such a situation would just be to exclaim: 'Stop the game!' – But it is not as simple as that, of course: for example, in their above-quoted passage arguing against the meaningfulness of there being maps in the brain, Bennett and Hacker offer an *argument*. And this argument demonstrates very clearly that the talk of 'maps in the brain' uses 'maps' in a sense quite different from the one in play when we speak of the things we find in an atlas.

Churchland's polemical tone aside – the talk of 'the average ten-year-old' – (a tone that, by the way, can be said to mirror Bennett and Hacker's), Churchland's main point is that since science makes 'conceptual progress' all the time by stretching the boundaries of common or established language use, it is far from clear why non-ordinary uses of words and neologisms should always be manifestations of conceptual confusion.¹⁴⁴ Churchland argues that not only need such language use in the sciences not be fated to be nonsensical babble from the very start, but that one could even say that it is essential to scientific development to break with what is established. Churchland concedes that Bennett and Hacker do leave some room for some conceptual evolution and admit that the meanings of concepts within scientific theories can and do change over time (2005, 473). But he nevertheless remains sceptical of their idea that all that is needed to avoid confusions and

¹⁴³ For another, similar example of questioning the supposed authority of rules of grammar and Hacker's philosophical practice, see Dennett 2007.

¹⁴⁴ Indeed, the new use of a word is unproblematic; as Section 5.2 indicated, the charge would have to be a conflation of the old and the new use. Of course, Hacker is aware of that, but sometimes in his actual critical practice, he appears to ignore this.

legitimately modify theoretical terms is that the (new) rules for the use of the relevant terms are made explicit.¹⁴⁵

Churchland gives several reasons for his scepticism towards what he calls the standards of 'conceptual hygiene'. For example, he writes that 'groping forward with fluid metaphors is the perfectly *normal* and *healthy* fate of any attempt to make significant new science' (2005, 474). He concedes that, insofar as it is actually true that cognitive theorists often use many common terms metaphorically¹⁴⁶, there is an important grain of truth in Bennett and Hacker's diagnosis that the scientific vocabulary often stands in need of clarification. Churchland also admits that there is some production of philosophical nonsense in the sciences and that this is often due to 'sheer conceptual confusion' (474). Nevertheless, he finds Bennett and Hacker's accusation of 'rampant conceptual confusion' 'wildly overstated' (474), because he thinks that it cannot be taken for granted that this is what is going on in all of the cases which Bennett and Hacker discuss. Churchland argues that many of those terms used in the sciences which we also use in ordinary language are, in fact, constantly negotiated within the scientific community. And he makes the point that '*some* of the relevant new theory *has* been made usefully explicit and genuinely non-metaphorical' (474).¹⁴⁷

On the basis of Chapter 4's discussion of intelligible projective uses of words, Witherspoon and Churchland might seem to have good reason to reject that language use departing from the 'standards of the marketplace' results in nonsense. Once projection is accepted, their point appears reasonable. At the same time, as our discussion of the 'equivocation' reading earlier in this chapter showed, rules of grammar allow us to expose the conflation of different uses of a word. Indeed, rules of grammar can be used to demonstrate inconsistencies in someone's uses of a word. But given the projectability of

¹⁴⁵ For example, Bennett and Hacker write that a lack of sense of scientific terminology is due to 'the failure to stipulate coherent novel rules for different uses of the expressions' (2003, 114).

¹⁴⁶ We saw in Chapter 4 that interpreters who claim that there are rules fixing what makes sense in advance, but also think that 'feed the machine' is not a piece of nonsense, owe us a story about how this case is different from, say, the case of a 'thinking' computer or a 'map' in the brain. Treating 'feed the machine' (or 'maps in the brain') as a metaphor does not change the situation, because then the same question arises: Why are certain metaphors workable and others not?

¹⁴⁷ Churchland gives two examples to support this: the allegedly confused talk of brains having sentence-like representations and map-like representations (2005, 474). In both cases, Churchland argues, there is a conceptual basis that demonstrates that the relevant terminology is coherent and determinate: modern computational theory and vector algebra, respectively.

words and the 'problem of persuasion', there seem reasons to doubt the force of the idea that we can assess what is meaningful and what is not merely by means of rules (as the Policing Conception suggests). This may threaten the understanding of a grammatical investigation as a *critical* tool.

The next chapter will explore whether we can still retain the possibility of a Wittgensteinian criticism of philosophical uses of language. As we have seen, some commentators have certain misgivings about Hacker's 'policing' invocations of rules of grammar. The Diagnostic Conception's proposed form of Wittgensteinian criticism takes into account that philosophical problems do not seem to be 'dissolvable' by simply pointing to supposedly uncontentious facts of grammar. Yet describing rules of grammar remains an important method for dispelling confusion, not the least because such descriptions make it possible to trace different senses of a word and thereby expose inconsistencies, as the 'equivocation' reading in this chapter's first half showed. Just as Bennett and Hacker's treatment of 'maps in the brain' shows, all that a grammatical investigation does is demonstrate dissimilarities between different uses of words and how they can, or do, mislead us. A main difficulty that we face is that what the 'diagnostic' Wittgensteinian philosopher does seems, *prima facie*, much more subtle and much harder to characterise. But, as we will see, their practice eventually collapses into a form of 'policing' if they want to maintain an understanding of a grammatical investigation as a method of *criticism*.

Chapter 6

Diagnosis and Philosophical Criticism

This chapter will discuss further the role of rules in the context of Wittgensteinian philosophical criticism. A major strand in this discussion lies in the contrast between what I call the Diagnostic Conception and Hacker's conception of Wittgenstein's philosophy (that some commentators accuse of 'policing'). I will carve out similarities and differences between these conceptions by examining themes in the Diagnostic Conception of how to carry out grammatical investigations. The approach that the Diagnostic Conception proposes may look quite different from (and perhaps less schoolmasterly than) Hacker's, but the 'diagnosticians' help themselves to very much the same ideas. One crucial moral that will emerge as we progress is that the Diagnostic Conception collapses into an approach with 'policing' elements. Another one is that no plausible account of a grammatical investigation might be able to escape certain difficulties in identifying uncontroversial criteria to decide whether a philosophical problem has been dissolved. This, however, need not be a failure on the part of such an account. In fact, to think that there is some uncontentious fact of the matter to be found may itself be an expression of a philosophical confusion that fails to recognise that there is no firmer ground than the one that is our form of life.

All sides in the debates we have examined agree that Wittgenstein views philosophical problems and disagreements as the expression of linguistic confusion; such disagreements, according to Wittgenstein, are settled by clarifying the grammar of our words. In the light of our discussion of projection, however, the disagreements can be seen as disagreements over the acceptability of a certain projection of a word; correspondingly, the question of sense and nonsense of a certain expression can be recast as the question of whether a certain projection of a word succeeds or fails.

But the phenomenon of projection can seem to rob us of what one might call 'an evidence base' for philosophical criticism. For if we accept the 'projection' point, making a case for thinking some claim is nonsense can no longer be a simple matter of pointing to divergence from ordinary use. As Chapter 5's second half showed, there are cases of

dispute that illustrate vividly the issue of trying to settle philosophical disagreements by invoking those rules of grammar which govern the ordinary use of a given expression – a ‘policing’ mode of Wittgensteinian criticism. Part of the problem with philosophical uses of language is that what we accept as intelligible beyond ordinary use seems to depend on what we are happy to accept as projections – and it is on that people do not agree. That is why the Policing Conception seems unsustainable. But what is the alternative that the Diagnostic Conception offers?

Section 6.1 will identify different themes in the proposals of those who argue for understanding a grammatical investigation as a ‘diagnostic’ task. Here we will begin to work our way through several similarities and dissimilarities between the Diagnostic Conception and Hacker’s account. As we will see, when advocates of the Diagnostic Conception turn to the question of the role of the rules of grammar, they seem to be focusing on what is wrong with the Policing Conception; and they have misgivings about Hacker’s invocations of rules of grammar, but it is not clear that all of them are valid. *Prima facie* the Diagnostic Conception certainly looks rather different from Hacker’s mode of criticism; however, Section 6.2 will demonstrate that a closer examination of how the diagnostic readers think one carries out a Wittgensteinian criticism may not substantially differ from what Hacker does – but just in ‘bedside manner’ (Hacker 2003, 19). In particular, a crucial element in both the diagnostic and Hacker’s approach is identifying inconsistencies in someone’s uses of an expression. This raises doubts about the distinctiveness of the diagnostic approach. Section 6.3 will outline a central difficulty that a Wittgensteinian criticism might face in turning to the notion of ‘agreement within a form of life’ in order to demonstrate inconsistencies. If – as diagnostic readers are keen to emphasise – that agreement does not run deeper than the agreement in whether a word is used correctly, then the force of citing inconsistencies seems limited. For there might be disagreements about what counts as similar to what – and, hence, about what counts as inconsistent. In section 6.4, I will present what I call the ‘bite’ worry that emerges because ‘diagnosticians’ seem to deny that it can be proved to someone that they are confused. But this should not mislead us into thinking that one cannot justifiably think one might be right. A ‘patient’ can, of course, always reject the diagnosis put to them, yet there is an important distinction between what is accepted and what should be accepted. The final

section (6.5) will demonstrate that Hacker might seem in no better position with respect to the 'bite' worry; he has not been successful in convincing many of those who he thinks are confused. From this perspective, certain high expectations of what a grammatical investigation is able to achieve have perhaps to be buried. However, that is not to deny that the possibility of a Wittgensteinian philosophical criticism can still be retained. After all, the rules of grammar can help us identify deviations from ordinary usage that might imply inconsistencies or involve lack of sense; and, in addition, our (linguistic) practices – or broader forms of life – are a matter of fact that we have good reason to believe does have a bearing on, and restrict, what it makes sense to say. But carving out how exactly they do seems then to require a form of analysis or diagnosis that goes beyond just 'mapping rules of grammar as the bounds of sense'. This issue will be further looked at – albeit briefly – in the last chapter of this thesis.

6.1 Themes in the Diagnostic Conception

In the light of the difficulties that the Policing Conception faces (illustrated by the possibility of intelligible projective uses (Chapter 4) and the cases presented in Section 5.3), the Diagnostic Conception might seem to offer an attractive alternative of how one carries out Wittgensteinian philosophy. On the Diagnostic Conception, the question of settling philosophical disagreements over the use of a word becomes complex. This section will look at the kind of response the Diagnostic Conception suggests a Wittgensteinian can give to someone who is arguably speaking nonsense. I will identify different themes (or motifs) in the texts of those commentators who can be seen to hold the Diagnostic Conception. What these commentators have in common is the rejection of the Policing Conception which some see realised in moments of Hacker's mode of criticism: a main problem with cases of alleged philosophical confusion is that in the case of disagreement – when someone's words do not seem to have a determinate meaning but she insists that they do – the dialectical situation does not seem to be one where merely citing rules of grammar can settle the dispute.

In a discussion of 'how Wittgenstein criticizes a philosophical utterance as nonsense', Witherspoon writes that when Wittgenstein excludes a sentence as senseless, 'the

exclusion is not an absolute prohibition' (2000, 345). Similarly, Mulhall thinks that when Wittgenstein is confronted with an utterance that leaves us puzzled he is not articulating a 'universal grammatical prohibition' (2007, 123) as the Policing Conception suggests. But what is Wittgenstein doing instead? According to Mulhall, Wittgenstein

is noting that the basis or ground of his, and to some yet-to-be-determined extent our, investigation is an aspect of our (cultivated) natural responses or inclinations. And in so doing, he brings into focus the fact that, and the variety of ways in which, we all transfer our words (and the ideas they articulate [...]) from one context to others, or fail to. Our willingness to do so is not further justified (say, by appeals to pre-given grammatical rules), which is not to say that we implement it without right (PI §289); and it is subject to cultivation or seduction – in large part because it is interwoven with our capacity to imagine or re-imagine the world of our experience in ways that invite the application of words where previously we could see no foothold for them. (2007, 123)

Mulhall distinguishes here between 'cultivation' and 'seduction'. He points out that new usages make sense as our world changes or as more of it is revealed (cultivation), though they might also seem to make sense when they do not (seduction). Of course, the crucial and tricky question is which cases are which.

In what follows, I will identify different themes in the strategy that the Diagnostic Conception proposes to show the philosopher that they are confused and talking nonsense. As such, these themes naturally overlap to some degree. My primary concern will be what role the notion of 'describing rules of grammar' might play in treating a 'patient' in a Wittgensteinian therapy.

(i) *Marking the limits of our ordinary language-game.* Using the example of Wittgenstein's discussion of scepticism, Conant describes a Wittgensteinian response to the philosopher as follows:

A grammatical investigation is a convening of our criteria for the employment of a particular concept. But the way an appeal to criteria comes to bear on a philosophical problem [...] is not by showing the skeptic that he has 'violated the rules for the use of an expression' [Baker/Hacker 1985, 39], and therefore that there is something determinate that he wants to mean that he *cannot* mean by his words [...]. The point of the grammatical investigation is rather to show the skeptic that he is faced with a dilemma: either he stays within our language-games and his words express a doubt but not the sort of super-doubt that he is after [...], or he will be led to speak 'outside language-games', stripping his putative context of use of the concrete specificity [...] which permits us to mean and thus

say what we do on the occasions on which we ordinarily employ the word 'doubt' to express the concept of doubt. (1998, 249-50)¹⁴⁸

But specifying whether (and if so, why) someone is employing a word outside the language-game in which it is 'at home' (PI §116) seems to be a matter of recognising and describing the rules for its ordinary use. Conant continues the passage about speaking 'outside of language-games':

No rule of grammar is adduced to exhibit the ineradicable flaws in the skeptic's utterances. Rather the grammar of our various language-games is exhibited to the skeptic, in order to present him with an overview of the various possibilities of meaning his words that are available to him. He is to find, once presented with a perspicuous overview of the grammar, that either he is making perfect sense but failing to ask the question he wants, or that it remains unclear which of the many things he can mean by his words he wants to mean. Wittgenstein's aim, in assembling these reminders, is [...] to query the sense of [the skeptic's] claim: to force on him the question, given what his words can mean, what he means by them. The problem with his words thus lies neither in the words themselves nor in some inherent incompatibility between his words and a determinate context of use, but in his confused relation with respect to his words. The aim is to offer a perspicuous representation of the various things he might mean by his words in order to show him that, in wanting to occupy more than one of the available alternatives at once and yet none in particular at a time, he is possessed of an incoherent desire with respect to his words. (250)

According to Conant, the role of rules of grammar is not a policing one, it is not to 'exhibit the ineradicable flaws' in a speaker's utterance; instead, describing these rules is part of exhibiting 'the grammar of various language-games' to the speaker – Conant identifies such an exhibition with giving a 'perspicuous overview' (or 'surveyable representation') of the grammar of a word (cf. PI §122). What he says about the aim of such an overview – demonstrating that a speaker 'want[s] to occupy more than one of the various things he might mean by his words' – reiterates the main idea of the 'equivocation' reading set out in Section 5.2.2, namely that a certain kind of confusion rests upon conflating two (or potentially more) particular senses of an expression.

Conant's suggestion is that there is nothing that a speaker wants to say with his words and fails to do. The task of the diagnostic Wittgensteinian is to attempt to establish what

¹⁴⁸ We find a similar characterisation of the idea of 'marking the limits of our ordinary language-game' in Witherspoon: '[T]he expressions that are philosophers' stock-in-trade continually invite confusion. For various reasons, we are inclined to think that we have determined a meaning for them, when really we haven't. They are forms of words that have been dissociated from a language-game.' (2000, 345)

the speaker might mean by presenting the speaker with an overview of the things his words *can* mean. But crucially, what the speaker might and can mean by his words depends to a significant degree on rules of grammar. These might not be a tool for identifying ‘ineradicable flaws’, yet they may help us detect a speaker’s ‘confused relation with respect to his words’, i.e. their grammar. As the next section will indicate, Conant’s proposed mode of criticism resembles that presented by Hacker in significant ways.

(ii) ‘*All the whirl of organism*’. Another idea that advocates of the Diagnostic Conception might turn to as pointing to an alternative to the Policing Conception is that of ‘forms of life’ as ‘all the whirl of organism’, i.e. our ‘sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humour and of significance and of fulfilment’, etc. (Cavell 2002, 48; see Section 3.8). The significance of rules in Cavell’s ‘whirl of organism’ picture is clearly diminished. Following Cavell, one could argue that whether a projection is acceptable is in part a matter of seeing, or showing, what the *point* is of using the word in the new context. In reflecting on why they think the new context invites or allows the projection the speaker might realise that they failed to note that their use of an expression does not sit well not only with the familiar conceptual web but with what matters to us in our form of life.¹⁴⁹ This failure would be a kind of confusion – a misunderstanding of what they are trying to do with their words: a loss of an ‘overarching sense’ of where what they are saying fits within the rest of what they and we are doing.¹⁵⁰

However, for the aspects that are encapsulated in this idea of ‘forms of life’ as ‘all the whirl of organism’ to have some critical bearing on philosophical problems it seems that we do not only have to assign a significant role to rules (though whether a word is used in a way that really leads to nonsense is a question that might require us to consider and attend to other factors than rules such as the contextual surroundings, the purpose of using them and the speaker’s explanation of what they want to mean by their words), *but* the role for rules in that may turn out to be close to the one that Hacker envisages. No

¹⁴⁹ Another, highly interesting (and difficult) question that arises here: What *should* matter to us in our form of life? Here is not the place, however, to discuss what might be seen as the ethical dimension of Wittgenstein’s considerations; it is far beyond the scope of this thesis. Whether Wittgenstein’s later philosophy might hold some answers, or at least ideas, relevant to that question (and how they might look) has recently received increased attention (see e.g. De Mesel/Kuusela 2019).

¹⁵⁰ This idea of ‘a loss of an overarching sense’ is borrowed from McManus’s discussion of a Heideggerian criticism of behaviouristic psychology (2012, 159-62).

doubt the rules of grammar matter to us in the sense that they are, certainly to some extent, expressions and manifestations of our interests, desires, biological constitution, etc.¹⁵¹ And Mulhall acknowledges that the role of rules is that they ‘offer[] us guidance, and determine[] what kinds of consideration will be pertinent to the question [of whether something falls under a given concept, i.e. can count as that particular thing]’ (2002, 314). But it would seem that this amounts to a mode of criticism that aims to bring to light confusions through using rules in much the same way as Hacker does.

(iii) *Satisfying the desires of the patient.* Mulhall argues that, given that the rules of grammar do not constitute a ‘universal prohibition’, ‘it would never be advisable to say that nothing could count as a private language, or a private definition, or an undertaking or promise or gift to oneself’ (2007, 123). Mulhall suggests that whether a given case is a ‘failure of meaning’ rather depends on, or can be assessed through asking, the question

whether, in making out any given way in which phenomena might so count [as e.g. a map in the brain; F.H.], we have satisfied the desires or the imaginations of those (including ourselves) who have been inclined to invoke them as self-evidently meaningful. (2007, 123)

We find a related idea that one might call ‘getting the patient to willingly confess’ in a remark of Wittgenstein’s in the *Big Typescript*:

One of the most important tasks is to express all false thought processes so true to character that the reader says, “Yes, that’s exactly the way I meant it”. To make a tracing of the physiognomy of every error. Indeed, we can only prove that someone made a mistake if he (really) acknowledges this expression as the correct expression of his feeling. For only if he acknowledges it as such, *is* it the correct expression. (Psychoanalysis.) (BT 410)¹⁵²

This idea of ‘satisfying the patient’s desires’ by finding the ‘correct’ expression that gets him to willingly confess might not seem to assign an important role to rules of grammar. In fact, this idea seems to focus exclusively on what the patient accepts as the right diagnosis – a rather implausible view, as I will argue. Section 6.4 will return to this theme of tailoring philosophical criticism to the needs of the patient and making the ‘correctness’ of a criticism dependent on the patient’s acceptance. It will raise another crucial question

¹⁵¹ Section 7.1 will briefly touch again on the relation of rules to those ‘kinds of consideration’ that might be relevant here, and on the sense in which rules can be seen to express/manifest interests, desires and suchlike.

¹⁵² Conant (2001, 61) quotes this passage favourably in support of his view that ‘Wittgenstein’s method only permits the verdict that sense has not been spoken to be passed by the one who speaks’. I will criticise this view in Section 6.4.

that is closely linked to the role of rules and the problem of persuasion that Section 5.3 identified: whether a Wittgensteinian critic is – in the face of the non-acceptance of their criticism – still entitled to think that they are right.

(iv) *Demonstrating inconsistencies.* Mulhall lists potentially important factors in a dispute between a speaker and a critic about a particular (projective) use of an expression; what might be said to justify or criticise the use will depend on

the disputants' knowledge of the new context for the word, their capacity to give explicit articulation to their implicit grasp of the word's criteria, the depth and range of their imaginations, their willingness to accommodate change in exchange for insight, their sense of a given concept's grammatical center of gravity, and so on. (2014, 306)

That is to say, consistency is a crucial criterion of sense: making sense is a matter of being consistent in applying a concept. Similarly, Witherspoon writes:

[W]hen Wittgenstein is confronted with an utterance that has no clearly discernible place in a language-game, he does not assume that he can parse the utterance; rather, he invites the speaker to explain how she is using her words, to connect them with other elements of the language-game in a way that displays their meaningfulness. Only if the speaker is unable to do this in a coherent way does Wittgenstein conclude that her utterance is nonsense. [...] When Wittgenstein criticizes an utterance as nonsensical, he aims to expose, not a defect in the words themselves, but a confusion in the speaker's relation to her words – a confusion that is manifested in the speaker's failure to specify a meaning for them. (2000, 345)

Just like Mulhall above, Witherspoon identifies here consistency (or coherency) as an essential criterion by which we can decide whether a given proposition lacks sense; a speaker is to be invited to show the meaningfulness of their words by explaining how they relate to other uses and other words;¹⁵³ and he writes that 'if the speaker is unable to do this in a coherent way [we can] conclude that her utterance is nonsense'. Witherspoon suggests that we view a speaker's confusion about certain words as manifested in 'the speaker's failure to specify a meaning for them'.

Similarly, Conant argues that a 'failure of meaning' is

¹⁵³ This seems to be what Churchland is doing in the case discussed in Section 5.3.2. Here a crucial question arises: what do the diagnostic readers think of such a case? Unfortunately, these readers have not said (as far as I am aware) much about any such concrete cases. Section 6.5 raises doubts about whether they would have anything convincing to say when someone cannot be brought to see that they are talking nonsense. See also Section 7.2 that suggests that herein lies a significant limitation of the 'meta' debate.

to be traced [...] to a failure on the part of the speaker to project [a linguistic] string into a new context which admits of a stable and coherent reading – in a fashion which admits of our being able to perceive in the sentence, when we view it against the background of its circumstances of use, a coherent physiognomy of meaning. (248-9)

Now the problem is, of course, that it might not be easy to show in a given case whether what we have before us is such a failure – i.e. whether it is a case in which ‘language is like an engine idling’ (PI §132), a case in which ‘language goes on holiday’ (PI §38). But it cannot be denied that an indispensable way in which this can be done is through ‘exhibit[ing]’ ‘the grammar of our various language-games’ and asking the speaker to ‘specify a meaning’ for their words in relation to the grammar of those various language-games. And an important element of this practice is the clarification of the use of a word by giving a surveyable representation of its grammar in order to demonstrate inconsistencies. As we progress in examining the ‘diagnostic’ proposals further, we will see that in the use of rules of grammar that they are making they are effectively doing what Hacker does.

6.2 Dissent as Differences in ‘Bedside Manner’?

This section will explore further some of the different ideas in the Diagnostic Conception that the previous section identified.¹⁵⁴ We have already seen that rules feature prominently (though not always explicitly) in the Diagnostic Conception. More specifically, the theme of *(iv) demonstrating inconsistencies* – a crucial element of the diagnostic practice that also seems to be at work in *(i)* and *(ii)* – seems to employ rules in order to force on someone ‘the question, given what his words can mean, what he means by them’ (Conant, quoted above). And this seems to imply that if that question cannot be satisfactorily answered, we can conclude that his words lack sense and we are justified in telling him that he is talking nonsense.

¹⁵⁴ There are, of course, other ideas at work in the work of those who would seem to advocate a diagnostic conception. For example, Mulhall suggests that we deal with philosophical confusion by ‘[e]xploding the fantasy from within’, he describes this practice as ‘imaginatively inhabiting the [...] interlocutor’s perspective, a diagnostic task which essentially involves a moment of willingness to take nonsense for sense – to articulate the interlocutor’s fantasy from the inside, and thus to participate in what is latently nonsensical with a view to allowing its nonsensicality to become patent’ (2007, 82).

This raises the question: Do the ideas in the Diagnostic Conception provide us with a strategy that differs in a substantial way from what a commentator like Hacker does? Is what appears to be a fundamental disagreement just a difference in ‘bedside manner’ (Hacker 2003, 19)¹⁵⁵ between diagnostic and policing ‘therapists’? Some doctors are very understanding, others blunt. Indeed, a closer inspection of how the diagnostic strategy is characterised reveals that its proponents entertain very much the same ideas as Hacker. I aim to show in this section that, given what they say about the ways to handle philosophical claims, the diagnostic readers do, in fact, propose a ‘therapy’ that does not really differ from Hacker’s approach.¹⁵⁶

The Diagnostic Conception suggests we move away from a picture of rules of grammar according to which these rules have a certain authority to which we can straightforwardly appeal in resolving philosophical problems; instead, we are left with a picture that emphasises the significance of various other factors alongside rules. For example, through bringing in ‘whirl of organism’ factors such as interests, purposes and our biological constitution, thereby registering the fact that the rules are no independent, self-standing authority, we seem to move away from Hacker’s understanding of ‘rules of grammar’ that sees a grammatical investigation as consisting primarily in tabulating rules.¹⁵⁷ By contrast, if we acknowledge the ‘messy’ basis of deciding questions of sense

¹⁵⁵ Hacker uses this expression to describe the relation of Wittgenstein’s discussion to Carnap’s discussion of Heidegger’s proposition ‘The nothing noths’. Hacker argues that both Carnap and Wittgenstein think this proposition is nonsense and that ‘[t]he difference between Carnap and Wittgenstein on this issue lies largely in the bedside manner’ (2003, 19).

¹⁵⁶ We will later see that the reason why the various diagnostic moves presuppose that there are rules to be made use of in a similar way to how Hacker makes use of them is that if they do not, they fall short of giving us much sense of a grammatical investigation as a *critical* tool (Section 6.4 will discuss this as the ‘bite’ worry).

¹⁵⁷ See also Section 1.5. In the debate about Wittgenstein’s notion of a ‘surveyable representation’ (PI §122; cf. Z §273), Hacker’s proposes a particular ‘geographical’ interpretation of ‘grammar’ and ‘surveyable representation’; he proposes that the notion of ‘surveyable representation’ is to be construed as the idea of ‘tabulating the grammar of expressions in a surveyable manner’ (Baker/Hacker 2005, 333). For him, grammar consists of a network or map of concepts and, importantly, all rules of grammar can be tabulated (Baker/Hacker 2009, 66). But this assimilation of presenting sketches of something like ‘conceptual maps’ to tabulating rules seems problematic. ‘Surveyable representations’ are certainly meant to make grammar perspicuous by examining how we operate with words: inasmuch as Wittgenstein explores certain concepts by pointing our attention to the use and functioning of (inter-)related words (e.g. ‘understanding’; PI §150), he can be said to depict more or less *übersichtliche* snippets of conceptual networks and contribute to something like conceptual geography. But Wittgenstein’s emphasis on the interwovenness of language use with other activities (see Chapter 3) throws doubt on the claim that such descriptions are tabulations or could always be given in a tabulated form. Note also that there is no textual evidence that Wittgenstein ever actually speaks of any such ‘tabulations’; rather, he writes that ‘[a] surveyable representation produces precisely that kind of

and nonsense suggested by the Diagnostic Conception, the nature of the conversation seems to be changing. But while the proposals of the Diagnostic Conception *look* different from Hacker's approach, there is reason to think that they do not fundamentally differ from it. Recall that the main worry about Hacker's conception is that it presupposes that there are rules that one can cite that should show the philosopher that they are confused. The previous section's list of themes, however, already alluded to a similar role of rules in the Diagnostic Conception.

In particular, Conant's suggestion of *(i) marking the limits of our ordinary language-game* confirms the impression of there just being differences in bedside manner between the diagnostic strategy and Hacker's approach. Conant proposes that a 'perspicuous overview' of the grammar of a word presents a speaker with what their words can mean, whereby such an overview may demonstrate the speaker that 'he is possessed of an incoherent desire with respect to his words' (Conant 1998, 250). It might seem that this is not a matter of rules but rather a case of a self-misunderstanding, or so a diagnostic reader might argue. Instead of charging the philosophers, who are putatively speaking nonsense, with breaking the rules of grammar, he could argue that these philosophers do not know what they are doing – their projections are unacceptable because the projections fail to express what they are meant to express. Criticising a speaker's use of words in this way would be the attempt to bring the speaker to see that they do not *want* to say what they are saying. If successful, this kind of criticism would make the speaker see that the point that an expression normally serves evaporates in the context in question. But this, I think, is also a matter of rules, where rules play effectively the same role as they do in Hacker's approach. (Which is not to deny that it may be plausible to claim that philosophers suffer from a certain kind of self-misunderstanding; however, this self-misunderstanding seems to involve a misunderstanding of the grammar of the relevant expressions.)

All sides in the debate considered so far agree that, when confused or unclear about some expressions, it can often prove helpful to make their use clear by a 'surveyable

understanding which consists in "seeing connections". Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate links*' (PI §122). Crucially, those links and connections may include the broader practical surroundings within which a certain expression is embedded and normally used. For another criticism of Hacker's interpretation of 'perspicuous/surveyable representations' see Engelmann 2011, 82-7.

representation' of their use (PI §122). Although Wittgenstein's concept of a language-game does point to a variety of insights (as I argued in Chapter 3), one crucial insight is that language-games essentially involve rules. Diagnostic readers make use of the notion of rules (albeit sometimes only implicitly) to mark the limits of our ordinary language-game in a manner similar to Hacker's, as a passage from Cavell indicates where he sketches a basis on which we could decide whether the projection of a concept is acceptable:

[Wittgensteinian] criteria [i.e. rules] do not relate a name to an object, but, we might say, various concepts to the concept of that object. Here the test of your possession of a concept [...] would be your ability to use the concept in conjunction with other concepts, your knowledge of which concepts are relevant to the one in question and which are not; your knowledge of how various relevant concepts, used in conjunction with the concepts of different kinds of objects, require different kinds of contexts for their competent employment. (1979, 73)

For example, knowing what depression is depends partly on what counts as having depression, what counts as alleviating depression, etc.¹⁵⁸ This knowledge might be seen as inseparable from a certain familiarity with (ii) '*all the whirl of organism*' in which a given concept has its point and place. But the task of marking the limits of our ordinary language-game by presenting its grammar is clearly also a matter of adducing rules in order to show that someone's deviation from common usage might, or does in fact, produce nonsense.

I have already mentioned above that (iv) *demonstrating inconsistencies* is perhaps the most important theme in the Diagnostic Conception. The idea is that if a speaker is deviating from common usage, they have to show that their use of words is consistent with other uses of these words and the usage of other words. If a speaker fails to give a consistent or coherent explanation, they fail to specify a meaning for their words – and we can conclude that their utterance is nonsense.

We also find this idea clearly articulated in a passage from Mulhall that explicitly discusses projective uses of a word:

[W]hen the acceptability [...] of a new projection of a given word is in question, our final judgment will turn upon the speaker's capacity to show that and how the new context into which he has projected it either invites or can be seen to allow that projection by inviting

¹⁵⁸ Mulhall (2014, 305) uses the concept of toothache as an example to make the same point.

or allowing (at least some modified form of) the projection of those other words to which its criteria relate it and which are accommodated in familiar contexts of the word's use. (2014, 305)

Mulhall proposes here that the speaker who is projecting a word must be able to tell us a story about why and how the projection should be accepted. This leaves open the possibility of cases of linguistic creativity and projection. But the idea that the test of the possession of a concept consists in the capacity to 'us[e] a concept in conjunction with other concepts' and to demonstrate knowledge of a word's grammar as the 'power to combine with other words' (Cavell, quoted above) shows that the diagnostic readers' suggested practice entertains the same idea that is central to (Baker and) Hacker's practice: when the use of words deviates from the rules by their ordinary use is governed, the Wittgensteinian's task consists in 'pointing out where they differ from received rules and why they determine a different *sense* for these words' (Baker/Hacker 2009, 57).¹⁵⁹

Despite differences in 'bedside manner', the 'diagnostician's' practice seems then effectively the same as Hacker's. Both proceed on the assumption that it is the grammar of the expressions involved that might render a given utterance senseless; and, unless the speaker can specify a meaning for their words in a consistent way, both aim to expose an inconsistency (or equivocation or lack of sense).¹⁶⁰

The difference in bedside manner comes out clearly in Mulhall's suggestion that what is needed in a discussion with someone who is speaking nonsense is not a 'corrective reminder' (a move associated with Hacker's philosophical practice) but a 're-orientation' of the interlocutor's sense of what their words might mean (Mulhall 2007, 60). But such a 're-orientation' would have to be given on the grounds of a charge of inconsistency, equivocation or lack of meaning – and it would be given with a view to persuading and correcting the interlocutor.

¹⁵⁹ Note that this is compatible with what Witherspoon says about deviations from common usage: 'nothing can stop someone from assigning a sense to the form of words in question, and so long as everyone is clear about this assignment, the words can be meaningfully used without confusion' (2000, 345).

¹⁶⁰ Of course, a crucial question that arises here is whether it should count as a 'policing' at all when Hacker brings to light inconsistencies, equivocations or a lack of sense. One may indeed have doubts about the accuracy of labelling him a 'policer'. Section 7.2 will briefly return to this and suggest that there are certain tensions between his theory and practice.

Finally in this section, I will briefly note that Chapter 5's discussion of philosophical nonsense supports that the dissent between Hacker and his opponents might come down to just a difference in 'bedside manner'. The discussion of the 'intelligibility' of philosophical nonsense and the 'equivocation' interpretation showed us that the rules of grammar can help us establish whether (and if so, how) the given use of a word involves conflating two (or more) patterns of usage and thus leads to nonsense. There I also argued that certain overlaps between 'resolute' and 'non-resolute' readings throw doubt on how distinct resolute readings really are. If Chapter 5's analysis of the 'austerity' conception of nonsense is right, i.e. if there is nothing left of the distinctiveness that 'resolute' readings claim for themselves because it is the 'equivocation' interpretation that – to use Witherspoon's words – 'does the heavy lifting' (2000, 318), then those who advocate a 'resolute' reading of the later Wittgenstein, most of whom can be seen as espousing the Diagnostic Conception, seem to want to use rules of grammar to determine and restrict what it makes sense to say in a way that is hard to distinguish from Hacker's approach, except perhaps in its 'bedside manner'.

I will later argue (in Section 6.5) that, if the Diagnostic Conception does not make use of rules in its philosophical practice in such a way that is at least close to Hacker's, it runs the risk of losing the sense in which a grammatical investigation can be a *critical* tool. There I will also discuss theme (iii) – the motif of *satisfying desires of the patient* and making the 'correctness' of a criticism dependent on the patient's acknowledgment – and argue that it cannot provide us with a plausible account of philosophical criticism.

6.3 Agreement and Projections

The previous sections showed that an important element of a Wittgensteinian philosophical practice upon which the Diagnostic Conception agrees with Hacker is the demonstration of inconsistencies. But this approach that stresses the demonstration of inconsistencies runs into a problem that 'diagnosticians' have precisely identified. In this section, I will show how the notion of 'agreement within a form of life' brings to light a central difficulty for philosophical criticism. This difficulty results from a certain 'powerlessness' of rules in responses to cases of controversy over a given philosophical

use of a word. An implication of this section's discussion is that an ambitious role for agreement in settling questions of sense and nonsense seems unavailable.

As Section 4.4 showed, an important moral from the discussion of projection and Cavell's 'whirl of organism' picture (first introduced in Section 3.8) is that we lack a certain straightforward account of deciding when someone is misusing a word and speaking nonsense. Our judgement of whether someone is misusing a word depends at least in part on the complex 'whirl', on various things which together make up our form of life. Given this complexity, any merely rule-based view of deciding questions of sense and nonsense is an oversimplification, and at least certain accounts of how rules might help us decide such questions seem flawed.

In the passage from Cavell that presents the 'whirl of organism' picture the notion of projection is also linked to that of agreement.¹⁶¹ Cavell identifies 'all the whirl of organism' – our form of life – as the foundation of our practices that is characterised by a fundamental agreement (cf. PI §241-2). Cavell also describes this agreement as a 'mutual attunement':

[This idea of mutual attunement] is meant to question whether a philosophical explanation is needed, or wanted, for the fact of agreement in the language human beings use together, an explanation, say, in terms of meanings or conventions or basic terms or propositions which are to provide the foundation of our agreements. For nothing is deeper than the fact, or the extent, of agreement itself. (1979, 32)

That is to say, our agreement in the rules for the use of a word is not meant to 'ground' or give a 'foundation' to our agreement in judgement. Nor can we appeal to our agreement in the rules for the use of a word to give an ultimate basis of agreement in the case of disagreeing in judgement. In fact, both kinds of agreement are intertwined because, as Mulhall points out, to agree in the rules for the use of a given word 'just is to agree in how we apply the word in the context of specific judgements' (2003, 91); correspondingly, when we find ourselves disagreeing in 'a specific judgement employing that word, we thereby show that, to that extent, we disagree in our criteria [rules]' (91). So we face the following difficulty: If we disagree in our judgements of whether a word is being misused, it cannot be assumed that we can turn to our agreement in definitions, i.e. the rules for the use of

¹⁶¹ This link to 'agreement' is, in turn, linked to the main target of Cavell's discussion of Wittgenstein's vision of language: a kind of philosophical foundationalism whose rejection might give us some terrifying feeling of 'vertigo', as McDowell puts it (2000, 42; see Section 3.8).

words, to resolve the conflict, because our disagreeing on our judgements may mean that we disagree on just those definitions and whether (and if so, to what extent) they can be applied in, or extended to, a given new context.

This does not necessarily imply that there is no – or cannot be a – point from which one can criticise other people’s uses of a word (quite how such a criticism might still be possible is a question that runs through the later chapters of this thesis). But it does appear to show that we cannot simply appeal to rules as an independent source of authority to criticise a philosopher’s divergent application of a word; just recalling to someone the ‘agreed’ rules might not help because that agreement does not run deeper than our agreement in whether a word is used correctly. For Mulhall, this means that, when criticising others in cases of disagreement, in the absence of a standard independent from agreement on a particular occasion, we have to accept a certain ‘powerlessness’ of appeals to rules.

Mulhall explains this ‘powerlessness’ by citing a passage in Cavell which comments on Wittgenstein’s well-known example of the deviant pupil who cannot be brought to see that the development of the number series ‘+ 2’ beyond 1000 is ‘1002, 1004, 1006, 1008, etc.’ (cf. PI §185):

Our ability to communicate with him depends upon his ‘natural understanding’, his ‘natural reaction’, to our directions and our gestures. It depends upon our mutual attunement in judgements. [...] [W]hen our attunements are dissonant, I cannot get below them to firmer ground. [...] For not only does he not receive me, because his natural reactions are not mine; but my own understanding is found to go no further than my own natural reactions bear it. I am thrown back upon myself: I as it were turn my palms outward, as if to exhibit the kind of creature I am, and declare my ground occupied, only mine, ceding yours. (Cavell 1979, 115)

Mulhall takes this passage to claim a certain ‘inseparability’ of our natural reactions from our attunement in criteria (as well as in definitions and in judgements). The ‘inseparability’ of what we find natural and normal from our agreement in criteria for correct application shows that in the case of ‘dissonance’ – when we find ourselves disagreeing on whether a word is used correctly, a projection acceptable –

we have nothing to which to appeal, no [independent] source of authority or guidance in determining how to respond to that dissonance – whether to acknowledge a difference, or withdraw a set of concepts, or see my own reactions as peculiar – except ourselves.

Mulhall continues:

It follows that citing criteria cannot constitute an objective resolution to a genuine disharmony in judgements [...]; for if our agreement in criteria runs no further and no deeper than our agreements in judgments and natural reactions, then citing criteria can never impersonally demonstrate the deviance of one party to the disagreement. It rather amounts to an invitation to reconsider that disagreement and what is truly at stake in it, to ask ourselves whether we wish to take a stand upon it and what stand we wish to take. (2003, 93)¹⁶²

Mulhall notes that this view shows ‘the power (and hence the powerlessness) of appeals to criteria and grammar’ (2003, 93).

But crucially, he does not think that we should therefore scrap the concepts of rules (criteria) and grammar. He argues that the concept of a rule does not necessarily imply ‘exactly the kind of impersonal authority [...] that Cavell’s account wishes to deny’; Cavell is better understood instead as ‘emphasising Wittgenstein’s demystification of the impersonal authority of normativity’ (2003, 93)¹⁶³. In other words, linguistic normativity might still be given expression in terms of rules, but we must not be misled by this into thinking that philosophical disputes can be settled by appealing to some impersonal authority similar to a book of rules giving the law for any and all possible situations.¹⁶⁴

Importantly, given their concern with ‘similarities’ (as presented Chapter 4’s discussion of projection), diagnostic readers confront, and point us to, the following problem. When we claim that something is inconsistent or incoherent, we are denying that there is a consistency or coherence, and that is a matter of a matching or similarity. But since diagnostic readers emphasise the continuities between established and novel uses of

¹⁶² I will return to, and criticise, the idea of providing an ‘invitation to reconsider [a] disagreement’ in Sections 6.4 and 6.5.

¹⁶³ Perhaps this is the most important point to be taken from the insight into the ‘groundlessness’ of our practices that the ‘whirl of organism’ picture illustrates vividly. A main theme that will run through the remaining sections of this thesis is to understand better the kind of impersonal authority of normativity there is and how it might feature in Wittgensteinian critical practice.

¹⁶⁴ We are easily misled into this by a certain aspect of the game comparison on which the Simple View (set out in Chapter 1) focuses: if one moves the bishop in a straight line on a chess board, the piece is misused or one is playing a different game. Whereas, as we have seen, we extend our uses of words constantly by projecting them into new contexts. The Policing Conception of Wittgenstein’s philosophy (seemingly exemplified by some aspects of Hacker’s philosophical practice as presented in Section 5.3) might therefore be seen to suffer from sliding into a misconception of what the talk of the rule-governedness of language amounts to; it might reiterate issues about the view that language is rule-bound and about the view that grammar reflects some ‘*metaphysical reality*’.

a word, they should be concerned about incorporating the demonstration of inconsistencies in their practice; for it barely needs saying but there are disagreements about what is inconsistent. For example, consider again the previous chapter's controversy about the sentence 'There are maps in the brain'. Bennett and Hacker argue that Churchland's use of 'maps' in this sentence is inconsistent with the word's ordinary meaning that Churchland also acknowledges.¹⁶⁵ No one denies that there are differences in Churchland's use of the word. But are these differences inconsistencies? Churchland maintains not and stresses the similarities. His response to the charge of inconsistency exemplifies an important element in the Diagnostic Conception. But it also illustrates why proponents of the Diagnostic Conception should be concerned about the persuasive and justificatory power of citing inconsistencies, a notion to which some of them at least turn.

One might indeed think that, given the projectability of words, we could settle questions of use and misuse by looking at just how extensive the similarities are between a candidate use and some core of (established) uses. But this is the crux: what we see *as* similarities is precisely the kind of issue that we are trying to settle with use/misuse judgements! We cannot settle questions of use and misuse by appealing to what we see as similarities, because it is precisely on *what we see as similarities* that we agree or disagree. One might think we could simply appeal to an agreement in 'form of life', which Wittgenstein describes as an agreement in definitions *and* judgements (cf. PI §242); but, as I have suggest, this agreement just does not run deeper than our agreement in whether a word is used correctly; to repeat Cavell's words, 'when our attunements are dissonant, I cannot get below them to firmer ground' (1979, 115).

I have argued that the diagnostic strategy involves an element that is equally essential to Hacker's approach: demonstrating inconsistencies in someone's use of words. But we have also seen that, in light of the considerations about similarities that Chapter 4 set out, the proponents of the Diagnostic Conception face difficulties in resorting to inconsistencies. This would seem to leave us with the option of saying that all a

¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, Churchland explicitly accepts coherency/consistency as an essential criterion of sense. He suggests that a way to establish whether a given expression that breaks with ordinary usage is nonsense is to confront the speaker with 'the task of giving coherent and determinate meaning to the [relevant] terms' (2005, 474).

Wittgensteinian can do is *invite the other person to agree*; a view that does not seem to be able to give us much sense of a grammatical investigation as a significant critical tool; a view that seems rather ‘toothless’. Indeed, diagnosis is not proof. And if it is implicit within the Diagnostic Conception that one cannot prove to someone that they are confused,¹⁶⁶ then its philosophical practice seems to lack ‘bite’.

6.4 The ‘Bite’ Worry

This section will address what I call the ‘bite’ worry: if we do not employ rules of grammar in a ‘policing’ way, we might seem to lose a clear sense of how Wittgensteinian philosophy can be a tool for criticising others by showing them that they are confused. It seems that for a grammatical investigation to be a form of *critical* philosophical practice, i.e. to have ‘bite’, it better defend a notion of the correct description of language use that is independent of the ‘patient’s’ acceptance of such a description.

The following passage from Mulhall illustrates the ‘bite’ worry:

If [...] a grammatical articulation just is (as [PI] §247 has it) a way of clarifying how an expression is used, then one cannot insist that the other accept that clarification, any more than one can insist that she use that expression in the way I use it – she can, after all, use it any way she wishes, and she is (she must, logically or grammatically, be) in at least as good a position as I am to make a claim about how ‘we’ use it. One can only invite her to bethink herself, and see whether or not she does speak as I (say that we) do – whether or not she can accept the claim to community that is implicit in my saying to her ‘that is how we use it [isn’t it?]. [...] [G]rammatical reminders do not tap into a given, impersonal source of authority, but rather articulate a way of going on with our words that the other is invited to acknowledge but is always free to deny. (2007, 66)

Mulhall seems to argue that all we can do is describe the rules and language-games to present the speaker with the meanings that are available to them; we can invite them to explain their use of words, to specify a meaning for the words they are using, to ‘bethink’ themselves; but all we can do is just that. This appears to remove the sting of Wittgenstein’s critical philosophy. Not only bashing other philosophers for talking

¹⁶⁶ Relatedly, if that is correct, then the question arises (which seems to exacerbate the problem): Can the ‘diagnostician’ prove it to themselves?

nonsense is then out of place; the whole diagnostic strategy might then appear to be quite 'toothless'.

To see this, recall the diagnostic theme of (iii) *satisfying the desires of the patient*. When applied, this idea essentially makes the 'correctness' of therapeutic measures dependent on the patient's acceptance. Suppose we do just offer a diagnosis and the 'patient' says: 'No, that's not what's happening.' For example, think of the dispute between Churchland and Bennett/Hacker that Section 5.3.2 presented. Churchland does seem satisfied with how neuroscientists explain why it makes sense to say things such as 'There are maps in the brain'. Indeed, we can very well imagine that Churchland sees support for his position in Witherspoon's description of the kind of conversation between a 'scientist-philosopher' and Hacker: Churchland can be seen as 'someone who takes himself to have compelling reasons for his utterance', 'who makes a problematic utterance [and] insists on it' (Witherspoon 2000, 332; see Section 5.3.1). The disputants occupy precisely those positions that Witherspoon describes: While Baker and Hacker 'proceed as though all who look will immediately recognize that "it makes no *sense* to say ["There are maps in the brain"]"', Churchland is not moved by this – 'he knows [...] already that the utterance is problematic by the lights of ordinary usage' (Witherspoon 2000, 332). What some are inclined to invoke as 'self-evidently meaningful' (Mulhall 2007, 123) is what others are inclined to invoke as self-evidently nonsensical. Indeed, Churchland might not be more responsive to a 'diagnosis'. Would it make a difference to him not being told that he is misusing language but being told (more therapeutically): 'Can't you see what's going on here?' I suspect not.

It might seem that the only option left is to satisfy the patient's desires by 'inviting him to agree' and leave it to him to decide whether a certain depiction of the situation does justice to his imaginations. We find this odd view articulated in the above-quoted *Big Typescript* passage (see Section 6.1) in which Wittgenstein likens his method to psychoanalysis and writes: 'we can only prove that someone made a mistake if he (really) acknowledges this expression as the correct expression of his feeling. For only if he acknowledges it as such, *is* it the correct expression' (BT 410). Conant takes up this analogy to psychoanalysis: 'Wittgenstein's method only permits the verdict that sense has not been

spoken to be passed by the one who speaks' (2001, 61).¹⁶⁷ This amounts to the view that all convictions depend on confessions. But given that people are not infallible, it would seem implausible to simply back off and say 'Oh, fair enough!' if they do not accept the diagnosis. For they might be wrong. So it should still be possible for a Wittgensteinian to justifiably feel entitled to conclude that their description is right, even if the other person does not accept it. Otherwise the method would collapse into some perverse modesty.

Now, no one in the debate thinks that one is *guaranteed* to get agreement from the 'patient'. For instance, Hacker writes that 'not all grammatical propositions are immediately obvious', but he nevertheless maintains that through a step-by-step clarification of grammar they can be shown to be obvious, which might be unsuccessful: 'It presupposes that one can always get people to see what is obvious – and that is obviously untrue' (Hacker 2012, 14).¹⁶⁸ Similarly, Witherspoon is aware that the 'diagnostic' practice might turn out to be unsuccessful: '*ideally*, the speaker will reach the same conclusion in the same way and will retract or modify her words accordingly' (2000, 345; my emphasis).¹⁶⁹

There is a difference between what someone *should* accept and what they *do* accept. We have seen that the success of a Wittgensteinian criticism (i.e. the removal of confusion) might depend on whether a given diagnosis is accepted or rejected. However, we must not overlook that a purely therapeutic criterion is not enough (see also Section 3.2); the

¹⁶⁷ Elements of this can also be found and are endorsed in Kuusela's discussion of the idea of 'The (Alleged) Necessity of Accepting Philosophical Statements' (2008, sec. 6.3).

¹⁶⁸ Here we see again that the appeal to the supposedly obvious may lack any persuasive power, as illustrated by the cases that Section 5.3 presented. We also begin to see that there might be a serious worry that Wittgenstein's proposed philosophical practice could be rather limited in achieving the objective of removing confusions.

¹⁶⁹ One might think that a substantial difference between Hacker and the 'diagnosticians' is that Hacker thinks that there is a matter of fact here, even if some people do not see it, whereas the diagnostic readers could be seen as denying that because of, for example, their conviction that there is nothing deeper than our agreement and here we have disagreement (but as Section 6.3 showed, this conviction threatens the idea of demonstrating inconsistencies). Another way to put this is that Hacker acknowledges that there is an epistemic issue here about getting (other people) to see *how the land lies*, whereas the diagnostic people worry about whether there is some matter of fact here *to see*. But importantly, much of the way they talk about their therapeutic work still seems to imply that there is. For example, Conant writes in what I think can be regarded as an exemplary characterisation of a 'diagnostic' Wittgenstein (see Section 1.5 for a full quote of this passage) that an 'ulterior elucidatory aim' of Wittgenstein's practice is that 'of *enabling us* to see something about ourselves: that sometimes we mean nothing when we think we mean something' (1997, 212). But to make this point plausible Conant must stress that what there is to see is not only something about ourselves in the sense of some psychological fact but also about our broader life with language – and this includes impersonal and non-psychological aspects about our language use – the grammar of our words.

grammatical investigation's task of describing language use is also about getting something right. Such descriptions might be rejected. But one is still entitled to think one might be right. All one can do in situations where a 'patient' does not accept that their words lack sense is to repeat the arguments and press the 'patient' on their conviction that their use of an expression makes perfect sense; we should elicit from them what they mean by their words and then show why the rule governing their deviant use determines a different (if any) sense for the relevant expression.

As we have seen, the diagnostic strategy differs from its supposed alternative merely in 'bedside manner'. The Diagnostic Conception will have to involve elements of 'policing' if it is to retain plausibility. Crucially, policing is not wrong as such. One can rightly criticise the use of an expression in philosophy as nonsense and thereby demand that it be withdrawn from circulation. But of course policing will not do the trick in cases where philosophers *intentionally* deviate from common usage. Consider a philosopher who knows perfectly well that their use of an expression in a philosophical claim is in conflict with common usage. They may go unimpressed by any grammatical evidence with which they are presented to show that their claim lacks sense. And even in cases where a change of meaning was *not* intentional, the philosopher's response could be: 'OK, I use the expression here in an extended sense. So what?' And in such a case (which seems similar to the 'maps in the brain' case), one could criticise their use of an expression by arguing that they failed to determine a clear sense for it. But any such criticism is never justified by some supposedly 'independent' or 'ultimate authority' reflected by the rules of grammar. It is only ever justified by nothing more, but nothing less, than our linguistic activities and their broader practical surroundings.

6.5 The Trouble of Dissolving Philosophical Problems

Why do we end up worrying about the 'bite' question? Cavell and Mulhall can be seen to bring out the depth at which Wittgenstein's characterisation that human beings agree in their language – an agreement in form of life (PI §241) – binds the intelligibility of the uses of words to retaining connection with human interests, perceptions of salience, purposes, natural reactions, and suchlike. According to their view, whether a particular use of a

word is intelligible is a matter of 'fitting' the 'whirl of organism', our form of life. How to decide whether a particular use of a word fits the 'whirl of organism' is a question that asks whether a particular use is in line with such things as our interests, perceptions of salience, etc. None of these things are independent of our form of life – but crucially, they are also a matter of fact beyond what some 'patient' might accept.

It looks like the problem is that – after we accept the 'projection' point – we have lost much sense of what one might call 'an evidence base'. Once the 'projection' point is accepted, making a case for thinking some claim is nonsense can no longer be a matter of pointing to divergence from ordinary use; and what we might accept as intelligible beyond ordinary use now seems to depend on what we are happy to accept as projections, and that is what people do not agree on! But the diagnostic strategy cannot give us a compelling response to this situation without falling into an implausibly modest view.

One might well wonder quite how a diagnostic reader would react if the 'patient' cannot be brought to see that their use of words is unintelligible. Mulhall in a passage quoted above talks about the possibility of coming to 'see my own reactions as peculiar' (2003, 93) in the case of dissonance or disagreement. But he never elaborates on what that would be like. There are traces of the same idea in the texts of other diagnostic commentators;¹⁷⁰ yet, as far as I am aware, this idea has not actually been thought through and spelled out in that literature. This reiterates issues about the 'bite' worry – for example, on what basis can a Wittgensteinian claim to be right and not to have to revise their own reaction or conviction? And it also raises the question whether the diagnostic keep their story straight – for example, they say they are in the business of removing philosophical confusion by giving perspicuous representations and by invoking facts about our form of life (interests, perceptions of salience, etc.), but they also say that whether someone can rightly be said to be confused depends on their 'confession' that they are.

Indeed, it is important to distinguish two questions here: (I) What kind of thing is a grammatical investigation trying to do? (II) How can we tell whether it has been done?¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ See e.g. Kuusela 2008, sec. 6.4, where he talks about 'dropping grammatical remarks not agreed upon' (248).

¹⁷¹ Cavell in his famous 1962 paper asks a similar question; in a discussion of PI §116's slogan-like claim 'What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use', Cavell asks: 'how do we accomplish the task of bringing words back home? How do we know when we have done it?' (Cavell 2002,

The answer to (I) is simple and accepted by everyone in the debate: dissolving philosophical problems by removing the underlying confusions. The answer to (II) is less simple; but, generally speaking, a confusion has been cleared away when it is exposed as what it is through an analysis or diagnosis. Both Hacker and the diagnostic face the same problem: they need to show their respective approaches actually dissolve philosophical problems in the sense of (II). Or they might both successfully describe (aspects of) Wittgenstein's unsuccessful and unviable method. So whether Wittgenstein gives us a powerful philosophical tool might therefore still seem to be an open question.

The diagnostic readers agree with the simple answer to (I). But as a result of what they feel obliged to say to (II), they run the risk of distorting their answer to (I); their 'confessional' point (iii) about *satisfying the patient's desires* clashes with things they want (and, I think, need) to say about our interests, salience, natural reaction, etc. – i.e. 'all the whirl of organism', our form of life – and about how a word is ordinarily used, similarities and differences with that, etc. If we accepted that exposing a confusion presupposes the approval of the confused, that would turn demonstrating inconsistencies in a speaker's use of a word, or revealing a confusion in the speaker's relation to her words, into a perversely modest enterprise. This raises the question whether, given a certain diagnosis which a speaker rejects, we can ever claim that we *do* have a dissolution before us. But importantly, a dissolution need not be a dissolution *to* the speaker, as they may fail to accept our diagnosis and thus the conviction that they are confused.

The crux of the matter is how the relation between the philosopher's statements and everyday language use can help us in clarifying the workings of language and in criticising other people's allegedly confused use of words – or indeed questioning our own. Here it is also very important to note that Wittgenstein's position does not amount to what one might call 'ordinary language purism'. He does not oppose introducing new concepts nor using familiar words with a new (or extended) meaning. Instead, the objection is to switching from ordinary usage of a word to a new or different use (and back again) *without noticing it*. As we have seen, it might be difficult to prove that in a given case a word has been misused, but that does not mean that it is implausible to think so. We do find clear

57) I do not have the room here to engage with his discussion, but I can say that I find it not the clearest or most conclusive one.

instances of accusations of misusing a word in Wittgenstein's own practice of dismissing certain expressions as nonsense (e.g. PI §§40, 246). But we have also seen that conflict with common usage is not enough. What has to be added is a further charge. Here there are at least three options: (a) charge of inconsistency, (b) charge of equivocation, (c) charge of lack of meaning. (Note that (a) is a very general charge and could thus be said to be at work in some of (b) and (c) as well.)

(a) Here the typical mechanism is that someone uses a familiar word 'x' in a new sense and so argues that (*taken in that new sense*) x is F; but then they take themselves to have shown that 'x' (*in the ordinary sense*) is F. To return to an example presented in Section 1.2, someone might use the word 'river' in a new sense and claim that for a river to remain the same river its water must remain the same; and then they take to have shown that you cannot step into the same river (in the ordinary sense of a stream of flowing water) twice – which is patently false.

(b) Section 5.2 discussed this case and showed how switching from using a word in one meaning to using it in another produces nonsense. Here a typical example is the White King's conflation of the use of 'Nobody' as a name and 'nobody' as a pronoun in *Alice in Wonderland* (quoted in Section 5.2.3). The fallacy of equivocation has, of course, a long-standing pedigree in the history of philosophy.

(c) This is perhaps the most interesting and difficult case. Consider the much debated claim 'The brain thinks'. Many philosophers are not impressed by the accusation that this claim lacks meaning. They admit that their use of the word 'think' is different from ordinary usage, but they do not see a problem with that; they may also point out similarities between the established use and their extended use, thereby trying to justify that the projection of 'think' into the new context is intelligible, acceptable and free from confusion. And then the challenge is to show that this new use of 'think' has not been given a clear meaning in the new context. Wittgenstein gives a paradigm illustration for that in the *Investigations*:

"You surely know what 'It's 5 o'clock here' means; so you also know what 'It's 5 o'clock on the sun' means. It means simply that it is just the same time there as it is here when it is 5 o'clock." – The explanation by means of *sameness* does not work here. For I know well

enough that one can call 5 o'clock here and 5 o'clock there "the same time", but do not know in what cases one is to speak of its being the same time here and there. (PI §350)

Here it is beautifully clear that it does not suffice to say 'Fair enough, I mean "5 o'clock" in a different sense', for the question is: in what sense? What is it supposed to mean? These questions arise because our normal concept of time of day requires a location on earth; so, in the absence of such a location, one need to explain how (and perhaps why) one want to extend the normal concept.

Of course, to the extent to which we disagree on whether a word is used correctly, we may disagree in definitions and judgements. To find out whether we in fact do, and whether a particular use of a word is nonsensical, we will have to take into account what a speaker has to say about their contested use of the word, and presumably such a dialogue will not only involve rules but also other facts and considerations about our form of life. We might also have to ask: Are there enough similarities between the cases of the word's application? What is the point of using the expression in this way? What is it that we want to say? In answering these questions we would have to consider the reasons for accepting a projection; and these reasons might not be exhausted by rules for the use of words, but these rules will play a central role. And crucially, as we have seen, despite what 'diagnostic' commentators claim about how to treat a philosophical problem, their proposal ends up collapsing into a view with 'policing' elements. Both conceptions that we have discussed in this thesis do eventually need to appeal to rules of grammar as capturing the correct use of words within a given form of life.

But since not all figuratively extended uses of a term are unacceptable or produce nonsense, it is not enough to point out that a word has been used differently; one also needs to show that it leads into philosophical confusion. And then one has to make a convincing case of this point. The new or uncommon use of a familiar word in philosophy or the sciences is not problematic in itself – it is perhaps harmless or even rather practical. An objection to certain uses of a word on the grounds of the rules of grammar can only ever be *conditional*. If someone uses a word in a sense different from its ordinary sense (whether intentionally or not), they need to explain what it is. Once such an explanation is given, inconsistencies, equivocations or a lack of sense could come to light. But as we have seen, it may turn out to be quite difficult to be successful in demonstrating in a clear

and convincing way that people are talking nonsense – not to mention the difficulties in persuading *them* that they are.

Indeed, acceptance and agreement can never be guaranteed. If someone is unimpressed by an argument which charges them with one of the mistakes (a)-(c) presented above, we should give more examples, show more dissimilarities and inconsistencies, present more arguments. Yet nothing we do can ensure that the other person will be convinced. The persuasive force of argument is limited, and it can always be simply denied. However, this is not just true of grammatical investigations proposed by Wittgenstein – it applies to any philosophical method and controversy, to any domain of discourse. It might be impossible to convince everyone of the soundness of an argument. That is why it should not come as a surprise that it is not possible to persuade all ‘patients’ that they are confused if they are.

Perhaps the right conclusion is then: everyone is in trouble. Hacker does not seem to be in a better position than the ‘diagnosticians’ in this respect. The ‘toothlessness’ of diagnosis finds its sibling in the ‘powerlessness’ of rules, in the lack of persuasive ‘bite’ that we have identified in moments of Hacker’s critical practice. Suppose that the rules of grammar have the kind of authority that Hacker sees attached to them – how come so many people are unfazed by being reminded of those rules? For example, Hacker has to repeat again and again the reasons why ‘Colours are sensations in the mind’ violates the rules of grammar; similarly, Hacker really does not seem to have been able to convince Churchland. So the bite worry seems to apply equally to Hacker’s view. But crucially, although Churchland is right to hold that simply diverging from the rules of the ‘marketplace’ need not make one’s words nonsense, there are no good reasons to think that Churchland is necessarily right not to be persuaded by Bennett and Hacker’s criticism of the claim ‘There are maps in the brain’ and of selling this claim as a scientific discovery.

Although it is vital to a grammatical investigation to consider the ordinary use of a given expression, it would not only be false to portray Wittgenstein as an ordinary language purist, it would also be false to claim that merely appealing to ordinary use can remove philosophical problems. For it is precisely the ‘ordinary use’ that often causes such problems by obscuring the difference between surface grammar and depth grammar (see

Section 1.1 for this distinction). We are easily misled into taking what really are quite diverse uses of a word to work in one and the same way, because their surface grammar looks the same.¹⁷²

Once we have seen that these conceptions ultimately collapse into one, it becomes clear in what way both sides make correct and pertinent points. Hacker – as an adherent of a ‘policing’ view – is right to stress that we can presume that people speak ordinary English (or German or any other language), that they use words with their established meanings – and that deviations from this default often imply inconsistencies or involve a lack of sense. On the other hand, the diagnostic commentators are right to emphasise that we must be careful not to slide into the view that the rules of grammar owe their authority to some metaphysical structure independent from our practices. They are also right to stress that it is not simply any deviation from common usage that leads to nonsense, such a deviation could be harmless; however, it will often need to be explained.

In the light of this, how can we uphold certain high expectation one might have of what a grammatical investigation is able to achieve? To be sure, Wittgenstein makes some apodictic remarks that brush aside certain statements as nonsense. For example: ‘It is important to note that it is a solecism to use the word “meaning” to signify the thing that “corresponds” to a word’ (PI §40); and: ‘The truth is: it makes sense to say about other people that they doubt whether I am in pain; but not to say it about myself’ (§246). But Wittgenstein also says things like ‘Explanations come to an end somewhere’ (PI §1) and ‘Once I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: “This is simply what I do.”’ (PI §217). These remarks seem to suggest a certain powerlessness or impotence pertaining to attempts of persuading someone who is using an expression in a deviant way. This powerlessness is echoed in Cavell’s above-quoted remark ‘I am thrown back upon myself: I as it were turn my palms outward, as if to exhibit the kind of creature I am, and declare my ground occupied, only mine, ceding yours’ (1979, 115). We have reason to think then that those who believe that

¹⁷² Consider the example of ‘measuring time’ that I discussed earlier in Section 1.2: we might be inclined to think that ‘measuring time’ is equivalent to ‘measuring the length of a cupboard’. Demonstrating that it is confused to think that we cannot measure time because the past and the future are never present involves showing that it is not necessary for measuring a period of time that the relevant moments in time be present in the sense in which physical objects must be present in order to measure them.

Wittgenstein's philosophy can have more 'bite' are deluding themselves. However, one is, I maintain, still entitled to think one might be *right*.

The reason for this is at least two-fold: people are not infallible and some kind of underpinning is there. There are facts of the matter about how we use words within our form of life, facts that can often be captured and expressed by rules, and such facts decide whether a particular use is intelligible and 'fits' our form of life. The next and final chapter of this thesis will thus continue to consider whether there is still room for the Wittgensteinian to criticise the philosopher's use of words. We will see that, while the significance of rules of grammar seems diminished in the later Wittgenstein, a certain form of diagnosis that takes into account rules *and* other factors might be a promising option for carrying out a philosophical criticism and dissolving problems by elimination of the underlying confusion.

Chapter 7

Further Questions and Conclusion

In philosophy we must always ask: "How must we look at this problem in order for it to become solvable?" (RC II, §11)

In the light of the preceding chapters' discussion of projection, persuasion, agreement, the 'bite' worry and the collapse of the Diagnostic Conception, it seems clear that the Wittgenstein's idea of a grammatical investigation faces several challenges. But a more general insight may seem to arise out of the discussion in preceding chapters of the ideas of projection, 'all the whirl of organism', the equivocation reading of austerity, and the similarities between Hacker's and the Diagnostic Conception: the insight that the rules of grammar play an important role in a Wittgensteinian criticism but that their significance is diminished (or not what we may have thought). Not only do they have no absolute authority but there are also extended uses of a word (projections) that are intelligible and need not necessarily constitute instances of confusion. That is also why I think that the diagnostic people's criticism of certain moments in Hacker's practice is helpful, in that it alerts us to why a view that holds that divergence from the rules of grammar results in nonsense threatens to degenerate into the Policing Conception that does not seem to give adequate room for the possibility that deviation from established usage need not be inconsistent or otherwise lack sense.

But we have also come to see the significance of the adherence to certain rules of grammar; if one uses an expression in a way that does not comply with the rules for its use, one runs the risk of speaking nonsense. So, adherence is important, but since the rules we have to adhere to are not once and for all fixed, it is much harder to adjudicate whether a given utterance is nonsense. Crucially, the rules of grammar are embedded within broader circumstances – 'the life we lead with our concepts' (Putnam 1996). To recognise this means to recognise that features of our form of life, our interests, preferences, desires, etc. have shaped our grammar and may play a crucial role in assessing whether a given expression used outside its current ordinary language-game is meaningful, nonetheless.

In this final chapter, I will focus on two further but related outstanding issues: (1) Wittgenstein's growing interest in what he calls 'natural history' (*Naturgeschichte*) (PI §415) and 'very general facts of nature' (PPF §365; cf. PI §§142, 415) – I will suggest that this interest indicates a certain diminished significance of rules of grammar and points us to the importance of other possibly relevant factors in understanding and resolving philosophical confusion, (2) the assessment of Wittgensteinian philosophy by the success of dissolving philosophical problems – since this thesis has almost exclusively focused on what could be called the 'meta' debate about the prominence of rules of grammar in Wittgenstein's philosophy, a crucial moral that will emerge – which also highlights a limitation of the present study – is that essential questions of philosophical practice cannot be solved in the abstract.

Section 7.1 will suggest that the ideas of 'very general facts of nature' and 'natural history' seem to play an increasingly important role in Wittgenstein. As they become more important, it seems to shift some of the weight from the significance of rules to other factors, factors that the crucial ideas of 'language-games' and 'forms of life' can be seen to already encapsulate. Section 7.1.1 will briefly return to the Arbitrariness Claim that Chapter 1 introduced, and present senses in which grammar is *not* arbitrary. I will suggest that grammar can be said to be 'grounded' in our form of life which is, in turn, underpinned by 'very general facts of nature': without these facts our use of certain concepts would become pointless. Reflecting about the significance of such facts thus points to the limitations of merely considering rules of grammar. Section 7.1.2 will present how some interpretations try to accommodate by broadening the understanding of 'grammar' those of Wittgenstein's considerations which seem to point beyond grammar. Section 7.2 will indicate that a certain mismatch between theory and practice in conceptions of Wittgenstein's later philosophy suggests that a proper assessment of these conceptions may require a close examination of how these conceptions understand particular explorations on Wittgenstein's part of particular first-order philosophical problems. Section 7.3 will conclude this thesis with some final remarks.

7.1 'Very General Facts of Nature'

The complexity of our practices and the worries about the persuasive and justificatory power of rules can be seen to require us to take a broader perspective on philosophical confusion. It is just such a demand that seems to motivate Wittgenstein's concern with 'the diversity of the tools of language and of the ways they are used' (PI §23); our language use is embedded in activities; this insight finds prominent articulation in the ideas of language-games and forms of life.

Indeed, Wittgenstein's remark that 'the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life' (PI §23) articulates a central perspective found in the later Wittgenstein's thought; and, as we have seen in this thesis, it is an element of a set of interrelated ideas, all of which stress the heterogeneity of our language use that makes any unified vision of language and its complexities a problematic one that is also incapable of addressing our various confusions. What Wittgenstein offers are characterisations that emphasise the diversity of our linguistic activities and their interwovenness with their social and natural settings. Our life with language is interwoven with our broader practices and these are, in turn, intertwined with our 'natural history' (PI §§25, 415 and PPF §365) and conditioned by 'extremely general facts of nature' (PI §142, cf. PPF §366).

This idea that there is a crucial connection between our concepts and facts of nature occurs throughout Wittgenstein's later writings, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly. For example, he writes about concept-formation and the relation between concepts and facts of nature:

If concept formation can be explained by facts of nature, shouldn't we be interested, not in grammar, but rather in what is its basis in nature? – We are, indeed, also interested in the correspondence between concepts and very general facts of nature. (Such facts as mostly do not strike us because of their generality.) But our interest is not thereby thrown back on to these possible causes of concept formation; we are not doing natural science; nor yet natural history – since we can also invent fictitious natural history for our purposes. (PPF §365)

Wittgenstein also directs attention to the importance of facts of nature which easily slip our notice; philosophy is, for Wittgenstein, in a certain sense concerned with the correspondence between these facts and our concepts. But acknowledging this

correspondence does not put philosophy into the business of putting forward empirical hypotheses:

I am not saying: if such-and-such facts of nature were different, people would have different concepts (in the sense of a hypothesis). Rather: if anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize – then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him. (PPF §366)

So, although Wittgenstein is critical of understanding philosophy as any explanatory or even justificatory project similar to that of the natural sciences (cf. e.g. PI §§124, 126), he maintains that ‘very general facts of nature’ play a potentially important role in his investigation: indeed, our concepts and practices clearly stand in an intimate relation to empirical facts. For

if things were quite different from what they actually are – if there were for instance no characteristic expression of pain, of fear, of joy; if rule became exception and exception rule; or if both became phenomena of roughly equal frequency – this would make our normal language-games lose their point. – The procedure of putting a lump of cheese on the balance and fixing the price by the turn of the scale would lose its point if it frequently happened for such lumps to grow or shrink for no obvious reason. (PI §142)

Wittgenstein then adds:

What we have to mention in order to explain the significance, I mean the importance, of a concept, are often extremely general facts of nature: such facts as are hardly ever mentioned because of their great generality. (§142)

And later in the *Investigations* we find this remark:

What we are supplying are really remarks on the natural history of human beings; not curiosities, however, but facts that no one has doubted, which have escaped notice only because they are always before our eyes. (PI §415)

The following two sub-sections briefly consider some of the issues to which these remarks point us.

7.1.1 Arbitrariness revisited

We come to see the significance of these remarks through recognising that the Arbitrariness Claim that Section 1.3 introduced has to be qualified, because there are clearly senses in which grammar is *not* arbitrary. Properly acknowledging this will also

allow us to see the importance of other factors in a grammatical investigation – natural facts and natural history – factors that the ideas of ‘language-games’ and ‘forms of life’ are designed to bring to our attention (as Chapter 3 indicated).

The Arbitrariness Claim is often seen as one of the main innovations and driving forces in Wittgenstein’s philosophical development.¹⁷³ In his pre-*Investigations* works, Wittgenstein explicitly says several times that the rules of grammar are ‘arbitrary’ or ‘conventional’. Language, he states, is ‘autonomous’ in this sense (PG §55, BT 237)¹⁷⁴, and: ‘It is grammatical rules that determine meaning (constitute it) and so they themselves are not answerable to any meaning and to that extent are arbitrary’ (PG §133). However, he also qualifies what would, *prima facie*, seem to be a general claim:

the rules must be laid down arbitrarily, i.e. are not to be read off from reality like a description. For when I say that the rules are arbitrary, I mean that they are not determined by reality in the way the description of reality is. And that means: it is nonsense to say that they agree with reality, e.g. that the rules for the words ‘blue’ and ‘red’ agree with the facts about those colours etc. (PG 246)

Wittgenstein seems already aware that the Arbitrariness Claim easily invites certain misunderstandings and he makes therefore explicit here that ‘the rules are not determined by reality in the way the *description* of reality is’ (my emphasis) – which leaves open the possibility that they might be determined by reality in some other way. Accordingly, McManus points out:

The general claim that ‘grammar is arbitrary’ suffers from what would appear, from the later Wittgenstein’s point of view, to be a characteristic defect of general claims about ‘language’: the kind of claim they embody is clear in connection with certain ranges of linguistic phenomena, but not in connection with others. It is not that these claims are false; rather, it is unclear what they, in their generality, mean. (2006, 244)

¹⁷³ See e.g. Hacker’s essay ‘The Arbitrariness of Grammar and the Bounds of Sense’ (in his 2000) and the essay ‘Grammar and Necessity’ (Baker/Hacker 2009, sect. 12). See also Forster 2004.

¹⁷⁴ Baker and Hacker remark in a footnote (2009, 333): ‘It would perhaps have been less misleading to use “autonomous” in place of “arbitrary” in as much as the latter has a host of connections and associations that are far removed from Wittgenstein’s intended meaning.’ I hope that this section contributes to a better understanding of ‘Wittgenstein’s intended meaning’ by pointing to some of the misleading ‘connections and associations’. A reason that might speak for preferring ‘arbitrary’ to ‘autonomous’ is that it does not just mean ‘not answerable to anything’ but also refers to something that *arbitrates*, i.e. determines what something counts as being (cf. PI §373).

Indeed, Wittgenstein later adds further explanations of the idea that ‘grammar is arbitrary’. For example, he writes

One is tempted to justify rules of grammar by statements like ‘But there really are four primary colours’. And the remark that the rules of grammar are arbitrary is directed against the possibility of this justification, which is constructed on the model of justifying a proposition by pointing to what verifies it. (Z §331)

One can look at language as a system of rules which is entirely created by us, like a game: here the leading idea is that the rules of the game are not forced upon us but are of our making. For instance, the rules of football could be different and both teams could be allowed 12 players on the pitch – no metaphysical or natural reality dictates how many players must be on the pitch. The features of our language are a matter of choice in this sense. That is why Wittgenstein strongly emphasises that grammar is not answerable to any reality outside it, and *in this sense* is arbitrary.¹⁷⁵

The Arbitrariness Claim is aimed then at a particular understanding of ‘grounding’: that the rules of grammar are arbitrary is a rejection of the idea that the rules are determined by reality (or facts) as truth-apt descriptions of reality are determined by reality (or facts). But there are other senses in which grammar *is* grounded in the facts. Indeed, the expressions ‘grounded’ and ‘grounding’ are ambiguous. Grammar can be said to be more or less practical and what is practical is in some sense grounded in the facts. For example, it is practical to have certain colour concepts. And given that grammar is an inextricable part of the living of certain lives, grammar can also be said to be grounded in facts about what it is to live those lives.

Wittgenstein became noticeably more circumspect in his later writings in refraining from stating unqualifiedly that grammar is arbitrary. For example, he responds to the idea that ‘surely’ ‘what grammar permits’ ‘is arbitrary’:

¹⁷⁵ Note also that, as McManus points out, ‘the only reference to “the arbitrariness of grammar” that survives into the [...] *Investigations*’ occurs in a ‘cautious and seemingly self-conscious passage’ (2006, 245): ‘The rules of grammar may be called “arbitrary”, if that is to mean that the *purpose* of grammar is nothing but that of language’ (PI §497; cf. also Z §320).

Is it arbitrary? – It is not every sentence-like formation that we know how to do something with, not every technique has an application in our life. (PI §520)¹⁷⁶

The constraints on adopting and changing grammar lie in things such as our natural history, general facts of nature, our biological constitution and our upbringing within specific social practices and traditions, i.e. things which we can do very little about (if anything) and which are, for the most part, beyond our power. Referring to Wittgenstein's list of various activities in PI §23 that are part of a form of life, McManus remarks on a central aspect of this point about non-arbitrariness:

with respect to the living of these lives, the grammar of the particular languages we speak is not arbitrary, in that speaking these languages is part of what it is to live those lives; thus to imagine dispensing with those languages is to imagine dispensing with those activities. (McManus 2006, 246)

In other words, our form of life that includes all those activities sets certain limits to the 'arbitrariness of grammar'. Some (many?) of our concepts cannot simply be suspended or discarded without 'suspending or discarding those activities'.¹⁷⁷

7.1.2 Beyond, or a broadening of, 'grammar'?

One clear moral of these reflections would seem to be that in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of philosophical confusion, we may have to pay considerable attention to factors such as interests, purposes, natural facts, etc. that shape and condition our language-games. But where does that leave the notion that a Wittgensteinian philosophical investigation is fundamentally a 'grammatical investigation'? Ought we now to deny that? Or see it as a partial truth? Or does it remain true but require of us that we broaden our understanding of what a 'grammatical investigation' is – perhaps by broadening how we understand 'grammar'?

¹⁷⁶ There is an important connection here to Wittgenstein's observation that meaning is use and his related remark 'The use of the proposition, that is its sense' (BT 76). This seems to imply that, roughly, if a sentence lacks a use or an application, if we do not know what to do with certain words, it fails to make sense. Sometimes we may believe that a sentence has sense, while in fact it does not.

¹⁷⁷ The various reasons this section has given for thinking that grammar is not arbitrary are also among the most important reasons given by some commentators (e.g. Williams 1974 and Lear 1982) that advocate an idealist reading of the later Wittgenstein, for some of those reasons obviously have to do with *us* and *our* 'form of life'. For the broader exegetical question of whether Wittgenstein's philosophy involves some commitment to some form of idealism, see also e.g. Anscombe 1981, Bloor 1996, Cerbone 2011, Moore 2010.

Baker and Hacker seem to be drawn to taking the latter tack, though they also seem a little hesitant about the downplaying of the role of rules that such a broadening seems to involve. For example, in their 2005, they state that '[t]o grammar belongs everything that determines sense, everything that has to be settled *antecedently to questions about truth*' (145), where this 'everything' seems to include facts about, for example, our biological constitution, our form of life and the world in general. And those facts can hardly count as 'rules'. Yet the preceding sentence states: '[Wittgenstein] used the expression "grammar" in an idiosyncratic way to refer to all the rules that determine the use of a word.' By their 2009, they are clearer that grammar 'incorporates', but is not exhausted by, rules:

Wittgenstein was inclined to characterize grammar very generally as all the conditions, the method, necessary for comparing the proposition with reality (PG 88). It incorporates any rules for using expressions that have to be determined antecedently to questions of truth and falsehood. (Baker/Hacker 2009, 61)¹⁷⁸

Such an extended definition of 'grammar'¹⁷⁹ seems to be supported by a remark of Wittgenstein's in the *Big Typescript*:

The only thing that doesn't belong to grammar is what makes a proposition true or false. That's the only thing grammar is not concerned with. Everything that's required for comparing the proposition with the facts belongs to grammar. That is, all the requirements for understanding. (All the requirements for sense.) (BT 38)¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Hacker's interpretation (initially developed in collaboration with Gordon Baker) has undergone other revisions which, I shall suggest, can be seen to respond to the increasing importance of 'very general facts of nature' in Wittgenstein's writings. There is some indication of a two-fold change in Hacker's understanding of grammar between earlier publications from the 1980s and more recent ones: he broadened the category of grammar whilst also toning down the role of rules. For example, in the first edition of the second volume of Baker and Hacker's commentary to the *Investigations* they write: 'There is no such thing as meaning independently of rules which determine how an expression is to be used' (Baker/Hacker 1985, 36-7). This sentence does not appear in the second and revised edition of the book; Hacker replaced it with a similar but significantly different sentence: 'There is no such thing as meaning (Bedeutung) independently of determination of how an expression is to be used' (Baker/Hacker 2009, 43). So there is no mention of rules in the newer version. This may suggest that Hacker came to realise that the emphasis on rules was potentially misleading and had to be attenuated accordingly. Another notable alteration in the new edition mitigates the claim that grammar is arbitrary or autonomous; the following clause was omitted: 'grammar is autonomous, a free-floating structure which is not answerable to reality' (Baker/Hacker 1985, 37).

¹⁷⁹ Moyal-Sharrock endorses a position that is in important respects similar to Hacker's; she also argues for an 'extension of grammar', for an understanding of 'grammar' as a 'generic term for *all* the conditions that govern our use of words or expressions' (2016, 117).

¹⁸⁰ This is clearly the original for PG 88 that Baker and Hacker cite above.

Yet this broadening of the notion of grammar can also seem quite ad hoc, rendering nebulous what grammar is.

Compare another important discussion in which Wittgenstein can be seen to be contemplating the haziness of the border between ‘grammar’ and ‘questions of truth and falsehood’ (Baker and Hacker, quoted above). In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein famously introduces the idea of ‘hinge propositions’ (OC §§341-3). Very roughly speaking, these are propositions that we would naturally call ‘empirical’ but which share important features with grammatical rules; they have a particular role in our system of empirical propositions – they belong to, and constitute, our ‘world-picture’ [*Weltbild*] (OC §§95, 162, 167); their essential feature is that their truth is withdrawn from doubt;¹⁸¹ indeed, Wittgenstein suggests that some empirical propositions cannot be doubted ‘if making judgments is to be possible at all’ (OC §308). Considerations along those lines seem to ultimately lead him to say:

I want to say: propositions of the form of empirical propositions, and not only propositions of logic, form the foundation of all operating with thoughts (with language). (OC §401)¹⁸²

One could say that the *role* of such propositions in our language-game is similar to that of rules;¹⁸³ and Wittgenstein even seems to become more sceptical of calling ‘world-picture’ propositions ‘empirical’ as *On Certainty* progresses.¹⁸⁴ But when Wittgenstein explicitly asks the question ‘Is it that rule and empirical proposition merge into one another?’ (OC §309), he does not give a straightforward answer.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Cf. OC §83 (‘The *truth* of certain empirical propositions belongs to our frame of reference’) and RFM 170: ‘To accept a proposition as unshakably certain [...] means to use it as a grammatical rule.’

¹⁸² Cf. OC §308 on the distinction between the *form* and the *role* of a proposition. This is a point that Wittgenstein makes frequently (see e.g. PI §11) and that can also be seen to inform his distinction between ‘surface grammar’ and ‘depth grammar’ (PI §664).

¹⁸³ What complicates matters is that Wittgenstein seems to imply that propositions might more or less ‘fluidly’ change their role: ‘It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid’ (OC §96). It is in this context where Wittgenstein uses his famous (and difficult) metaphor of the river-bed (OC §97).

¹⁸⁴ At one point Wittgenstein uses quotation marks to express his doubts about a sharply distinguishable set of empirical propositions: ‘Our “empirical propositions” do not form a homogeneous mass’ (OC §213).

¹⁸⁵ In his *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Wittgenstein writes: ‘Every empirical proposition may serve as a rule if it is fixed, like a machine part, made immovable, so that now the whole representation turns around it and it becomes part of the coordinate system, independent of facts.’ (RFM 437) To prevent misunderstandings of this remark, one should note that Wittgenstein in another passage makes clear that he would not want to say (anymore?) that *every* empirical proposition can be fixed so that it can then have the

So ought we then extend the notion of grammar beyond rules and include ‘hinge propositions’ and indeed considerations about what Wittgenstein idiosyncratically referred to as ‘form of life’ and ‘very general facts of nature’? Of course, what complicates matters further, as Chapter 2 discussed, is that Baker and Hacker would have us extend the notion of a ‘rule’ by interpreting it ‘functionally’: on such an interpretation if an ‘empirical proposition may serve as a rule’ (RFM 437, quoted in n.185), then it *is* a rule. So do the themes in the later Wittgenstein that might seem to diminish the importance of ‘rules of grammar’ only do so if we interpret ‘grammar’ too narrowly? Or do we come to that conclusion only because we are interpreting ‘rule’ too narrowly?

My suspicion is that insisting on a ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ answer to either of these questions is likely to obscure matters rather than illuminate them. Consider Wittgenstein’s response to the related question of whether a sample used in explaining an expression ought to be considered ‘part of the *language*’; his response is: ‘Well, it is as you please. [...] It is most natural, and causes least confusion, to reckon the samples among the instruments of the language’ (PI §16), but clearly – he would seem to indicate – non-obligatory. With our questions – of whether the later Wittgenstein’s philosophical investigations take us beyond grammar, or instead broaden our concept of ‘grammar’, and whether they take us beyond rules, or instead broaden our concept of ‘rule’ – perhaps we should here too say ‘it is as you please’: these are decisions – should we insist on making them – to be made in light of what one thinks most natural and least likely to cause confusion. What matters is that we do not lose sight of the importance of paying attention to the ways we use language *and* how these are intertwined with our practices, our form of life, our ‘natural history’ and ‘very general facts of nature’: a nexus that needs our attention if we are to understand (and possibly remove) certain philosophical confusions, a nexus the complexity and character of which what is perhaps our most readily available concept of ‘grammar’ – that in which grammar is a body of rules – seems ill-equipped to capture.

role of a rule; see OC §321: ‘Isn’t what I am saying: any empirical proposition can be transformed into a postulate – and then becomes a norm of description. But I am suspicious even of this. The sentence is too general. One almost wants to say “any empirical proposition can, theoretically, be transformed ...”, but what does “theoretically” mean here? It sounds all too reminiscent of the *Tractatus*.’

7.2 Limitations of the 'Meta' Debate

When I first introduced the Policing Conception, in Section 1.5, I said that it is unclear whether Hacker can be seen to be a proponent of that conception and nothing but that conception. While I have no doubt that some moments in his practice make his approach look at least close to the Policing Conception, it is far from clear that dismissing him as a proponent of that conception *tout court* is justified. Hacker frequently acknowledges that, *strictu sensu*, no use of words can be considered illicit or nonsensical in itself – it is, after all, a crucial lesson of the arbitrariness of grammar that we can assign any sense we like to any linguistic item at will, as no metaphysical reality dictates concepts or makes them correct or incorrect.¹⁸⁶

But in places in his actual practice of philosophical criticism, Hacker seems to ignore this insight. Sometimes his writings seem to display the conviction that for a given philosophical utterance to be declared nonsensical, it is sufficient to demonstrate that it departs from ordinary usage of the relevant words or that it uses words in what are simply new ways. But the philosopher (or scientist) certainly is free to give the terms they employ whatever meaning they want them to have. This is not to deny that once certain rules are established, non-compliance with these rules may lead to nonsense (as I argued, e.g., in Section 5.2 and Section 6.5). But, equally, this might not be the case (as the intelligibility of projective uses and cases of new terms that can (help) reveal new facts show).

Hacker's dismissive rejection of what might be harmless extended uses of a term and some people's reactions (e.g. Churchland's, see Section 5.3.2) to Hacker's mode of criticism has led some commentators to think that the problem lies with Hacker's metaphilosophy. But it is not clear that Hacker's theoretical account of the later Wittgenstein is the problem. It might perhaps be more plausible to say that Hacker's theoretical account is at odds with the way he actually handles some philosophical problems. The doubts about the distinctiveness of the Diagnostic Conception that Chapter 6 raised seem to be supported

¹⁸⁶ See Sections 1.3 and 7.1.1 on the Arbitrariness Claim.

by what appear to be certain tensions between Hacker's theoretical account of Wittgenstein's philosophy and his practice of philosophical criticism derived from it.¹⁸⁷

But we encountered a similar worry about the relationship between theory and practice when we considered the Diagnostic Conception. In light of the discussion in Chapters 5 and 6, we have reason to wonder whether the diagnostic interpreters' proposal of how one carries out a Wittgensteinian criticism differ in any substantial way from Hacker's. The diagnostic interpreters may press the distinctiveness of their conception by emphasising the powerlessness of rules and the corresponding – and, as I argued, implausible – idea of leaving it to the patient to decide whether a diagnosis is correct; but despite such differences in 'bedside manner', the diagnostic strategy seems to involve an element of 'policing' that they identify as problematic in Hacker. Given the tensions in Hacker's account and the doubts about the distinctiveness of the Diagnostic Conception, we have good reasons to think that there are significant overlaps between what might appear to be two conflicting approaches, overlaps which may have been made more difficult to hear by the rhetorical noise with which both sides presented their positions.

The worry that, when these outlooks are set to work, a certain dissociation seems to open up between theory and practice suggests that a proper assessment of these outlooks may require something that is manifestly absent from the present study: a close examination of how these outlooks understand particular explorations on Wittgenstein's part of particular first-order philosophical problems. We have seen how critics of Hacker have argued that his approach to particular philosophical problems degenerates in practice into problematic 'policing'. A worry that Chapters 5 and 6 raised is that the same might prove to be the case with the Diagnostic Conception too; though significantly, it is

¹⁸⁷ Mulhall describes this tension between theory and practice in (Baker and) Hacker as follows: 'I think it is undeniable that there are moments in Baker and Hacker's work when their philosophical practice subverts their own official account of its grammatical basis [...]. [I]t must surely be acknowledged that, at such moments, what their practice subverts is their own official account; in other words, such failures in practice do not invalidate their theoretical stance, as if that stance entailed such forms of practice, but are rather identifiable as such by reference to it. One might say, then, that their official account is honored rather than discredited by such breaches in its practical observance. Hence, even if they can be criticized in this way, such criticism does not invalidate their reliance upon the concept of a rule to elucidate Wittgenstein's notion of grammar and of criteria. One might perhaps argue that the very idea of a rule – insofar as it brings with it visions of rulebooks, or codified systems of independently established norms governing a practice – can encourage us to fall into the forms of philosophizing under criticism here; but nothing in the specific inflection of that concept as it is elucidated in Baker and Hacker's work (an inflection which repeatedly averts itself from the model of a calculus or rulebook) in fact offers any such encouragement.' (2014, 301)

difficult to tell, because – as Hacker is wont to complain – ‘diagnostic’ examinations of first-order philosophical problems are thin on the ground.¹⁸⁸

We have Mulhall’s 2007 book on Wittgenstein’s remarks on ‘private language’ and Cavell’s 1979 discussion of scepticism. But Mulhall’s text is brief and Cavell’s, while addressing his topic eloquently and extensively, is a decidedly difficult text, its arguments quick and often hard to discern. Moreover, both texts are marked by a readiness to turn attention away from Wittgenstein’s¹⁸⁹ – in undoubtedly imaginative ways, but ones which also leave one wondering just which texts are truly being illuminated.

But the importance of the first-order explorations that we lack here goes beyond, of course, getting clarity about the nature of the outlooks we have been considering and, for example, the morals we should draw about the nature of ‘grammar’ and ‘grammatical investigation’. Our interest in these outlooks lies in their promise to make clear a novel philosophical practice that itself promises to bring a ‘*complete* clarity’ in which philosophical problems ‘*completely* disappear’ (PI §133). In other words, the true test of the philosophical value of these outlooks is whether Wittgenstein’s grammatical investigations, when viewed through the lenses that these outlooks offer, *work*. This is surely the fundamental limitation of the ‘meta’ debate upon which much of this thesis has reflected.

7.3 Conclusion

We have now reached the end of the substantive argumentation of this thesis. What I have offered is a discussion of the concepts of ‘grammar’ and ‘rules’ and their role and significance in Wittgenstein’s later texts. I take that discussion to shed some light on those texts and the idea of philosophy as a grammatical investigation. I have identified main themes connected to those concepts and running through Wittgenstein’s work and the scholarly debate that it has sparked. Identifying those themes allowed me, and made it necessary, to address certain exegetical and systematic issues to which I have attempted

¹⁸⁸ Hacker complains about his critics not going out there to help intellectuals become saner, not examining real confusions, but only his, Hacker’s, alleged confusion (see e.g. Hacker 2013). Indeed, Hacker almost despairs about all the internecine arguments among Wittgenstein commentators (see e.g. Hacker 2012).

¹⁸⁹ See e.g. the later chapters of Mulhall’s book in particular.

to give an answer, but our discussion may also perform some of the groundwork needed for a full exploration of the detail of what the most convincing conception of Wittgenstein's later philosophy might be and how its critical practice might look.

Rather than provide another summary of the main arguments of my thesis, as was given in the Introduction, I will draw on some crucial concluding ideas on the role of rules of grammar given in Section 6.5 and in the previous sections of this chapter, in order to briefly point out some general insights that can be drawn from Wittgenstein's approach. If Wittgenstein is right about the nature of philosophical problems, philosophers are experiencing the pain that comes with trying to accomplish in reality something that cannot be done – because such problems have their source in confusions and thus cannot be addressed in the way philosophers usually do. We have seen that dissolving philosophical problems cannot be achieved by simply pointing to the rules for the use of words. But we have also seen that a 'diagnostic' practice cannot differ from a 'policing' practice in more than 'bedside manner' if it is not to lose the sense of a grammatical investigation as a critical tool. Those who think they offer an alternative to assigning a vital role to rules of grammar are mistaken – because, in fact, they do not. Both conceptions that we have discussed in this thesis need to appeal to rules as capturing the correct use of words.

In the light of Wittgenstein's reflections on grammar and his efforts to bring into view how the significance and authority of rules is intertwined with our practices and our form of life, the notion that philosophy might yield '*complete* clarity' in making philosophical problems '*completely* disappear' (PI §133) may seem fanciful. Yet all that Wittgenstein's later philosophy suggests is that a fair assessment of a given philosophical disagreement requires systematically going through all the factors relevant to the use of an expression and its place in our life with language.

It might seem particularly hard to adjudicate whether a given philosophical problem has been cleared away if philosophy is stripped of assumptions of metaphysical 'facts' and 'certainties'. But who says that finding such supposedly uncontentious 'facts of the matter' is possible? At the very heart of Wittgenstein's understanding of philosophy lies the conviction that that objective is misguided and that we cannot give a non-question-

begging answer to a philosophical question by finding such facts. And if this is correct – if the objective of philosophy is a fantasy – then what we have before us is not as down-beat a conclusion as it may appear to be at first sight. For it does not imply that there is no fact of the matter that we can appeal to. Yet what a grammatical investigation appeals to – facts about how we use words – just is not quite what most philosophers seek – and they are then left disappointed. The failure to achieve an objective, however, is only something to be disappointed about – is only really a *failure* – if the objective made sense in the first place. Indeed, the very requirement of a ‘matter of fact’ is itself confused if by that we mean something other than our form of life: facts about our diverse linguistic practices and their interwovenness with social and natural settings. And the intelligibility of what we say in philosophy is bound to retain connection to our form of life.

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