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## The Lens of Language

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The Lens of Language

Senior Project submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies

of Bard College

by

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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*For my parents who are two of my closest friends*

*For Norton Batkin, without whom this project would not exist — I will always relish our  
conversations, your kindness and friendship*

*For Garry Hagberg, Kritika Yegnashankaran, and Daniel Berthold. Though brief, my  
time with each of you, and Norton, is the reason for my love of Bard. You are each  
exceptional professors and powerfully good people*

*Thank you*

## Introduction

The role of language in our lives, our perceptions, and our knowledge has long been the subject of philosophical inquiry. A still-pervasive theme in the discourse on language revolves around the idea that meaning, that the content of our words and expressions, is grounded in that which they reference in the world. The word “rock” means what it does because there is a thing in the world, namely a rock, that the word ‘points to’ and consequently means. Contrastingly, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein argues that this reduction of language to representation cannot possibly encompass the whole of what we do with language. Wittgenstein emphasizes the point that there is no one thing that language simply *is*<sup>1</sup>, no generalizable, “ultimate,” meaning to our words, and that the human activity of language (the “form of life”<sup>2</sup>) is situated within, is a part of, the regular activity of human life and, as such, a very large portion “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.”<sup>3</sup>

By elaborating the notion of meaning beyond the confines of mere representation, Wittgenstein opens the door for an understanding of the ‘mind-independent world’ that need not, at base, rely on the traditional picture of an ultimate reality composed of

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<sup>1</sup> In section §23 of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein remarks that these, which are by no means encompassing (or even fractionally representative) of the diversity of our language, are the sort of thing we do with language: giving orders and acting on them, describing an object, speculating about an event, forming a hypothesis, making up a story, reading a story, acting, singing, guessing riddles, telling a joke, solving a problem, translating, requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying, &c.

<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, §23. 3rd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1953. Print.

<sup>3</sup> *Investigations*, §43

ultimate-things (of ‘things-in-themselves’).<sup>4</sup> By depositing the referential (denotative, definitional, representational, &c.) picture of language and meaning, Wittgenstein prefigures a kind of anti-realist sentiment that allows for a discussion of things, meaning, knowledge, and emotion that will become the focus of this project.

In the coming chapter I will review a line of skeptical argument that, as I intend to demonstrate, is manifest from an understanding of the objective world as stratified — as composed of individual pieces which I will typically refer to as “objects-in-themselves” for the idea of an entity that exists *as* an entity (as a bounded, discrete ‘thing’) fully independent of human cognition, can be restated as the idea of an object-in-and-of-itself, as an object that is so not through its conception within the human mind or the activity of language, but rather by virtue of itself alone. It is important to note that the skeptical argument I will present in the coming pages is neither meant to be indicative or representative of the diverse field of skeptical thought, but rather is intended to serve as a microcosm for a line of philosophical reasoning that remains pervasive, both implicitly and explicitly, within a great deal of philosophical discourse past and present. By evaluating what kind of idea ‘objects-in-themselves’ is, and what kind of picture of language it fosters, I will present an alternative understanding of objective reality (or rather, an alternative understanding of language through which the notion of objective reality can be seen to have no sensible place in ordinary discourse) that, with the help of Wittgenstein,

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<sup>4</sup> Note here that the use of “mind-independent world,” “ultimate reality,” “objective reality,” &c. are all used interchangeably to indicate the idea of a fundamentally existent world — of what exists, not within the confines of human experience, but as the underlying (or, as I will sometimes say, “transcendent”) reality. This idea will be most often utilized in the context of my investigation into the notion of ‘things-in-themselves,’ which I will also refer to synonymously as “objects-in-themselves,” “objects-in-and-of-themselves,” “objects independent of human cognition,” and so on.

J.L. Austin, and Stanley Cavell, may rid us of the need to seek generality<sup>5</sup> and objectivity.

As with the cessation of any foundational belief, it will be important that we attend not only to the untenability of a referential mode but also to the gaps that are left when such thinking is abandoned. For example, it is vital that we establish an alternative understanding of the role of grammar, convention, and community such that we might make sense of the success, efficacy, &c. of language — and, importantly, how such concepts as ‘knowledge,’ ‘truth,’ and ‘correctness’ remain sensible without the crutch of reference to anchor them. To this end Austin’s essay, in tandem with Wittgenstein’s notion of criteria (and Cavell’s invaluable examination of that notion), will let us discern something important about the role language plays in our ascriptions and expressions of experiential states.

In the second chapter of this project I will reconcile the purported non-existence of ultimate constituent pieces of reality with the intuitive and seemingly self-evident existence of objects, of things, in our own lives. In an attempt to dissuade us from taking our own diversely populated perceptions to be indicative of a parallel, external reality likewise composed, I will examine how precisely we are trained in language and into a language-speaking community and then elaborate on this training with a discussion of the way language inflects the many ways we see and understand the world around us. This discussion is intended to provide a preliminary intuition for the way that our language training, and, as we will see, no less than our entire natural history as full-blooded human beings, consolidates a lens through which we perceive the world, perceive objects,

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<sup>5</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *The Blue and Brown Books (BB)*, 1. 1958, Oxford: Blackwell.

perceive emotion.

This last brings us to the final chapter: an analysis of other minds, our ability to know them, and our capacity to see (recognize, call out, act on, &c.) the emotions of others. In order to explain such a contentious and superficially unintuitive idea as ‘the visibility of emotion’ I will begin by paraphrasing the thoughts of J.L. Austin from his essay *Other Minds*. Having proceeded through the first two chapters, I hope by this point to have cultivated a budding understanding of the way that our training with language shapes our perceptions.

In contrast to *Other Minds* though, I will attempt to undermine the “something special” that Austin ultimately sustains as a characteristic and troubling facet of our attempts to ‘know’ the emotion of others. This argument will take form in the thesis that *behavior is honest* and, however inadequate our perceptions and judgments of emotion in others may be — undoubtedly we are often wrong or, at least, reductive in our attempts to recognize the emotions of those around us — such errors (if we could call them that) are a reflection of 1). The nuance and complexity of felt-experience (relative to the blunt and often reductive character of linguistic expressions) and 2). The informationally rich contextual details, personal relationships, and natural histories that are sometimes more and sometimes less integral to our perceptions, assessments, judgments, ascriptions, &c. of the emotion of others.

An aside: I expect that at this moment it will seem a far leap to equate our “assessment” of someone’s emotion with our “perception” of it, however, this language is vitally important to the views I will be presenting — As I mentioned before, the second



chapter will be devoted to the idea that perception is not the passive reception of sense data and rather that language (and, for that matter, our entire natural history) inflects (constitutes?) the way we see and interact with the world: The talented musician may hear the individual notes, chords; the learned painter may see the world in its composite colors; the language-proficient reader can see the words on the page, the sentences, the meaning (and not, say, squiggles of ink on a page or, even more primitively, a splotted mess of black and white).

As such, I will be arguing for the notion that our training with language and other relevant cultural and social practices facilitates, literally, the perception of emotion in others. The tiredness of the student with the slowly shutting eyes, the nodding head, and slumped posture, can be seen as much as the chair he sits in. Thus it is no accident that our discussion will focus on Wittgenstein's ideas about symptoms and criteria as well as those on ascriptions of emotion. That locutions about emotion ("I'm happy" or "I think he's in pain") are *expressions* of that emotion, as much as any behavior (scratching at an area as an expression of feeling itchy, for example) is.

This will likely come up again but, to clarify, I am not asserting that we are somehow capable of *introspecting* the emotion of another person — obviously, except in highly special empathetic circumstances, we do not share the quality of their experience. Rather, the decisive point is that the quality of the experience of anger simply fails to encompass all of what we mean by "anger," all of what 'anger' is. Anger has rich and varied cultural connotations, it is deeply seated within the context of an individual's life (they have their own connotations, associations, &c. for anger), it is a piece of language

with a particular pronunciation, it is a part of numerous idiomatic expressions, it is used for blackmail and persuasion (“You wouldn’t like me when I’m angry”) — Anger is a radically more detailed and rich concept than its phenomenology can hope to account for. When I say that we see the bored student, it is not because I am somehow literally feeling bored by looking at him, but simply this: He is bored! The wandering eyes, the vacant dissociated expression; these things are all part of what boredom is (as much as the feeling of boredom), and by virtue of my training with language ‘boredom’ and the presentation of these criteria facilitate my perception of ‘bored’ — and no less the fact that I am in a classroom, that there is a teacher, that this person has a backpack, &c. all inform me that this is a student!

Given the general layout of each chapter to come I hope it is clear that the topics to be covered, while distinct, are interwoven and depend upon one another in important ways. The skeptical argument serves to highlight a particular kind of presupposition common to certain strains of analytic argument such that we might inspect our assumptions about reference and reality. This is exemplified in the notion of objects-in-themselves which, once sufficiently disassembled, provides us a kind of ontological ‘blank slate’ whereupon we can begin to piece together a view of language and the world that needn’t be tethered to any notion of essence, objective reality, referent, &c. As we establish this, at least in a preliminary way, we will then move into an examination of perception — through what some would call an ‘embodied cognition framework<sup>6</sup> — as

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<sup>6</sup> While I will not spend much time contextualizing the picture of language and perception that I put forward, it is worth briefly noting that there is much in common with and inspired by the scientific and philosophical notion of embodied cognition. Specifically, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s *Philosophy in the Flesh* has remained a touchstone for my thinking over the years despite the relative independence of their work from that of Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell.

constructive: powerfully manifest from physical context of our bodies and deeply inflected by our history in the world (notable in that history is, of course, language). By discussing our language training we might also elaborate a notion of convention, regulation, and grammar, that can account for many of the concepts (truth, accuracy, success, to name a few) commonly taken to be indicative of ‘things-in-themselves,’ ‘objective reality,’ ‘meaning as reference,’ &c. It is only then, after arriving at the two primary viewpoints of the previous chapters and, more importantly, that our discussion of emotion will be properly contextualized.

Finally, there are many ways in which the resources of language, in Wittgenstein’s words, “bewitch us.” My own writing is of course no exception and there are a great deal of instances where the language I must rely upon to convey some idea or intuition belies (and in some cases even contradicts) my overall aims. I will make an effort going forward to preface such instances as they appear, however, there are cases in which the denial of contradictory or hypocritical rhetoric seems to inescapably result in such opaque linguistic contortions as the previously mentioned, “objects-in-and-of-themselves,” and thus some combination of the two must be made use of in order to adequately and least bemusingly convey these ideas.

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## I. Objects and Skepticism

### 1 Organic Doubt on Uncertain Ground

Years ago I was wandering the premises of the nature reserve, aptly called “the sanctuary,” at the boarding school I attended. At my side was a close friend with whom I had often discussed the many perplexities of my youth. One day in particular I had been considering a previous conversation we had and was suddenly struck by an odd thing. In this earlier conversation we were discussing the ever-contentious death penalty, the ethical ramifications of taking someone’s life, the seeming hypocrisy of violent punishment for violent crime, the possibility that the mere existence of the penalty, the threat of death, serves as a valuable disincentive for would-be criminals, and so on. Whatever the conclusion of the discussion was, what I recall most distinctly was the simple fact that my position, following our conversation, had changed. Certainly this should not seem so odd, but, somehow in the particular context of my life at that moment, during that walk, I was devastated by that reality. My views on this topic had fundamentally shifted. What I found so startling, so unsettling, was the sudden realization that — if my beliefs change, have changed, and will in all likelihood, given all available evidence, continue to change — how, in light of the suddenly apparent ephemerality of my beliefs, could I claim certainty,

in the views that I held now? Perhaps this cursory, adolescent formulation of an age old philosophical theme is not ultimately tenable, but the lived experience itself indicates to us something of the nature of the skeptical problem, of the felt urgency that skeptical thought demands. We can see here that philosophical skepticism is not merely the product of esoteric philosophizing, alien to real human experience, and ought not be dismissed as such. However, if we are to understand what the skeptic puts forward and why it falls on deaf ears, we should first more clearly dissemble the scaffolding of her argument.

Before proceeding further, it is worth noting that philosophical skepticism takes many and variegated forms. The example that we will be examining is only one of many brands of skepticism and I have no intention of claiming that our breed of skepticism can stand for all arguments in the rich skeptical tradition. That being said, in our evaluation we will uncover an ultimately fatal assumption present in the skeptic's argument that I believe endemic to much of skeptical thought and beyond. That is, our investigation into a particular characterization of skepticism stands to highlight a way of thinking about language that, as will be argued further on, is both philosophically misbegotten and yet pervasive among both old and contemporary discourse.

In the traditional skeptic's argument the claim "that is an apple" is met with the request for a basis, such as "I can see it in plain view in front of me." This basis is then confronted with a grounds for doubt, such as "your experience with what you are perceiving to be an apple could in actuality just be taking place within a dream, in which case really there would be no apple," or "your basis for knowing there is an apple in front of you is that you see it, but you do not see all of it, you do not see the back or inside, so

how can you *know* it is an apple?,” or “the perception of a curved stick in water does not warrant ‘knowledge’ that the stick is curved, so how could the sight of the apple constitute knowledge that it is indeed an apple?” While ‘on the inside’ of a dream there are no discernible qualities distinguishing the dream from real life — having had experiences where, upon awakening, I mused “That dream was so realistic that I had no idea I was in a dream,” it is the kind of naturally occurring doubt which in the Cartesian sense stands as sensible. The force of this is something like: I am unjustified in making the claim “that is an apple in front of me,” or “I know that is an apple,” because, in reality, I am (could be) dreaming; I am (could be) seeing only a cardboard facsimile of an apple, a projection of an apple, and so on. That is to say, the possibility of dreaming means I do not actually know and so am not justified in my knowledge claim. And, with the ultimate qualification that we take a ‘best possible case’ of knowledge (the apple is in plain view, in broad daylight, I am unimpaired, &c.) entails that, if we can not know here, then we can not know *anywhere*. Surely if, in the most clear case of our knowing something, it is proven that we merely ‘believe,’ then in all descending cases of more ambiguous, less clearly-cut knowledge, we must also be laboring under a delusion.

The skeptic wants to say that if there exists the slightest ground for doubt, then there cannot be certainty, only belief — that, if doubt is still present in an ideal case, then we cannot have certainty *generally*. Undoubtedly the argument for the inadequacy of sensation is a convincing one, we have all experienced from time to time the fallibility of our senses, our memories; more than once I have been out for a walk at night only to work myself up by misjudging a tree to be a person (did I judge the tree to be a person or did I

see the tree as a person?). The skeptic uses the occasional failure of our sensory judgments as a demonstration of the principled barrier between the observer and the observed, the perception and the thing-perceived. In doing so the skeptic thus draws on a familiar intuition, one that has been held by philosophers since antiquity: From Plato's distinction between form and essence and Aristotle's "object itself" versus its "hylomorphic form" to Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities and, popularizer of philosophical skepticism himself, Descartes' epistemological dualism. So what does this distinction hold? What is it that we lack when it is said that we merely perceive the form and not the 'object itself'? If, as the skeptic portends, this lack entails a lack of entitlement to knowledge, to certainty, then what is the certainty that the skeptic seeks?

When looking at an apple on a table, in clear view, I cannot, the skeptic says, justifiably claim "I know that's an apple" because, surely, it could be a cardboard representation, a mere facsimile of an apple. What, then, if I walk the perimeter of the table, viewing the apple from many different directions? Not so, the skeptic replies, that could simply be a convincing plastic apple. As long as there is the possibility, however remote, of being wrong ("It *could* be plastic") then certainty is out of the question. What if I pick the apple up, feel its weight and, more, cut into the cut into it revealing the apple's flesh? Surely *this* must be an apple, I must be justified in saying "now I *know* this is an apple." Alas, the skeptic is again prepared: That is merely a lab-made facsimile of an apple, possessed of nearly identical weight and texture but nonetheless not an apple — apples grow on trees! If this, which from all angles appears to be an apple, which feels like

an apple, has an apple's flesh, and so on; if this is not an apple, then what is an apple? Then what does it mean to be an apple? With this line of questioning I hope to highlight some of the queerness present in the skeptic's notion of what a 'thing' is, of what makes an apple, an 'apple,' and not a lab-made facsimile. I hope to inject some hesitation into our willingness to accept the conventional notion that object identity is black and white, apple and not-apple, such that we might glean some of the haziness in the scaffolding of the skeptic's argument; such that the clean edges bounding the apple from the not-apple come out of focus and begin to reveal a far more vaporous sense of what an 'apple' 'is.' While at this point the intuition is inchoate at best, the strangeness of the skeptic's answers as we delve farther and farther down the rabbit hole of sensation and knowledge, prefigures the discussion to come and relates where we will ultimately find the proverbial kink in the skeptic's armor.

## **2 The Lived-in World**

In the course of clarifying the force of the skeptic's argument and specifically the sense of the certainty and knowledge that the skeptic seeks (that is, in clarifying what it is that the skeptic thinks we lack when she says "we cannot be certain"), I hope to demonstrate that the skeptic's world is not the world we *live* in. And, though we have seen it is possible for philosophical doubt to arise organically, that doubt arises out of a muddled intuition for the workings of language. In the first pillar of this philosophical project I will set out to undo the intuition that there exists an objectively stratified external reality. That is, I will demonstrate the lack of sense in presuming 'singularity'



(objects, distinct entities, discreteness &c.) to exist in reality outside of human cognition; I hope to clarify that ‘objects’ as distinct, singular entities are a powerful but ultimately human construction and one that does not transpose onto the ‘external’ world.. To clarify the emphasis here, I am working to show that the characteristic unity, singularity, individuality, &c. of ‘objects’ is a function of the language that describes them — that is, I will argue that identity (what makes the ‘apple’ an apple and not, say, a plastic replica) does not inhere in the object (nothing about the apple itself individuates it from the universe around it) but of the behavior, practice, and conventions of language use. This may seem like an esoteric point at first, certainly the language I must resort to in describing it is obscure, but the notion of a stratified external reality has its roots in ancient history and remains pervasive today among realist schools of thought and is, as we have seen in the skeptic’s argument, an unspoken assumption in a greater number still. Plato’s forms jump to mind as an obvious example of the belief that, outside of human perception, there exist ultimate Entities which transcend human perception. However a far more subtle and troubling example lies in the still-pervasive ‘referential theory of meaning’ which describes the relationship between language and the world as denotative; the word is merely a tag placed onto some ‘thing’ that exists outside of the language that describes it. Suffice it to say, the idea that there exists an external reality populated by entities is monolithic, tacitly-accepted or intuited, and, as we shall see, woefully misbegotten. The sense in which there exists an Objective Reality at all is, to some extent, problematic, but the specific brand nonsense that I wish to highlight lies in the characterization of an external reality composed of constituent *parts*, of a world outside of

language that is carved up into individual ‘things.’

On the surface it would appear that there is a sense in which the argument that I will be making is its own kind of skepticism, perhaps even a more radical form than the kind I wish to deconstruct. To answer this let us first look to Wittgenstein for a sense of context. In his *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein paints a picture of language, how we use it, and how the concept of ‘meaning’ is seated within the complex web of those language games, that posits no *theory* of language. There is no, as has sometimes been falsely attributed to him, ‘use theory of meaning.’ Rather, through a myriad of ground-floor instances of language, Wittgenstein establishes an understanding of how a language-speaking community, through convention and use, confers meaning — *life* — to the words that populate our language. Similarly, in this project I hope to consolidate a sense of *the way language works*; a sense of knowledge and certainty, of the *concepts* of ‘knowledge’ and ‘certainty,’ of ‘objectivity’ and ‘perception,’ that diffuses some of the mystery in language which impels the so-called “problems of philosophy.” Among the problems and misconceptions that I wish to dissolve is the antiquated, platonic notion of objects or concepts as existent external to the human mind or the activities (meaning-making practices) of humanity. To construct a “theory” of perception, meaning, or language would typically mean to propose a system that explains what meaning *is*. In his *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein compels us to understand that “theorizing,” in this sense, is a misbegotten activity — a relic of Platonic essentialism and the attempt to ‘get at’ the fundamental, underlying nature of things. This project is not an attempt to formulate a theory about meaning or perception. Neither is it an opinion on the existence

or non-existence of objective entities. “But wait!” you may, quite appropriately, be thinking, “did he not just say precisely that?” Yes, and no — I will likely seem to contradict myself with some frequency in the coming text but, as I will speak in greater detail about later, there are constraints imposed by language that, simply because language is the medium through which I must communicate, I am confined by. For the moment I will briefly say that, yes, the picture of language that I wish to establish renders the notion of fundamentally existent entities obsolete. And superficially the statement ‘there are no Objects in external reality’ is radically skeptical but in understanding the full force of my argument we will see that what I am saying is the *concept* of ‘objects’ does not *belong* in a discussion of the universe external to human cognition. That is, when taken skeptically, the force of the claim imparts a kind of shock — that, to say this, is akin to saying ‘when I close my eyes the universe stops existing’ or ‘we are all a figment of our own imaginations’ or some equally strident, sententious nonsense. Rather, in establishing how our meaning-making practices police and reform the boundaries of language use; what ‘objects’ ‘are’; and a more ordinary, down-to-earth vision of perception, it ought to be clear that talk of an entity that is bounded, distinct, individual &c. in some fundamental way, is simply meaningless — ‘language on holiday.’

Both the skeptic and myself are, ultimately, making the claim that there is a kind of certainty which is fundamentally unattainable. On this point, I do not fault the skeptic. However, in concluding that the unreliability of sensation indicates a fundamental inability for us to attain true knowledge, we are, along with the skeptic, made to lament this as a profound loss. The intended force of the skeptical argument is something like, “alas, we

can never have certainty at all but only belief.” The skeptic argues aptly that sensation cannot get at the *thing-itself* and so we can only ever infer, or place faith in, our sensation based beliefs. The skeptic intimates a kind of ‘leap-of-faith’ that must be taken anytime we place weight on our perceptions. I, too, argue that the kind of knowledge, the sense of certainty, that the skeptic seeks is fundamentally unattainable but in contrast to the skeptic, I hope to show that this is a meaningless conclusion. *We do not live in the skeptic’s world.* The skeptic fights perception in the quest to disprove certainty whereas I believe that the skeptic is seeking such a peculiar kind of certainty, one that imports an ultimately untenable ontology, that its loss carries no weight. Namely, for us to have the kind of knowledge the skeptic wants is for us to know the thing-in-itself (as opposed to merely having a sensory impression from which we guess at the thing-in-itself); this sense of certainty necessitates the existence of a stratified external reality. This should not be surprising, for there to exist things-in-themselves is for there to be things — individual, bounded entities — independent of any human cognition or practice: An underlying, objective universe composed of objective things, of things-in-themselves, that our sensory perceptions only fallibly represent and (‘unfortunately’)<sup>7</sup> do not *get at*.

However, if the characteristic of ‘singularness,’ of being bounded — ‘one’ — is itself of linguistic origin, if the unique sensory modalities and neurophysiological faculties that humans have evolved, and so too the development of language based communication, have resulted in the *perception* of a divided world but one that is not *in-itself* divided, then

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<sup>7</sup> This is the loss that the skeptic laments, this is the intended force of the skeptical argument and thus too the precise place that my argument diverges. I argue against the possibility of ‘objects’ *as singular entities* outside of language but only insofar as it is a linguistic impossibility — it is not a loss because there was never anything to lose, *per se*.

the skeptic's argument has no ground to stand on. In the coming text we shall gesture on the notion that our language games, including the practices and conventions surrounding such philosophically laden terms as 'knowledge' and 'certainty,' have appropriate contexts of employment and thus meaning that is deeply grounded in the customs and conventions of the language-speaking community and *not* some underlying or transcendent state of affairs. To lose the kind of knowledge that the skeptic wants is only to lose grounding in an already alien way of speaking — only to lose a sense devoid of context.

The skeptic desires that we conclude, in not having this 'certainty,' that we've lost the *ordinary* sense of certainty. That is, rather than stretching a sense of certainty to its breaking point and reconvening on a (not-objective, everyday, &c.) certainty, the intended power of the skeptic's argument resides in the implication that we have lost all certainty; certainty generally; the possibility for certainty (in our day to day life) — he might say, "We can only ever take leaps of faith! We are perpetually rolling the dice of idle speculation as we proceed through life" However, the skeptic's sense of certainty is highly specialized, seeking something that our senses cannot in principle provide: Access to the thing-in-itself. We cannot pull up the curtain past 'mere' perception to see the ultimate constituents of reality (were there ultimate constituents of reality, objects-in-themselves) with which the skeptic concludes the unattainability of certainty, as though we can so thoughtlessly equate 'perception of the thing in itself, knowledge of the objective state of reality' with the many and varied uses of 'certainty.' Further, as will be argued later in this chapter, objects-in-themselves are a relic of essentialist and referentialist thinking and

as such the sense of 'knowledge' cultivated by the skeptic is so specialized that it (and so too, the loss of it) has no force. We have merely made transparent the vapidness of Wittgenstein's "language on holiday."

### **3 A Sense of Certainty**

In ordinary usage, both the question "Is there actually...?" ("Is there actually going to be a celebrity speaker at the convention?" "Is this actually your paper and not a cleverly guised plagiarism?" &c.) as well as the statement "There is actually..." ("There is actually no such thing as Santa Claus") are justifiable, uncontroversial. Let us imagine that, in her considerable comic genius, my housemate takes it upon herself to replace the cups in our house with superficially identical objects that have holes in their bottoms and hence cannot hold any liquid. For weeks following the incident, as she holds a cup out to me, I cautiously ask "is that actually a cup?" My words are sensible and my question can be answered sensibly. I am concerned that, while the object held out to me looks like a cup, it might instead be (a cup with holes in it) a practical joke designed to spill water on me. I use the word 'actually' because there is a sense in which the reliability of the superficial characteristics of the object, the cup, has been called into question. In contrast to the demonstrated, perpetually reinforced reliability of the many 'identity judgments'<sup>8</sup> we make on a daily basis, my roommate has forced me into a position of hesitation in my

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<sup>8</sup> Identity judgments needn't be verbal, like "that is a cup," in fact they far more realistically, and commonly, take for in our behavior; in, for example, my pouring a liquid into what I am judging, assuming, &c. to be a cup. When I ask a friend for a pencil and he reaches into his bag and hands me one, there are implicit identity judgments being made and, as I do not correct his actions, I tacitly reinforce those judgments as correct, reliable.

cup-related judgments, at least while I'm at home.

This hesitation, this holding off from judgment, is a sensible, if temporary, response to the antics of my roommate. The skeptic poses her problem as such: Here I am skeptical, reluctant to judge, hesitant to act with certainty, &c. because I have been given reason to doubt the reliability of the superficial characteristics of the cup as being indicative of the object actually being a cup — the morphic qualities of the cup, in this context, no longer reliably entail the identity of the cup, if instead I were given reason to doubt the reliability of not just one identity judgment but rather the ascertainment of identity generally then I would be compelled to carry this same hesitation, this wary acknowledgement of the inconclusiveness of perceptory-judgment indiscriminately into life.

The sense of certainty employed by the philosopher in the above thought exercise relies on a notion of an underlying reality — when Plato asks “what is justice? (but what is *Justice*?)” he does not seek a definition or a context of appropriate use, rather he seeks an *essence*. Plato asks a different question than that of the curious child wondering what “justice” means (to which the parent might respond “Justice is treating people fairly”) — rather Plato, and a great many other philosophers, ask such questions with a very peculiar, existential sense in mind. When the philosophical skeptic makes the claim that there is a principled inadequacy in using our sensory perception of ‘X’ as the justification for knowledge of ‘X’ she demonstrates an underlying, untenable assumption: That there is some *thing*, ‘X,’ beyond the boundaries of our perception. The skeptic does not mean to say, for example, that “no, in this case, seeing isn’t good enough because actually X was a

3-dimensional projection, you merely needed to reach out and touch it to know!” Rather, the skeptic makes the claim that *no* perceptory judgment would be adequate for, quite simply: The perception of X — the image of X, the taste of X, the smell of X and so on — is not X itself, does not entail X. We do not see beyond the veil. If we are missing something, namely: ‘X,’ in not seeing beyond the veil, then the skeptic is unavoidably making the claim that there is an ‘X’ “beyond the veil,” outside of perception, independent of human consciousness, &c. Let this be the locus of the skeptic’s failing for it is precisely this claim, that there exist objects in and of themselves, entities independent of human cognition, that I refute, “since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain” (*PI*, 126).

#### **4 Lines in Language: The Regulation of Concepts**

Within the frame of conscious experience we have come to categorize and classify the world around us. Through my training with language, my training with music, &c. I have come to intuitively perceive discrete entities within my environment; I look around my room and see a chair, a bookshelf, a sleeping dog; I hear a song by Nick Drake, a particular chord, in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time. This capacity, while profound and worthy of discussion in its own right, contributes fatally to an intuition that many of us carry — the chair, the song, will go on being a chair and a song when I am no longer there, right? The seeming nature of the objects in our world as hermetically sealed, ontologically distinct entities is an intuitive but fully human construction. While sometimes an inconsequential assumption, within the diaphanous territory of philosophical discourse the tacit presupposition of



objects-in-themselves can carry ruinous weight.

Is the cup still a cup when no one is around to call it one? Does the fact that there are currently, let me count, seventy-seven things in this room mean there are, objectively seventy-seven objects in this room? The Eskimo, ostensibly due to the unique needs and qualities of their arctic environment, have twelve words for snow. Peering out of a window at a fresh snowfall, certain tribes of Eskimo may look at what we see as ‘snow,’ one thing, and instead see ‘aput’ and ‘qimuqsuq,’ two fully distinct entities. We would neither say that this entails the human-independent existence of twelve different things (which we happen to collate into ‘snow’), nor that the distinctions of identity which the Eskimo make are false ‘really’ there is objectively just one thing, ‘snow’ — We must avoid the trap of thinking that language reflects the objective contents of reality.

The ‘lines’ that we draw, the words that we create and use to relate our experience, are not the result of an individual person but of an entire language speaking community that enforces the boundaries of use of our concepts. A concept is not merely the word but the entire system of use, misuse, connotation, association, regulation and so on that all together gives *life* to the concept. Language is a regulatory practice and the boundaries of our concepts, which are the lines that ‘carve up our world,’ so to speak, only exist insofar as they are policed and reinforced by the entire language speaking community. The possible rightness and wrongness of our claims does not derive from, as we have seen, their adherence to some underlying actuality, some ‘object-in-itself,’ but rather is a product of the claim’s harmony or disharmony with the language speaking community at large.

Language, in providing humans with a lens through which we see the ‘carved up’ world (through which you see these *words* and not just squiggles of black ink), engenders the dangerous intuition that there must exist objects outside of our conception of them; objects in and of themselves. “Surely,” this intuition impels, “the fact that there are a myriad of distinct, singular things all around me,” the cup, glasses, computer, table, and so on, “is not going to change if I were not here” Undoubtedly the room and its contents would not somehow vanish upon our departure, this is not the force of our claim; rather we must ask whether it still exists *as* a room; whether the keys and cup on the desk still exist *as* keys and a cup, as *separate entities* independent of human cognition. Is there something fundamental about the cup that distinguishes it from its surroundings? Bounds it, separates it from ‘the desk’? The items surrounding me have identity, they are individual, one — were you to ask me for the cup I would not smash the cup and hand you a fragment of glass — but this perceived unity does not inhere in the universe. The associations and impressions that I have of sunglasses, their grammatical schematism in language, carve them out and make them ‘*one*.’ Their identity, their one-ness, comes not from some vaporous ‘actuality,’ but from consciousness and the meaning making practice of language.

## **5 Becoming a Rock**

We call these hard, often jagged things “rocks” though there is nothing that inheres in them which conveys the phonetically arbitrary “rock.” What would it mean for there to be some *thing* that the rock objectively is (onto which the name “rock” is merely a

tag)? That is, when the skeptic intimates the distinction between the perception and the thing-perceived (the image and the actuality, &c.), what would it mean for there to be such mind-independent entities; for reality outside of human consciousness to be stratified, composed of individual things? If there are ultimate constituents of reality which beget the identity, unity, ‘one-ness,’ &c. of our words (“rock,” “cup”) and the objects chained to them then let us seek it out. If there is some essence of ‘rockness’ from which the rock derives its identity or some ultimate building block of reality that is fundamentally *one*, objectively individuated, then let us try to find it.

The rock is an amalgam of elements crystallized, eroded, smashed together and, ultimately, culminated in the rock. For there to be some objective thing that a rock *is*, then we ought to be able to triangulate that essence of ‘rockness’ by examining the transition from what is plainly not a rock to what definitively is. The amalgam of sand, gravel, &c. is certainly not a rock, while the final state of the rock certainly is: If there is some essence of ‘rockness,’ if the rock is objectively a rock and its identity, its one-ness, is not merely a human construction, then we should be able to ascertain that identity by examining how the lava, gravel, sand, &c. ‘become a rock.’ Were we to investigate what it means for something to be alcoholic by examining a number of different beverages, non-alcoholic and alcoholic; were we to watch as a glass of soda goes from non-alcoholic to alcoholic as whiskey is poured into the glass, or tonic as gin is mixed in, we would discover some commonality to all of these instances of ‘alcoholic’ that is missing in all instances of ‘non-alcoholic,’ and in examining the transition of a beverage from one to the other we clearly see that indeed, surprisingly, it is the alcohol which makes the beverage

alcoholic. In this vein, if there is some essence or ultimate object that manifests the rock's identity (that makes the rock a rock and not, say, sand) then let us attempt a similar triangulation of such an essence or ultimate property. A perhaps unnecessary foreshadowing: If instead the identity of the rock, the cup, or a game, does not correspond to some essence that transcends perception, is not manifest from an objective constituent of reality 'hidden from view,' but rather is the far more ordinary consequence of "family resemblance" then we will find our search both fruitless and misguided.

If we were to watch a timelapse of sand or mineral gradually coalescing into a rock and point out the moment when it is no longer sand but now rock, we would find no divine objectivity in our judgment – instead we find a nebulous, intersubjective<sup>9</sup> intuition that guides us to a vaporous, desultory conclusion. The act of calling out a moment as the transition from not-a-rock to a-rock is fully interpolative. We would say with certainty that at first there is no rock, and at the end there is a rock, but the 'moment of instantiation,' as it were, would be nowhere to be found. Or, if found, the moment would vary from person to person, thus providing no insight into what makes the rock 'a rock.' There is no a-priori line through which the rock passes from being layers of slowly eroding and compressing earth into what we see as rock-dom. The boundaries of identity are organic, of human origin, often bearing only family resemblance, and manifest through

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<sup>9</sup> By "intersubjective" here I mean to say that our understandings of words, what they 'mean' to each of us, how they are grammatically schematized for each of us, is both unique and shared. There is an important subjectivity to our individual lexicons insofar as every individual has a fully idiosyncratic natural history, a unique 'training with language' that shapes and inflects their understandings of every concept populating their idioplex. That said, there is also important overlap in our understandings of words that results from the regulatory practices of language: the conventions, customs, and traditions, that shape how we learn and use language enable the our effective communication. If we all had radically unique lexicons which little or no commonality the entire enterprise of effective communication would be undermined.

the learning, teaching, and policing of our language.

## 6 Seeking Certainty

Does this mean then that we are wrong in our certainty? That we ought not claim 'to know' that at first there is no rock and that at the end there is a rock? Perhaps we are fully justified in being 'certain' about there not being a rock and then, later, being a rock, perhaps instead the problem lies in the notion that there is some underlying actuality by virtue of which the "rock" is a rock, some essence beneath the surface of perception that gives the rock identity. If the rock is a rock not with reference to objective reality, but rather because of the deep grammatical schematism of 'rock' through our training with language, then there is no problem in our not finding an objective transition from 'non-rock' to 'rock;' there would be no essence of rockness objectively because everything that a rock 'is,' what 'rock' 'means,' would be in plain sight and publicly available. The ambiguity of identity that seems to be implied in relinquishing ourselves from the grasp of referential meaning appears problematic ("How then can we have real Truth if there is no stratified objective reality?"). Language, unlike math or science, is an informal system—a system that warrants adaptation and reform, a form of life that is policed, regulated, but not so unyieldingly as in the context of mathematics or, for example, chess.

It is readily available, plainly evident, that our words function effectively. We can speak of 'truth,' 'knowledge,' and 'certainty' in a variety of contexts with full understanding. To frame the question of 'truth' differently, let us look to J.L. Austin. Austin inquires about the truth of the statement "France is hexagonal." He writes that, to

the war general who needs a vague sense of the geography of France in order to formulate appropriate orders to his men, “France is hexagonal” is a perfectly acceptable characterization of France’s shape and thus, to the general, the statement is true. On the other hand, Austin writes, the cartographer who is precisely mapping the entire region would call the claim “rough” at best and perhaps even “totally false.” What Austin intends to highlight by this is the tremendous importance of *context* in evaluating the meaning of a statement, in *understanding* the statement. In one situation the claim is true, in another it is false, but more to the point: it’s *complicated*. The claim may be rough, vague, vaporous, &c.; the claim may be an attempt to get under someone’s skin; the claim might be a part of a memorization exercise — The ‘meaning’ of the claim is no simple thing and the attempt to reduce it, to generalize about it, to extricate its so-called “truth value” is an absurdly, uniquely philosophical mistake. This point, the contextual complexity of meaning, is essential for it shows us not only another sense in which the attempt to generalize meaning, or ‘get at’ the Truth, is faulty, but also provides us with picture of the way that the ordinary concepts of ‘knowledge,’ ‘truth,’ ‘certainty,’ and so on fully retain their sense and weight despite the nonexistence of the skeptic’s general, idealized sense of ‘knowledge.’ I will reiterate that this is the place where the skeptic and I deviate. The skeptic concludes that, as we cannot have the knowledge, the certainty, she seeks, our capacity for certainty and knowledge *generally* is undermined. Whereas I recognize the unattainability of this ‘knowledge’ only as an inability to employ an already alien concept. Truth and knowledge are regularly employed competently in a context sensitive way, and regulated by stringent conventions and customs of the

language-speaking community. To lose the skeptic's sense of certainty is to lose very little after all.

## 7 A Batty Language

We can imagine an exceptionally intelligent species of bat that has evolved its own language which, hypothetically, is as sophisticated as our own. The bats in this scenario sleep under the branches of what we roughly call "trees." Imagine now that these bats, within their own language, refer to the trees as "nukkol." The bat word for the tree identifies in our environment many of the same things, or kinds of things, that our word "tree" does, but it does *not* identify the exact same thing. The bat word "nukkol" may, for example, imbue the qualities (in approximately comparable human words) of 'tall' and 'safe' and 'shelter.' While the human concept 'tree' is grammatically schematized such that 'wood,' 'tall,' and 'hard' are all tangentially related concepts. This is, of course, a dramatic oversimplification of both concepts but the idea is that as a human we may recognize things as trees that a bat would not and vice-versa. The point of this example is to illustrate from a different angle that our concepts, and what those concepts mean, are by no means referential.

The referential theorist posits that meaning is denotative, that the word is a link onto a thing in the world — thus, "tree" simply means the wooden pillars we happen to call trees, and "nukkol" would likely be conflated to mean the same. Clearly, though, the meaning of each is far more complex — our words carry their weight only as they are seated within the vast and intricate web of our language and thus do not, as it were,

simply contain determinate, definitional meaning. This is analogous to the way that scribbles on a page do not carry intrinsic, absolute-meaning: They only carry the weight of meaning when understood, when someone with a particular background reads them and even then that meaning may range widely from person to person. To a young child they may literally be scribbles, while to another slightly more linguistically developed reader they may discernibly be words strung together but that are not yet recognizable, and to yet another who actually speaks the language the words may represent a scene in a play. Meaning, in this sense, is constructive just as, relatedly, object-hood is.

Even though both bat and human can go into a forest and point to the same ‘object’ and say “nukkol” and “tree” respectively, a human may see a bonsai plant and call it a “tree” where the bat would not use the word “nukkol” at all because clearly the bonsai could not serve as a shelter for it. The constitution of our definitions of tree or nukkol are contingent on our (as well as our species as a whole) use of and experience with them, there is nothing about the thing that is tree’y or nukkol’y which makes us or the bats use those words for them. The bat, too, may look at a streetlamp and call it “nukkol” because it falls into the bat’s grammatical schematism for ‘nukkol’ as a tall, potential shelter. Were we to dissect the tree, peeling off bark and splitting wood to *really* see it, to find its essence, to find that which makes it a ‘tree,’ we would obviously be being foolish. The identity of the object does not reside outside of our construction of it linguistically and with the possession of these words, with the individuating lens provided by language, we tend to assume a more basic identity that. In understanding that our word ‘tree’ does not correspond to some essence of tree-ness, in understanding the picture of language I hope



to consolidate in this project, we may avoid many of the linguistic road-bumps, like skepticism, that trouble philosophers of a more referential mind.

## 8 Tapestry

Let's imagine for a moment a two dimensional plane, extending in all directions, which to us appears to be a tapestry filled with washes of color. Given our unique neurophysiologies and sensory modalities we see a plane full of seemingly arbitrary, varied colors that gradate into one another such that there are no boundaries, no blocks of color, just an unbounded phantasmagoria of overlapping, interwoven color. Now let us consider an intelligent species that exists solely on this plane, living out their hypothetical lives on this tapestry. We can imagine then that the colors of the tapestry hold real-world significance to the creatures inhabiting it, that, for example, the gradient that emerges where red and green intersect constitutes a potentially fatal trap for the inhabitants while the more blue the area is the more sustenance the creatures can derive. That is, the creatures of the tapestry live and die, survive or perish, within and because of the environment that they occupy. Thus we can also imagine that over the course of centuries spent on the tapestry the creatures have evolved powerfully functional sensory modalities in response to their environment.

The creatures have evolved the capacity to clearly individuate the contents of their world; they can literally *taste* the suppliers of sustenance or nutrition, they can *see* the places of peril in their world, they can *feel* the need for nourishment or a threat to their survival. The unique sensory modalities they have developed through the long term

dialogue of body and environment allow these creatures to distinguish individual things in their environment, they perceive (our equivalent of) food, they see distinct ‘traps’ and threats to their survival. Their world, that is, is stratified, full of individual entities that, as a matter of survival, the creatures have evolved to see and interact with. What to us appear to be nebulous washes seemingly random colors are, to the creatures, richly populated ecosystems and environments constituted by distinct entities that have direct bearing on the survivability of the creatures. But then, what is *really* there? Is the tapestry made up of a nebula of colors, unbounded and indiscrete, or is it constituted by a constellation of entities? Surely, we must answer, neither! The question is faulty, to us the tapestry is most certainly a wash of color and to the creatures the tapestry is unambiguously populated by a myriad of things — For us to ask what it is *really* is to seek definitional, determinate meaning, to look for the object in itself, instead of seeing that there is no objective ‘Truth’ to what the tapestry contains for its contents are the product, and construction, of the uniquely developed, language-using community that observes it.

To clarify with a final experiment, let us imagine a canvas on a wall that, to you and I, is uniformly yellow. Now, consider a succession of species with extremely similar but slightly different sensory modalities from humans. A member from each species looks upon the canvas and sees something different. The first sees nearly what we see but darker, as shade of orange. The next sees a distinct red while each individual onward sees purple, blue, teal, green, and brown respectively. Is it sensible for us to ask, “What color is it really?”

## 9 Constraints of Language

It is here worth noting that I am certainly not saying “the rock (color, snow) doesn’t exist *as* a rock objectively” only to have us then default to ‘atoms,’ or ‘strings,’ &c. Rather, in this we can feel the constraints of language. We should say that the atoms too are not somehow objectively singular entities, that at the level of vibrating quantum strings we would see no divine line around certain clumps of strings separating them from other clumps, but this would be defaulting to ‘strings’ as the somehow ontologically distinct ‘things’. We might say that the atoms are not objectively distinct, that viewed as a field of fluctuating energy it would be clear that there are no objective lines drawn around what we, through our training with language, see as discrete ‘atoms’ — but again we would then be privileging the ultimate existence of ‘energy’ which, too, is antithetical to the understanding of language here proposed. These are the constraints of language; we cannot convey the intuition of a thing not existing without somehow referencing other things and sinking into a futile recursivity. It is rather difficult to speak of the nonexistence of something outside of language while using talking about a nonexistent ‘*something*.’

The only reality we have access to is the reality of our experience, the reality of perception shaped by language, and the objects of that reality only exist *as* objects (as singular entities) through our training with language. These hard, often jagged things are “rocks” despite the fact that there is nothing about this or that clump of molecules that is hermetically sealed, nothing about the rock that objectively individuates itself from the

trillions of molecules all around it. The rock — due to its characterization in language, its schematism in my personal lexicon — has identity and so to me, and those who share my language (who share similar language training), feels singular, contained, is an *object*; but, were we somehow to view the rock and its surroundings at an atomic level, we would not so casually individuate; we would not presume identity. The rock has no objective identity, no essence that pulls it from its surroundings and makes it a singular entity; there is no divine line around what we call the rock separating it from the ground around it — we humans draw the line in language. Identity is a form of life as much as language, the diverse cultural history, personal connotations, environmental context, sensory modalities, &c. together give rise to the object and so too the ‘thing’ evolves, fluctuates, births new ‘things,’ becomes antiquated, extinguished, and so on.

## II. Perception and Technique

### 1 Beginnings

Beyond his discussion of how words are used, Wittgenstein also provides a detailed discussion of their functions, aims, and purposes. With these varied locutions Wittgenstein urges a more general sense of the part that expressions play in language, and thus that the mastery of a language consists in being able to employ its vast repertoire of expressions in the profoundly nuanced and varied language-games that they belong in. Given this constantly reaffirmed sense of contextual complexity it is unsurprising that the concept of use be so broad as to defy any singular theory could hoping to encompass it. But here, Wittgenstein offers, we want to object — “‘You take the easy way out! You talk about all sorts of language-games, but have nowhere said what the essence of a language-game, and hence of language, is: what is common to all these activities, and what makes them into language or parts of language’”.<sup>10</sup> Wittgenstein likens this pursuit, this desire for generality or essential definition, to somebody trying to explain what a ‘game’ is, trying to uncover or extricate the very essence of a game — the thing by which all games *are* games.

Consider for example the proceedings that we call "games". I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? — Don't say: "There must be something common, or they would not be called 'games' "-but look and see whether there is anything

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<sup>10</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, §65. 3rd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1953. Print.

common to all. — For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.<sup>11</sup>

In moving between particular instances of games and observing how multivalent and variegated they are (“Don’t think, but look!”)<sup>12</sup>, he demonstrates that while there is undoubtedly continuity among games, common characteristics, the most we could reasonably say *of the entire lot* is that they share a kind of ‘family resemblance.’ “We see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities ... I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than “*family resemblances*”; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc”.<sup>13</sup> The accumulation of particular instances of language-use exemplifies Wittgenstein’s creed that “problems,” in philosophy, “are solved, not by coming up with new discoveries, but by assembling what we have long been familiar with”<sup>14</sup> — rather than construct linguistic formulae in an attempt to uncover some essential quality, we must consolidate and observe what is already in plain view in order to clear away confusion and misunderstanding.

Before moving into our own examination of language — which will take shape as an inquiry into what kind of thing (or things) our training with language is, and how this training is embodied, manifest, present, &c. in our everyday life — let us first offer an account of Wittgenstein’s philosophy on rule-following, as well as a discussion of his notion of ‘understanding.’ In terms of the preceding chapter, the distinction between the

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<sup>11</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, § 66. 3rd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1953. Print.

<sup>12</sup> *Investigations*, § 66.

<sup>13</sup> *Investigations*, § 66 - 67.

<sup>14</sup> *Investigations*, § 109

two paradigms of rule-following (the then-traditional calculus conception and the Wittgensteinian “mastery of a technique”) that we will discuss follows the same lines as the that between referential and so-called “ordinary” conceptions of language. Further, we will see that the convergence of Wittgenstein’s notions of rule-following and understanding provides fertile ground for an expansion of his thought into the territory of perception generally which, at length, ought to clear away the type of misunderstanding<sup>15</sup> endemic to epistemological and skeptical discourse. First, however, we must preface our descent into rules and their practice by highlighting the distinction between Wittgenstein’s earlier work, as seen in the *Tractatus*, and his later views in *Philosophical Investigations*.

## 2 Denotative Links in Early Wittgenstein

In his first work, the *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein’s position was that, seated within the kaleidoscope of ordinary language, there exists an essential, underlying logic that can be excavated through a structural analysis of the relationship between language and the world. Wittgenstein called this (the relationship between language and the world) a ‘picturing’ relation, and it took form, to summarize, as a denotative link between words and objects. Thus, in the *Tractatus*, the meaning of a word was constituted with reference to the object it ‘pointed’ to; in this view names *mean* objects. In Wittgenstein’s transitional phase, as articulated in *The Blue and Brown Books*, he inquires anew “What is the meaning of a word?” The reiteration of this question,

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<sup>15</sup> Chapter 1, on ‘skepticism’

supposedly answered in his *Tractatus*, signifies the beginning of the doubt felt toward his earlier work and thus a dramatic turning point in his understanding of language and philosophical methodology. Note that the following example quoting Augustine on language learning is not meant to equate the views of *Tractatus*-Wittgenstein with Augustine but rather simply because it is a good example and, as Wittgenstein readily provides, is mistaken in many of the same ways that his own ‘picturing relation’ account of meaning is. At the beginning of the *Investigations* Wittgenstein calls upon Augustine to precisely articulate the position that he will be retaliating against:

When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shewn by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires.<sup>16</sup>

By showing ostensively that a word corresponds to an object, Augustine explains, he learns the word. While certainly there are instances of being taught the name of an object through ostension, as is often the case with second language learners, Wittgenstein (post-*Tractatus*) argues that this view, this *theory*, is an ultimately insufficient account of both the method by which we learn language and the constitution of meaning. Just as the attempt to unify all games under single banner — i.e. “someone wins and someone loses” — falls flat (“what about ‘waiting games?’”), so too is Augustine’s derivation of ostensive

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<sup>16</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the ‘Philosophical Investigations’* Second ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1958. 1. Print.



learning an impermissibly sparse representation of language training generally. Under Augustine's view, and in line with Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* position, meaning is equated with the object; "cup" means cup because the word *denotes* the thing.

The denotative picture of language posits that, whatever the mechanism for the acquisition of language, its contents correspond to pieces of the world and the function of our locutions is to communicate that correspondence such that, by adhering to the grammar, conventions, definitions, &c. of the language we *mean* — proper conjugation and syntax in tandem with the appropriate concepts results in 'meaning,' in a *sensible* utterance in much the same way that the terms and syntax of a mathematical equation result in an 'answer.' The stringent rules of mathematics legislate that in the equation '5+2 = x,' x *must* be ('mean') 7 — the mathematical items, '5', '+', '2', and '=' combine to form a mathematical sentence which has a determinate meaning that can be derived univocally through the methodological adherence to the 'grammar' of mathematics. So too, under the Augustinian and early Wittgensteinian position, does the combination of words in this sentence, applied in accordance with the essential logic of language, have a determinate meaning. It is worth noting that, while there may be *ad hoc* exceptions, the denotative or referential picture of language generally holds 'made up' utterances as fully devoid of meaning. The homeless man yelling nonsense at me from across the street *did not mean anything* — he could not! His words had no referents and hence were vacuous — whereas I thought it meant "time to walk away," and "this man is mentally unwell," or maybe "you got a cigarette?"

### 3 Truth and Objectivity in Late Wittgenstein

In stark contrast, Wittgenstein begins *The Blue and Brown Books* by carefully dismantling the question of meaning, the *general* question of meaning. By consolidating an understanding of the work language does in specific contexts, Wittgenstein demonstrates that, to ask generally about the meaning of a word, is to take ‘language on holiday.’ In specific contexts we are capable of plainly viewing the meaning of words, but when we attempt to analyze an expression and its ‘nature,’ in a vacuum, isolated from their natural context, we lose sight of the expression and the ways that the language did its work. “The confusions which occupy us,” Wittgenstein writes, “arise when language is like an engine idling, not when it is doing work”.<sup>17</sup>

To return to Austin’s example in his essay *Truth*, if we ask whether the statement “France is hexagonal” is true, we must realize that such an investigation must be contextually seated: For the purposes of a war general dispersing his troops and determining possible routes &c. the statement is true — for his purposes, yes, “France is hexagonal.” However, for the cartographer mapping the span from the Mediterranean Sea to the English Channel, “France is hexagonal” would likely be met with indignation. It is at best a rough approximation. However this too is only part of the story; in both cases there are a great many ways of understanding and conveying truth within such contexts as ‘a general commanding his troops’ or ‘a cartographer mapping the terrain of Western Europe’ and no one of them can be determinately derived from its originating expression

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<sup>17</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, §132. 3rd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1-953. Print.

alone; much less can such a derivation be taken as a general principle of ‘Truth.’ Whether the statement is true, for the general or the cartographer, is almost besides the point — truth and falsity are just two concepts among a great many possibly more suitable concepts. To name a few: practical, approximate, rough, dangerous, efficient, &c. are in many ways far more valuable characterizations of the statement in its specific context.

Now we want to say, “Well, perhaps we can permit truth (the word ‘truth’) to have different inflections in different contexts, but surely there when scientists debate the truth of a theory they are not squabbling over (“mere”) semantics, they are trying to determine which corresponds to the universe!” But is this any different? Undoubtedly the idolon of science has reached a profound apotheosis in recent decades but should we consider the context of science to somehow transcend contextualization? The highly specialized language games of scientific enterprise are no less a context than that of soccer, or cooking, or a student in class. There is certainly something peculiar about the *regulatory practices* of the scientific community, the conventions to which they adhere, which ultimately engender a methodological and revisional rigorousness that we often default to as “the success of science.” But, we might ask, if stringent conventions alone are not enough to account for the truth, applicability, consistency, &c. of science, what is it that grounds the regulation? If there is no sense in ‘objective truth’ then what *is* the truth of science? With reference to what does science qualify its theories?

In the previous chapter I made a show of why objects-in-themselves do not exist; here again we are given to wonder, if science is a map onto the so-called real, then is my denial of ultimately-existent things a dismissal of science — or, for example, of the atoms

on which Atomic Theory so heavily relies? Does the nonexistence of things-in-themselves stand to contradict String Theory because the theory posits the existence of ‘strings’? When I argue for the lack of sense in objective entities I am arguing against an often presupposed narrative that can have philosophically damaging implications. There is an important difference between the denial of a theory that makes use of the concept of bounded-entities and the denial of the position that those entities transcend the theory, the scientist, and the community, to exist unto themselves alone. I would not deny the success or applicability of mathematics because (excluding Category Theory) it utilizes a notion of discreteness, whether in points, sets, or numbers; however, the arguments of the previous chapter *do* stand against the notion of Mathematical Platonism which posits the existence of such entities outside of our field of mathematics, outside of human cognition, in the objective world.

At the risk of redundancy let us reexamine the idea of things-in-themselves. The physical concept of discreteness is natural to us as we readily consider the world to be composed of pieces. A great deal could be said about why individuation is a part of our conscious experience, about how a world of objects is a place that can be described in causal terms, about how perceptory distinctions facilitate mental representation, allowing the cognitive power of planning and abstraction — but this would be idle speculation and is unrelated to the present argument. When I hold up a stick in each hand we can intuitively describe this as two sticks, two entities, but to say this discreteness inheres in the object-itself rather than the tremendously complicated web of language, person, culture, history, community, and so on, is a very different claim. A broken stick is now

two sticks — in the moment of breaking, as fibers snapped past one another, where was the moment they became two distinct things? I suppose it would be the moment when the last fiber was pulled asunder, thus separating the one into two. And if there was a piece of gum someone had placed on the stick, precisely at the place where the final fibers snapped, such that the stick was now held together only by the gum, would this be one or two objects (not including the gum)? Well, I'd think two because the gum is a different material. And what if it was not a piece of gum but rather a perfectly placed piece of wood inserted precisely such that the stick was never not in contact with more wood as it broke, is it now one stick or does should we say it must be from the original tree, or that it must have *grown* together, or...

The problem of objects-in-themselves is peculiar given our many daily interactions with objects; we constantly navigate our lives under the assumption of objects — this is not wrong! Objects certainly *do exist* in an ordinary sense, it is only the peculiar, philosophical context of generalizable or objective things that the language “goes on holiday,” it is what Austin would call “a distortion.”<sup>18</sup> The regress of ad hoc answers should be an indication of the queerness of such a line of questioning. Similar to “What is the meaning of a word?” the philosophical emphasis of the question “When does the stick (*really*) become two sticks (*objectively*)?” pulls the language out of context to a place where it can no longer do work. In real life, if (for whatever reason) I were actually asked when this stick became two sticks, I would say “when it broke in half,” and this would be a perfectly satisfactory answer just as “the definition” would be an adequate if vaguely

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<sup>18</sup> See page 115 in *Other Minds* for a discussion of distortions in language.  
Austin, J. L. *Philosophical Papers*, 115 Oxford: Clarendon, 1961. Print.

reductive response to the former question. The “engine idling” in Wittgenstein’s metaphor, reflects the attempt to pull the word or expression out from its specific context (where the language actually does its work) and evaluate it generally, thus creating the puzzle which confuses us into ultimately wondering not just about the truth of the particular statement but indeed “What Truth *is*?” generally.

There are no atoms-in-themselves or strings-in-themselves but this does nothing to devalue the practical effectiveness or even (in an *ordinary* sense) the truth of the theory. The atoms are a useful construct just as the numbers are to math — in math there are even theories which circumvent the need for discrete objects (Category Theory, for example) and so too in the twentieth century scientists shed the idea that atoms were the ultimate constituents of matter but rather were themselves a conglomerate. But let us not now make the mistake of thinking, “Oh, so then it’s just *electrons* objectively” — It is turtles all the way down.

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For there to be, as is the commonplace view in certain circles, an essential notion of truth — as opposed to a polysemous concept that is situated within the intricacies of particular language games and among whom there is merely a family resemblance — is for there to be an objective state of affairs in the world, the ‘Real’, that our expressions are true by virtue of; true *with reference* to. An objective, essential notion of truth mandates objective, essential correlates to the things that are true; for the statement ‘there is an apple on my desk’ to be true in some objective sense, there must be some

fundamental, transcendent thing (that we call an apple) which is on top of some fundamental entity that we call “desk” — there must exist *objects-in-themselves*. We have seen that the referential picture of language also posits a denotative link between words and the ‘things in the world’ to which they correspond. The propensity to seek generality, to grasp for an essential meaning, while understandable, defies the far more interesting and diverse reality of ordinary language and precludes the task of philosophy by muddling the ground with language on holiday. “Philosophy,” Wittgenstein writes, “is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language.”<sup>19</sup>

#### **4 Rule Following**

In his *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein was concerned with repudiating a particular view of rule following that treated rules and their applications as a kind of calculus. Among his many qualms with the theory, the traditional ‘calculus’ perspective held that, to follow a rule, there must be some kind of conscious or unconscious acquiescence to said rule. To move a pawn forward in chess, that is, is to act in accordance with and in reference to the rules constraining the pawns movement. The idea of a word, rule, image, &c. being ‘held before one’s mind’ when engaging in language-games is returned to repeatedly throughout the *Investigations* and here in the context of rule following this privacy is particularly problematic for Wittgenstein. Not only, he argues, is this occult notion of rule following a relic of a cartesian dualism but further the calculus conception views rules as *legislative* over our action. Wittgenstein

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<sup>19</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, § 109. 3rd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1953. Print.

acknowledges that the rules may serve as a 'guide' insofar as our training with rules often (but not always) constitutes an initial template or methodology for their employment, but the idea that they are *necessarily* before one's mind when acting in accordance with them is, for Wittgenstein, a doomed-to-fail attempt to 'get at' the essence of the activity of rule following. In seeing rules as legislative, the calculus-theorists facilitate the admittance of objective standards of correctness. While certainly there is a standard of correctness in our language use, we will see that it does not mysteriously transcend the language-using community. Wittgenstein argues that our training with rules is public and our application of rules within language games is manifest. By understanding rule following as an activity instead of a calculus we can begin to approach the topic of language training.

Wittgenstein provides an account of meaning, rule-following, and understanding, that clears away many misunderstandings regarding the role of mental content in language use. By examining Wittgenstein's depiction of understanding as "the mastery of a technique"<sup>20</sup> it is made clear that our words are not like keys that unlock mental content, (or 'meaning', as construed by Augustine); our words are not understood after their utterance (after 'examining the mental content contained within') but *with* their utterance. "Just for once," Wittgenstein pleads, "don't think of understanding as a 'mental process' at all! - For that is the way of talking which confuses you." Our words are not strung together with constant mental reference to the rules of the language. Wittgenstein inquires broadly about our capacity to follow rules (grammatical and otherwise): "'How am I able to follow a rule?' - If this is not a question about causes, then it is about the

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<sup>20</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, §199. 3rd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1953. Print.



justification for my acting in this way in complying with the rule." How then are we capable of acting "this way" in accordance with the system's rules and regulations, both formal and informal? Our words are uttered with the relevant background of our training, the intuition for language use hence developed, which provides the shape of our usage. Thus, in speaking 'as a proficient English speaker' the meaning of my words is not a mysterious second entity lying before one's mind but is plainly manifest to us, in the words uttered (written) in the particular context of their utterance, with the relevant backgrounds of being proficient language users. Wittgenstein entices us, "But isn't chess defined by rules? And how are these rules present in the mind of someone who intends to play chess?".<sup>21</sup> The intuition that the rules of chess and the chess player's actions are divorceable; the intuition that an utterance can be divorced from the understanding of it is no more sensible than proclaiming that we see the sense-data of the cup in front of us before seeing 'the cup' itself. We cannot speak of the passive registration of sensory information and then of the qualitative experience inspired by it any more than we can sensibly talk about seeing the squiggles of ink before seeing the word.

### **5 Understanding 'Understanding'**

The private picture of rule following arises out of the perception that rules uniformly underlie language thus provide objective standards of correctness — another reflection of the idea that though language coheres to the objective structure of the world. Wittgenstein argues instead that rule following arises out of the customs and conventions

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<sup>21</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, §205. 3rd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1953. Print.

of the language-speaking community and hence that the act of rule following is not internal but public, manifest in the use of language. The proficient chess player is not coerced into particular choices by the rules, rather they shape his understanding of the game and are manifest in how he navigates it. To “look” rather than “think,” as Wittgenstein earlier pled, let us imagine the progression, the training, of a soccer player.

The nascent soccer player initially spends a great deal of time and effort simply ‘getting a feel’ for the ball, for moving in tandem with the ball, for making it go where he wants it to, for not tripping over it. He fosters the development of the relevant muscles and begins to make the relevant neural paths and connections, the muscle memory. At some point he learns the rules of the game and, for a time, must make reference to them. That is, in the beginning he may sometimes remind himself of the rules in order to navigate the game successfully, he may reflexively want to pick up the ball but in considering this he recalls that only the goalie has this privilege. But other times, the player will forget the rules entirely, or the relevant ones; he may run the ball out of bounds or pass it to the wrong team.

It is not an official rule that you cannot pass to the other team but there are a great many events and operations within the game that have consequences detrimental to your goals as a player — it is often just as damaging (to the objective of winning the game) to pass to the opposing team as it is to run out of bounds and provide the opposing team with the ball that way. But the effects of the player’s actions, of his running the ball out of bounds, of kicking and scoring a goal, of kicking and missing the goal, as well as the effects of his teammates actions, together constitute a multitude of micro-alterations and

inflections to the player's understanding of the game, of his role within it, and how to navigate it. Now ultimately the player has etched the many rules, both formal and informal, into the pathways of his brain; he has acquired a reflexive understanding of soccer and so too, cultivated a kind of working intuition for 'how to play soccer' — He is like the ship's captain who after decades on the sea, is able to navigate the ceaseless unpredictability of the ocean while keeping his crew safe and reaching a destination. Certainly there are times when both the player and the captain have to plan or deliberate, there are moments where abstraction is necessary and moments when explicitly consulting one's memory of rules is vital (planning a complicated play without violating the 'offsides' rule, for example). But soon the soccer player has "mastered a technique," rarely making explicit mental reference to his training anymore, he has been conditioned by it.

Wittgenstein wrote that, "To understand a sentence means to understand a language" and "To understand a language means to have mastered a technique"<sup>22</sup> — just as the proficient listener understands the sentence without (typically) any interior mental reference, the soccer player has consolidated a wealth of experience, of training, that has engendered an understanding of the game and so too of "the sentence:" of the game at any given moment. As we have seen the training is not nearly so simple as reading the rule book until it is memorized. The soccer player must learn the relevant functions and variations of his body within the system of the game; he must acquire an intuition not just for 'staying within bounds' but also for how hard to kick, and when, and where on the ball, and from what distance, all based on the relevant context of the opponents around

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<sup>22</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, §199. 3rd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1953. Print.

him, the teammates nearby, where the goalie presently is, and finally entrenched in the idiosyncratic anatomy and competencies of the player himself, and so duly attached to his particular likes and dislikes, challenges and obstacles, personal agenda, ego, &c. This is not to say that the player is making constant reference to the aforementioned facets of his training (he usually does not contemplate how or why his last kick went awry before making his next) in order to act in the game; rather, in acquiring this intuition, the mastery of this technique, he *understands* the game around him<sup>23</sup> and hence navigates it aptly in light of his training. And, in case this has not been made clear, one does not suddenly, after sufficient practice ‘get’ the mastery. Training, understanding, and technique, are not black and white — they are, of course, gradual processes and the understanding, the intuition for navigating the games, is ever-evolving.

The player’s training, and that was by no means an exhaustive characterization of it, cannot be reduced to the rule book or a set of drills without massive blindness to relevant information; and thus the understanding too (of the game at any given time, and hence how to act in it), is accordingly irreducible. Our training with language is no different: growing up, listening, speaking, reading, learning, playing, arguing, and countless such events and activities and interactions are all constitutive of our training with language. When we speak, we do not ordinarily make explicit access to our training and, when we listen, we do not ordinarily understand by mentally referencing our training. Rather, we perceive and act in the light of my training (and thus, in perceiving, understand).

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<sup>23</sup> To this effect, the player understands the game around him in the same way that you are capable of understanding the words that you are currently reading.

## 6 Regulation

Like the game of soccer, language is a form of life which we cannot grasp in totality in each passing moment of its progression. No less so, the conventions for language-use, the criteria and grammatical schematism of concepts for the community at large, evolve through the totality of a society's linguistic-engagements. They thus seem inaccessible to us because we are not capable of simultaneously interacting with everyone all-the-time, the grammatical schematism of our personal idiolects results from our engagement with only a relatively tiny portion of that totality. However, while the entire community is evolving so too are we. By being engaged members of a dynamic language-using community we receive constant feedback (we are understood and misunderstood, our language-use is validated and invalidated) that drives us toward attunement. Thus, over time, the schematism of our language approaches approximate correspondence to that of the community at large. This tendency founds the striking success of language but the idiosyncrasies of language use and training will inevitably become manifest as well:

And obviously sometimes you're going to be wrong in your assertion of the concept, and moreover you can never be sure you are not wrong. So say if you like that there are bases for applying concepts, and call those bases criteria; just don't think it follows that you might not have to *withhold* the concept sometimes. And it might be wise to add, whenever you do assert it, a pinch of recognition (e.g., 'almost certain') that you may have to take it back <sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Cavell, Stanley. *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, 68. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. Print.

The dictionary as well as the surface grammar of the language serve to explicate and solidify the otherwise nebulously evolving rules for language-use and hence we may find a common backing to many of our words and ways of speaking, but to truly ‘know’ a word it must be heard and used in such a variety of contexts so as to flesh out (for oneself) its schematization in language. Each individual’s criteria are manifest in the way that they speak (in asserting a concept you make public the satisfaction of your criteria for that concept’s use) and hence our interpersonal relationships and interactions engender the feeling of ‘near certainty’ in our language use but this leaves no room for skepticism about the so-called “reality” of the situation.

The mastery of a language is publicly manifest, just as ‘whether someone knows how to play soccer’ will ordinarily be accessible to us through our perception of their soccer match (though it is likely we may not be able to make such judgments without ourselves possessing some semblance of the relevant techniques). Our training with language is seen and heard in our competent or incompetent application of concepts in language-games. Not only is our intuition for language use continually evolving but also, like the soccer player whose perception (understanding) of the game around him is gradually changed, the very way in which we perceive the world around us is altered through language: Try to see not words in this sentence but rather squiggles of ink on the page; try, in conversation, to hear not the words being said but the raw auditory sounds. As we navigate the world around us we see that world *as* ourselves; having internalized such sociocultural sign systems as language and mathematics our perception is forever

altered.

## 7 Perception in the Light of Language

Experience, whether in the form of language or soccer, astronomy or mathematics, trains us to understand, to *perceive* and to navigate the world around us in light of that training. We are not receptacles of raw sensory information which we then interpret. The astronomer, viewing the topological aberrations on the surface of the moon, does not encounter a kind of ‘raw picture of the moon’ that is *then* interpreted in light of his or her professional training; rather the astronomer literally perceives the moon *in the light of his or her training*. We do not, Wittgenstein would argue, hear raw auditory input from a speaker and then somehow inject meaning into it with mental reference to prior experience; but rather, *in hearing*, we understand — semantic content, “meaning,” is a fact of our use of language as proficient speakers. Just as you are not confronted with scribbles on a page but words, you do not perceive *and then* understand but, *in perceiving*, understand. You perceive in light of your training with language. And so it is that the world appears stratified for us — we are not presented with raw visual input but with objects.

The notion, that we hear, see, speak, understand, perceive, *in the light of* our training with language (and our professional endeavors, our hobbies, &c.), compels us to understand that our language use and our knowledge of and claims about our perceptions

of this profoundly affected world,<sup>25</sup> are not somehow justified by correspondence to the so-called ‘nature of reality,’<sup>26</sup> but rather are substantive by virtue of their place within the rich environmental, personal, and cultural history that contextualizes them. For a non-native speaker to be wrong in saying “this is a piece of painter” is for him to be in disharmony with the community at large, he is wrong not because *actually*<sup>27</sup> it is ‘paper’ but because, conventionally, it is “paper,” because *usually* we call this “paper.”

Our accumulated experience, our history, shapes how we perceive the world, it provides us with a lens through which objects take form, acquire identity, are individuated. A tremendous portion of our history in the world is also our training with language — every act of language we have ever encountered or performed, written or read, seen or heard, whether in the confines of our own heads or in outward verbal expression, together constitutes our training with language — and as such, language can be said to lend significant weight to the lens of experience. The objects of our perception and our abstraction are the fruit of human consciousness and not a glimpse into the stratified contents of an objective reality. As such, the rightness and wrongness of our claims, our capacities and justifications for belief and knowledge, all exist within those same confines. For someone to be right or wrong, for a statement to be true, an individual to be honest, an accusation to be justified; these questions are answered with no appeal to

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<sup>25</sup> The “affected world” here being the world inflected by our training with and use of language, the world as it is engendered by the culture, community, history, and physiology nothing less than full-blooded human beings; the world as *we see it*.

<sup>26</sup> The idea that our claims about our perceptions of the world are justified by their correspondence to the state of the real, is one of the foundational ideas in a representational theory of meaning and is a tacit assumption of the skeptical problem of knowledge about other minds.

<sup>27</sup> “Actually” insofar as the word is used in philosophical contexts to indicate a correspondence to objective reality, e.g. “‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is *actually* white”



a transcendent state of affairs for they are games, they are activities and parts of activities, they are contextualized physically, personally, culturally, and historically and it would be nothing less than a distortion, a reduction, to seek more general answers to them.

If a soccer player were to pass midfield while in possession of the ball, grow nearer to the opposing goal but with the goalie facing her, while two opponents quickly close in from behind, and only one teammate parallel to her on the opposite side of the goal, the player then trying to curve the ball such that it might circumvent the goalie and score, only to miss — would it make sense for us to question whether this was objectively the right decision or the objectively wrong decision? Would it be sensible, if asked whether this was the right call, to appeal to an objective state of affairs? Or should we say that “the player was under a lot of pressure from midfield and only had a moment, she could have passed to her teammate for a better angle on the goal but that would likely have given the two opposing defenders the time needed to close the distance” — and this too would probably be a highly reductive analysis. I return to the example of soccer to illustrate the unrelenting complexity of actual human activity and accordingly, that the question of rightness and wrongness here, in *this* context, is answered through the resources of the game alone and thus necessitates the mastery of the technique. The context of the soccer player is no more or less intricate than that of the language speaker.

## **8 Finding Truth**

To master a language, then, is not to master objective reality (it is not to have

somehow gained insight into how the world ‘really’ is) but to acquire a lens through which that world may be carved up. Through this predominantly shared lens we gain the capacity to communicate our experience, for, in carving up the world, we gain the facility to draw out and speak of its pieces. Our training with language, understanding the grammatical schematism of its concepts, constitutes that lens and that capacity. Thus, in claiming “there is a cup in front of me” we ought not ask whether ‘in actuality’ there is a cup for perhaps it is a tube (mug, hat, &c.), for this is neither the function nor privilege of language, rather we must ask if what we are seeing is conventionally (usually, ordinarily, &c.) a “cup,” or, if ‘wrong,’ perhaps it is (what the community would call) a “tube”, “mug”, &c. The normativity of our perceptions, the very fact that we can intelligibly question the veridicality of what we perceive, creates the false intuition that our perceptions and claims are ‘true’ or ‘false’ based on some notion of what is ‘objectively the case’ but there are no things, no individual entities, ‘objectively,’ for a claim to be held up against. If I am wrong in my claim that “there is a cup in front of me” it is not because ‘objectively’ it is a tube, but because it is *conventionally* (typically, generally, &c.) a tube, it is usually called “a tube.” And so, had my training with language (specifically with ‘cups’ and ‘tubes’) been more comprehensive *I would have seen a tube* and thus said “there is a tube in front of me.” We must not be tricked into asking “is this actually anger” out of a misbegotten intuition that the behavior, the criteria, merely indicate — though, of course, the further peculiarities of emotion and how we talk about it warrant additional analysis.

To understand what an apple is; what we call an apple; the ‘meaning’ of ‘apple,’ is to have the “ability to use the concept in conjunction with other concepts,” to have “knowledge of which concepts are relevant to the one in question and which are not;” and to know “how various relevant concepts, used in conjunction with the concepts of different kinds of objects, require different kinds of contexts for their competent employment.”<sup>28</sup> To lack all of this, to lack the language training and hence the grammatical schematism for a concept, is to lack “not only a piece of information or knowledge, but the possibility of acquiring any information about such objects *uberhaupt*; you cannot be told the name of that object, because there is as yet no *object*.”<sup>29</sup> To see emotion, to see joy, despondence, ire, and so on, in the world around us is to have mastered a language, to possess its vast repertoire of concepts and their grammatical schematism, to possess their criteria and to hence perceive the world in light of them, to perceive the world *constituted* by them. Once this is the case, “Consciousness is as clear in his face and behavior, as in myself.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Cavell, Stanley. *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, 73. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. Print.

<sup>29</sup> *The Claim of Reason*, 77

<sup>30</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Zettel*, 221. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Ed. G. H. Von Wright. Berkeley: U of California, 1967. Print.

### III. Emotion

#### 1 Introduction

In his *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*<sup>31</sup>, Wittgenstein sets out to undermine and problematize much of the philosophical canon regarding the mind and how we talk about it. J.L. Austin's landmark essay *Other Minds*<sup>32</sup> accomplishes many of the same goals and, though they set about their work in characteristically different ways, Austin and Wittgenstein ultimately arrive in similar territory. In exploring each of their perspectives we will come to see that the way that we talk about the phenomenality — the quality or 'feel' — of our experience is deeply misbegotten; whether those locutions take form in the description of someone else's mental state or in an account of our own experience, there are profoundly misleading assumptions manifest in the ways that we talk about feeling and emotion. The fallible characterization of phenomenology (the misleading depiction of conscious, quality-laden experience) evident in the way we speak

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<sup>31</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Ed. G. H. Von Wright and Heikki Nyman. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1980. Print.

<sup>32</sup> Austin, J. L. *Philosophical Papers*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1961. Print.

of/describe emotions is symptomatic of a misunderstanding of how the verb ‘to know’ works — how and when we ‘know,’ what it is ‘to know.’

The epistemological issues that seem to arise with the notion of private experience, and specifically those that arise in the context of the Cartesian mind<sup>33</sup>, are the result of the assumption that when we speak of the mind, whether ours or another’s, we are reporting on a kind of essentially private, interior life — that, to speak of or speculate about feelings and emotions is to try to *get at* something fundamentally disconnected from the exterior, physical world. Stanley Cavell’s *The Claim of Reason*<sup>34</sup> advocates the Wittgensteinian position that, often, the outward behavior of a person quite simply *is* the criteria for the emotion, for ‘calling out’ their anger, for ‘knowing’ the man is expecting someone. In exploring the interwoven arguments of Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell I hope to ultimately show that, given the intersecting points of these authors, not only is the locution “I am expecting a friend” an *expression* of expectation but that behavior itself can be seen as an expression of phenomenality; or, rather, that one’s particular behavior (including the use of language) in a particular context, is manifest from, necessitated by, and an expression of their experiential state.

There is a further issue that I believe is worth bringing notice to now and as it is one that will recur throughout the writing to come: Language, being inescapably the medium through which I here will be formulating an argument, poses constraints on my writing that are of the very type I wish to highlight and renounce. For example, when I

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<sup>33</sup> The philosophical tradition engendered by Descartes known as Cartesian dualism posits that mental phenomena are divorced from the physical world—that the mind, consciousness is a nonphysical substance.

<sup>34</sup> Cavell, Stanley. *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. Print.

speak of an individual's experiential "state" I am being unintentionally misleading. One of the fundamental, seemingly omnipresent assumptions exemplified in (or, at the very least, reinforced by) our language use that has also toxically extended into philosophical discourse, is the objective existence of, singular entities — the existence, that is, of *objectively singular* objects — which, in totality, constitute an objective reality. While this notion is complicated to articulate, it is actually a rather simple idea that happens to be constrained by the opaque language used to describe it. Do not mistake me for saying that 'states,' 'cups,' emotions,' &c. do not exist for surely we are not wrong to speak of them, rather the point is that the constant linguistic realization of such concepts consolidates an intuition that, objectively, outside of human experience, there exist individuated 'things' that our words refer to — that though the name 'cup' is simply a tag we have created, underneath the word is some actual, existent object. Later in this paper I will be exploring in far greater detail what this assumption means for philosophy and why, despite how tremendously intuitive it is, we ought not subscribe to it. For now though, be aware that the constraints posed by language resolve me to speak of mental "states," of "atoms," of distinct "criteria," and so forth but this is not to say that such 'things' exist as individual entities objectively — the importance of this point will become far clearer as the paper progresses.

The notion that my behavior, both internal and external, verbal and nonverbal, to be an expression/manifestation of my experience carries the invaluable implication that emotion (the quality of conscious experience) is, so to speak, worn on our sleeves. To some this may seem obvious or intuitive but it carries with it far-reaching epistemological and

ontological implications that I will here attempt to explicate. However, it is first important to note that this claim is neither saying that all emotion can be reduced to behavior, nor that we ought not concern ourselves with one's inner, conscious life in making a judgment. The argument I will be presenting in retaliation against the skeptical tradition is fully distinct from behaviorism and conventionalism. Rather, in this paper I will attempt to show that behavior is one illuminating facet in a larger totality that, in many circumstances, can facilitate the ready and accurate assessment of emotion — in ordinary light and familiar circumstances we readily perceive the consciousness of others, we *see* their happiness, anger, &c. This is by no means to be taken as the claim that one can *introspect* another individual's experience (that one can feel what someone else is feeling), but merely that, in the same way that we presently see this paper before us, we can and often do see (recognize) emotion.

## 2 Wittgenstein on Ascriptions of Mental States

Toward the end of his *Philosophical Investigations*<sup>35</sup> Wittgenstein fervently denies that first-person ascriptions of mental states such as “I'm expecting him to arrive in five minutes” or “I wish it would stop raining” are reports or descriptions of some necessarily interior (and hence private) mental state. Rather these statements, in Wittgenstein's eyes, are actually manifestations of the mental states, or *expressions* of them. When I am expecting a friend to arrive, when I am experiencing the state of ‘expectation,’ that state may be expressed in my saying ‘I'm expecting her to arrive soon’ or ‘where is she?’ Just

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<sup>35</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1953. Print.

as I might rub my temples when having a particularly troubling headache, I also might say ‘I’m in pain’ and the locution is no less an expression of my psychological state than my rubbing my temples. As Wittgenstein explains, “By nature and particular training... we are disposed to give spontaneous expression to wishes in certain circumstances.”<sup>36</sup>

The boy who, after being stung by a bee, says ‘that hurts!’ is expressing his pain as much as he is by shaking the arm that got stung by the bee, “The statement ‘I am expecting a band at any moment’ is an expression of expectation” (Wittgenstein, P.253)<sup>37</sup> — Wittgenstein is making the point that such ascriptions are not to be seen as the external signs of some internal phenomenon but rather should be viewed as themselves a part of the experienced state, a part of ‘being in pain.’ In some cases, part of what it is to be in pain is to say “Ouch that hurts!” Just as in some cases part of what it means to wish for something is to say ‘I wish...’

Wittgenstein goes on to explain that in the case of third-person ascriptions, like ‘she’s bored’ or ‘he might be in pain,’ we are, much like in the case of first-person ascriptions, merely expressing our behavior towards others. That is, in many circumstances, part of what it means for me to believe someone is bored is to say “she’s bored.” Similarly, we can imagine a circumstance where someone is being punished and I, being an onlooker, am concerned for their well being; in this circumstance my saying “Sarah, he’s in pain!” is an expression of my belief that Sarah’s victim is in pain and, too, that I am concerned and want her to stop hurting him. Wittgenstein writes that “being sure that someone is in pain, doubting whether he is, and so on, are so many natural

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<sup>36</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, §441

<sup>37</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, §253



instinctive kinds of behavior towards other human beings, and our language is merely an auxiliary to, and further extension of, this relation. Our language-game is an extension of the primitive behavior.”<sup>38</sup> In this passage, the “primitive behavior” to which Wittgenstein refers can be understood as the more reflexive or basic behavior that often accompanies a feeling or emotion; thus wincing or grimacing when in pain or pacing anxiously when anticipating something constitute kinds of primitive behavior. So, when Wittgenstein notes that our language is “merely an auxiliary to, and further extension of” our instinctive behaviors towards other people we can see the implication that Wittgenstein, like Austin, recognizes that the states deemed essentially ‘inner’ and ‘private’ in the traditional formulation of the ‘problem of other minds’ are in fact tied up, in most ordinary contexts, with an entire array of manifestly public behaviors; and, though those behaviors (both primitive and linguistic) in some cases necessitate a level of language proficiency to be understood — to be *seen* — the way we behave and talk is deeply intertwined with the quality and emotion of our experience. The way we behave is manifest from and an expression of the phenomenality of our experience. As such, in the right context (in broad daylight, viewed by someone who knows you well, for example), it should be plainly evident how you are feeling; whether you are angry or sad, content or restless. We need not ambiguate the situation of someone commenting on, for example, an angry person by asking “But is she really angry, or are these just symptoms of anger?” For, in ordinary circumstances, that should be clear as day and, if it is not, that is not because their outward behavior is a mere an indication of a fundamentally inaccessible interior but

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<sup>38</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Zettel*, 545. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Ed. G. H. Von Wright. Berkeley: U of California, 1967. Print.

because perhaps in the present context the criteria do not plainly show anger, perhaps they show something more complex — a shade of anger, a combination of rage and self-pity, &c.

### 3 Austin on Signs and Symptoms

As Austin writes in his *Philosophical Papers*, we may talk of signs of a storm that has or will occur but not of one that is presently occurring. The air might be thick and so ‘smell like a storm is coming’, or the morning after one there might be a lightning strike in a tree, and all of these things might be considered signs of a storm, but we ought not talk about the literal presence of a storm, of black clouds and pouring rain and thunder, as ‘signs of a storm,’ they simply *are* the storm. Analogously, it is possible that one might enter a house and find it in disarray (papers everywhere, a broken chair, &c.) and rightly say that these things are signs of anger, of someone who was angry. But in the presence of anger we ought never talk of its many manifestations and characteristics as signs or symptoms of anger for they quite simply *are* the anger, are part of the anger, are *expressions* of anger. “What is important,” Austin writes, “is that we never talk of ‘symptoms’ or ‘signs’ except *by way of implied contrast with inspection of the item itself.*”

<sup>39</sup> Both Austin and Wittgenstein thus retaliate against the traditional skepticism regarding other minds, the seemingly intuitive language we use in talking about emotion deludes us into seeing our words as indicating mental states instead of describing them, being a part of them.

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<sup>39</sup> Austin, J. L. *Philosophical Papers*, 105 Oxford: Clarendon, 1961. Print.

#### 4 Cavell on Criteria and Deep Grammar

The notion of criteria here plays a very important role for they justify us in our claims about emotion and, more particularly, can be seen as the cause or stimulus for those claims. To have the criteria for a concept is to ‘understand’ it, to see and know it in the world, to be capable of seeing and knowing it. For Cavell, criteria justify the observer in the knowledge claim (in saying) “that is X.” And what could ‘knowing’ be, besides being justified in claiming to know? In seeing that criteria justify the knowledge claim we must also see that this (having the criteria) *is* what it is ‘to know X’. And, as such, to have the criteria for a concept (for that concept to be grammatically schematized in one’s personal lexicon) is to understand it — to, literally, see, identify, and *know* it in the world around us. In possessing the criteria for the concept of ‘expecting a friend’ one can recognize, literally, *see* the man (pacing anxiously, checking his diary, looking out the window, and setting out tea) *as ‘a man expecting a friend’*.

The criteria 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 (of the meaning of a word; of what it is to know something) 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<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Cavell, Stanley. *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, 73. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. Print.

In possessing the grammatical schematism, explained above, for ‘cup’ (in knowing what a cup is), I do not see the white, round shape in front of me that is filled with clear liquid and then through some ambiguous mental gymnastics arrive at the conclusion that there is a cup in front of me, *I simply see the cup*, I ‘know’ there is a ‘cup’ in front of me. In fact, when looked at more closely, we can see that the notion (of perceiving the characteristics of the cup and only then deducing that it is indeed a cup) is poorly disguised nonsense. If, in ordinary circumstances, I did actually perceive the characteristics of the cup in order to conclude its being a ‘cup’, then how did I ascertain the precise identity of those informing characteristics? How did I know it was ‘white’ and ‘round’? By observing the underlying characteristics of whiteness and roundness and hence deducing that it was white and round? Then what of those characteristics? The regression here outlines the fallibility of the inciting idea. We do not, in clear light and ordinary circumstance, privately ascertain the identity of our perceptions, rather, we simply see the cup as a cup. Having been trained into proficiency in a language we have acquired a vast and intricate web of concepts and an intuition, a mastered technique, for their profoundly nuanced and varied contextual employment.

In learning a language we learn a way of seeing the world, we learn to see *our* world. When I see the boy in class with eyes drifting around the room, with his head perched carelessly on his hands, having no overt reaction to the professor’s lecture, I simply see that he is bored, I possess the concept of boredom and recognize its criteria here and can hence quite simply tell that he is bored. As Wittgenstein writes, “Look into

someone else's face, and see the consciousness in it, and a particular shade of consciousness. You see on it, in it, joy, indifference, interest, excitement, torpor, and so on... Do you look into yourself in order to recognize the fury in his face? It is there as clearly as in your own breast."<sup>41</sup>

## 5 Reconciling Language and Emotion

Having established the idea that language provides (a portion of) the lens through which we view the world, that as proficient language users we literally perceive the 'cup,' the 'storm,' the man's 'anger,' and that our perception of these things need not be tethered to some notion of objectivity but rather can be understood as a testament to our active, ongoing engagement in the language-speaking community. While there are cases of ambiguity, in ordinary circumstances the storm does not come to us piecemeal: high winds, heavy rain, thunder in the distance, and (wait for it) lightning! are not consolidated in some kind of conceptual, cognitive-arithmetic that outputs 'storm.' No less, Wittgenstein's man pacing back and forth, looking out the window, checking his datebook, &c. can simply be seen as 'a man expecting a friend.' There will always be cases of exception, cases where we are reticent, where our judgment is held back, but these are not indicative of some general principle that states we, in all cases, *can not* see his anger, expectation, boredom, and so on. Rather our participation in the meaning-making practice of language engenders a rich and colorful lens through which we *do* see the storm, the 'anger,' the 'man expecting a friend.' But we must be careful here for we are in danger of

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<sup>41</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Zettel*, 220. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Ed. G. H. Von Wright. Berkeley: U of California, 1967. Print.

making the same mistake that the skeptic makes: In precisely the same way that we ought not extricate a general principle of The Unknowability of Emotion, so too we must restrain ourselves from taking the ordinary visibility of emotion to entail the Necessarily Ever-Present Visibility of Emotion. There are a great many cases where, in fact, we simply do not know an individual's precise emotional state and, further, there are cases where we even may never know!

Toward the end of Austin's essay *Other Minds* he speculates that Mr. Wisdom (advocating skepticism of other minds) is "justified" in feeling that "there is a further and quite *special* difficulty"<sup>42</sup> in the case of knowledge about mental states and clarifies this saying "Might the man not exhibit all the symptoms (and display and everything else) of anger, even ad infinitum, and yet still *not* (really) *be* angry?"<sup>43</sup> On the surface this question seems intuitive, surely we often exhibit the behavior of one thing while feeling another altogether, surely we can *act*. Let us consider that perhaps the issue is not so much *is she sad and only pretending to be happy?* but instead isn't my thought "*is she sad and only pretending to be happy?*" itself a complicated and expression of my perception of her emotional state. First let us turn to Wittgenstein when he writes that we see not just emotion in the face of another but a "particular shade" of emotion. Here he highlights an important reality: Emotion is no simple, easily reducible thing; there is a color, shade, nuance, and subtlety to our conscious experience. It is a rare thing for someone to conform, without remainder or reduction, to our articulations of emotional states. The lack of tone and nuance at play in such scenarios as being described as 'happy,' 'sad,'

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<sup>42</sup> Austin, J. L. *Philosophical Papers*, 111. Oxford: Clarendon, 1961. Print.

<sup>43</sup> *Philosophical Papers*, 111

'angry' or otherwise fails profoundly to encapsulate the depth and context of our feelings-- Even our more subtle, particularized adjectives (quizzical, disgruntled, serene) rarely do justice to the totality and specificity of the experienced emotion. Truly we do have a powerful intuition that we can be something and yet behave as something else but I take this delusion to arise from a too casually simplified construal of what it is to *'be something'* at all.

If I am angry and angry is all I am (assuming we can even sensibly talk of such a thing) then I would necessarily behave angrily, my behavior would express my anger and be a part of it, of being angry. But surely, Austin posits, could you not possess that precise feeling and yet, for whatever reason, behave differently? Well, if I were upset, and for whatever reason wanted to express myself differently -- for example because I don't want my friends to worry -- then I am not simply upset. Rather, I am upset and also nervous or ashamed or concerned &c. at the prospect of my friends worrying and, as such, my behavior is a precisely suited expression of that state. Sometimes a part of being angry and ashamed is trying to behave in such a way as to disguise that anger. Perhaps I can successfully mislead my friends into seeing me as not upset but that is not because my outward state differs in kind from my inward one, rather it is precisely because of the way that I feel, in totality, that my behavior takes that form.

My behavior (attempting to act calm and unphased) is an expression of my mental state (angry and ashamed) but only those possessing the relevant contextual details, familiarity with my idiosyncrasies, knowledge of my natural history, would be able to see it as such. The recognition of the criteria here for my mental state depends on not just the

possession of the grammatical schematism for the relevant general concepts but also on the possession of an intimate personal, contextual knowledge which furnishes those concepts with meaning and specificity in this particular context, in this particular interaction with this particular person. thus, while it might mislead my acquaintances, upon returning home to my spouse and exhibiting the same behavior, she, given her more intimate knowledge of my idiosyncrasies, history, and recent context, might very well see me as ‘upset, ashamed, and doing my utmost to hide it.’ Thus in the specific context of my standing front of someone who possesses the relevant knowledge, my behavior *is* the criteria for my mental state, for seeing me as ‘upset and ashamed.’ Whereas, in the case of a stranger, I am seen as perfectly alright but not because, as the skeptic advocates, my external being is a fallible symptom of my internal being; rather it is because my ongoing behavior is part of a larger totality of which the stranger, unlike the confidant, is not aware. To speak of ‘being angry’ and *only* ‘angry’ may very well be nonsense as the quality of our experience does not fall neatly into categories that can classify our present states without ambiguity or blindness to some facet of our present experience. If we could simply be angry then it would manifest truly. Still this is counter-intuitive, we protest ‘Well I really am happy right now and yet can wear a guise of apathy or sadness, you would never know!’ And indeed it is the case that *I* may ‘never know,’ but the crux of the matter is not so much whether a false-portrayal of your present state is successful or unsuccessful but that in fact there is no such thing as a false-portrayal at all, just a bad judgment on my part or on over-simplification on theirs.



Take, for example, Elizabeth. Each day when I arrive home from work I chat with my housemate Elizabeth, who is at school during the day. On one particular afternoon I arrive home expecting to find her upset, because earlier that day a mutual friend mentioned that every single student in one of Elizabeth's classes had failed their midterm exam. I expected Elizabeth to be upset because I know that she, like myself, takes her academic work very seriously. Strangely though, when I walked into our kitchen and said hello she did not seem upset at all. Rather, she appeared to be contentedly cooking, seemingly unperturbed by the day's events. I wondered to myself, *is she really happy or just pretending to be happy?* Here we have a case in which, surely, I do not know how she feels. What does this tell us about our ascriptions of mental states? Well, when viewing this situation as a lack of judgment, a kind of back-and-forth between two emotions (happy and upset), it does indeed seem that I am simply at a loss. However, if we take a step back from the utterance and, instead of viewing it as my inability to reach a judgment about her emotional state, see the entire expression — “is she really happy, or just pretending to be happy?” — taken in totality, as a judgment, as an ascription of a mental state, then our view would be cleared.

Let us imagine that, as it turns out, there has always been an unspoken competitiveness to my relationship with Elizabeth who, as such, was embarrassed about her failing mark and withheld any explicit show of her own irritation so that I would not think less of her. The problem here is that we are very attached to our emotional *labels* — the fact that we cannot easily apply ‘happy’ or ‘sad’ makes us uneasy, as though my oscillating between the two were as unsubstantive as my not making any judgment at all.

But *this* is the point! My entire expression, the very fact that I was indeed experiencing such an internal dialogue about whether it could be this or that, was itself an honest expression of my understanding of her emotional state. It is as though, to place us in familiar ground, we could have a third emotion word ‘*really-happy-or-just-pretending*’ that I can see her as, just as I can see the ‘angry’ man or the expectant one, and so on. The perception of emotion is a complicated dialogue between the observer and the observed. The relevant contextual details (the failed test), my historical or personal knowledge of the individual (the unspoken competition, academic seriousness, &c.), as well as the current context (Elizabeth’s calm demeanor while cooking) all culminate in my perception of Elizabeth in this situation — it is the full-blooded complexity of human life, of felt experience *and nothing less* that engenders such rich and densely populated visions as our own.

Your present feelings, your beliefs, expectations, desires and goals, are all exemplified simultaneously, occurrently, in *how you are right now*, and ‘what you are doing’ is as much a part of how you are as ‘what you are feeling’. If I feel happy and pretend to be sad then I have my reasons for doing so--the reality is not that there is a dichotomy of ‘*really*’ being happy that runs parallel to ‘coming off’ as sad, but instead that what I ‘really’ am is not reducible to a single emotion, like ‘happy’, but rather is a vastly intricate network of feelings, beliefs, ambitions, intentions, motivations, past experiences &c. So it is that when I pretend to be sad I am not so much ‘actually happy’ as I am ‘actually happy and somehow motivated to appear sad,’ and hence the behavior that is

being called pretending is in fact a necessarily appropriate manifestation of how I truly am. We misleadingly label it ‘pretending’ simply because we often lack the relevant information or context to label it what it actually is.

Indeed, we have all experienced being angry and yet simultaneously reluctant for whatever reason (insecurity, shame, fear) to admit or expose that anger; thus our external manifestation may be delusive (someone could easily misinterpret your *seeming* lack of anger as an *actual* lack of anger) but really it is perfectly suitable. To *be* angry-and-hesitant-to-admit-that-anger is to *behave* angry-and-hesitant-to-admit-that-anger. In a case like this where one’s emotional state is complex the observer may very well be too unfamiliar with your behavior or the wider context of your history and as a result misinfer what your behavior *is*, but the relevance of how well you judge harkens back to Austin’s qualification of knowledge. It should not be surprising, really it should be obvious, that our judgments about someone’s behavior are often wrong, just as our judgments about the world and everything else often are. While this difficulty is frustrating it is not so insurmountable that we can take refuge in the notion that, even in theory, we *could not know*, as if due to some enigmatic cloaking mechanism. Rather than plead impossibility we should consider that, in situations where we fail to accurately assess behavior, it is not the privy access to the person’s phenomenal state that is our undoing but instead our lack of information, familiarity, intimacy, historical knowledge &c. with the person that disallows us from recognizing the criteria being presented to us .

The fact that we do not necessarily have an accurate understanding of the behavior we seek to understand should **not** lead to a bifurcation of mind from body but rather to a

careful consideration of the wider context. All apparent aberrations of behavior stem from a lack of necessary or relevant information. In knowing someone intimately for many years, in sharing experience and life with them, the behavior, which to someone less educated in their particular manner of being would seem ‘sad,’ would to you be aptly recognized as ‘happy-but-trying-to-appear-sad’ for reasons x, y, z. Surely I am not alone in having been upset while trying to maintain a ‘happy-face’ when low-and-behold someone very close to me asked what was wrong, where no one else possessed the relevant context and familiarity that would have allowed them to recognize that there was something wrong at all. Like language, behavior is nuanced and entrenched in context, to assume that an action can be isolated from its situation and still evaluated as though it corresponds so simply to a single thing is to dramatically oversimplify the fact that everything we do is a part of everything we are. Recognizing the fallibility of judgment must not lead to the conclusion that what we see overtly is a potentially delusive version of what we are under the surface; instead we should endorse the idea that the fallibility of our judgments arises out of our lack of relevant knowledge and our blindness to greater context. The more you know the more accurately you can see someone’s actions for what they are.

In the end then, the ‘something special’ in the case of recognizing another’s feelings that Austin hints at toward the end of *Other Minds* mustn’t be referring to a mysterious dualism of mind and body but rather to the less mysterious, and far less troubling, understanding that you simply can’t know everything and so at best all judgments are approximate. To those who have all of the relevant knowledge (though few they will

likely be) it will be necessarily evident what the manifest behavior really is because that behavior is an infinitely nuanced exemplification of how you really are. A final clarification: To behave a facsimile of usual-anger does not mean that you are actually, or even nearly angry but that the act of, and motives for, attempting to give a false impression of yourself would have some external criteria and so (given proper contextual knowledge) could be reasonably distinguished from actual anger. To actually behave happy is to be actually happy.

## **6 Idiosyncrasy and Commonality**

And, though our outward behavior in all of its massive nuance and complexity is manifest from and an expression of the equally subtle and intricate phenomenology behind it, there is another important facet of Austin's question we must elucidate such that we might further understand the confusion surrounding other minds. Due to the inherent contrast in the way each of us experience the world, as unique human beings possessed of unique neurophysiological capacities, idiosyncratic histories and so on, we thus express ourselves, our psychological states, in unique and varied ways. The contrast in the experience of one human to another, biological and historical, is manifest in the contrast in their behavior. The teenager whose therapist has indicated a 'problem with anger' and provided coping strategies for it naturally expresses her anger in a unique way, in a way inflected by her experience with her therapist and, generally, in a way inflected by her entire natural history. This, the disparity in our modes of experience and means of expression, is vitally important to understanding why Austin's question is misleading.

When Austin describes the man as exhibiting “all the symptoms (and display and everything else) of anger” we must understand Austin to be generalizing; that is, the man exhibits all of the conventional, ordinary, usual, standard &c. behavior of anger and yet ‘really’ feels something besides anger. The variety of manifestations that our phenomenal states may take is in a sense equilibrated here such that, going about the world, one can assess the ‘typical’ behavior of the ‘typical’ person, but this leveling off, this abstraction from the particular is deeply misleading as it allows us to seemingly sensibly pose Austin’s question. When we instead zoom in and examine a particular case of an actual person’s behavior we can see that, though their behavior might not be the conventional/usual manifestation of whatever emotion, it *is their* expression of that emotion.

### **7 Inferential Distance or Ordinary Ambiguity?**

The seeming inferential distance in our judgments of other minds, or, rather, in the way we perceive emotion in the world around us, is far less mysterious than the philosophical tradition has made it out to be. The same kind of misunderstanding that is constantly at play in our lives as we interact with the world is what we too hastily deem a mysterious inferential distance in how we see, and misunderstand, the emotions of others. Take Jones, as he walks down the road at dusk he surveys the horizon and sees a person standing, immobile in the lawn a block down. As Jones approaches the person he becomes better illuminated, and can be seen more clearly, at this point Jones realizes that the ‘person’ he was seeing is actually an oddly shaped mailbox. The process of Jones approaching the person, of Jones becoming suspicious of the figure’s extended stillness, of

the increasingly clear mailbox-esque shape of the person, all resulting in Jones' ultimately seeing that, no, it is a mailbox, is entirely analogous to the process of approaching a person and seeing that they are happy, realizing gradually that their smile falters, hearing about some unfortunate news regarding them, and ultimately seeing that, no, this person is upset and trying to retain a 'happy face.'

## 8 Conclusion

Behavior is honest. Our phenomenal experience is manifest, however subtly or imperceptibly, in our behavior. We can misunderstand behavior, we do sometimes misunderstand emotion. This is the result of the complexity of felt-experience and the nuance and richness of relevant contextual, historical and personal information which we may or may not be in possession of. To say that lacking these things and thus calling someone angry when really they were "pretending to be irritated" is a result of the fundamental inaccessibility of other minds is no more sensible than if I were to claim that my having never played croquet and hence not being able to understand<sup>44</sup> the state of the game entails an unbreachable barrier between myself and croquet.

A final passage from Austin in answer to the residual dissatisfaction that such a discussion is ultimately besides the point because, "The real crux of the matter remains

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<sup>44</sup> In the Wittgensteinian sense, understanding as "the mastery of a technique."

still that ‘I ought not to say that I know Tom is angry, because I don’t introspect his feelings’”

1. *Of course I don’t introspect Tom’s feelings...*
2. *Of course I do sometimes know Tom is angry.*
3. To suppose that the question ‘How do I know that Tom’s angry?’ is meant to mean ‘How do I introspect Tom’s feelings?’, ... is simply barking our way up the wrong gum tree <sup>45</sup>

The Cartesian narrative of mind independent from a body, of inside and outside, has long been damaging to both ordinary intuitions and philosophical discussions — our behavior whether public (what others see of us) or private (one’s inner monologue) fully exemplifies, *is literally suited to, necessitated by, and an expression of*, the phenomenality of our experience. And, though it is not unusual for an observer to lack some relevant information or familiarity which would enable him to recognize the outward behavior, the criteria, of the person being observed as the emotion that it is, there are indeed external criteria that, given relevant historical and contextual knowledge as well as language proficiency, enable the observer to recognize what they are feeling, to “see the consciousness in [someone else’s face].”<sup>46</sup> The idiosyncratic sensory modalities and neurophysiological capacities each of us possess certainly engender challenging variety in outward criteria and the inability of such simple, one-dimensional words for emotion (‘happy,’ ‘sad,’ &c.) to encompass the complexity and nuance therein ultimately come together to create this confusion and misunderstanding laden picture of emotion and how

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<sup>45</sup> Austin, J. L. *Philosophical Papers*, 115 - 116. Oxford: Clarendon, 1961. Print.

<sup>46</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Zettel*, 220. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Ed. G. H. Von Wright. Berkeley: U of California, 1967. Print.



we talk about it; but nowhere in this idiosyncrasy riddled confusion is there space for the notion that we misunderstand and mislabel emotion because it exists apart from its outward symptoms. We must not look at the dark clouds and lightning and say “look, signs of a storm.

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