Nasrudin was invited to give a discourse to the inhabitants of a nearby village. He mounted the rostrum and began.

“O people, do you know what I am about to tell you?”

Some rowdies, seeking to amuse themselves, shouted, “No!”

“In that case,” said the Mulla with dignity, “I shall abstain from trying to instruct such an ignorant community.”

The following week, having obtained an assurance from the hooligans that they would not repeat their remarks, the elders of the village again prevailed upon Nasrudin to address them.

“O people!” he began again, “do you know what I am about to say to you?”

Some of the people, uncertain as to how to react, for he was gazing at them fiercely, muttered, “Yes.”

“In that case,” retorted Nasrudin, “there is no need for me to say more.” He left the hall.

On the third occasion, when a deputation had again visited him and implored him to make one further effort, he presented himself before the assembly.

“O people! Do you know what I am about to say?”

Since he seemed to demand a reply, the villagers shouted, “Some of us do, and some of us do not.”

“In that case,” said Nasrudin as he withdrew, “let those who know tell those who do not.”

The Sufis
0. WITTGENSTEIN THE MAN

Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein was a great philosopher who has already become a classic in philosophy. He was born in Vienna on 26 April 1889 in a very wealthy and cultured family. He was educated at home till he was fourteen and then went to school for three years in Upper Austria. In 1906 he proceeded to a technical institute in Berlin. Ever since his childhood he was interested in machinery and as a boy he had constructed a sewing machine.

The period between 1906 and 1912 in Wittgenstein’s life was of restlessness and of painful seeking and of finally finding his vocation. In 1908 he went to England as a research student in engineering at the University of Manchester. He did research in aeronautics there for three years and some of his inventions in aeronautics were patented. But while he was at Manchester, Wittgenstein’s interests began to shift from aeronautics to pure mathematics and then to the foundations of mathematics. During this period he read Russell’s *Principles of Mathematics* and became very interested in the ‘new logic’ of Frege and Russell. In 1912 Wittgenstein’s father died and he inherited a great fortune.

Between 1912 and 1913 Wittgenstein was registered at Cambridge first as an undergraduate and later as an advanced student under Russell. He soon became intimate with Russell and got to know Moore and Whitehead and was friendly with many other eminent intellectuals. Russell has described getting to know Wittgenstein as “one of the most exciting intellectual adventures of my life”. Besides philosophy Wittgenstein also did some experimental work in psychology concerning rhythm in music. He was exceptionally musical. He played the clarinet and had a rare talent for whistling, and for some time he wished to become a conductor.

In 1913 Wittgenstein went to Norway and lived on a farm in a hut he built himself. But when the war broke out in 1914 he joined the Austrian army and was captured by the Italians in 1918 and held as a prisoner of war till the following year. During his captivity he sent Russell the manuscript of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* which he had finished
writing during the war. He was in the habit of writing down his thoughts in notebooks and sometimes he dictated to colleagues and pupils. During the war he became acquainted with the religious and ethical writings of Tolstoy. This was a period of crisis in Wittgenstein’s life which was always infused with an intensity bordering on mental illness.

After returning from the war one of the first things Wittgenstein did was to give away all his money. Henceforth he lived a life of extreme simplicity, and banished all ornamentation from his dress and lifestyle. After being trained in a teachers’ training college during 1919-1920 he took up the vocation of a schoolmaster. For six years he taught in various remote villages in Lower Austria. In 1926 he resigned his post and went to work as a gardener’s assistant in a monastery. During this period – as also at other periods in his life – he contemplated entering a monastery. His service with the monks soon came to an end when he took up a task that absorbed his time and genius for two years. He built a mansion in Vienna for one of his sisters. He also did a sculpture during this period. His biographer tells us that both these creations – like Wittgenstein’s writings – are marked by a severe simplicity and finished and restful beauty. There is a striking contrast between the restlessness, the continual searching and changing in Wittgenstein’s life and personality, and the perfection and elegance of his finished work.

Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* had appeared in German in 1921 and an English translation had appeared the following year. This, along with a spelling book for elementary schools, and a paper on logical form which he was supposed to read at the annual meeting of British philosophers in 1929, was all that Wittgenstein published during his lifetime. Curiously enough he repudiated the *Tractatus* in his later writings and the paper on logical form he considered worthless. At the meeting where he was supposed to read it he surprised his audience by talking about a completely different topic, viz. the notion of the infinite in mathematics. But even during the ten year detour from philosophy Wittgenstein had kept in touch with some philosophers. His influence on the leaders of the famous Vienna Circle of logical positivists, in particular, was tremendous even if it was based on an erroneous interpretation of Wittgenstein’s philosophy. Now Wittgenstein felt he could again do creative work and in 1929 he arrived in Cambridge again. He was first registered as a research student though
he had already proven to be one of the greatest living philosophers. But his pre-war residence at Cambridge was credited and his book published eight years earlier was presented as a thesis and he was awarded a Ph.D. in June 1929. He became a Fellow of Trinity College in 1930.

After returning to Cambridge Wittgenstein began to write down his philosophical thoughts. His output from then on was tremendous. But he never published anything in the last twenty years of his life, never attended conferences or lectures out of Cambridge, discouraged the circulation even of notes of his Cambridge lectures and discussions, and even had many of his notebooks destroyed. But with his serious students and a few colleagues, – economists, mathematicians, physicians and philosophers, – he would discuss philosophical matters unwearyingly. Yet from this jealously preserved little pond, as Gilbert Ryle said in an obituary, there have spread waves over the philosophical thinking of much of the English speaking world. Except for some interruptions Wittgenstein continued to live in England till the end of his life. In 1935 he had planned to settle in the Soviet Union but he did not do it. Instead he spent a year in his hut in Norway, where he began writing the *Philosophical Investigations*. In 1937 he returned to Cambridge and in 1939 succeeded Moore to the chair of philosophy.

Before Wittgenstein could assume the chair, however, war broke out again. For some time during the Second World War he served as a porter in a hospital in London. Later he worked in a medical laboratory in Newcastle where he developed some useful technical innovations. He was strongly attracted to medicine and had once seriously considered giving up philosophy for medicine. In 1947 Wittgenstein gave up his chair at Cambridge to devote all his remaining strength to his research. As he had done before, he went to live in seclusion in the Irish countryside in 1948 and later in a hut beside the ocean on the Irish west coast. Here he became a legend among his neighbours who were primitive fishermen, because he had tamed so many birds that used to come everyday to be fed by him. Later he moved to Dublin where he finished the second part of the *Investigations*. In 1949 he visited his pupil Norman Malcolm in Ithaca, New York, who instigated Wittgenstein to write about Moore’s philosophy of common sense, which resulted in Wittgenstein’s remarks
On Certainty written during the last eighteen years of his life. When he returned from America it was found that he had cancer. He was severely ill during the last two years of his life but he continued to write excellent philosophy till two days before his death on 29 April 1951.

1. AN INTRODUCTION TO WITTGENSTEIN’S EARLY PHILOSOPHY

There has been a phenomenal amount of interest in the publication and study of Wittgenstein’s works after his death. The field of Wittgenstein exegesis has become vast and jealously guarded. The bibliography lists the two philosophical works Wittgenstein published during his lifetime and some of those parts of the Wittgenstein corpus published in book form since his death. The dates of composition of these posthumously published works are given in parentheses after the titles. Parts of the corpus have appeared in periodical literature and some other records of conversations, lectures, and letters by Wittgenstein are also available, but not listed here. It was Wittgenstein’s habit to work by writing separate paragraphs or remarks on the questions that were exercising him. Later he would seek for an arrangement of his results which would make a satisfactory book. This was as much hard work as the thinking that had gone into the remarks; and he did not aim to incorporate all the remarks that he was satisfied with in the book that finally emerged. Thus there is a great difference between the first draft material and the finished works like the Tractatus or the Investigations. Most of the notebooks containing his preliminary work, belonging to all his periods of writing, were destroyed by him in 1950.

Wittgenstein’s writings are formidable and there is no shortcut to or through them. His remarks are connected like the strands of a fishing net. You cannot isolate one strand for study without at the same time exerting a pull on all the other strands. He writes cryptically and his thoughts are so compressed that they cannot be compressed further. His views are radically perspectival because he constantly strove to unveil a perspective that had not already been ordered into a public map. His language is extremely tensile and full of spiritual intensity. Wittgenstein
was not the first philosopher of language; even in the Upanishads we are told to meditate on speech: “If there were no speech, neither right nor wrong would be known, neither true nor false, neither the pleasant nor the unpleasant. Speech makes us understand all this. Meditate on speech.” But Wittgenstein, more than anyone else, has brought the problem of language into the forefront of philosophical inquiry. It is due more to Wittgenstein than anyone else that language is now regarded not only as a necessary means by which philosophical thought may be developed and communicated but as a basic ingredient of such thought.

To add to the difficulties in understanding Wittgenstein, there are almost two Wittgensteins. As the young man who wrote the *Tractatus* and then gave up doing philosophy, and later as the author of the posthumously published works, Wittgenstein created two different and partly conflicting philosophies. Though some scholars are more impressed by the unity of purpose between the early and the later philosophies of Wittgenstein, all are aware of the great difference between the two. Let us first look at the *Tractatus*, before looking at his later philosophy, especially as presented in the *Investigations*. Considering the range and profundity of Wittgenstein’s thinking, I must warn you that my effort will amount to offering you spoonfuls of salt water and asking you to imagine the ocean from it!

### 1.1 The Tractatus

The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is a complex work of genius containing short oracular remarks running into about seventy-five pages. There is a total of about 525 remarks of which seven are main propositions and the others are hierarchically numbered comments and comments on comments pertaining to the main remarks. Within this short span, ideas of many different kinds are combined, and widely different questions find connected answers. In his Preface to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Wittgenstein wrote:

> Perhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it – or at least similar thoughts. – So it is not a textbook...
The book deals with the problems of philosophy, and shows, I believe, that the reason why these problems are posed is that the logic of our language is misunderstood. The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence.

Thus the aim of the book is to set a limit to thought, or rather – not to thought, but to the expression of thought: for in order to be able to set a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e. we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought). It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be set, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense….

He concludes the preface thus:

If this work has any value, it consists in two things: the first is that thoughts are expressed in it, and on this score the better thoughts are expressed – the more the nail has been hit on the head – the greater will be its value – here I am conscious of having fallen a long way short of what is possible……

On the other hand the truth of the thoughts that are here set forth seems to me unassailable and definitive. I therefore believe myself to have found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems. And if I am not mistaken in this belief, then the second thing in which the value of this work consists is that it shows how little is achieved when these problems are solved.

Wittgenstein had once said that his idea of the work was not that anyone by reading it will understand his ideas but that someday someone will think them out again for himself and will derive great pleasure from finding in his book their exact expression. According to him the three foremost philosophers of his time – Russell, Moore, and Frege – had misunderstood the book.
The point of departure of the *Tractatus* was the great difference between two uses of language: to make meaningful factual statements and to make metaphysical or philosophical statements that were born of confusion. The aim of the book was to set a limit to the expression of thought, to see how it is that what can be said at all can be said clearly. What Wittgenstein was trying to do was this: he was working inside the structure of actual language, and he was trying to establish the limits of any possible language. It is as if a creature living inside the skin of an opaque bubble plotted its centre, and then used some hydraulic formula to calculate the maximum expansion of any possible bubble. The aim of philosophizing in the *Tractatus* is to end all philosophizing. The idea was that every philosophical proposition is bad grammar and that if the logic of our language were to be correctly understood, philosophical problems would not even be posed. Thus the *Tractatus* investigates the essence of language – its function and its structure. Logic, Language, and the World are the three master issues of the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein’s order of investigation is from the nature of logic to the nature of language and then to the nature of the world but the order of presentation of these master issues in the *Tractatus* is the reverse. It begins with the propositions:

1. The world is all that is the case,
   1.1 The world is the totality of facts, not of things
   1.1.1 The world is determined by the facts, and by their being *all* the facts.

Let us start by examining Wittgenstein’s treatment of the question of how language relates to the world, how propositions can have factual meaning. He conceives of language as the totality of propositions, to correspond to the totality of facts that is the world. Propositions have sense and the sense of an ordinary proposition is a function of its implications: it depends on what is necessarily the case if the proposition is true. Now any proposition can be analyzed into elementary propositions such that they cannot be further broken down into other propositions. Elementary propositions are factual propositions which are logically independent of one another: the truth or falsity of one elementary proposition never implies the truth or falsity of any other
elementary proposition. Such elementary propositions would describe 
atomic facts. The assertion of an ordinary factual proposition is a gross 
move, which contains within itself a large number of minute moves. 
Wittgenstein was not recommending that the assertion of each of these 
implicated propositions should be a separate move in everyday life. The 
grossness of ordinary factual propositions is a blessing. His point was 
that an exact account of what they mean could be given only if they 
were analyzed into their ultimate components, elementary propositions.

The ultimate constituents of atomic facts are simple objects which have 
names. Names are the simple symbols indicated by single letters ‘x’, 
‘y’, ‘z’. Elementary propositions are functions of names having the form 
‘f(x)’, ‘(x, y)’ etc. and are indicated by the letters ‘p’, ‘q’, ‘r’. Only 
propositions have sense and only in the context of a proposition does a 
name have reference.

Diagram 1 represents Wittgenstein’s conception of language as a mirror 
of the world. Like Diagram 2 (which we will soon examine), if it is 
folded horizontally in the middle, the lower half will be congruent with 
the upper half. Diagram 1 shows how the constituents of elementary 
propositions name simple objects in the world. Elementary propositions 
picture atomic facts and gross or ordinary factual propositions picture 
facts just as a map of Hyderabad would picture this city – whether 
correctly or incorrectly. And the world is the totality of facts, all that is 
the case.

Every factual proposition has a precise sense. A factual proposition 
always excludes, or shuts out a certain possibility. It is possible to draw 
a sharp line around everything that is necessarily the case if it is true. 
Within this enclosure all its implications would stand up to be counted. 
Together they would make a definite claim on reality, which would either 
satisfy the claim, in which case the proposition would be true, or not 
satisfy it, in which case the proposition would be false. A factual 
proposition like ‘it is nearing 5 o’clock now’ excludes the possibility of 
‘it is not nearing 5 o’clock now – that it is nearing 11 o’clock now and 
your watch has stopped’, for example. Whereas a logical proposition 
like ‘it is either nearing 5 o’clock or it is not nearing 5 o’clock’ excludes 
nothing.
Diagram 1
Now when we retrace our steps back from this notional centre to the outer limits of factual discourse through Wittgenstein’s theory of meaning, we can draw the line between what can be said and what cannot be said. Two points need to be made about Wittgenstein’s task of charting the limits of the sayable before his theory of meaning can be understood. The first point is about what lies on the other side of the limit. He said in the preface that on the other side of the limit lies nonsense. But he points out later in the *Tractatus* that there is no other side to the limit, and so the task of plotting it is more like calculating the curvature of space itself. Secondly, if the limits of sense are the limits of factual discourse, all non factual discourse will be nonsense. But he avoided such destructive positivism by drawing a subtle distinction between good and bad nonsense. To locate the truths of religion and morality outside factual discourse was not for him to reject and condemn them as unintelligible; it was taking the first step toward understanding them.

There are two aspects of Wittgenstein’s theory of meaning: the picture theory which states that propositions are pictures of facts, which we have already examined; and the truth functions theory which states that ordinary factual propositions are truth functions of elementary propositions. Let us now examine this second aspect which is a brilliant and entirely original contribution Wittgenstein has made to logic.

4.3.1. We can represent truth-possibilities (i.e. possibilities of existence and non-existence of the states of affairs) by schemata of the following kind (‘T’ means ‘True’, ‘F’ means ‘False’; the rows of ‘T’s’ and ‘F’s’ under the row of elementary propositions symbolize their truth possibilities in a way that can be easily understood):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>p</th>
<th>q</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>p</th>
<th>q</th>
<th>r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4 A proposition is an expression of agreement and disagreement with truth-possibilities of elementary propositions.

4.4.3 The expression of agreement and disagreement with truth-possibilities of elementary propositions express the truth conditions of a proposition.

4.4.4 The sign that results from correlating the mark ‘T’ with truth possibilities is a propositional sign.

4.4.2 For example, the following is a propositional sign:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>p</th>
<th>q</th>
<th>~</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the order of the truth-possibilities in a schema is fixed once and for all by a combinatory rule, then the last column by itself will be an expression of the truth-conditions. If we now write this column as a row, the propositional sign will become

(T T F T) (p, q)

(The number of places in the left-hand pair of brackets is determined by the number of terms in the right-hand pair.)

5.1.0.1 The truth-functions of a given number of elementary propositions can always be set out in a schema of the following kind:

(T T T T) (p, q) Tautology (If p then p, and if q then q)

\[ p > p \text{ and } q > q \]

(F T T T) (p, q) In words: Not both p and q (~ (p.q))

(T F T T) (p, q) In words: If q then p (q>p)

(T T F T) (p, q) In words: If p then q (p>q)

(T T T F) (p, q) In words: p or q (p^q)

(F F T T) (p, q) In words: not q (~q)

(F T F T) (p, q) In words: not p (~p)

(F T F F) (p, q) In words: p or q, but not both (p. ~q: ^:q. ~p)

(T F F T) (p, q) In words: If p then q, and if q then p (p=q)
I will give the name truth-grounds of a proposition to those truth-possibilities of its truth-arguments that make it true.

Wittgenstein’s ‘thesis of extensionality’ is that the entire sense of any factual proposition is given by saying which of the $2^n$ possibilities it shuts out, where $n$ is the number of propositions in the analysis of the original proposition.

To summarize Wittgenstein’s answer to the question why what can be said can be said clearly, every factual proposition has a precise sense because it shuts out a certain number of possibilities from among all the relevant possibilities in its analysis, and this sense is obtained by picturing facts. Language is truth-functionally structured and its essential function is to describe the world. Here we have the limit of language and what amounts to the same, the limit of the world.

The theory about the limits of expressibility is an outgrowth of the picture theory. According to Wittgenstein there are things which cannot be pictured at all. The spatial representation of the spatial reality may be as faithful as you please, but one thing it cannot represent – the character of being spatial, which it has in common with reality. Similarly a proposition is a picture or model of reality as we imagine it. At first sight a proposition does not seem to be a picture of the reality with which it is concerned. But no more does musical notation at first sight seem to be a picture of music, nor our phonetic notation a picture of our speech. A gramophone record, the musical idea, the written notes, and the sound waves, all stand to one another in the same internal relation of depicting that holds between language and the world. The proposition can represent the whole reality but it cannot represent what it must have in common with the reality in order to represent it – the logical form; the proposition shows the logical form of the reality. It exhibits it. And what can be shown cannot be said.
The world is all that is the case. Within this world all that can be said in language can be said clearly. Something in the world is always ruled out by a factual proposition which is why it can have a precise sense. A logical proposition however is senseless because it tries to talk in language about the limit of language. A metaphysical statement is nonsense because it tries to say what can only be shown. Thus a solipsist – who believes that only she exists, or that only her experiences are real – may be right, but she cannot say it. If she tries to say it, who would she be talking to? One cannot go behind the mirror of language because there is nothing behind the mirror, it reflects only what it reflects.

Wittgenstein devotes the last part of the *Tractatus* to tracing out the consequences of his theory of language, especially with reference to the propositions of logic, mathematics, ethics, aesthetics, metaphysics, and so on. His conclusion is that these propositions do not say anything. They are senseless or nonsensical because they are attempts to transcend, in *language*, the limits of language, and hence, the world. Wittgenstein contends however that there are important things (moral and aesthetic...
values, meaning of life etc.) which although they cannot be said, can be shown. They are what is mystical. The bulk of the Tractatus deals with language and logic because Wittgenstein wants to signify what cannot be said, by presenting clearly what can be said. What does not belong to the world but to its limits is dumbly felt and all the perplexities of metaphysics arise from trying to express them. The solution to the riddle is that there is no riddle, for no riddle can be put. Philosophy is not the science of these things. The only science is natural science. Philosophy is a discipline, the object of which is to make us see the vanity of all metaphysical speculation. Philosophy has no information to impart. “What we cannot speak about, we must pass over in silence.” That is the last proposition of the Tractatus. But just before that we find:

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world alright.

Wittgenstein’s ladder metaphor is reminiscent of the Buddha’s raft parable when he says in a sermon in the Majjhima Nikaaya: “Even so, monks, is the Parable of the Raft dhamma taught by me for crossing over, not for retaining. You, monks, by understanding the Parable of the Raft, should get rid even of wholesome mental states, all the more of unwholesome ones.”

2. WITTGENSTEIN’S LATER PHILOSOPHY

So far we have had a glimpse of the restless life of a man who was, by turns, a mechanical and aeronautical engineer, mathematician, musician, soldier, ascetic, school teacher, gardener’s assistant, architect, sculptor, porter, medical technician, recluse, and the most influential philosopher of our age.
We have also seen what he said in his first and only published book on philosophy, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*:

The book deals with the problems of philosophy, and shows, I believe, that the reason why these problems are posed is that the logic of our language is misunderstood. The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence.

Wittgenstein’s attempt to draw the boundary between what can be said (and said clearly), and what cannot be said but only shown, was based on three axioms: Every factual proposition has a precise sense. The way in which it gets this sense is pictorial. If two propositions are logically related then at least one of them is non-elementary, i.e. one or both of them contain a logical complexity that analysis can reveal. The *Tractatus* gave a very neat a priori picture of what the structure and function of language must be like. After writing the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein acted consistently with his belief that he had found the final solution of philosophical problems, and gave up doing philosophy for ten years. During this period he taught for a few years in various elementary schools, among other things. When he started doing philosophy again it was a radically new philosophy.

Let us now look at the change from Wittgenstein’s early to his later philosophy, and sketch the later philosophy as represented by the posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations*.

In his Preface to the *Investigations* Wittgenstein says that the thoughts it contains concern many subjects: the concepts of a meaning, of understanding, of a proposition, of logic, the foundations of mathematics, states of consciousness, and other things. The nature of the investigation compels him to travel over a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction. And the book is therefore like an album of sketches he has made during sixteen years of long and involved journeyings. What I had said about the *Tractatus* is even more true of the *Investigations*: that my attempt to give a sketch of it amounts to little more than offering you a few spoons of salt water and asking you to imagine the ocean from it.
It has been suggested that the years Wittgenstein spent in teaching elementary-school children were a decisive factor in the shaping of his later philosophy. The reality of teaching children how to read, write, calculate, etc. and the experience of compiling a dictionary for elementary schools contributed to Wittgenstein’s later, pragmatic view of language. He remarked once that in order to get clear about the meaning of a word, it is very useful to ask oneself: ‘How is this word learned?’ One finds out whether a child knows the meaning of a word by observing how the child uses the word. And the explanation of the meaning of a word to children consists in teaching them the use of the word. How did we learn ‘I dreamt so and so’ – by being shown a dream? Thus Wittgenstein’s ivory-tower view of language was brought down to earth by his elementary-school pupils. The a priori procedure of investigation of the Tractatus was replaced by an a posteriori logical investigation of phenomena of language learning and language use in the later philosophy.

Throughout his later writings the presuppositions and views of the Tractatus served as the main targets of his attack. The Tractatus was concerned with explaining how language is possible. According to the early Wittgenstein ordinary propositions are vague but they serve our purpose because they are really quite clear and distinct. Every proposition can be analyzed into a set of elementary propositions which are composed of names signifying simple objects. Language mirrored the world. As a code it could only communicate information concerning the same number of possible objective alternatives as happens to be the number of its alternative possible messages. Hence no all-embracing statements about the world as a whole or language as a whole could be made without straying into nonsense. We can’t see through the mirror to what is behind it. Any greater richness in the world cannot be conveyed by a code which is equipped to communicate information concerning the world as it is. On the other hand any greater richness in the code – i.e. more signs than are necessary for the number of alternative messages liable to be conveyed by it – is redundant.

Wittgenstein had believed that there must be a ‘final analysis’ in which all propositions are resolved into elementary propositions. Now he
pointed out that he had produced no examples of elementary propositions. And the basic assumption of the *Tractatus* that every proposition has a perfectly determinate or definitive sense which can be set out clearly was *not a result of investigation*: it was a requirement*. He had believed that an indefinite sense would not really be a sense at all and would be as if one said ‘I have locked the man up fast in the room, there is only one door left open’. But now he questioned this and asked if an indistinct photograph is a picture of a person at all and is it even always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture by a sharp one?

In actual language many propositions are vague, inexact, or indefinite but serve our purposes perfectly well. Another assumption which was connected with the assumption that every proposition must have a definite sense was that the process of analysis makes the sense of the proposition explicit and clear. The method of analysis which was absolutely essential to the whole doctrine of the *Tractatus* now came under severe criticism. Is ‘My broom is in the corner’ really a statement about the broomstick and the brush? Wittgenstein conceded that analysis is useful in some cases but he no longer believed that ‘further analyzed’ forms of an expression can be further and further analyzed until we come to a ‘final analysis’ in which the expression is completely clarified and all vagueness eliminated.

The belief in a ‘final analysis’ was closely connected in the *Tractatus* with the assumption that the distinction between the simple and the complex is an absolute one –that a thing is, apart from context and without qualification, either simple or complex. The purpose of analysis is to resolve the complex proposition which describes a complex fact into the simplest (elementary) propositions which describe the simplest (atomic) facts. Elementary propositions were assumed to consist of names denoting absolutely simple things which are the simple constituent parts of reality. Wittgenstein now points out that ‘simple’ and ‘complex’, like ‘exact’ and ‘inexact’ are relative terms. It makes sense to speak of something as simple or complex only in a context. In one sense we may say that a chessboard is composed of thirty-two white and thirty-two black squares, and in that sense we may consider the chess-board ‘complex’ and the squares ‘simple’. But in a different context we might
want to describe the chess-board as being composed of the colours black and white and the scheme of squares. Furthermore, is the colour of a square simple, or does it consist of pure white and pure yellow? And is pure white simple, or does it consist of the colours of the rainbow? The point is that we use the words ‘simple’ and ‘complex’ in an enormous number of different ways relative to different contexts. To ask ‘Is this object complex?’ outside a particular language game is reminiscent, says Wittgenstein, of a boy who had to say whether the verbs in certain sentences were in the active or passive voice, and who racked his brains over the question whether the verb ‘to sleep’ meant something active or passive.

In questioning the existence of elementary propositions and in abandoning the possibility of a final analysis Wittgenstein completely repudiated his earlier conception of language. The early Wittgenstein assumed that the function of language was to depict or ‘picture’ facts. Words had their references and sentences had their senses. Combinations of linguistic elements corresponded to the combinations of the elements of reality. Every proposition was built up from elementary propositions which consist of names signifying simple objects. He had assumed that ultimately the meaning of a word consists in what it names.

In his later philosophy Wittgenstein came to realize that the doctrine of the Tractatus rested on a ‘particular picture of the essence of human language’, namely the correspondence theory of meaning. The essence of this theory is that the individual words in language name objects, the object for which a word stands is its meaning. One group of words name objects in the ‘external’ world while another group of words name objects in the ‘internal’ world. Wittgenstein now attacked this conception on two fronts – against essentialism and against private language.

According to this conception of language the mastery of language consists in learning the names of objects. Wittgenstein begins to criticize this particular conception by showing how it fails to recognize any difference between kinds of words. In describing the learning of language as essentially a naming activity one has in mind primarily words like ‘table’, ‘chair’, ‘shoes’ and people’s names, and properties, e.g. ‘plain’ ‘laughing’ and ‘red’. But not words like ‘eleven’, ‘soon’, ‘or’, etc. The
The notion of ostensive definition is intimately connected with this conception of language that Wittgenstein is criticizing. It is generally assumed that the explanation of the meaning of a word is roughly divided into verbal and ostensive definitions. A verbal definition takes us from one verbal expression to another but no further. Hence all learning of the meaning ultimately depends on the ostensive definition which establishes a direct relationship between the meaning and the word.

Against this view Wittgenstein points out that for one thing, there do not seem to be ostensive definitions for many words in our language, e.g. ‘number’, ‘not’, ‘yet’, ‘this’, ‘now’, etc. Secondly ostensive definition can establish an association between the word and the thing only in context and given a certain sort of training. Ostensive definition can always be misunderstood. If I were to point to a pencil and say ‘This is a yarble’, it may be interpreted to mean variously ‘This is a pencil’, ‘This is round’, ‘This is red’, ‘This is wood’, ‘This is hard’, ‘This is one’, etc. etc. So, ostensive definition explains the use or meaning of the word only when the overall role of the word in language is clear.

Let us consider here Wittgenstein’s criticism of the notion of private language. This notion is born of the idea that words for sensations, feelings, moods etc. refer to my inner experiences or private sensation, and what can only be known to myself and no one else. Now, ‘My sensations are private’ is comparable to ‘One plays patience by oneself’. Its form makes it look like an empirical proposition, but it is really a ‘grammatical’ proposition. For in what sense are my sensations private? Because only I can know whether I am really in pain; another person can only surmise it. But are we not misusing ‘know’ here? For it makes no sense to say that I know I am in pain or I doubt whether I am in pain. What is it supposed to mean except perhaps that I am in pain? Imagine however that I keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. I call it ‘S’ and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have this sensation. First of all what reason do I have to call ‘S’ the sign for a sensation? For ‘sensation’ is a word in our common language, not one intelligible to me alone. Secondly, if S is a private sensation how do I know that it is S I am having? How do I know that I remember what S feels like correctly? Appealing from one memory to another endlessly, Wittgenstein says, is like buying several copies of a newspaper to assure oneself that what it says is true.
The question ‘what is the meaning of a word?’ produces in us a mental cramp. The phrase ‘the meaning of a word’ exercises a certain spell which results in the idea that there must be a thing corresponding to each noun and adjective, that this thing is the meaning of the word, and it is named by the word as an individual is named by it. To break this spell Wittgenstein first suggested that instead of asking ‘What’s the meaning?’ we should ask ‘What’s the explanation of meaning?’ This replacement brings the question down to earth and helps to cure us of the temptation to look for some object which we might call ‘the meaning’. Later he made his famous recommendation: ‘Don’t ask for the meaning, ask for the use’, and said that ‘for a large class of cases – though not for all – in which we employ the word “meaning”, it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language’. ‘Use’ carries with it no suggestion of an object corresponding to a word and ‘use’ cannot be understood merely by looking at the word; it can only be understood in context – both linguistic and social.

Wittgenstein invites us to compare words in a language with tools in a toolbox. In a tool box there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a rule, a gluepot, glue, nails and screws. The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects. A word is characterized by its use just as a tool is characterized by its function. Just as there is not one function that all tools have in common there is no one function (e.g. to name things) that all words have in common.

Words are used for different purposes and the demand for a general theory of the meanings of words is quite pointless. Sentences as well as words may be understood as tools or instruments. When we become confused about the sense of a sentence, Wittgenstein offers the following advice: ‘Look at the sentence as an instrument, and its sense as employment. Ask yourself: on what occasion, for what purpose, do we say this? What kinds of actions accompany these words? In what senses will they be used, and what for? The use of language ordinarily has a point just as instruments are usually made for some purposes. But there is no single point of the practice of language as a whole. Wittgenstein lists a few of the countless uses of language in the *Investigations*:
Giving orders, and obeying them
Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements
Constructing an object from a description (a drawing)
Reporting an event
Speculating about an event
Forming and testing a hypothesis
Making up a story; and reading it
Play-acting
Singing Catches
Guessing riddles
Making a joke; telling it
Solving a problem in practical mathematics
Translating from one language into another
Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying, etc.

He then says: ‘It is interesting to compare the multiplicity of tools in language and of the ways they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of words and sentences, with what logicians have said about the structure of language (including the author of the *Tractatus*).’ He is warning us against oversimplifying our concept of language. It is not one practice or one instrument, having one essential purpose but a collection of tools serving a variety of purposes. It is like a working machine which gets jobs done – namely everyday activities of life.

Besides its pragmatic nature, there is one other feature of language that Wittgenstein stressed in his later philosophy. This was its social nature. He emphasized the social nature of language by comparing languages with games and in speaking of, and constructing language-games. For example, he invites us to compare language with a chess game and to look at a word as a piece in chess and an utterance as a move in chess. He says we are concerned with the spatial and temporal phenomenon of languages, not with some non-spatial, non-temporal phantasm; we talk about it as we do about the piece in chess when we are stating the rules of the game, not describing their physical properties. The question ‘what is a word – really?’ is analogous to ‘What is a place in chess?’ To understand what a place in chess is one must understand the whole game, the rules defining it, and the role of the place in the game. Similarly the
meaning of a word is its place in the language-game, determined by the grammatical rules with which it is used in that language. Just as a move in chess doesn’t consist simply in moving a piece in such-and–such a way on the board, but in the circumstances that we call ‘playing a game of chess’, ‘solving a chess problem’ and so on, it is only in language that one can mean something by something. We cannot call anything a word or a sentence unless it is part of that kind of a rule-governed activity which we call a language.

In order to be clear about the social nature of language Wittgenstein suggests that we ask ourselves: what is it for someone to follow a rule? What does the activity called ‘following a rule’ consist in? It does not make sense that there should have been only one occasion on which someone followed a rule. Following a rule, making a promise, giving an order, insulting someone, and so on, are ‘customs’, ‘uses’, ‘practices’, or ‘institutions’. They presuppose a society, a form of life. There cannot be ‘private’ rules. Rules are ‘public’ and it must be possible for more than one person to learn to follow the rule. The notion of following a rule is logically inseparable from both interpersonal agreement as well as the notion of making a mistake. The possibility of making a mistake is what distinguishes someone’s merely manifesting a regularity in his behaviour and his following a rule. Following a rule involves an agreement to go on in the same way. However, learning the use of words like ‘same’ and ‘different’, ‘agreement’, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ presupposes rule-governed activities. I cannot make words mean what I want them to mean; I can use them meaningfully only if other people can come to understand how I am using them. When it comes to following rules I must accept certain conventions. A mistake is a contravention of what is established as correct; as such it must be recognizable. If I make a mistake other people must be able to point it out to me. If there is to be a practice defined by rules, there must be some way of learning how to engage in the practice or follow the rules. If it is impossible to train a person to use an alleged language we cannot say that it is a language. Learning how to follow rules is gaining mastery of a technique, or acquiring a skill. To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to be master of a technique. When we learn a language, we learn not only one technique but a whole
complex set of techniques. Language is a composite practice made up of a number of practices. The multiplicity and variety of the practice which constitutes our language are pointed out over and over again by Wittgenstein in the series of language-games which he constructs in his later writings.

Wittgenstein admits readily that he has not stated the essence of language:

Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, but they are related to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all ‘language.’

If we consider the proceedings that we call ‘games’ – board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on, what do we find that is common to them all? Wittgenstein warns us: Don’t say there must be something common, or they would not be called ‘games’, but look and see whether there is anything 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. There is a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing, sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail. Wittgenstein characterized these similarities as ‘family resemblances’ and says that ‘games’ form a family. Various language-games have not one thing in common but they form a family. We can extend our concept of languages by adding and inventing new language-games just as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. The strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.

Wittgenstein’s later view of language is an antithesis of his earlier doctrine. He now repudiated his earlier preoccupation with the form of language as distinct from its function. The striving for absolute exactness is now regarded as an illusion, and vagueness is accepted as reality, in so far as it serves our ordinary purposes. Instead of looking for unifying principles and abstracting essences he now draws our attention to case
after case of real or imaginary uses of languages. Instead of the terse, jargon-saturated style of the *Tractatus* we now find informal descriptions of language-games which show how words and expressions have meaning only in social contexts, or in the ‘stream of life’. In spite of all these differences his main concern is still the same as in his earlier philosophy, viz. what are the nature, tasks, and methods of philosophy. He is still trying to question the questions of philosophy and to draw a boundary between what can be said and what cannot be said, between sense and nonsense. But in the *Tractatus* the boundary was a single sweeping line. Now it is a filigree of lines. Formerly he had attempted to delineate the external limit of language; now he is concerned with marking internal subdivisions. In the *Tractatus*, the limit of language was discovered. Now the limits of language are drawn. Wittgenstein says that when one draws a boundary it may be for various kinds of reasons. If I surround an area with a fence or a line or otherwise, the purpose may be to prevent someone from getting in or out; but it may also be part of a game and the players be supposed, say, to jump over the boundary (metaphysical language-game?)... so if I draw a boundary line that is not yet to say what I am drawing it for.

Wittgenstein was not an intolerant positivist trying to eliminate metaphysics or to end all philosophy. His task is to understand the nature of philosophy. He once told one of his students: ‘Don’t think I despise metaphysics or ridicule it. On the contrary, I regard the great metaphysical writings of the past as among the noblest productions of the human mind.’ Just as Wittgenstein’s old view of philosophy was a logical consequence of his earlier theory of language, the new conception of philosophy follows from the new way of looking at language. Philosophical problems arise mainly through a misinterpretation of our forms of language, they are ‘linguistic’ rather than ‘conceptual’ problems. Philosophy begins with puzzlement. Philosophical questions are ‘vexations’ or ‘intellectual discomfort’ comparable to some sort of mental disease. Philosophers are ‘in a muddle about things’. Philosophical problems are compared to a ‘mental cramp’ to be relieved or a ‘knot in our thinking’ to be untied. And a person caught in a philosophical perplexity is compared to a man in a room who wants to get out but doesn’t know how, or a fly caught in a fly-bottle. Wittgenstein now
conceives of philosophy as ‘a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language’. His aim is ‘to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle’. All these metaphorical descriptions or philosophical problems in psychological terms are an expression of Wittgenstein’s personal involvement with them. They are an appropriate characterization of his own methods and aim of philosophy. He sees the philosopher’s treatment of a question as resembling the treatment of an illness. Just as there is not one conclusive therapy for all mental illness, there is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies. The real discovery in philosophy, he says, is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to, the one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer troubled by questions which bring itself in question. In a sense he is exactly where he started, for philosophy ‘leaves everything as it is’. However, philosophy is never trivial or unimportant just as treatment by psycho-analysis should not be regarded as trivial on the ground that it merely restores a man’s sanity.

The main mistake of traditional philosophers, including the author of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein now says, is that when they look at language what is looked at is a form of words and not the use made of the form of words. We remain unconscious of the prodigious diversity of all the everyday language-games because the clothing of our language makes everything alike. If we look into the cabin of a locomotive we see handles all looking more or less alike. Traditional philosophy treats of terms or words as handles and ignores to a large extent the different ways the handles work. This is a very important point which Wittgenstein reminds us of over and over again in the *Investigations*. He distinguishes the ‘surface grammar’ from the ‘depth grammar’ in the use of words. The surface grammar is ‘what immediately impresses itself upon us about the use of a word,’ the part of its use ‘that can be taken in by the ear’. The depth grammar is the application of words. Let us look at a few examples to clarify this distinction.

If we compare the propositions ‘I have a beautiful hat’ and ‘I have a terrible toothache’, the similarity in their surface grammar is obvious. The difference in their use or depth grammar can be brought out by
comparing ‘Is this my hat?’ and ‘Is this my toothache?’ which is nonsense. Similarly, ‘All roses have thorns ‘and ‘All rods have length’ both look like empirical generalizations on the surface; but while we can imagine roses without thorns, can we also imagine rods without length? The second proposition is not experimental but ‘logical’, or ‘grammatical’ as Wittgenstein calls it. It does not give us information about rods but states a rule governing the use of the word ‘rod’. We all know what ‘It is 5 clock here’ means, but do we also know what ‘It is 5 clock on the sun’ means? Or we feel we can understand this statement: ‘Although the deaf mutes have learned only a gesture language, each of them really talks to himself inwardly in a vocal language’. Wittgenstein asks: What can I do with this information (if it is such)? The whole idea of understanding smells fishy here. I do not know whether I am to say I understand it or I don’t understand it. It is an English sentence, apparently (the surface grammar) quite in order – until one wants to do something with it. ‘The earth has existed for millions of years’ makes clearer sense than ‘The earth was created only five minutes ago, complete with memories and all’. We know the ideas and observations associated with the former propositions but what observations do the latter propositions refer to, and what observations would count against them? Finally compare ‘A new born child has no teeth’, ‘A goose has no teeth’, and ‘A rose has no teeth.’ The last proposition at any rate is obviously true, one would like to say. It is even surer than that a goose has none. And yet it is none too clear. For where should a rose’s teeth have been?

In all these cases we have seen there is a picture in the foreground (the surface grammar) but the sense lies far in the background. That is, the application of the picture (the depth grammar) is not easy to survey. Instead of concentrating on the theoretical study of linguistic forms as he did in the Tractatus, Wittgenstein is now concerned with the pragmatic examination of linguistic functions. A boundary of sense is drawn around criteria of ‘use’, ‘purpose’, ‘employment’, ‘practical consequences’, etc. The purpose of drawing this boundary is to remind ourselves that it is not every sentence-like formation that we know how to do something with, not every technique has an application in our life. When we are tempted in philosophy to count some quite useless thing as a proposition, that is often because we have not considered its application sufficiently.
The confusions which occupy us arise when language is like an engine idling, not when it is doing work. Philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday. A metaphysical pronouncement is like a wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it; it is not part of the mechanism. It is caused by the difficulty in understanding the depth-grammar of some sentences, and it obliterates the distinction between factual and conceptual investigation. If we compare the following three propositions: (1) Only one person can play patience; (2) Only one person can sit on a bench 6" wide; (3) Only one person can feel my pain, their surface grammar is quite alike but their depth grammar is utterly different. The second states a physical impossibility and the first states a grammatical impossibility. Though the third has an experiential form it also states a grammatical rule governing the use of ‘pain’. Nonsense is produced by trying to express by the use of language what ought to be embodied in the grammar. To go back to the analogy between chess and language: just as learning the initial positions of each chessman and the rules defining each piece, etc. is not yet playing the game, but preparing to play, similarly propositions are preparations for the use of language, they are part of the apparatus of language, not of the application of language. Wittgenstein criticizes metaphysics because it has been presented in an empirical form, not because it deals with unimportant matters.

I have so far presented some salient points of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy, especially of his Philosophical Investigations. By way of concluding I may be expected to critically evaluate the Investigations as a philosophy book. Instead, I will conclude by saying why it is not possible to do so. The Investigations is a very unusual book of philosophy. Wittgenstein was not merely a professional philosopher. He was a passionate thinker for whom philosophical problems were tormenting personal problems, and he worried about them with such intensity that he could have gone mad at any moment. The Investigations are primarily one long dialogue Wittgenstein had with himself. They contain a record of the temptation to feel philosophic puzzlement compulsively and the willingness to correct it and give it up. The voices of temptation and correction are the antagonists in Wittgenstein’s dialogues. Unlike dogmas and theories, confessions are not to be believed, criticized, or refuted.
They are either honest or not honest, helpful or not helpful. The *Investigations* is also one long case history of philosophic cures. Wittgenstein describes it in the preface as an album of ‘sketches of landscapes’ made in the course of some sixteen years of ‘long and involved journeying’. There is nothing in the *Investigations* which we should ordinarily call reasoning, argument, or proof. It is a book of reminders: the work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose. ‘If one tries to advance theses in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them’.

The purpose of writing a confession, recording case histories, or assembling reminders is ‘to show the fly out of the fly bottle’. What Wittgenstein is doing can be characterized as persuasion, conversion, even propaganda. He said what he was doing was to persuade the people to change their style of thinking. He employed different methods to do this, like different therapies. Among these were imagining or inventing language-games as objects of comparison; calling attention to some well-known facts which are forgotten; finding and making up intermediate cases; reminding someone that the question does not arise; poking fun at a metaphysical statement to make its oddness ring; giving rules of thumb; etc. Wittgenstein once said that a serious and good philosophical work could be written that would consist entirely of jokes. At another time he said that a philosophical treatise might contain nothing but questions (without answers). The *Investigations* contain 784 questions, only 110 of these are answered and 70 of the answers are meant to be wrong. Some examples of jokes and questions used by him in doing philosophy are; ‘Why can’t a dog simulate pain? Is he too honest?’ ‘Why can’t my right hand give my left hand money?’ ‘Why does it sound queer to say: “For a second he felt deep grief?” Only because it so seldom happens?’ Wittgenstein was not trying to teach any new truths; he was trying to give a method. His method cannot be followed as a recipe or formula, it is rather an *art*. Unfortunately however, it has degenerated into an intellectual parlour-game among his followers.

I had compared the ladder at the end of the *Tractatus* which one throws away after climbing up it with the Buddha’s raft which one leaves behind.
after crossing over on it. Wittgenstein’s new method is perhaps closest to that of Zen Buddhism. Both seek to give peace to those who are tormented by abstract philosophical questions. Both show the nonsensicality of metaphysical questions by replying to the questioner with nonsense, joke, an irrelevancy, a gesture, or what not. Both seek a state of complete clarity in which the mind is free from Philosophical questions.

REFERENCES

(The dates of composition of posthumously published works are given in parentheses after the title.)


