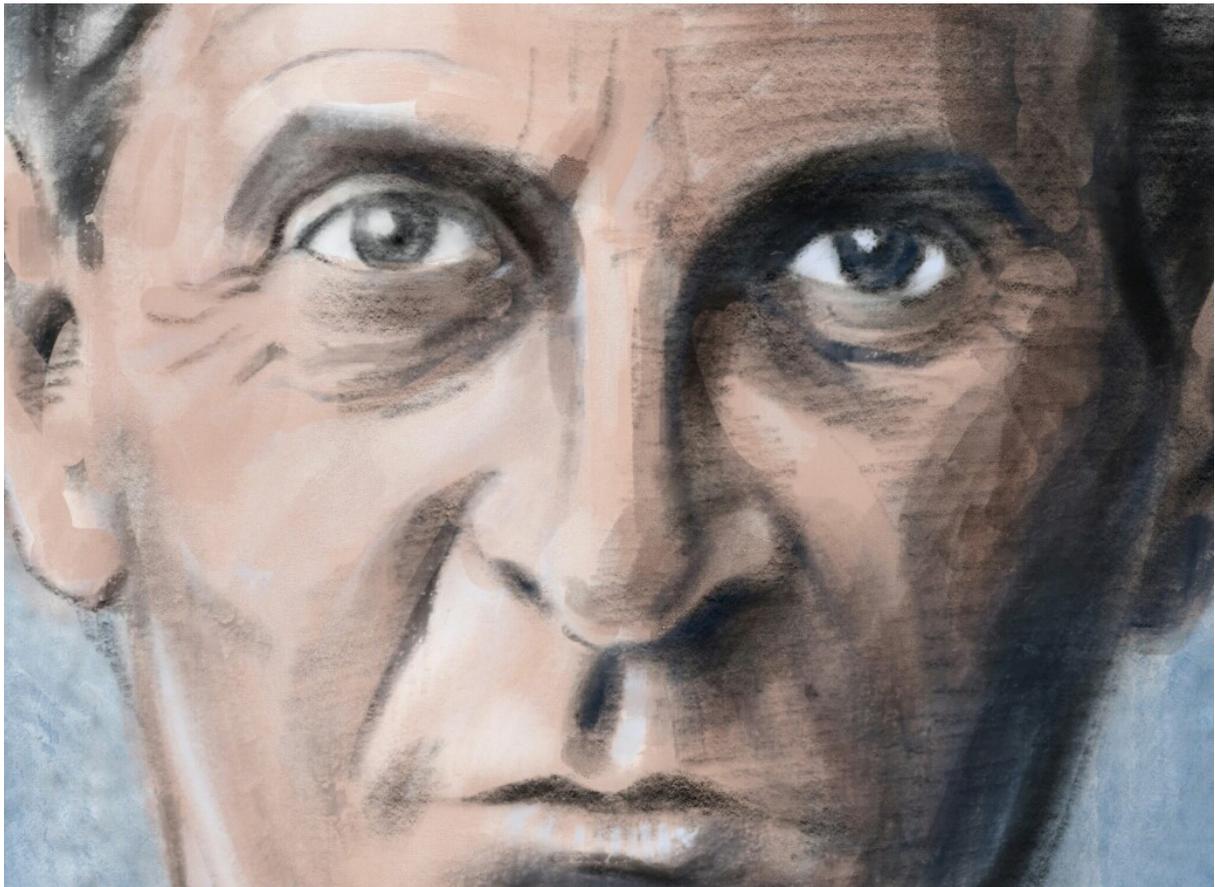


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Editorial

It is 65 years since Wittgenstein's death. During his lifetime he acquired an almost mythic reputation. His alarming brilliance was evident in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* published shortly after the First World War. His second incarnation, after his return to Cambridge in 1929, saw his status grow by whisper and rumour, despite the absence of published work, until, as Bertrand Russell says, 'most philosophers both [at Cambridge] and at Oxford became his disciples'. After his death in 1951 the *Philosophical Investigations* were published, followed by other writings from the vast store of written material he had left. So for a period his posthumous reputation and influence reached even dizzy heights.

Inevitably there was a reaction. Though he still holds a unique place in the recent history of philosophy and his presence still haunts philosophers working in the Analytic tradition, he now has as many detractors as admirers. One reason is the issue that emerged from the beginning: is Wittgenstein trying to provide, once and for all, definitive answers to philosophical problems, or is he aiming, once and for all, to put an end to philosophical thought? The prospect of being put out of work inevitably evokes strong reactions from those who see themselves as pursuing an honest and endless career.

One of the most dispiriting interpretations of his work combines the end of philosophy theme ('philosophical problems should completely disappear') with a deeply conservative estimate of its cultural impact (at the end of all our philosophical efforts, philosophy 'leaves everything as it is').

These problems - more threat than problem - have in recent years animated a lively discussion among his interpreters, particularly concerning the continuity of his earlier and later writings. The disputes

encourage us to go back and reassess Wittgensteinian positions that have become hardened partly through the enthusiasms and loyalties of the first generation of his disciples and his critics. This reassessment is not just a retrospective exercise; it has encouraged a new phase of philosophical research.

The articles in this edition aim to think *with* Wittgenstein rather than *about* him, to develop new lines of thought, not to defend this or that interpretation of his work.

They share the belief that far from being an arch conservative Wittgenstein was, in Ian Ground's words, 'intensely relaxed about conceptual change'; far from closing down philosophical investigation, he loosens up problems and suggests new ways of thinking.

Wittgenstein and Dialogue – Jane Heal

Quite a number of philosophers have written in explicit dialogue form, Plato, Berkeley and Hume among the most famous in our tradition. There are many reasons why this form might be attractive and appropriate and I am not going to examine or speculate on all of them here.

Rather I want to focus on just one philosopher whose writings have been said to have the character of a dialogue. This is Wittgenstein, where commentators on the *Philosophical Investigations* find it natural to speak of 'the interlocutor' and to see many passages as representing exchanges between Wittgenstein and some other voice. But it is only a sense of dialogue, an inexplicit representation, which we find in Wittgenstein. So we have several questions to consider. Why did Wittgenstein write in this way rather than in conventional expository philosophical prose? Who is the other contributor and what does his or her presence bring to the work? If a kind of dialogue form was appropriate, why did Wittgenstein not do it explicitly, with named characters?

In the hope of getting light on these issues, let us look at a particular passage, and see what the experience of engaging with it is like when we try to present the content in various alternative forms. Below are some paragraphs from the *Investigations*. They are part of a sequence of remarks concerned with the idea of understanding a system or rule, so as to be able to carry on an activity correctly. The example Wittgenstein has been considering immediately before is teaching someone to write out the sequence of numbers in decimal notation. Wittgenstein is inviting us to think about the role of the pupil's performances in making it correct to say that he or she now understands the system. He has already brought out (in §139) the point that any formula, as a mere set of marks, cannot itself enforce a particular kind of response, or make a response correct. This is how things go on:

Suppose I now ask: "Has he understood the system when he continues the series to the hundredth place?" Or - if I should not speak of 'understanding' in connection with our primitive language-game: Has he got the system, if he continues the series correct so far? - Perhaps you will say here: to have got the system (or, again, to understand it) can't consist in continuing the series up to this or that number: that is only applying one's understanding. The understanding itself is a state which is the source of the correct use.

What is one really thinking of here? Isn't one thinking of the derivation of a series from its algebraic formula? Or at least of something analogous? - But this is where we were before. The point is, we can think of more than one application of an algebraic formula; and every type of application can in turn be formulated algebraically; but naturally this does not get us any further. - The application is still a criterion of understanding. (PI §146)

"But how can it be? When I say I understand the rule of a series, I am surely not saying so because I have found out that up to now I have applied the algebraic formula in such-and-such a way! In my own case at all events I surely know that I mean such-and-such a series; it doesn't matter how far I have actually developed it." -

Your idea, then, is that you know the application of the rule of the series quite apart from remembering applications to particular numbers. And you will perhaps say: "Of course! For the series is infinite and the bit of it that I can have developed is finite." (PI §147)

So now what happens if we rewrite this, as far as we can, in the sort of academic style now familiar. Something like this is what emerges:

Let us now consider whether it would be right to say that a person has understood the system when she continues the series to the hundredth place. Or, if it is not appropriate to speak of 'understanding' in connection with the primitive language-game, we could consider whether she has 'got the system', if she continues the series correctly to that point. Against this it is natural to say that getting the system, or understanding it, cannot consist in continuing the series up to some particular number, such as the hundredth in the series. Such continuation is only applying one's understanding. The understanding itself is a state which is the source of the correct use.



Jane Heal

It may be that what makes this view seem plausible is having in mind the derivation of a series from its algebraic formula, or something analogous. But as we have already seen this idea is not adequate. This is because we can think of more than one application of an algebraic formula. Moreover every type of application can in turn be formulated algebraically. So this way of envisaging things has not got us any further. We have not found anything other than the application to be a criterion of understanding.

But someone may well object that application cannot be a criterion. A person who claims to understand the rule of a series does not say so because she has found out that up to that point she has applied the algebraic formula in such-and-such a way. Each person, it seems, knows in her own case that she means such and such. It does not matter how far she has actually developed the series.

The idea here is that a person knows the application of the rule of the series quite apart from remembering applications to particular numbers. And the idea may seem to get additional plausibility from the fact that the series is infinite and the bit of it that any individual has developed will be finite.

The adjustments above have been fairly minor. But even in this minimally altered form, the tone of the passage is interestingly different from the original, and hence so are the kinds of response it evokes. What we have now is a specimen of writing in a recognizable and distinctive academic genre. And so it activates the attitudes, habits and expectations of the academic practices from which such writing arises. And the fact is that philosophical discussion, for those in the profession, often has the character of a spectator sport. A philosopher, keyed in to the tone of the writing, is likely to be prompted to read it in a detached way, being led to consider whether Wittgenstein has formulated the issue helpfully, whether the 'someone who may well object' would have a good point and so forth. And insofar as this reader is not just an observer of a match between Wittgenstein and the objector he invokes, but is also a potential participant in some future match, it will probably be because he or she is thinking of writing a reply which can be published and which will serve for career advancement. So the parts of the mind strongly activated by academic prose are those which try to find objections to what others say or to find things to say which show off how clever one is oneself.

Wittgenstein's refraining from writing in this genre suggests he did not like that approach to doing philosophy. And of course there is ample evidence from what he wrote elsewhere and said to friends, that he did not like it. Rather he wanted the reader to be engaged, to be a participant in the thinking evoked by the written words, but in some different spirit. He wanted the reader to identify, as honestly as possible, what he or she thinks and feels about the topics raised. Very importantly, he hoped the reader might be willing to acknowledge that he or she is muddled, that what he or she finds tempting to say may be nonsense, and that it is important to dig deeply into why this nonsense is attractive. So the 'you', i.e. the reader, who figures in the original and has disappeared from the academic re-write, is indeed invited to engage in dialogue with Wittgenstein, but in a way which involves the whole person, operating with as much reflective integrity as possible.

Would the writing serve to encourage that engagement, if it took the form of an explicit dialogue between Wittgenstein and the reader? Below is a stab at that. The other participant could be called 'OTHER' or 'INTERLOCUTOR'. But as we have just seen, it is reader whom Wittgenstein hopes to engage. So 'YOU' is the right label here. So this is how things go if we make that explicit.

WITT: Suppose I now ask: "Has he understood the system when he continues the series to the hundredth place?" Or - if I should not speak of 'understanding' in connection with our primitive language-game: Has he got the system, if he continues the series correct so far?

YOU: To have got the system (or, again, to understand it) can't consist in continuing the series up to this or that number: that is only applying one's understanding. The understanding itself is a state which is the source of the correct use.

WITT: What are you really thinking of here? Aren't you thinking of the derivation of a series from its algebraic formula? Or at least of something analogous? But this is where we were before. The point is, we can think of more than one application of an algebraic formula; and every type of application can in turn be formulated algebraically; but naturally this does not get us any further. The application is still a criterion of understanding.

YOU: But how can it be? When I say I understand the rule of a series, I am surely not saying so because I have found out that up to now I have applied the algebraic formula in such-and-such a way! In my own case at all events I surely know that I mean such-and-such a series; it doesn't matter how far I have actually developed it.

WITT: Your idea, then, is that you know the application of the rule of the series quite apart from remembering applications to particular numbers.

YOU: Of course! For the series is infinite and the bit of it that I can have developed is finite.

One interesting fact is that the dividing into voices can be done quite easily (at least so it seems to me), confirming the view that there is indeed a dialogue element in Wittgenstein's writing.

So why not construct it explicitly like this? The answer is surely that this form will not work any better than the conventional academic one for Wittgenstein's purposes. The key point is that the form is likely to raise hackles. The reader may well think: who is Wittgenstein to take it

upon himself to put words in my mouth? Who is he to cast me in the role of fall guy, whose silly mistakes are about to be shown up? As it is actually written, Wittgenstein's original text does not invite this response. So a remark is put in inverted commas, but it is left inexplicit who is saying it. It is there for the reader to try out and see whether he/she identifies with the thought expressed. Or Wittgenstein remarks that *perhaps* you will say such and such. And again, it is up to reader to reflect on whether the remark is indeed a tempting one.



So my suggestion is that the form of the *Philosophical Investigations*, having as it does the suggestion of dialogue but not the explicit form, is well-judged just as it is. The inexplicit dialogue form neither prompts arming for the academic arena nor makes the reader feel got at. Rather it offers each reader an invitation to take part in the reflection, to the extent that he or she is willing to do so.

An Age Old Dilemma – Ian Ground

If Wittgenstein thought that "One of [his] most important methods is to imagine a historical development of our ideas different from what has actually occurred" then it seems interesting to test that method against the real possibility of the development of our ideas. I have in mind contemporary discussions about the concept of ageing.

We have a default view of ageing:

Although the incidence of disease increases with age, ageing and disease are not synonymous. Ageing is a normal concomitant of the passage of time that takes place in everyone; disease occurs in only a part of the population...Although there are wide individual differences in the rate at which age changes take place ageing affects all members of a population, whilst specific diseases and accidents are selective.¹

However quite recently, medical researchers have made startling progress in discovering the causes of ageing. There is coming into sharp focus now a theoretical story about the causes of cell senescence involving the TOR protein. The critical claim is that the very same mechanisms that produce the changes that we naturally associate with ageing, say grey hair and wrinkling, are also responsible for the degenerative effects we treat as diseases, for example cardio-vascular problems. Treatment of mice with the semi-selective mTOR inhibitor rapamycin extends lifespan by c. 20%, and slows many functional changes associated with ageing. It is beginning to look very possible that there can be clinical interventions which target not the diseases of age, but the common causes of those diseases in the ageing process. We are being asked to see that the diseases associated with old age are the symptoms of the underlying diseased condition which is the ageing.²

As a result, groups of scientists have recently started to make the case for changing the way we think about ageing. They want ageing to be thought of *as a disease*.

Now one reason why they want to do that is that medical research that is clinical - that treats diseases - gets better funded. But another element in their thinking is that a claim that throughout the long history of civilisation our concept of ageing has not been aligned with the natural facts. Just as we once thought that the sun went round the earth, we thought that ageing was an inevitable process. Turns out we were wrong. In fact, ageing was all along a disease. But we didn't know it.

Our objections are likely to veer between the pragmatic, the moral and the metaphysical. We might worry about pensions or political structures or population growth in a world with healthier older people. But we may well feel a peculiar kind of discomfiting puzzlement about this claim. Was it the case that all along we did not thinking of ageing as a disease but as something naturally associated with increased risk of disease? We surely didn't think that wrinkling and grey hair were *uncaused*. We might feel also in some inchoate way that the fact of our embodied ageing, for all its misery, was the expression of the fact that we really belonged to the world. A sign of our essential temporality. The fact that human beings, and all living things, age and decline, we may think, is one of very general background facts of nature against which our concepts take shape. What should we do when that background changes?

¹ Nathan Wetherill Shock and George T Baker, *The International Association of Gerontology: A Chronicle, 1950 to 1986* (Springer Pub Co, 1988). quoted in Richard G. A. Faragher, 'Should We Treat Aging as a Disease? The Consequences and Dangers of Miscategorisation', *Frontiers in Genetics* 6 (14 July 2015), doi:10.3389/fgene.2015.00171.

² Faragher, 'Should We Treat Aging as a Disease?'

Does Wittgenstein help us to resolve our anxiety about whether to think of ageing as a disease?

There is plenty of evidence that Wittgenstein was, as a matter of philosophical method, indifferent to the question of actual historical conceptual change. He writes:

*I am not saying: if such-and-such facts of nature were different people would have different concepts (in the sense of a hypothesis). Rather: if anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize--then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him.*³

Here, Wittgenstein is insisting that our concepts are not justified by the facts since they are, in an important sense neither justified nor unjustified. They are in relation to the facts, autonomous without being arbitrary. Given the way the world is, and given some very general facts about how we are, this is how we go on. The philosophical task, as Wittgenstein sees it, is to get a clear view of our actual concepts so that we can clear up our current confusion about them.

Wittgenstein's remarks about actual human languages may make the point clearer. Thus he points out that:

*(In Russian one says "stone red" instead of "the stone is red"; do they feel the copula to be missing in the sense, or attach it in thought?)*⁴

Should we think that these and other zero-copula languages (including Bengali, Kannada, Malay/Indonesian, Turkish, Japanese, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Hebrew, Arabic, Berber Ganda, Hawaiian, Sinhala, and American Sign Language) have missed something vital about the world? In fact, *the* most important thing: being? Should the Russians think that we English introduce a notion which has no corresponding metaphysical fact?

Prima facie, given this perspective on "grammar" we might expect Wittgenstein to be intensely relaxed about conceptual change and to be indifferent to the sources of that change. After all, we cannot resist such changes on the basis that our current way of thinking is "the absolutely correct one".

Yet. Wittgenstein is often regarded as a philosopher who wanted to resist the seemingly ever more far-reaching invasion of what we say, think and do by scientific and technological developments. That he was, if not anti-science, then certainly anti-scientistic, where "scientistic" is a pejorative term to describe a perspective which proclaims and celebrates the omniscience of science, in values, methods and content; and asserts that omniscience over what might loosely be called humanistic concerns, for example, ethical and broadly spiritual concerns, aesthetic and artistic concerns and our relations with one another, at domestic, societal and political levels.

Commonly, two strands in Wittgenstein's position are noted.

First, that scientific developments *ought not* to be allowed to condition our ordinary concepts which are also of philosophical interest because, they give rise to philosophical puzzlement. This is a normative or ethical position

Second, that scientific developments *cannot* condition our ordinary concepts in a way that is philosophically significant. This is a philosophical position.

It should be noted that, as stated, these strands seem inconsistent. As James Klagge⁵ notes, we

³ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th Edition (Trans. Hacker and Schulte) (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pt. xii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, sec. 20.

could hold that science ought not to replace our ordinary concepts or we can hold that it cannot. But since 'ought not' implies 'can', we cannot reasonably hold both positions.

Perhaps. But they might be thought consistent if we take the view that we think or act *as if* scientific developments should change our ordinary thinking, say about how we conduct our marriages or friendships or how we think of ourselves as agents and as moral agents, when in fact they cannot. We might say that even if such developments actually cannot have an effect on our ordinary lives in these respects, we are under the illusion that they do. We don't see that they don't work, but think that they do. In so thinking, we lose sight of, or traction upon, attitudes, insights and values which we need and may need precisely in order to forestall large scale catastrophe. Thus Wittgenstein wrote of our "disgusting, soapy-water science' that is "putting man to sleep"⁶.



Ian Ground

It should be noted that what Wittgenstein thinks about the relation between philosophy and science is conditioned by what he thinks about philosophy, rather than by anything he thinks about science:

It was true to say that our considerations could not be scientific ones. It was not of any possible interest to us to find out empirically 'that, contrary to our preconceived ideas, it is possible to think such-and-such'—whatever that may mean. (The conception of thought as a gaseous medium.) And we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all explanation, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking into the

*workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: in despite of an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.*⁷

The reason offered here for the fact that philosophical investigation is not porous to empirical discovery is not that philosophy has some access to truths which science cannot have. Far from it. It is because philosophy is not in the truth game at all whereas science certainly is.

In fact, these passages are entirely consistent with, and even expressive of, a very healthy respect for the empirical sciences. Philosophical problems do not arise because we need to build bridges, or discover cleaner energy sources or cure cancer or figure out the structure of matter or the evolution of the universe. But because we misrepresent to ourselves our own forms of

⁵ James Klagge, 'Wittgenstein, Science, and the Evolution of Concepts', in *Wittgenstein and Scientism*, ed. Jonathan Beale and Ian James Kidd (Routledge, 2017).

⁶ L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, revised (H von Wright, of the text by A. Pichler, translated by Peter Winch, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), sec. 49e.

⁷ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th Edition (Trans. Hacker and Schulte), sec. 109.

representation. We can piecemeal diagnose and correct such misrepresentations and sometimes find patterns in them that point to their sources. As individuals we can find peace about particular problems. At the cultural level, they will regenerate in different forms. Insofar as these misrepresentations infect our empirical investigations, they prevent progress, and it will be helpful to those investigations to get a clear view of where we go wrong. Philosophy can help the empirical sciences, but the reverse is not the case. The philosopher must put her own house in order.

Still, in thinking about how to situate the debate about ageing as a disease, I want to bring to bear some remarks which indicate a more more nuanced and even ambivalent position in Wittgenstein.

Thus in 1939, he writes:

*We have an idea of compulsion. If a policeman grabs me and shoves me through a door, we say I am compelled. But if I walk up and down here, we say I move freely. But it is objected: "If you knew all the laws of nature, and could observe all the particles etc., you would no longer say you were moving freely; you would see that a man just cannot do anything else".— But in the first place, this is not how we use the expression "he can't do anything else". Although it is conceivable that if we had a mechanism which would show all this, we would change our terminology—and say, "He's as much compelled as if a policeman shoved him." We'd give up this distinction then; and if we did, I would be very sorry.*⁸

Here, Wittgenstein thinks it conceivable that we could, change our terminology and give up distinctions that seem central to our notion of agency. Now we might say that Wittgenstein's thought here that "if we did, I would be very sorry" is very odd. For it is hard to know what regret and sorrow would look like when we have given up concepts of agency. But in any case, he seems to think that it is conceivable that our society might change in this way, perhaps turning into B.F Skinner's *Walden 2*⁹.

Elsewhere, after remarking that "[But} of course it isn't true that we are never certain about the mental processes in someone else. In countless cases we are.", he continues:

And now the question remains whether we would give up our language-game which rests on 'imponderable evidence' and frequently leads to uncertainty, if it were possible to exchange it for a more exact one which by and large would have similar consequences. For instance, we could work with a mechanical "lie detector" and redefine a lie as that which causes a deflection on the lie detector.

*So the question is: Would we change our way of living if this or that were provided for us?— And how could I answer that?*¹⁰

The nuance of Wittgenstein's position lies in that question "how could I answer that?". It expresses the need to revert to imponderability. To decide whether someone is lying involves judgements that may not be easily articulated, even though it is not a matter of lacking the words. There are rules but not systems of rules. It can be taught but only through tips and examples. It involves an open-ended range of factors, involving different weightings and different kinds of weighting. Above all, practice. Judgements based on imponderable evidence are a close cousin of Aristotelian *phronesis* - that practical sensitivity to the particular which cannot be reduced to a system of generalisations. It is a matter not of empirical evidence or information or knowledge but wisdom.

⁸ L. Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Cambridge, 1939, ed. Cora Diamond (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 242.

⁹ B. F. Skinner, *Walden Two* (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2010).

¹⁰ *Last Writings*, Volume 2, p. 95e

When we find ourselves in different contexts, and when we come to different times, we often face choices about not just what we will think, but how we will think. In particular, *we face choices about whether to act so as to bring about the change in how we think*. Whether we will in fact play the game so differently that it becomes a different game. Whether we choose to extend the concept, to add new threads to the rope that binds them, to put new links in the chain. Our dilemma is we have no definite criteria to defend the current concept against challenge without assuming the application of the concept under challenge. Yet at the same time the concept *is* under challenge, for example, from the empirical sciences. This is precisely the problem about thinking about ageing as a disease. To put this another way, as Michael Luntley¹¹ has expressed the matter, it is one thing to say that a concept imposes normative constraints on what we say, quite another to say that we are normatively constrained to go on in that particular way. Ultimately, 'grammar' is nothing but linguistic regularity. We do or don't go on in the same way. And this way lies a much more open-ended, improvisational, and dynamic conception of language and our thinking. But that regularity remains normatively charged in this sense. That we have still to take ethical responsibility for the changes we embrace or deny.

So we are not going to decide the question of whether ageing should be classified as a disease by constructing knock down arguments for either side. For those arguments will depend on what concepts, the extant or the new, we employ. Rather there will be things we can do and things we can no longer do, or be unable to do, if we do or don't make the change, with consequences that are hard to fathom. There might be some comfort to be had in thinking that any change will come about slowly. For a certain generation, thinking of ageing as a disease is nonsense. For future generations, it will seem perfectly ordinary (compare attitudes towards same sex marriage). But whether those generations will think that way depends on what we now, more or less, do. So now, as pressure builds to establish new clinical definitions, that comfort seems precious little.

It seems very likely that we are, in coming decades, going to see a great many more cases where concepts that in Cavell's words go "without saying, and only without saying"¹² *are said*, and made to sound odd or false or arbitrary, and are going to be replaced by new ways of going on.

The implications of his account of conceptual evolution, - in which concepts can gradually evolve without being anchored in necessary and sufficient conditions, sustained, not by the facts but only by our going on in the same way, against the background of the facts - make decisions about what changes we embrace and which we resist, both problematic and inevitable. Science and technology will ask us, on grounds, mostly spurious but occasionally compelling, to make changes to the concepts we now think constitutive of our humanity and thus to bring about, or not, a sort of "life [which] would simply look quite different from ours".¹³

About these changes, we might or not "be sorry". How to know what to do? We need to be rational and informed and morally decent. But neither reason nor knowledge nor decency can decisively settle the choices we face. Perhaps all that can is that imperfect reckoning of the imponderable, we call wisdom. And that seems to be a resource, these days, in dangerously short supply.

¹¹ Michael Luntley, *Wittgenstein: Opening Investigations* (John Wiley & Sons, 2015).

¹² Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, 1999, 33.

¹³ L. Wittgenstein, *Last Writings on Philosophy of Psychology*, H von Wright & H Nyman, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, p.40.

Imagine: a Wittgensteinian Strategy – Michael Bavidge

Wittgenstein frequently encourages us to imagine this or that, or warns us against the bewitching powers of the imagination. So the question arises: what impact does he think the imagination has, or ought to have, on philosophical thinking?

Sometimes he talks of the imagination when he wants to deflate the influence it should have on philosophical argument: the fact that we can, in an attenuated sense, 'imagine' something, does not mean that it should influence the argument. In *Zettel* we find the question: 'Are roses red in the dark?' His response is brusque:

One can *think* of the rose in the dark as red.-- (That one can 'imagine' something does not mean that it makes sense to say it.) [Z §250]

But there are occasions when he wishes to downplay the role of imagination while pointing out, at the same time, that the unimportance of imagination is itself a matter of importance:

... when you ask me "Don't you know, then, what I mean when I say that the stove is in pain?" -- I can reply: These words may lead me to have all sorts of *images*; but their usefulness goes no further. [PI, §351]

Ringing the changes on the important unimportance of the imagination becomes quite subtle and plays a part, for example, in Wittgenstein's discussion of the Other Minds problem. Immediately after the roses remark in *Zettel* he writes:

"The supposition that this person--who behaves quite normally--is nevertheless blind, surely makes sense!"--That means: 'after all it is a supposition.' 'I surely can actually suppose something like that.' And that means: I picture the thing I am supposing. Very well: but does it go any further than that? If in other circumstances, I suppose that someone is blind, I never assure myself that this assumption really makes sense. And my actually imagining something, picturing something, as I make the assumption, plays no part at all in that case. This *picture* only becomes important here, where it is so to speak the *only* thing that gives a handle for thinking that I really have supposed something. That is all that is left of there being an assumption here. [Z §251]

I read this as saying: in a real life situation, when we suppose someone is blind - for example, we see them feeling their way along the road with a stick - our assumption makes sense without recourse to imagining or picturing anything about their experience. In the philosophical case however, when we suppose that a normal person is blind, we have to do *something* to make it appear that our supposition can bear any load in the argument. So perhaps we imagine that the person is, at it were, in the dark, although in fact they are walking around like a sighted person in good light.

Another example, my own: I can know that John loves Jane without *imagining* anything about what it is like to be John in love. But if in an extravagant philosophical moment I imagine that the chair you are sitting on has fallen in love with you and is not just bearing your weight but is giving you a cuddle, my imagination has to work overtime. But what has love got to do with chairs? To reference Thomas Nagel, but at the risk of bad taste, I could say that the problem of understanding other minds does not hang on an ability to know or imagine what it is like to be as blind as bat.

There is a third sort of reference to imagination in Wittgenstein's writings in which he warns us against the power of the imagination to distort and deflect our thinking. In these cases he thinks

that imagination can cause a disorientation of the mind which makes us systematically misread our own experience and on the basis of which we construct hopeless philosophical theories.

A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably. [PI §115].

These cases, which it could be argued pervade the whole of his later philosophy, are central to its therapeutic mission: to identify and describe the misleading pictures which determine the shape of our questions even before we ask them - and then to free us from their grip. In this context imagination is seen as the enemy.



Michael Bavidge

General Facts of Nature

Interesting as these cases are, the appeals to the imagination that I want to concentrate on belong to a fourth category. They are neither the trivial ones in which imagination plays little or no part; nor are they empty gestures which have no real force in argument; nor are they the distorting pictures which pervert thought and which must be exorcised.

Sometimes Wittgenstein appeals to the imagination to free us from philosophical dogmas that seem utterly obvious and undeniable. In these cases his appeal to the imagination aspires to being a methodology.

In *Culture and Value* he is reported as saying:

One of my most important methods is to imagine a historical development of our ideas different from what has actually occurred. If we do that the problem shows us a quite new side. [CV p. 45]

The main passage I have in mind is from the *Philosophical Investigations*; there are corresponding, indeed almost exactly similar, passages in *Zettel* and in the *Philosophy of Psychology*:

If the formation of concepts can be explained by facts of nature, should we not be interested, not in grammar, but rather in that in nature which is the basis of grammar?--Our interest certainly includes the correspondence between concepts and very general facts of nature. (Such facts as mostly do not strike us because of their generality.) But our interest does not fall back upon these possible causes of the formation of concepts; we are not doing natural science; nor yet natural history--since we can also invent fictitious natural history for our purposes.

I am not saying: if such-and-such facts of nature were different people would have different concepts (in the sense of a hypothesis). But: if anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize--then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him. [PI, II, §XII]

Necessity

He is not proposing a straightforward counterfactual: if things had been different in the past they would be different now: say, if a meteor had not crashed into the earth, the dinosaurs might not have become extinct. He argues that if the general facts of nature were different we might not feel the normative grip of our current ways of thinking: "It is as if our concepts involved a scaffolding of facts" [RPP II, §392] and if the facts were different we would think differently.'

In *On Certainty* he draws a general lesson:

Why, would it be *unthinkable* that I should stay in the saddle however much the facts bucked? Certain events would put me into a position in which I could not go on with the old language-game any further. In which I was torn away from the sureness of the game. Indeed, doesn't it seem obvious that the possibility of a language-game is conditioned by certain facts? [OC, §616/17]

Wittgenstein's immediate target is the idea that our particular *concepts are absolutely the correct ones*; that, as it were, Nature determines the one and only way we can think - perhaps because our thinking just reproduces the shape of reality, or because the physical world causally determines the laws according to which we think, or because we have discovered a universal methodology which fixes the rails along which we must think forever.

His aim is at least to loosen our idea of the conceptual necessities that govern the way we think. His method is imaginatively to step outside of the context that makes sense of what we say. His most ambitious target is to make us reassess the very idea of conceptual necessities.

How about this for a comparison? There are general facts of nature that explain why human beings play football. We have two legs; we can walk and run erect; we have binocular vision. Of course it is true that, if we had flippers or could acquire oxygen only under water, we would not play football; and there would be, for example, no off-side rule. Nevertheless, however exhaustively we examine these facts we will never explain the emergence of the off-side rule in soccer.

The Gap

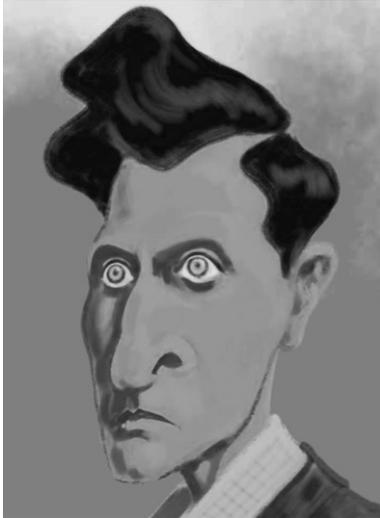
Imagining the facts of nature to be different opens up a gap between the ways in which we *have to* think and what the facts of nature seem to force upon us.

Sometimes Wittgenstein argues in a way that appears to run counter to his own declared intention. Although he explicitly says he is not thinking scientifically, 'I am not saying: if such-and-such facts of nature were different people would have different concepts (in the sense of a hypothesis)', he sometimes seems to do just that: drawing tentative conclusions about what we might say.

For example in *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* we find:

It is interesting ... to observe that particular shapes are not tied to particular colours in our environment; that, for example, we do not always see green in connection with round, red in connection with square. If we imagined a world in which shapes and colours were always tied to one another in such ways, we'd find intelligible a system of concepts, in which the fundamental division--shape and colour--did not hold. [RPP, I, §47]

This sounds like a straightforward thought experiment: if shapes and colours were connected differently, we would find a different system of concepts intelligible. But do we *now* find that thought intelligible? He is not asking us just to suppose that, as a matter of empirical generalization, all round things are green and all square things are red - which may seem no more difficult than imagining all swan-shaped things really are white. The imaginative move is supposed to cut more deeply than that. We are asked to imagine a world which we could not divide up into colours and shapes. It amounts to a meta-thought namely that in those circumstances we would find intelligible what *now* we find unintelligible.



Similar things can be said about another ingenious example he comes up with:

'Suppose people used always to *point* to objects in the following way: they describe a circle as it were round the object with their finger in the air; in that case a philosopher could be imagined who said: "All things are circular, for the table looks like this, the stove like this, the lamp like this", etc., drawing a circle round the thing each time.

[Z §443]

It is difficult to make sense of the idea that objects might be taken to have a different shape if the physical movement of pointing was different. But it is not offered as a hypothesis; it is an imaginative aid holding us in place just long enough to raise the possibility that things I cannot make sense of *now* would make sense under different circumstances. This is why it is an exercise in imagination rather than a scientific hypothesis.

What goes on in the gap?

If Wittgenstein does not intend to fill the gap with inferences explaining how concepts arise out of general facts of nature, what then does fill the gap?

We should pause here and give ourselves time to be surprised and shocked by Wittgenstein's apparently cavalier attitude to scientific explanation. He refers, in the passage from the *Investigations* I quoted, to the general facts of nature that 'correspond' to concepts, and then he says he doesn't care what they are; his only concern is that they are there. This thought leads him to insist on the difference between his philosophical investigations and scientific inquiries. Science forms and tests hypotheses about these facts of nature; philosophy asks what is the relationship between these explanations, whatever they are, and human life.

There are those who will say that here the Wittgensteinians with their usual disdain for science turn away from the only inquiries that can resolve the issues. Indeed this may be the point at which one of the big divisions in our culture opens up between those who think that scientific research will resolve the issues about the nature of thought and those who do not. How we react to the gap we have imaginatively opened between the general facts of nature and conceptual necessities will determine where we set the limits to naturalistic accounts of mind.

The cognitive sciences are set on showing how it is natural that we should think in this way rather than that, or indeed why it is natural that we should think at all. They want to naturalise thinking. They are determined to avoid any suggestion that thinking is parachuted into the natural world. They must show how thinking arises seamlessly in the natural world. As it were, Nature looks after language. What we must think, the necessities of the normative domains, must be capturable in terms of natural relationships.

Against Theory

However the suspicion remains that there is a problem that scientific explanations do not touch. A commitment to a naturalistic account of mind - no supernatural interventions or extra-terrestrial programming - is compatible with denying the possibility of a Natural History of the emergence of conceptual necessities. To oversee the emergence of mind (or football) is to follow a track that starts with observing certain facts and ends in actually being in the grip of the necessities that shape the way we talk and think (or play football); and that end state is only possible on the inside of the game. It is to start with facts about brains (or legs and flippers) and to end up with being

under the necessities that determine the way we think (or play). If the point of view of a disengaged observer is retained throughout, we start with natural facts and end with normative facts. We are then faced with an option: either dualism or, if normative facts seem too weird, reductionism.

Some scientifically orientated thinkers realise that the shift from scientific fact to conceptual necessity is unbridgeable. But their scientific loyalties commit them to fill the gap between the facts of nature and the way we think with the generation of illusion. Colin Blakemore, for example, writes:

those who study the human brain see our experiences, even of our own intentions, as being an illusory commentary on what our brains have already decided to do.

He acknowledges the gap between our thoughts and the facts, and he fills it with illusions. [Colin Blakemore: 'Science is just one gene away from defeating religion', *The Observer*, Feb. 22, 2009]

Wittgenstein's philosophical career can be seen, in part, as the story of his attempt to construct an alternative to the choice between dualism and illusion. In the *Tractatus* the connection of world and language was guaranteed by the isomorphism of world and language. Language, in virtue of its own properties, just is a picture of the world. Once we have abandoned that idea, meaning is no longer seen as a property of linguistic structures nor of psychological states nor a precipitate of brain activity, we are forced to reintroduce *ourselves* into the story. The slogan of the *Investigations* 'Meaning is use' is a functional, impersonal statement; but it claims that meaning emerges from what *we* do. And once we accept that, we let the whole of human life back in. What fills the gap between the general facts of nature and conceptual necessities? The whole of human life.

The birth of meaning is incomprehensible, in the sense, but only in the sense, that there cannot be an over-arching theory which seamlessly explains the shift from fact to rule. Our inability to construct a single theoretical over-view is a function both of the problem itself - it involves a shift of stance - and of our position vis-à-vis the problem - *we* are the problem.

Inside/Outside

When we consider the approach to language in the *Investigations*, though there is plenty to say about forms of life and language games, there remains something that these *descriptions* do not explain - the shift from the outside to the inside of language. This is hardly mysterious; but the shift is not an explanation: it does not consist in accepting a theory. It is a change in stance. It has to be lived, not understood - a shift of perspective from an outsider's view of a normative domain to the experience of an insider.

Wittgenstein illustrates our predicament by comparing it to the shift from the inside to the outside of an aesthetic world - a shift that we may initiate ourselves or which we may be forced into:

... It is as if at first we looked at a picture so as to enter into it and the objects in it surrounded us like real ones; and then we stepped back, and were now outside it; we saw the frame, and the picture was a painted surface. In this way, when we intend, we are surrounded by our intention's pictures, and we are inside them. But when we step outside intention, they are mere patches on a canvas, without life and of no interest to us. When we intend, we exist in the space of intention, among the pictures (shadows) of intention, as well as with real things. Let us imagine we are sitting in a darkened cinema and entering into the film. Now the lights are turned on, though the film continues on the screen. But suddenly we are outside it and see it as movements of light and dark patches on a screen. [Z, §233]

A little later - and admittedly in a different context - he suggests a similar comparison and adds a remark about the dissatisfaction and the ambition of the philosopher; he cannot accept what is gifted to him:

But I can't anticipate reality in my thoughts, using words to sneak in something I am not acquainted with. ...

As if I could as it were get round and approach from behind in thought, and so snatch a glimpse of what it is impossible to see from the front. [Z §262]

Imagine you are in a theatre - let's say watching *King Lear* - caught up in the pathos and the beauty of it all. You want to understand how they do it. So you sneak around the back. But all you see are props and bits of stage machinery and actors having a quick drag between scenes. What we, as theorists, find so difficult to accept - and what Wittgenstein is trying to get us to accept - is that nothing was hidden. It (the pathos and the beauty) was all front of stage, there and only there, from the beginning.

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Unanswerable Questions – Moritz Schlick

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It is natural that mankind should take great pride in the steady advance of its knowledge. The joy we feel in the contemplation of scientific progress is fully justified. One problem after another is solved by science; and the success of the past gives us ample reason for our hope that this process will go on, perhaps even at a quicker pace. But will it, can it, go on indefinitely? It seems a little ridiculous to suppose a day might come when all imaginable problems would be solved, so that there would be no questions left for which the human mind would crave an answer. We feel sure that our curiosity will never be completely satisfied and that the progress of knowledge will not come to a stop when it has reached its last goal.

It is commonly assumed that there are other imperative reasons why scientific advance cannot go on forever. Most people believe in the existence of barriers that cannot be scaled by human reason and by human experience. The final and perhaps the most important truths are thought to be permanently hidden from our eyes; the key to the Riddle of the Universe is believed to be buried in depths the access to which is barred to all mortals by the very nature of the Universe. According to this common belief, there are many questions which we can formulate, and whose meaning we can grasp completely, though it is definitely impossible to know their answer which is beyond the nature and necessary boundary of all knowledge. In regard to these questions a final *ignorabimus* is pronounced. Nature, it is said, does not wish her deepest secrets to be revealed; God has set a limit of knowledge which shall not be passed by his creatures, and beyond which faith must take the place of curiosity.

It is easy to understand how such a view originated, but it is not so clear why it should be considered to be a particularly pious or reverent attitude. Why should Nature seem more wonderful to us if she cannot be known completely? Surely she does not wish to conceal anything on purpose, for she has no secrets, nothing to be ashamed of. On the contrary, the more we know of the world the more we shall marvel at it; and if we should know its ultimate principles and its most general laws, our feeling of wonder and reverence would pass all bounds. Nothing is gained by picturing God as jealously hiding from his creatures the innermost structure of his creation, indeed, a worthier conception of a Supreme Being should imply that no ultimate boundary should be set to the knowledge of beings to whom an infinite desire of knowledge has been given. The existence of an absolute *ignorabimus* would form an exceedingly vexing problem to a philosophical mind. It would be a great step forward in philosophy, if the burden of this bewildering problem could be thrown off.

This, one may argue, is evidently impossible, for without doubt there are unanswerable questions. It is very easy to ask questions the answers to which, we have the strongest reasons to believe, will never be known to any Human being. What did Plato do at eight o'clock in the morning of his fiftieth birthday? How much did Homer weigh when he wrote the first line of the *Iliad*? Is there a piece of silver to be found on the other side of the moon, three inches long and shaped like a fish? Obviously, men will never know the answers to these questions, however hard they may try. But at the same time, we know that they would never try very hard. These problems, they will say, are of no importance, no philosopher would worry about them, and no historian or naturalist would care whether he knew the answers or not.

Here, then, we have certain questions whose insolubility does not trouble the philosopher; and evidently there are reasons why it need not trouble him. This is important. We must be content to have insoluble questions. But what if all of them could be shown to be of such a kind as not to cause any really serious concern to the philosopher? In that case he would be relieved. Although

there would be many things he could not know, the real burden of the *ignorabimus* would be lifted from his shoulders. At first sight there seems to be little hope for this as some of the most important issues of philosophy are generally held to belong to the class of insoluble problems. Let us consider this point carefully.

What do we mean when we call a question important? When do we hold it to be of interest to the philosopher? Broadly speaking, when it is a question of principle; one that refers to a general feature of the world, not a detail; one that concerns the structure of the world, a valid law, not a single unique fact. This distinction may be described as the difference between the real nature of the Universe and the accidental form in which this nature manifests itself.

Correspondingly, the reasons why a given problem is insoluble may be of two entirely different kinds. In the first place, the impossibility of answering a given question may be an impossibility in principle or, as we shall call it, a logical impossibility. In the second place, it may be due to accidental circumstances which do not affect the general laws, and in this case we shall speak of an empirical impossibility.

In the simple instances given above, it is clear that the impossibility of answering these questions is of the empirical kind. It is merely a matter of chance that neither Plato nor any of his friends took exact notes of his doings on his fiftieth birthday (or that such notes were lost if any were taken); and a similar remark applies to the questions concerning the weight of Homer and things on the other side of the moon. It is practically or technically impossible for humans to reach the moon and go around it, and such an exploration of our earth's satellite will never take place. But we cannot declare it impossible in principle. The moon happens to be very far off; it happens to turn always the same side towards the earth; it happens to possess no atmosphere which human beings could breathe -but we can very easily imagine all of these circumstances to be different. We are prevented from visiting the moon only by brute facts, by an unfortunate state of affairs, not by any principle by which certain things were deliberately held from our knowledge. Even if the impossibility of solving a certain question is due to a Law of Nature, we shall have to say that it is only empirical, not logical, provided we can indicate how the law would have to be changed in order to make the question answerable. After all, the existence of any Law of Nature must be considered as an empirical fact which might just as well be different. The scientist's whole interest is concentrated on the particular Laws of Nature; but the philosopher's general point of view must be independent of the validity of any particular one of them.

It is one of the most important contentions of the Philosophy I am advocating that there are many questions which it is empirically impossible to answer, - but not a single real question for which it would be logically impossible to find a solution. Since only the latter kind of impossibility would have that hopeless and fatal character which is implied by the *ignorabimus* and which could cause philosophers to speak of a "Riddle of the Universe" and to despair of such problems as the "cognition of things in themselves," and similar ones, it would seem that the acceptance of my opinion would bring the greatest relief to all those who have been unduly concerned about the essential incompetence of human knowledge in regard to the greatest issues. Nobody can reasonably complain about the empirical impossibility of knowing everything, for that would be equivalent to complaining that we cannot live at all times and be in all places simultaneously. Nobody wants to know all the facts, and it is not important to know them: the really essential principles of the universe reveal themselves at any time and any place. I do not suggest, of course, that they lie open at first glance, but they can always be discovered by the careful and penetrating methods of science.

How can I prove my point? What assures us that the impossibility of answering questions never belongs to the question as such, is never a matter of principle, but is always due to accidental

empirical circumstances, which may some day change? There is no room here for a real proof;* but I can indicate in general how the result is obtained.

It is done by an analysis of the meaning of our questions. Evidently philosophical issues - and very often other problems too - are difficult to understand: we have to ask for an explanation of what is meant by them. How is such an explanation given? How do we indicate the meaning of a question?

A conscientious examination shows that all the various ways of explaining what is actually meant by a question are, ultimately, nothing but various descriptions of ways in which the answer to the question must be found. Every explanation or indication of the meaning of a question consists, in some way or other, of prescriptions for finding its answer. This principle has proved to be of fundamental importance for the method of science. For example, it led Einstein, as he himself admits, to the discovery of the Theory of Relativity. It may be empirically impossible to follow those prescriptions (like travelling around the moon), but it cannot be logically impossible. For what is logically impossible cannot even be described, i.e., it cannot be expressed by words or other means of communication.

The truth of this last statement is shown by an analysis of "description" and "expression" into which we cannot enter here. But taking it for granted, we see that no real question is in principle - i.e. logically - unanswerable. For the logical impossibility of solving a problem is equivalent to the impossibility of describing a method of finding its solution and this, as we have stated, is equivalent to the impossibility of indicating the meaning of the problem. Thus a question which is unanswerable in principle can have no meaning; it can be no question at all: it is nothing but a nonsensical series of words with a question mark after them. As it is logically impossible to give an answer where there is no question, this cannot be a cause of wonder, dissatisfaction, or despair.

This conclusion can be made clearer by considering one or two examples. Our question as to the weight of Homer has meaning, of course, because we can easily describe methods of weighing human bodies (even poets); in other words, the notion of weight is accurately defined. Probably Homer was never weighed, and it is empirically impossible to do it now, because his body no longer exists; but these accidental facts do not alter the sense of the question. Or take the problem of survival after death. It is a meaningful question, because we can indicate ways in which it could be solved. One method of ascertaining one's own survival would simply consist in dying. It would also be possible to describe certain observations of scientific character that would lead us to accept a definite answer. That such observations could not be made thus far is an empirical fact which cannot entail a definite *ignorabimus* in regard to the problem.

Now consider the question: "What is the nature of time?" What does it mean? What do the words "the nature of" stand for, The scientist might, perhaps, invent some kind of explanation, he might suggest some statements which he would regard as possible answers to the question; but his explanation could be nothing but the description of a method of discovering which of the suggested answers is the true one. In other words, by giving a meaning to the question he has at the same time. made it logically answerable, although he may not be able to make it empirically soluble. Without such an explanation, however, words "What is the nature of time?" are no question at all. If a philosopher confronts us with a series of words like this and neglects to explain the meaning, he cannot wonder if no answer is forthcoming. It is as if he had asked us: "How much does philosophy weigh?" in which case it is immediately seen that is not a question at all, but mere nonsense. Questions like "Can we know the Absolute?" and innumerable similar ones must be dealt with in the same, way as the " problem" concerning the nature of Time.

All great philosophical issues that have been discussed since the time of Parmenides to our present day are of one of two kinds: we can either give them a definite meaning by careful and accurate explanation and definitions, and then we are sure that they are soluble in principle, although they may give scientist the greatest trouble and may even never solved on account of unfavourable empirical circumstances, or we fail to give them any meaning, and then they are no questions at all. Neither case need cause uneasiness for the philosopher. His greatest troubles arose from a failure to distinguish between the two.