

# Wittgenstein: Concepts or Conceptions?

By Gordon Baker

I WANT TO MAKE A DISTINCTION BETWEEN CONCEPTS (*BEGRIFFE*) AND CONCEPTIONS (*Auffassungen*), and a related distinction between descriptions (*Beschreibungen*) and pictures (*Bilder*). I will then try to put this material to work in clarifying an important dimension in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*: the difference between conceptual analyses and overviews (*Übersichten* or *Überblicken*) [compare *F\*16*].

These distinctions have been hidden from view by the widespread preconception that Wittgenstein is always in the business of giving clarifications of the meaning of words that are allegedly grounded in detailed descriptions of their everyday use in ordinary discourse and that his philosophical investigations have a substantial degree of overlap with Carnap's program of constructing logical syntax and with Ryle's mapping of logical geography. The distinctions I discuss are both subtle and contestable, but I will try to make a case for their being of decisive importance.

Initially I follow the practice indicated in the index to the *Philosophical Investigations*, which distinguishes a sense of 'picture' that is glossed as 'conception, model'. Wittgenstein seems frequently to take conceptions to be crystallized in what he call 'pictures', and he often uses 'picture' to characterize ideas that seem non-pictorial or even unpicturable.<sup>1</sup>

My *modus operandi* is more a matter of raising questions than of providing answers. But failing to raise enough questions, or failing to put the question marks deep enough down, is a main weakness of much philosophy. It generates the danger of *falsche Fragestellung*.

## Preliminary: *PI* §1

THE *PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS* OPEN WITH A QUOTE FROM AUGUSTINE'S *Confessions*. Wittgenstein then comments: "These words, it seems to me, give us a particular *picture* (*Bild*) of the *essence* (*Wesen*) of human language. Namely: the words in language name objects—sentences are combinations of such names" [§1].<sup>2</sup> (Elsewhere he remarks that this picture treats naming and describing as the two essential activities in speaking a language and also that it assigns a fundamental role to ostensive definition.)

What is meant by calling this a 'picture' of the 'essence' of language?

Essence may be readily understood. What belongs to essence is necessary.

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What is essential is what *cannot* be otherwise than it is. So according to Augustine's picture, every word *must* be a name, and every sentence *must* be a combination of names. Or: every (meaningful) word *must* be correlated with an object, and every sentence *must* be composite. These uses of "must" produce statements that cannot be read as empirical generalizations. In this sense, Augustine's picture is not comparable to any 'theory of meaning'. Formulations of essence are the paradigms of the 'metaphysical uses' of words [§116].

But what does it mean to speak of a 'picture' of the essence of language? What is 'picture' supposed to contrast with?

One relevant point might be that the picture ascribed to Augustine is *not explicit* in the citation. It is imputed to him on the basis of his description of how he learned to speak. In this case, if Augustine had set out to answer the question

"What is the essence of language?", could we no longer say that he gave us a picture?

Another point might be that Augustine's account is *impressionistic*. Almost certainly it does not report memo-

ries of actual speech-learning episodes in his childhood but rather reports his idea of how he *must* have learned to speak. The account is also highly schematic, devoid of significant detail. Does it follow that what is inferred from this account must be equally an *impression* of the essence of language?

Yet another point might be that 'picture' here suggests that Augustine's account is inaccurate or incorrect or incomplete, as it were a *mere* picture. This dyslogistic use of 'picture' is familiar from other contexts. We speak of somebody's picture of a sequence of momentous events in which he was a participant, contrast one participant's picture with another's, and perhaps also contrast the pictures of all the participants with a description of what really happened. Is Wittgenstein preparing to give a correct *description* of the essence of language (not a picture at all!) to be contrasted with all other *pictures* of this essence? Does 'picture' here imply that he judges Augustine's picture to be *incorrect*? And if it is not incorrect, how can it "surround the working of language with a haze that makes clear vision impossible" [§5]?

On the other hand, Wittgenstein often seems to suggest that what he calls 'pictures' are not subject to assessment as being correct or incorrect. They might be superstitions, but they are *not* mistakes [§110]. "The picture is there; I don't dispute its correctness" [§424]. This is because there is nothing to dispute in this respect about a picture. He continues: "What is in question is unclarity about how it is to be applied." An example would be misapplying the picture of inner-outer by taking something to be hidden behind what is inner in the picture [LPE 281]. Pictures are to be contrasted with applications of pictures [§§374, 422-7].

But if a picture cannot be correct or incorrect, then in a sense it cannot give any information, so it *must*, in a sense, be vacuous. And yet it can be misleading [VI.248], damaging, constraining. How is this possible? A description might be misleading, for example, if it incorporates false information (how?) or implies (or even naturally suggests (to *us*)) ideas that are false (as 'objects' suggests logical inde-

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pendence to us). But what if no information is conveyed? How can a picture be challenged as being mistaken or wrong?<sup>3</sup> How can it “take us in” [PI p.184]?

These questions are all-important. Uncertainty about how to construe ‘picture’ affects the overall interpretation of §§1-89 and arguably too the interpretation of the Private Language Argument [§§243-321]. Is Wittgenstein’s intention to demolish Augustine’s picture? To demonstrate that it is a *misdescription* of the essence of language? (Does he regard this picture as a botched attempt to describe the everyday use of such terms as ‘language’, ‘meaning’, ‘word’, ‘sentence’, and ‘object’? Hence as a *misrepresentation* of these *concepts*?) Is his aim to replace Augustine’s picture with a *correct description* of the essence of language, that is, with an accurate description of the grammar of ‘language’ [compare §372]—and perhaps also of ‘name’, ‘sentence’, ‘object’, ‘description’, and so forth? Or does he propose, and try to win our acceptance of, a different *picture* of the essence of language? Could it be a *picture* that he means to present in the slogan: “The meaning of a word is its use in language—a sentence is an instrument in a language-game” [compare §§43, 421]? What would be the implications of our calling this a ‘picture’? Would it thereby lose all philosophical interest? Or any claim to our attention? Would it be a *mere* picture?

### **Provisional typology of remarks in the *Philosophical Investigations***

AT LEAST THREE DISTINCT KINDS OF REMARKS STAND OUT IN THE *PHILISOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS*:

1) Formulations of rules of grammar; or descriptions of the grammar of certain words (whether these be our words in everyday use or symbols of an imaginary language-game). For example:

§2: The language of the builder and his assistant.

§246: “I cannot be said to learn of my sensations. I *have* them. The truth is: it makes sense to say about other people that they doubt whether I am in pain but not to say it about myself. (Incidentally, this perhaps describes the grammar of our current language, but not of Descartes’!)”

§199: “It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which someone obeyed a rule.”

§248: “One plays patience by oneself.”

p. 222: “It is correct to say ‘I know what you are thinking,’ and wrong to say ‘I know what I am thinking.’ (A whole cloud of philosophy condensed into a drop of grammar.)”

2) Extremely general facts of nature (see p. 56n), which are important for explaining the importance of certain concepts (see p. 230). Also propositions constituting our *Weltbild* (C §§93-4, 167). For example:

§142: The practice of selling things by weight would “lose its point if it frequently happened for (lumps of cheese) suddenly to grow or shrink for no obvious reason.”

When I point to something, another generally looks in the direction in which I have pointed, not at my finger (as a cat does).

§199: “It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which someone obeyed a rule.”

The world has existed for a long time. [C §§85, 182-8, 233, 311]

Cats and motor-cars do not grow on trees. [C §§279, 282]

Mathematicians do not worry about the stability or permanence of paper-and-ink calculations.

p. 227: "There is in general complete agreement in the judgments of colors made by those who have not been diagnosed as abnormal.... There is in general no such agreement over the question whether an expression of feeling is genuine or not."

3) Pictures: *Bild, Vorstellung, Auffassung*. Some clear examples:

The picture of possibility as a shadowy reality, for example §194: "The possibility of the movement is...supposed to be like the shadow of the movement itself." (Compare §448).

§427: " 'While I was speaking to him I did not know what was going on in his head (*hinter seiner Stirn*; lit. behind his forehead).' In saying this, one is...thinking of thought-processes. The picture should be taken seriously.... We have this vivid picture."

§352: "Our thinking plays us a queer trick. We want...to quote the law of excluded middle and to say: 'Either such an image is in his mind, or it is not; there is no third possibility!'.... When it is said 'Either he has this experience, or not'—what primarily occurs to us is a picture which by itself seems to make the sense of the expressions *unmistakable*: 'Now you know what is in question'—we would like to say. And that is precisely what it does not tell him."

§59: " 'A *name* signifies only what is an *element* of reality. What cannot be destroyed; what remains the same in all changes.'—This was the expression of a quite particular image: of a particular picture which we want to use."

The picture of the mind as a private inner world [LPE 279-81].<sup>4</sup>

I would like to offer some very preliminary comments on this third kind of remark, that is, about a picture as it contrasts with the first two kinds of remarks:

A picture gives no information, hence no incorrect information. "Not facts; but as it were illustrated turns of speech" [§295]. Perhaps it is more like a way of seeing things, a conception (*Auffassung*), or a norm of representation. Its adoption may force us to give descriptions having a particular pattern, for example to describe all differences in word-use as differences in the objects signified by the words, or (as with Frege) to describe the inferential powers of judgments in terms of analysis into functions and arguments.

A picture may force itself upon us or persist unshakably as part of our thinking. "The picture forces itself on us" [§103]. It is very important that pictures do *force* themselves on us [RFM 42], or "intrude on us" [CV 50]. They may captivate us [§112]. They may get a grip on our thinking, holding us in a cramped position or keeping us in thrall. In this way, some pictures resemble prejudices or superstitions. And they may seriously restrict intellectual freedom. They produce mental cramps.

A picture seems non-literal, metaphorical [LPE 280], allegorical, figurative, and so forth (for example, of possibility as a shadow, or the outside/inside distinction like a drawer and its contents). Hence, apparently beyond criticism as 'non-sense'.

Changes in grammar alter sense (concepts), but changes in pictures do not.

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For example, different pictures may be attached to our concept of possibility. It seems that we may replace one with another without altering the meaning of 'possible'.<sup>5</sup>

*Weltbild* and pictures need not be evident or conscious; often they must be discovered by sensitive reflection on our own practice (hence, in a sense, by bringing to consciousness what is unconscious). We may even resist acknowledging them, because they are revolting or too crude. (Whereas grammar can be regarded as being fixed by the explanations we give [compare §75]—though perhaps not without some prompting?) The power of pictures (or prejudices) to distort thinking may largely depend on their being unconscious.<sup>6</sup>

Two clear points about pictures emerge:

1) Pictures are often to be contrasted with rules of grammar or everyday explanations of the meanings of words. (Nobody would explain 'possible' by calling possibility a shadowy reality. Or formulate Augustine's picture to explain how to make use of the expression 'a language'. Or propose 'inner' as a *synonym* for 'mental' or 'conscious'.)

2) Pictures are of the utmost importance for Wittgenstein's philosophy. "Grammatical problems are connected with the oldest *Denkgewohnheiten*, that is, with the oldest pictures embedded in our language" [V.224; BT 422-3]. "Our investigation tried to remove this bias which forces us to think that the facts *must* conform to certain pictures embedded in our language" [BB 43].<sup>7</sup>

### The main issue

THE BIG QUESTION IS: HOW DOES AUGUSTINE'S PICTURE FIT INTO THIS TRIPARTITE framework? Is it to be treated as a *picture* of meaning? Or as a *misdescription* of the grammar of 'meaning', 'word', 'sentence', and so forth? How does Wittgenstein see this matter? (Which view makes best sense of his strategy of investigation? Which best epitomizes the content of §§1-143?)

A subsidiary goal here is to attain further clarification of the distinctions among these three kinds of remark and to show what is at stake in confusing them with one another.

The use of resolving these matters will be to mark out the danger of crossing two different language-games in discussing Wittgenstein, that is, the danger of genre-misidentification. In particular, to caution against attacking and defending pictures as if they were meant as (literal?) descriptions of grammar. (For example: arithmetical equations are rules of grammar; the mathematician is an inventor, not a discoverer; in a proof we win through to a decision.) Much secondary literature may be *deeply* flawed in this respect.

A similar danger is taking Wittgenstein to offer grammatical *refutations* of pictures. For example: "Every *Satz* must be composite" [PLP 316-7], or "The real elements must be indestructible" [§39], or "A proposition-sign must be a fact" [TLP 3.14]. Does Wittgenstein intend to canvas exceptions to such statements? To propose counterexamples?

### The grammar of 'picture'

THIS SECTION ATTEMPTS A FIRST SKETCH OF THE USE OF 'PICTURE' (IN, AS IT WERE,

'Wittgenstein-Speak'), that is, an exploration of one of Wittgenstein's uses of the term. (I ignore here his discussions of painted pictures, portraits, and so forth.) These remarks seem to hold equally of his use of 'conceptions' (*Auffassungen*) and 'ways of seeing things'.

1) 'Picture' is quite naturally associated with facticity-disclaimers. Hence a picture might be called a 'conception' (*Auffassung*), 'way of seeing things', 'way of looking at or regarding things', or 'aspect'. And it might be marked with qualifiers, for example, "in a certain sense," "one might say," "I want to say." (Perhaps too with scare-quotes and italics.)

Wittgenstein emphasizes this point; he refrains from disputing the *correctness* of pictures [§424].

"The mind seems able to give a word meaning" [p. 184]. This is *not* something that *seems to be so*; it is a *picture*. Thus we see that a picture is *not suggested* to us *by experience* [§59]. (Though it may be drawn from familiar materials.) It is not gotten by induction, for example, the picture theory of the proposition [compare *Z* §444].

This point about non-facticity seems independent of the particular content of a picture, especially of whether it is a picture of language or of the world.

Corollary: a picture cannot be contradicted by observations or discoveries. It lies outside the range of refutation by facts. (It may be as easily dislodged by fiction as by fact. For example, §244: "Here is *one possibility*....")

2) Pictures are contrasted with explanations of how to use words. Pictures are no substitute for detailed formulations of how words are to be used. Sometimes they may seem to make the sense of an expression unmistakable—but this is precisely what they do not do [§352]. In this sense, they are not part of grammar.

Corollary: they cannot be *misdescriptions* of the grammar of our language. (Not *mistakes*, but, at least sometimes, superstitions [§110].)

A good example here is the picture of thinking as either a hidden mental process or as operating with signs [*BB* 6]. This divergence of pictures seems not to

engage with the everyday practice of using the word 'think'. (Pictures are, in this respect, free-wheeling [*Leerlaufende Räder*].)

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3) It is a further (though related) implication of 'picture' that acceptance or rejection of pictures is always

optional, an exercise of intellectual freedom. Impressed by other possibilities, I may decide to give up a picture, even one deeply entrenched in my thinking (a prejudice or preconception). Wittgenstein, like Descartes, urges us to try to do this. Conversely, I may *refuse* to accept any picture without thereby displaying any form of stupidity or intellectual ineptitude. By contrast, shutting my eyes in the face of unwelcome facts (even facts of grammar?) is a form of irrationality.

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4) A picture is, in a sense, empty: it tells us nothing and conveys no information. (Even a picture of grammar is empty.) For example, when we say (in accord with Augustine's picture): " 'Every word in language signifies something' we have so far said nothing whatever" [§13]. But it does not follow that every picture is harmless. For example, Augustine's picture surrounds the working of language with a fog [§5]. More generally, Wittgenstein traces the origins of many philosophical problems to the influence of pictures. The source of philosophical problems (disquiet, torment, compulsion, and so forth) is repeatedly identified as unacknowledged or unconscious analogies [BT 410], pictures (*Bilder, Vorstellungen*) [V.140, VI.40], *Idee* [V.193; PG 107], models, ways of seeing things [PG 57], comparisons [V.174], dogmas (prejudices), "misleading analogies in the use of our language" [BT 408], or "similes absorbed into the forms of our language" [§112]. In dissolving problems, "I must *always* point to an analogy according to which one had been thinking, but which one did not recognize as an analogy" [BT 408].

How is this to be explained? A picture picks out certain things as self-explanatory, others as problematic; it steers attention towards certain aspects of things and away from others; and it guides the direction that problem-solving takes and helps to set the standard of adequacy for a solution. These matters are of the greatest importance. It seems to set up, as it were, a *form of representation* for the description of things. Even for the description of the *grammar* of our language (compare §131). Nothing more? Rather, nothing less! Choice of a form of representation is answerable to no facts, but it is of decisive importance. It determines a whole intellectual orientation.

A picture may be both *empty* and *pernicious*—this seeming paradox is fundamental to Wittgenstein's conception of pictures, that is, to his metaphorical use of 'picture' with respect to conceptions or models. (In fact it is not a paradox at all: its emptiness makes the picture irrefutable and beyond the reach of attack and channels intellectual activity into the perverse activity of explaining away apparent counterexamples [CV 28].) "A *picture* held us captive" [§115], namely, the picture of a proposition as a logical picture of a state of affairs (necessarily isomorphic with what it depicts). The italics call attention to the paradox. How is it *possible* for a mere picture to hold anybody captive, in thrall, in bondage? How can a *picture* exercise tyranny over our thinking? Especially if pictures are essentially voluntary or optional?

5) Pictures are locally (transiently or temporarily) exclusionary. "I cannot see something in two ways at the same time." Such as seeing mathematics as what measures, not as what is measured. Hence they generate (or may even constitute) aspect-blindness.

6) But pictures are globally complementary, not exclusionary. One way of seeing things (*Auffassung*) does not exclude the possibility of others.<sup>8</sup> It is rational to make use of different pictures of a single phenomenon for the purpose of bringing out different patterns or aspects of what is investigated for the purpose of treating different conceptual confusions (compare §132). *Ceteris paribus*, pluralism is a virtue in making use of pictures. (Unlike constructing theories in science.) I can

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investigate language as a mechanism of human interaction (in a stimulus-response model) or as a calculus of rules.

Corollary: we must surrender the desire to establish "the only possibility," "the nature of...," and so forth and the desire to confute philosophical adversaries. (Perhaps a very *difficult* renunciation?).

7) Consequently, remedying the defects of one picture (or eliminating its tyranny) is a matter of gaining acceptance for other pictures. (This is a kind of homeopathy: pictures are to be treated with pictures.) Another apparent paradox: *only* pictures have the power to transform the aspects of things. Hence, according to Wittgenstein, what Darwin, Freud, and Einstein discovered are primarily new and fruitful ways of looking at things; paradigms of *Übersichten*. Accepting a picture is changing ways of seeing things [§144].

8) Hence dissolving picture-generated philosophical problems depends on each thinker's *consent*. Accepting a picture is voluntary (like aspect-seeing or imagination) [p. 213], not in the sense that it is easy or can be effected at whim, but in the sense that refusal is possible. Hence a philosopher is up against difficulties of the will, not the intellect [CV 17, BT 406-7]. Discarding one picture and adopting another is an exercise of freedom. (Hence, [HISP 21] philosophy is the realm of freedom, that is, of rational choice.) It involves willingness to explore comparisons [LFM 55] or even conversion to a new way of seeing things (*Umstellung der Auffassung*) [§144].

To a considerable extent, Wittgenstein's philosophy involves *negotiations* with others (his readers and interlocutors, real or imaginary) about pictures, *Auffassungen*, conceptions. This is liable to go deeply against the grain of *soi-disants* analytic philosophers. They relish the clash of steel on steel, the adversarial model of argument, the possibility of proving something, especially the possibility of proving other philosophers to be *wrong*. They have a definite ideal of philosophical argument as case-building. Wittgenstein's admirers want to see him as participating in this activity: they want to extract results from his texts (for example, proof of the incoherence of speaking a private language), and they wish to find in his work cogent justification of their own activity. In their view, swapping pictures or possible ways of seeing things would be useless and repugnant, perhaps to be condemned as a form of 'relativism'.

### A picture: 'Meaning is use'

GIVEN WITTGENSTEIN'S CARE IN DRAFTING REMARKS, AND GIVEN THIS MINIMAL background to his use of 'picture' (his conception of a picture?), we should expect him to juxtapose against Augustine's picture of the essence of language *another picture*, not a compendium of grammatical rules for using 'meaning' or 'language' or an alternative 'theory'. We might set out to look for signs that his slogan, "The meaning of a word is its use in the language," is meant to be taken *as a picture* in his sense, that is, as a counter-picture to Augustine's picture.

This expectation seems to be abundantly borne out. Evidence is everywhere in plain view in his texts. Wittgenstein's own discussion of meaning, explanation, language, and so forth is full of the qualifiers characteristic of pictures: "in our

(my) sense,” “for us,” “for my purposes,” and so forth. These seem to mark off his remarks as presenting an alternative *conception* rather than facts of the grammar of our language (standard English). Here is a sample of such remarks from the early 1930’s: “For us, understanding is a correlate of explanation.” “Meaning, in our sense, is embodied in explanations of meaning.” “For our purposes, mental pictures can always be replaced by drawings or diagrams.” “We are always comparing language with a game played according to strict rules.” [PG 60, 63, 68, 69; BB 4, 25] “[I]n meiner Darstellung” [VI.102]. “I treat ‘etwas meinen’ as synonymous with ‘einer Regel folgen’” [V.281].

This form of discourse continues in the *Philosophical Investigations*: “it causes least confusion to reckon the samples among the instruments of the language” [§16]. “We can put it like this: This sample is an instrument of the language used in the ascription of color” [§50]. “What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use” [§116]. Are these not clear indications of Wittgenstein’s offering what he considered to be (no more—and no less than) a particular conception (*Auffassung*) of language? (And what is the alternative? Is it plausible to think that a careful description of the actual use of the phrase ‘instruments of a language’ would clearly endorse the claim (truism?) that *samples* (and *gestures*) fall under this concept? If I refuse to go along with his recommendation [§16], do I exhibit *misunderstanding* of the phrase ‘instruments of a language’?)

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Of course there are many remarks in the *Philosophical Investigations* that lack locutions that explicitly signal the intention to offer a picture. They may give the appearance of being straightforward descriptions of the grammar of our language. See, for example, p. 224: “we do not learn [what ‘judging a motive’ means] by being told what ‘motive’ is and what ‘judging’ is.” That is, it cannot be explained in this way, as “measuring length” can. More importantly: “For a *large* class of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word ‘meaning’ it *can be explained thus*: the meaning of a word is its use in the language” [§43]. This sounds as if it were meant to be definitive of *the* concept of meaning, not a *picture* of the essence of word-meaning. It seems to say something authoritative and final (even worryingly dogmatic?). It has the register of fact-stating discourse. So too does the remark: “The use of a word in the language is its meaning” [PG 60]. Is there really inconsistency or tension here?

This implication might easily be resisted. Provided Wittgenstein thought that he had made it perfectly clear that his general intention was to offer a counter-*picture* to Augustine’s picture, he might see no point in drafting *every* individual remark to make this explicit. The whole discussion of §§1-89 might be deemed to be subordinate to this qualification. Just as Montaigne said of Aristotle that his ideas are Pyrrhonism cloaked in assertion, so we might say of Wittgenstein that his criticism of Augustine’s picture consists of a picture (*Auffassung*) cloaked in assertion. The issue is the *spirit* in which his remarks are to be read.

Augustine's picture is a widely accepted form of representation of the grammar of our language, of the meaning of words. (It is visible in Frege's search for the definitions of the natural numbers, or in Quine's concern with 'ontological commitments'.) Wittgenstein labors to establish a different form of representation in the thinking of his readers. According to his alternative *picture*, the meaning of a word is its use in practice (compare the grocer in §1), its meaning is the correlate of everyday explanations of meaning [§§69, 75], meaning is *in* the expression (not *behind* it) [DS 4-5; F\* 18], speaking and thinking are *operating* with signs, and it is use that gives life to 'dead' signs [BB 4]. Just as Augustine's picture is not criticized by reference to 'linguistic facts', so this picture is cannot be justified by the claim that it describes them correctly. Wittgenstein does not claim that "meaning is what is explained by an explanation of meaning" is a true account of *the* concept of meaning (and *the* concept of explanation), but rather that this principle characterizes 'meaning *in our sense*' (or his *conception* of meaning). Similarly, he does not claim that 'think' and 'operate with signs' are synonymous (or have identical uses) but rather that this rough equivalence should be the center of variation for describing the complex use of the term 'think' [BB 6]. The fact that he offers this *Übersicht* of the grammar of 'think' while acknowledging discrepancies between the uses of 'think' and 'operate with signs' is a clear indication of his conception that pictures are not fact-stating. (This *Übersicht* of 'think' is misunderstood when it is taken to formulate a rule of grammar.)

Both attacks on his philosophy of language and defenses of his conception neglect the crucial point that he is offering an interpretative *picture*. (This is what these disputes look like. One party attacks Wittgenstein's form of expression as if they were attacking a statement; the others defend it, as if they were stating facts recognized by every reasonable human being [compare §402].) The same point holds in his philosophy of mathematics, for example, his calling arithmetical equations rules of grammar.

### Augustine's picture of language

ANALYSIS OF WITTGENSTEIN'S DISCUSSION OF AUGUSTINE'S PICTURE PAYS TOO LITTLE attention to his treating it as a *picture* of the *essence* of language. His methods of investigation are thereby misrepresented. Both 'picture' and 'essence' are crucial for understanding the contours of his critical investigation.

### Essence

AUGUSTINE'S PICTURE CONSISTS ENTIRELY OF NECESSARY TRUTHS: IT IS CONCERNED with the *essence* of language. Hence it tells us nothing about the actual uses of any words. In particular, it does not state that all words in English or German have the same use, that there are no categorial (or combinatorial) differences among them, that all English or German sentences contain more than one word, or that all sentences are used in a single way. It cannot be demonstrated to be incorrect by producing *counterexamples*. That strategy fails to acknowledge the radical difference between a necessary truth and an empirical generalization. (Claims about essence are demands [*Erforderungen*], not discoveries [*Ergebnisse*].) Canvassing counterexamples also pays no attention to the distinction between appearance and reality: as in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, apparent nonconformity may mask real (hid-

den) conformity.

Wittgenstein's own discussion pays scrupulous attention to this difference. Here is one clear example [paraphrase of *PLP* 317-8]: An objection might be made to the thesis that any proposition must be composite (complex). Consider the sign "Restaurant" posted over the door into a building. This simple, one-word (non-composite) sign is apparently sufficient to state that this building is a restaurant. Q.E.D.—But, it is replied, what signifies that this building is a restaurant is not the sign alone, but the *fact* that the sign is *positioned* over the door. This fact is itself composite, one of its elements being the spatial position occupied by the word "Restaurant." So, if we recognize that the propositional-sign must be the *whole* of what states that this is a restaurant, it is not a single word and it is manifestly composite. (This line of reasoning, derived from a dictation to Waismann [*F\** 38], could serve as a model of how cogently to rebut any putative counterexample to any of the essential truths of the *Tractatus*.)

How then can one criticize this component thesis in Augustine's picture? Wittgenstein's 'argument' (derived from a conversation with Sraffa) is to point out that we can use a gesture to make a statement (for example, the gesture of slitting the throat). He then asks a question: "Is it clear what we should call the elements out of which it is composed?" or (better) "What do *you want* to call the elements of a gesture?" [compare *PLP* 318]. This movement of thought may be persuasive, but it certainly does not consist in confronting a thesis with a recalcitrant fact. In fact, as an *argument*, it seems open to an obvious objection: what right has Wittgenstein to take a *gesture* as an instance of a *sentence* of a *language*? (An important aspect of his discussion—even in the *Tractatus*—is to encourage us to reconsider, even to redraw, the boundary between language [symbols] and the world [what is symbolized]—at least for the purpose of certain discussions. This seems a paradigm of exercising freedom [rational choice] in stipulating concepts.)

Wittgenstein seems aware of, and critical of, a tendency among philosophers to disregard modal qualifications ('can', 'cannot', 'may', 'need not', and so forth) and thereby to assimilate essential truths to empirical generalizations. "Science has shown that...." is a constant refrain, a recurrent form of criticism in modern philosophy. For example, Descartes held that there was no such thing as a thought of which the thinker is not *conscious*, to which is made the objection: but Freud has shown that there are unconscious states of mind. (Here is an *ignoratio facti* with regard to 'thought' and 'conscious'.) Wittgenstein suggests seeing 'unconscious toothache' (or 'unconscious desire') as a new *convention*, rather than seeing this as a 'stupendous discovery...which in a sense bewilders our imagination' [*BB* 23]. He suggests regarding many revolutions, even in science, as stipulations of new concepts rather than discovery of new facts. For example admitting action at a distance in mechanics (Newton versus Descartes) changes what it makes sense to say, or to offer as an explanation.<sup>9</sup>

Wittgenstein himself constantly emphasizes the radical distinction between necessary and contingent propositions (especially in mathematics): he is very careful in his use of modal qualifications, and he respects them in the thinking and writing of others. In his view, it is a fundamental confusion to propose counterexamples to descriptions of *essence*.

Here, we might say, Wittgenstein emphasizes the distinction between descriptions of grammar and very general facts of nature, the importance of keeping these things distinct. He treats Augustine's picture as consisting of propositions

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about *essence*, not a schematic, quasi-scientific theory (or proto-theory) of meaning.

## Picture

IMPRESSED BY THIS LAST POINT, ONE MIGHT ADOPT A NEW STRATEGY FOR DEALING with Augustine's picture, one that discounts the importance of the term "picture." (This strategy is widespread in interpreting Wittgenstein.) Since *essence* is expressed by *grammar* [§372], Augustine's 'account' of the essence of language must be taken to consist of descriptions of the use of the terms 'name', 'object', 'sentence', 'combination', 'word', and so forth. The essence of language is then 'given,' namely by *the grammar* of 'meaning', 'name', 'word', 'sentence', 'object', 'combination', and so forth.

It is then tempting to suppose that the use of these terms is relatively fixed or omnitemporal. They belong to the basic vocabulary of everyday discourse—a vocabulary whose application seems more or less invariant. (Compare *BT 424*: there is no progress in philosophy because language always throws up the same problems.)

Combining these two ideas gives scope for trenchant criticism of Augustine's picture. That is, it gives an *incorrect* description of *the* (omnitemporal) grammar of 'meaning', 'name', and so forth. So it stands in need of replacement by the correct account.

This provides another pattern of interpreting Wittgenstein's discussion of Augustine's picture. Its theses are *mistaken*. Here is one remark that seems to fit this pattern: having noted that some philosophers call the word "this" the *only* genuine name, Wittgenstein observes that the kind of use the word "this" has is not among the many different kinds of use of a word that are labeled by the word "name" [§38]. Hence to call "this" and "that" *names* is to *misuse* the term "name." It is, apparently, a 'metaphysical use' (because it is deviant from ordinary practice), and it is to be corrected by bringing the word "name" back to its *everyday* use [§116]. Similar remarks may be made about other features of Augustine's picture. For example that it is incorrect to classify "Now I understand" or "I am in pain" as 'descriptions': the first is a signal [§180], while the second is an expression or avowal (*Äusserung*) of pain, a learned replacement for pain-behavior [§244]. Similarly, he seems to claim that it is incorrect to describe ostensive definitions as connecting language with reality; they in fact connect symbols with samples, which are themselves parts of language [§51]. In this way, each of the component theses of Augustine's picture is demonstrated to be *mistaken*.

Correspondingly, Wittgenstein's positive conception of meaning (identifying meaning with use) is taken to be the *correct* description of *the* concept of meaning (or *the grammar* of 'meaning'). For example, the slogan "Meaning is use" is itself a description of grammar: it is justified by the observation that the use of "the meaning of the word...." and the use of "the use of the word...." run along parallel tracks. Wittgenstein is correct to state that ostensive definitions are substitution-rules for symbols (including gestures and samples) [*BB 109*], that it remains within language.<sup>10</sup>

However, neither the negative nor the positive sides of this account seems to correspond *closely* to what Wittgenstein actually says.

The negative case is not simply a clarification of the grammar of these met-

alinguistic concepts. The discussion does not terminate with identifying ‘mistakes’. For example:

§24a: “If you do not keep the multiplicity of language-games in view you will perhaps be inclined to ask questions like: ‘What is a question?’.” Wittgenstein proceeds to list some answers. The point is not that these are incorrect answers (based on the idea that answers to questions are all descriptions) but that the question itself is pointless, to be discarded as without interest (dissolved). The inclination is misguided, not the particular answers given (as opposed to better ones, as in *PLP* ch. XX.)

§27a: Wittgenstein lists some one-word sentences. Why? Not to establish anything. Instead he ends with a question: “Are you still *inclined to call* these words ‘names of objects?’” (This is directed at the will, not the intellect; compare §261.)

§38: Noting

that “this” is not what is called a name is not the end of Wittgenstein’s discussion, but the beginning. He seeks to understand why it occurs to one to want to make precisely this word into a name when it evidently is *not* a name [§39].<sup>11</sup> The implication is that this particular application of Augustine’s picture appeals to someone precisely because it involves a deviant use of the term “name.” He is already aware of this deviant usage—so pointing it out to him achieves nothing! What needs to be counteracted is the urge to describe the use of “this” in this peculiar manner.

Wittgenstein treats Augustine’s *picture* as if it lay beyond the reach of argument based on cataloguing facts about the grammar of meta-linguistic concepts. He discusses this *conception* of the *essence* of language as something powerful, deep-rooted and worthy of respect. And he treats it as being, in a certain sense, unassailable.

The counterpart, positive, idea that Wittgenstein’s own discussion of the essence of language is intended to be a *correct* description of the grammar of ‘meaning’, ‘name’, and so forth is equally misconceived. (It too begins from the thesis that “*Essence* is described by grammar” is a description of *the* grammar of ‘essence’, not an insight or way of seeing things [*HISP* 33].) We have already noted the abundance of textual signals that what he offers is a picture or conception of language (of the meaning of words and the sense of sentences). Such as in §421: “*Look at* the sentence as an instrument, and at its sense as its employment.” (This is an optional point of view, not an ineluctable fact about the grammar of the phrase ‘the sense of the sentence....’)

Here, we might say: Wittgenstein emphasizes the distinction between *descriptions* of grammar and *pictures* of grammar, the importance of keeping these

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*Analysis of Wittgenstein’s discussion of Augustine’s picture pays too little attention to his treating it as a picture of the essence of language. His methods of investigation are thereby misrepresented. Both ‘picture’ and ‘essence’ are crucial for understanding the contours of his critical investigation.*

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distinct. A picture is not subject to a *reductio ad absurdum*—in even the loosest sense.

The point of having a clear conception of what Wittgenstein means by a picture is two-fold:

First, Augustine's picture is primarily a form of representation, a way of seeing things, an intellectual orientation. To displace or replace it is a tremendous undertaking. Wittgenstein aims at nothing less than transforming an entrenched way of thinking, habits of thought (*Denkgewohnheiten*) that are evidently still dominant among analytic philosophers. This is much more ambitious and radical than correcting a misdescription of the uses of words. Part of what he aims to achieve is win acceptance of the principle that "*Essence* is expressed by grammar," that is, acceptance of a particular *conception* of essence.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, appreciating that Augustine's picture is a *picture* is vital for acknowledging that Wittgenstein's own 'theory of meaning' is also meant to be a *picture* (conception, way of seeing things). Hence its acceptance (or rejection) is wholly voluntary. This has the implication that most of the discussions that try to refute or rebut Wittgenstein's 'theory,' as well as most of those that try to defend it against attack, are misconceived. There is literally nothing to attack—as being incorrect. And nothing to defend—as being an accurate description of the grammar of our language. To engage in these controversies is already to take Wittgenstein's philosophical investigations in the wrong spirit.

Wittgenstein's positive aim is not to get you to say something you don't want to say, but to do something you don't want to do (compare *LFM* 55), namely to investigate meaning from a very different point of view. To focus on use—as in §1; not on *Satzbau* (sentence-construction)—as in "logical geography." *Soi-disants* Wittgensteinians tend to miss this aspect of his philosophy.

### **The content of the picture of meaning as use**

HERE IS NOT THE PLACE TO ELABORATE THIS PICTURE, EVEN IN ITS MAIN LINES. BUT what stands out in Wittgenstein's initial descriptions of word-use is important to note.

1) Wittgenstein shows little or no interest in sentence-construction (*Satzbau*)—even in *logische Satzbau* [§101]. This is not discussed in the grocer's game [§1] or the slab-game [§2].

2) He directs attention to how we *operate* with words [§1], how they are integrated into human activities [§6], and how differently sentences function as instruments [§24].

His interests are radically different from the concerns of logicians to clarify sentence structure to carry out the analysis of inferences.

We might say that his investigations of language take place largely in a different dimension. (Could that be his point in contrasting "*surface*" with "*depth* grammar" [§664]?)

In any case, his descriptions of grammar are products of a very distinctive way of regarding the uses of symbols. (This seems to be neglected by interpreters who see his main activity as primarily one of bringing words back to their everyday use.)

Just as Augustine's picture leaves indefinite flexibility in distinguishing kinds of objects (hence kinds of word-use), so too this picture leaves indefinite flexi-

bility in distinguishing kinds of use (hence kinds of word-meaning). It seems a virtue—not a defect—that ‘use’ is not precisely pinned down. What counts as use is open to negotiation, from case to case. (This is another dimension of freedom in Wittgenstein’s philosophical methods.)

### Coda

I WANT TO FINISH BY POINTING OUT THAT WHAT I HAVE DONE HERE IS AT BEST INDICATE some topics that seem worth further exploration and discussion. Here is a brief list of things that need still to be done:

Further investigation of the ‘logic of pictures’, especially of their being heterogeneous, strictly purpose-relative, and non-additive. (This would be crucial for understanding §132 and the conception of *Übersicht* in §129.)

Close examination of Wittgenstein’s various treatments of different pictures in his writings and lectures; clarifying in detail his *methods* of therapy.

The implication of picture-investigation for his method. His concern with revealing and combatting philosophical *prejudices* and *superstitions* (which links him to some extent with Descartes, Nietzsche, and Merleau-Ponty). The exact place and role of his own pictures in his various ‘descriptions of grammar’.

Clarifying his *conception* of philosophy. (Not: *the* nature of philosophy.)

The possibility of seeing the history of philosophy as a dialectic of conceptions or pictures and of recognizing the fluidity of conceptions (and even decisive shifts in concepts).

Finally, exploring motives for *resistance* to admitting picture-investigation to be a major component of his philosophical investigations. ◻

### Abbreviations

#### 1. Wittgenstein’s published works

The following abbreviations are used to refer to Wittgenstein’s published works, listed in chronological order (where possible; some works straddle many years). The list includes derivative primary sources and lecture notes taken by others.

- TLP* *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961.
- PG* *Philosophical Grammar*. Edited by R. Rhees. Translated by A. J. P. Kenny. Oxford: Blackwell, 1974.
- BB* *The Blue and Brown Books*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1958.
- LPE* “Wittgenstein’s Notes for Lectures on Private Experience and ‘Sense Data’,” edited by R. Rhees, *Philosophical Review* 77 (1968): 275-320.
- RFM* *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, edited by G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees, and G.E.M. Anscombe, revised edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978.
- LA* *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Beliefs*. Edited by C. Barrett. Oxford: Blackwell, 1970.
- LFM* *Wittgenstein’s Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics, Cambridge 1939*. Edited by C. Diamond Sussex: Harvester Press, 1976.
- PI* *Philosophical Investigations*. Edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1958.
- Z* *Zettel*. Edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1967.
- C* *On Certainty*. Edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Translated by D. Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1969.

Reference style: all references to *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I are to sections (e.g. *PI* §1), except those to notes below the line on various pages. References to Part II are to pages (e.g. *PI* p. 202). References to other printed works are either to numbered remarks (*TLP*) or to sections signified '§' (*Z*, *RPP*, *LW*): in all other cases references are to pages (e.g. *LFM* 21 = *LFM* page 21), or to numbered letters (*R*).

## 2. Wittgenstein's Nachlass

All references to unpublished material cited in the von Wright catalogue (G.H. von Wright, *Wittgenstein* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1982], 35ff.) are by MS or TS number followed by page number. Wherever possible, the pagination entered in the original document has been used. The Cornell xeroxes in Bodleian are defective; sometimes a dozen or more papers have been omitted. Consequently, where access to the originals or to complete xeroxes has not been possible, some errors of page reference will unavoidably have occurred.

### Manuscripts:

Roman numerals refer to the eighteen large manuscript volumes (MSS 105 22) written between February 2, 1929 and 1944. For example, VI, 241 refers to Volume VI, page 241.

### Typescripts

*BT* The "Big Typescript" (TS 213): a rearrangement, with modifications, written additions and deletions, of TS 211 (1933). All references are to page numbers. A page number followed by "v" indicates a handwritten addition on the reverse side of the TS page.

### 3. Waismann's published works:

*PLP* *The Principles of Linguistic Philosophy*. Edited by R Harré. London: Macmillan, 1965.

*HISP* "How I See Philosophy," in *British Philosophy in the Mid-Century*. Edited by C. Mace. London: Allen and Unwin, 1957.

*F\** Dictations to Waismann (reference by catalogue number to typescripts in the Bodleian Library, Oxford). At present the only published version is a French translation *Dictées a Waismann et pour Schlick*. Edited by A. Soulez (Paris: P.U.F, 1997).

## Notes

1. A more thorough study of the role of conceptions in Wittgenstein's thinking would have to investigate his use of a wider range of expressions, e.g. 'way of seeing' (*Auffassungsweise*), 'regarding ... as' (*ansehen als*), 'mode of investigation' (*Betrachtungsweise*), 'form of representation' (*Darstellungsform*), 'way of thinking' (*Denkweise*), and 'figurative proposition' (*bildhafter Satz*).
2. For the sake of concision, subsequent remarks from the *Philosophical Investigations* are referenced by their section number only. Other sources are referenced by an abbreviated title and page or section number. All translations are mine, following, with some exceptions, G. E. M. Anscombe's translation.
3. See *falsche Bild* [VI.10, *PI* p. 184 (*d.h. unzutreffendes*)]; *irreführende Bild* [VI.247]; *falsche Vorstellung* [V.140, VI.38-9]; *falsche Auffassung* [VI.3]; *falsche Betrachtungsweise* [VI.2]. See also 'false analogies' (*falsche Vergleichen*) [VI.19, 23, 86-7, 229-30, 236, 241, 300] and 'misleading comparisons' (*falschen Gleichnissen*) [V.174].
4. I.e. the arena of "inner processes" [§305], "inner pictures" [p. 196], etc. "The realm of consciousness" [LPE 320].
5. Though Wittgenstein sometimes uses 'concept' more or less equivalently with 'conception' (e.g. §308, p. 196), and, in that sense, the concept of possibility would be transformed.

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6. Here is one resemblance of Wittgenstein's philosophical method with psychoanalysis [BT 408-10].
  7. What is meant by the phrase "embedded in our language"? or "absorbed into the forms of our language" [§112]?
  8. This mirrors a familiar point about visual aspect-seeing, and it is a crucial component of Frege's explanation of articulating judgments into function and argument [Frege, *Begriffsschrift* §§9-10].
  9. On this view, there is a lot of important change in many concepts in each of the past four centuries! Though of course, criteria of concept-identity are open to negotiation.
  10. This line of reasoning is prosecuted with some vigor in Baker and Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1980.
  11. Cf. "Why do we have this urge to misunderstand things?" [§109]. And his answer to that question is "That is just the reason! For one is tempted to make an objection against what is ordinarily called a name."
  12. The grammar of "essence"? Is there any such thing? Outside philosophy?