

Wittgenstein and Dialogue

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DOES WITTMENSTEIN WRITE IN DIALOGUE FORM? And if so, why? These, very baldly stated, are my questions. In the first section I shall try to substantiate the claim that the *Investigations* at least is a dialogue. I shall also hope to clarify what that claim amounts to and to draw out some of the difficulties and complexities in the topic. In the second section I shall discuss the idea that this dialogue form is a mere rhetorical device and consider what would have to be the case if that were not to be so. I shall try to defend the view that Wittgenstein is not setting himself against the tradition which takes Philosophy to require a discursively rational treatment of its topics and I shall suggest that his procedure is designed to provide and does provide the reader, precisely through the dialogue form, with a rational route to an end point which is properly thought of as a better understanding or insight into how things are. So the form is particularly appropriate as a vehicle for the intended content. On the other hand I shall also try to show that this need not prevent us from trying to re-express 'Wittgenstein's arguments' or 'Wittgenstein's views' in a more standard academic manner, nor need it rule out there being some grounds in some circumstances for preferring this latter mode of proceeding. We may both recognise a rationale for Wittgenstein's procedure and also see that there are things to be said against it; we need not be locked into an outlook which

thinks that use of conventional expository forms is betrayal of Wittgenstein, or a betrayal of lack of understanding of him; but equally we need not think that his particular way of writing is an unnecessary and regrettable obfuscation.¹

I

Recent writings on Wittgenstein often take for granted that he does, in some sense, write in dialogue form. For example, commentators talk of Wittgenstein and his 'interlocutor' and the idiom is found natural and helpful. It will, however, be useful to assemble the evidence that such talk is appropriate and thus put ourselves in a better position to consider the extent and nature of the dialogue we find in Wittgenstein's writings. So I shall first quote some familiar passages to remind us of the distinctive tone of Wittgenstein's writings and to give us a small set of specimens to work with. I keep the paragraphing and numbering of the standard edition of the *Investigations*, but have inserted letters for ease of later reference.²

146. **a** 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 correctly so far? — **b** Perhaps you will say here: to have got the system (or, again, to understand it) can't consist in continuing

¹ There is interesting material in Berel Lang, *The Anatomy of Philosophical Style* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1990) and the question about Wittgenstein's use of language was opened up by T. Bingley in *Wittgenstein's Language* (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, 1973). Those interested in these general topics will also find much of interest in the writings of S. Cavell and in the discussion of Wittgenstein in Hilary Putnam's *Renewing Philosophy* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge Mass, 1992). I am indebted to my former pupil Beth Savickey for making the interest of these questions apparent to me.

² L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edition (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1968). All the other works by Wittgenstein mentioned are also published by Blackwells, with the exception of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1961).

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.

c 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? — **d** 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.

147. **e** '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.' —

f Your idea, then, is that you know the application of the rule of the series quite apart from remembering actual applications to particular numbers. **g** And you will perhaps say: 'Of course! For the series is infinite and the bit of it that I can have developed finite.'

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208 . . .

h We should distinguish between the 'and so on' which is, and the 'and so on' which is not, an abbreviated notation. 'And so on ad inf.' is *not* such an abbreviation. The fact that we cannot write down all the digits of π is not a human shortcoming, as mathematicians sometimes think.

Teaching which is not meant to apply to anything but the examples given is different from that which '*points beyond*' them.

209. **i** 'But then doesn't our understanding reach beyond all the examples?' — **j** A very queer expression, and a quite natural one! —

k But is that *all*? Isn't there a deeper explanation: or mustn't at least the *understanding* of the explanation be deeper? — **l** Well, have I myself a deeper understanding? Have I *got* more than I give in the explanation? — But then, whence the feeling that I have got more?

Is it like the case where I interpret what is not limited as a length that reaches beyond every length?

210. **m** 'But do you really explain to the other person what you yourself understand? Don't you get him to *guess* the essential thing? You give him examples, – but he has to guess their drift, to guess your intention.' – **n** Every explanation which I can give myself I give to him too. — 'He guesses what I intend' would mean: various interpretations of my explanation come to his mind, and he lights on one of them. So in this case he could ask; and I could and should answer him.

211. **o** How can he know how he is to continue a pattern by himself — whatever instruction you give him? — **p** Well, how do I know? — If that means 'Have I reasons?' the answer is: my reasons will soon give out. And then I shall act, without reasons.

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258. **q** Let us imagine the following case. I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it with the sign 'S' and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have the sensation. — I will remark first of all that a definition cannot be formulated. — **r** But still I can give myself a kind of ostensive definition. — **s** How? Can I point to the sensation? **t** Not in the ordinary sense. But I speak, or write the sign down, and at the same time I concentrate my attention on the sensation — and so, as it were, point to it inwardly. — **u** But what is this ceremony for? for that is all it seems to be. A definition surely serves to establish the meaning of a sign. — **v** Well, that is done precisely by the concentration of my attention; for in this way I impress on myself the connexion between the sign and the sensation. — **w** But 'I impress it on myself' can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connexion *right* in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right'.

Wittgenstein wrote in a distinctive style pretty much throughout his life from the pre-Tractarian *Notebooks* to *On Certainty*. The marks of this style are directness, simplicity and great confi-

dence of tone (despite occasional expressions of despondency and of frustration at his inability to put things rightly). But it would be wrong to think that the avoidance of anything resembling a purple passage means flatness or monotony. On the contrary, the simplicity is of the kind which comes from a high level of craftsmanship. And the writing, in its variation of pace, length and balance of sentences, etc., is continuously lively. Moreover the later writings are enriched by a wealth of apt examples. But although there are thus common elements in his writings we should also remember the considerable differences in their status and history. As is now well known, he wrote in notebooks, from which selections then emerged by an at least two stage process of sifting and rearranging. The *Tractatus* (1921) was the only book published in his lifetime. The *Philosophical Remarks* and *Philosophical Grammar* (and part of *Blue and Brown Books*) were put by him into book form during the early 1930s and planned as substantial units which he might publish. But he was never happy with them. The *Investigations* (published in 1953, after his death) is the most worked upon and, from his point of view, the most nearly satisfactory of his later writings, although even this he thought to need improvement, especially in its later parts. The other works that we have (*Zettel*, *On Certainty*, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, etc.) are notebooks, or intermediate selections from notebooks, never thought of by Wittgenstein as near publishable form.

Where then, in all this variety of writing, do we find the dialogue? Clearly not in the *Tractatus*. But is it a feature of all his later writings? My strong impression is that it is not but is confined primarily to the *Investigations*. There is certainly the occasional passage of dialogue (in the sense which I shall try to clarify below) in other places, but I suggest that it is only in the *Investigations* that it becomes a prominent feature. To show this convincingly would require more textual analysis and collection of statistics than will be undertaken or reported on here. But my hope is that anyone widely read in the Wittgenstein corpus will, on reflection, agree with me here. And if the claim is correct it

gives an added importance to the question of why Wittgenstein adopts the dialogue form, since it strongly suggests it to be something which he deliberately adopted.

But what do we mean by 'dialogue' in the context of this debate? It is patent that Wittgenstein does not write dialogue in the sense in which we find it in Plato, Berkeley, Hume etc., i.e. with named characters to whom remarks are assigned, as in a play script. What, however, makes the term seem entirely apt is the strong impression that, from time to time, a voice other than Wittgenstein's speaks, i.e. that some thought other than one endorsed by Wittgenstein himself is being expressed. My impression (which I shall try to substantiate below) is that there is no uniform syntactic device (such as dashes or inverted commas) which Wittgenstein uses as a signal of this. There seem to be a variety of devices used; and each syntactic feature has multiple uses, sometimes to signal dialogue, sometimes for other purposes. So it is from the content of particular remarks, together with their context, that we identify the other voice. Sometimes this is, it seems to me, comparatively easy to do. At other points matters are more complex. Let us now look at the passages given above, by way of testing out these ideas.

A central clue is to be found in §§146–7. At **b** (and again at **g**) Wittgenstein explicitly attributes a (possible) remark to another person, here addressed as 'you'. But then at **e** surely we must take it that it is not Wittgenstein speaking but the other, who was earlier told that he or she might perhaps say such and such, who now offers the question and protest in quotation marks and whose contribution is commented on at **f**.

But let us note also that Wittgenstein himself asks questions, sometimes overtly flagged as from him, as at **a**, or simply with an interrogative sentence as at **c**. And then (often) he makes some move in response to his own question — as at **d**. It is of some importance to have this phenomenon clearly in mind because part of the liveliness of all Wittgenstein's writing stems from its variety of rhythm, sentence form, etc., including considerable use of interrogatives. But it would be a mistake to take this

by itself as evidence of 'dialogue' throughout the writings, at least in the sense of 'dialogue' that concerns us. Perhaps thinking is, in some sense, the soul talking to herself.³ The aptness of this picture is, however, a different topic from the one we are directly concerned with. A self-addressed question or exclamation may be the expression of puzzlement or of awareness of temptation to assent to each of two seeming incompatibles. But it is a natural part of the experience of a unified but reflective mind to be so puzzled and torn. In working through such states we do not usually feel ourselves in danger of splitting into two people. But it is dialogue, in the sense of a representation of conversation between two distinct people, which interests us now.

There may well be artificiality (as we shall discover below) in taking every stretch of text as unambiguously representing either interior debate or real external dialogue. Some stretches can be read either way. And we need to recognise that the thoughts which Wittgenstein puts in the mouth of his interlocutor are ones which he himself had at times found compelling and so, at some earlier stage, could well have figured in an interior debate. But that does not lessen the impression which is given by some of the passages quoted above that he represents himself there as no longer impelled to say those things but rather as recognising sympathetically the impulse which another is there represented as experiencing.

But the possibility of both interior dialogue as well as exterior shows that the frequency of interrogatives is by itself no indication of the presence of a real and independent interlocutor. We need to look in every case to see, from the context and general feel of the passage, whether it is the other who poses the question or Wittgenstein himself. And we also need to look, in those cases where Wittgenstein raises the query, to see whether we can detect at whom it is directed. One has the strong impression that sometimes it is part of a dialogue, in that it is

³ Wittgenstein writes (a remark from 1948) 'Nearly all my writings are private conversations with myself. Things that I say to myself tête à tête.' *Culture and Value* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1980), p. 77.

directed at the interlocutor, while at other times it represents simply the flow of Wittgenstein's own ideas.

Let me pause here to comment on the phrase 'rhetorical question'. Is it one which we should use in talking of these self-posed questions in Wittgenstein's writing? It is certainly at home in the context, for example, of analysis of a political speech, but is, I suggest, inappropriate here, as inappropriate as it would be in comment on someone's informal notes. Many of us use interrogatives as we scribble down points and struggle to get our ideas clear; they are the first and natural expression of many thoughts. The familiar academic phrases 'An objection which may well be raised here is ...' or 'It is important here to consider whether ...' are at a much greater distance from natural expression, and so in a sense more rhetorical, than the interrogatives and exclamations one jots down on being struck by an objection or puzzlement. We have been trained to abandon these direct expressions in working up our notes into continuous exposition of our conclusions. And Wittgenstein clearly refuses to go along with this transformation into decorous conventional form, for reasons some of which we shall speculate upon later. But let us be clear that this is a *not* doing of something (a deliberate refraining) rather than the imposition of some 'rhetorical flourishes'.

If we move on to consider §§208 ff. some more points of interest and also some difficulties emerge. We start towards the end of §208 at **h** with Wittgenstein speaking directly. But at §209 **i** the other asks a question on which we find Wittgenstein's comment at **j**. And clearly at **m** the other speaks again. But what is happening at **k** and **o**? On ground of content — for example the sense that **l** is a counter question to **k** — it seems plausible to assign them also to the interlocutor. But the fact that **i** and **m** are so explicitly set off with quotation marks, while **k** and **o** are not, might make us hesitate. But if we look back again at §146 **a** we see that Wittgenstein poses his own questions first using quotation marks and then merely a colon. So it is clear that there is

not entirely consistent use of punctuation and the hesitation should, I suggest, lessen.

§258 illustrates further intriguing possibilities. A first and strong impulse is to represent this as a dialogue, with *r*, *t* and *v* coming from the other voice. But against this we have the fact that 'I' occurs throughout where 'you' would seem to be required by the suggested construal. Perhaps then it is Wittgenstein himself who speaks and we have rather a case of an internal 'dialogue' where the indicated remarks represent what Wittgenstein is, at each point, genuinely inclined to think? But this is extremely unconvincing in the light of the denouement and of the fact that he presents himself, pretty much throughout the *Investigations* as having, to some extent at least, succeeded in escaping from the grip of the false pictures, which motivate *r*, *t* and *v* and from which he hopes also to release his reader. A modification of this idea is that we are being led through a sort of Cartesian meditation, in which Wittgenstein recreates his own past deliberation. This is, it seems to me, a possible way of seeing the relation of the remarks. But yet another takes off from the fact that the paragraph starts 'Let us imagine . . .' and a particular enterprise is sketched which each of us may undertake for him or herself. It is possible then to suppose that the 'I' who speaks in *r*, *t* and *v* is neither the present nor an earlier Wittgenstein but rather the other part of the 'us' — i.e. the interlocutor — who is expressing a view of how the project of diary keeping would go in his or her own case. We can thus accommodate both the use of the first person and the sense of different viewpoints being represented.

But perhaps we need not insist on finding one of these last two interpretations to be the correct one to the exclusion of the other. We are at this point so much immersed in the argument itself that reading the passage as dialogue, in the way we would be forced to by inverted commas or 'you', could well distract us unhelpfully. Has anyone been hindered in his or her attempts to grapple with Wittgenstein's thoughts on sensation language by unclarities of the kind I have canvassed in the preceding paragraph? The fact that the dialogue element in the *Investigations* is

introduced so inexplicitly and is not signposted by some uniform device enables Wittgenstein to foreground it or background it to the extent that seems most appropriate to him at any given stage of the discussion. And at this point he seems to have backgrounded it while still leaving a strong residual impression of the to and fro of discussion.

Another point I would like to draw attention to at this stage is the occurrence in the *Investigations* of reflections on what it is natural to say and on what we would like to say. We find it in the quoted passages in *j* and again at *w*. But we have even better illustrations in other places, for example at §101: 'We want to say that there can't be any vagueness in logic. The idea now absorbs us, that the ideal "must" be found in reality.' Or §165 'But surely — we should like to say — reading is a quite particular process!' Or §215: 'We seem to have an infallible paradigm of identity in the identity of a thing with itself. I feel like saying: "Here at any rate there can't be a variety of interpretations. If you are seeing a thing you are seeing identity too."'

I have used above the word 'reflection' to label these remarks. But this does not really capture their nature. Something like 'avowal' or 'acknowledgement' (or even 'confession') would be much nearer the mark. And the fact that moves of this character can occur is bound up with the fact that what is represented is a dialogue, because it is centrally to some other with whom one is in dialogue that such avowals are made.

So there is dialogue in the *Investigations*. But who is Wittgenstein's interlocutor? Clearly it is whoever is addressed as 'you' and is the other part of the 'we'. And who is that? We can envisage the exchanges from the outside, putting the non-Wittgensteinian remarks into the mouth of some member of his 1930s lecture audience. That is, however, it seems to me, not Wittgenstein's intention, which is more plausibly (as suggested precisely by the use of the words 'you' and 'we') that the part of 'you' is to be played by whoever is reading the *Investigations*. Thus 'you' is me, *if I find myself nodding when 'you' speaks and*

if I am willing to be counted a part of the 'we' invoked by Wittgenstein. And it is you, if you are similarly willing to join in.

The claims of this section are then, in summary:

- 1 that the *Investigations* is a dialogue,
- 2 that the other speaker is each of us, if we recognise ourselves in the words and are willing to enter the exchange,
- 3 that in the course of the dialogue many different kinds of speech acts occur, among them assertions, objections, protests, questions, avowals etc., and
- 4 that all this is deliberately crafted, in that it is found in the *Investigations* to a greater extent than in the other late writings.

II

So what, if anything, would have been lost if Wittgenstein had proceeded in a different fashion and presented what he had to say in more conventional expository mode? Why did he not write such things as 'In my first chapter I shall set out what I call "the Augustinian view of language" — a view which we found powerfully attractive but which, I shall argue . . . The third chapter tackles what may be labelled "the private language argument" (hereafter PLA) and it applies the conclusions of the earlier chapters to the special case of . . .' and so forth. What would have been distorted or gone missing if he had proceeded thus?

Let us summarise first a line of thought on which it seems that the dialogue form can be no more than an incidental matter and that nothing of importance would be lost by a different manner of writing. This view acknowledges that use of dialogue may make presentation of philosophical ideas more lively and interesting, but holds that the real argument, which is what matters, could always be presented more plainly.

The reasoning goes like this. Philosophy is, by definition, in the business of trying to get answers to fundamental questions about what exists, about the nature of the human mind and its

ability to represent the world, about what ought to be done, what sort of people we ought to be and so forth. So Philosophy is in the general business of moving us from less good to better stances on these issues; it is in the business of promoting wisdom, understanding, and virtue, if they are to be had. But there are many possible routes from less good to better stances — growing up, study of science, reading poetry etc. And what is distinctive about Philosophy is that, again by definition, what it offers is discursive and is designed to be as clear and as rational as possible. It is, in some cases, an open question whether Philosophy can supply any answer or part of an answer to the questions, i.e. can contribute to the establishment of a better stance. (Indeed on many issues it is an open question whether there is anything that counts as a better stance.) But if it can contribute it must do so by rational, dispassionate argument. This is true of all Philosophy, even when the questions at issue are about value and therefore linked to issues in practical reason. It is however even more obviously true when the topics under discussion are issues such as the nature of meaning and representation. Thus someone who has views about what it is for a person to mean something or to have a certain thought (and surely this is, in some sense, a central topic of the *Investigations*) ought to be able to present them *via* a straightforward exposition, stating his premises, trying to make explicit the false presuppositions of those he disagrees with, proceeding through matters in an orderly way and generally making everything as clear and as easy to follow as the difficulty of the subject matter admits. Wittgenstein could have done this if he had wanted to. Thus runs this line of thought.

It may also seem possible to level further positive charges against Wittgenstein. Perhaps his not using the regular expository form stemmed from a desire for singularity, or a misconceived sense of his own superiority to existing philosophical practice. Use of the dialogue form does not necessarily get in the way of the objectives of Philosophy, viz, improved stances on fundamental questions through rationality and discursive clarity, but Wittgenstein's particular way of using the form obfuscates and

irritates. In part this is because the dialogue element occurs with the obliqueness and potential ambiguity noted above. In part it is because (it seems) so much of the argument remains to be filled in; Wittgenstein does not address his interlocutor's difficulties directly and helpfully but falls back on gnomic utterances, in which there is an element of the pretentious or posturing.

In considering this line of thought, let us note first that much of what it stands for, Wittgenstein himself also stood for. It is clear that he was very much concerned with intellectual integrity, with the importance of being honest, of not confusing oneself by verbiage and of avoiding self-seeking.⁴ The idea of setting things out discursively in some big system can lead to writing of extreme difficulty and pretentiousness. And Wittgenstein is concerned to avoid falling into that kind of manner of proceedings or encouraging others to do so. He is also concerned (and this was even more important for him) to avoid treating matters in a style which suggests that we have a kind of grip on them (the kind delivered, for example, by an appropriate scientific theory) when we do not.

But all the same it seems plausible to suppose that we can avoid both these pitfalls without retreating to the gnomic opacity of the *Investigations*. Certainly modern academic Philosophy is far from avoiding needless obscurity, purple passages, pseudo-scientific jargon, etc. But is it fair to accuse all standard academic Philosophy of this? Surely not. So why could Wittgenstein not have written like the best, i.e. least pretentious, clearest, etc. of his contemporaries? Or, better, what, if anything, would have been lost if he had?

One quick way of dealing with the question is to maintain that the idea, implicit in the last few paragraphs, that Wittgenstein is intending to contribute to Philosophy — in the sense of that strand of our intellectual tradition which understands itself in the way outlined above — is a mistake. Rather, it could be suggested, Wittgenstein aimed to put an end to Philosophy in this sense. His

⁴ See, e.g. the biography by B. McGuinness, *Wittgenstein, A Life* (Penguin Books: London, 1990), or Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein, The Duty of Genius* (Jonathan Cape: London, 1990).

work has no argumentative structure, and does not engage with works which do have argumentative structure. Rather it offers insights of a quite other kind – poetic or mystical. Against this we should note that the *Investigations* is full of both assertions and arguments on the subject matters of traditional Philosophy, meaning, truth, fact, etc. and that Wittgenstein is clearly at times engaging directly with the thoughts of Frege, Russell, etc. Moreover those who attended Wittgenstein's lectures were not required to meditate and have uplifting experiences; they were required to think and to think hard.

The view of Wittgenstein as non-argumentative and anti-philosophical seems to accept a dichotomy between arguing in a discursive rational manner and promoting insight by means other than argument. And it wishes to line Wittgenstein up as doing the second and not the first. But a more attractive possible position is that we should not accept (and Wittgenstein would not have accepted) the dichotomy. Perhaps rather he wishes to get us to apprehend differently the point of philosophical thinking or the spirit in which one should do it. Perhaps it is not that rational discursive thought is to be bypassed or banished but that doing it properly is more demanding than one might imagine on first acquaintance and that, if done rightly, it ends up in a different place from that which one might expect.

So on the assumption that it is not wholly wrong to think of Wittgenstein as addressing the same puzzlements (about meaning etc.) as previous philosophers and to think of him as wishing to address them by discursive rational means, let us return to the question whether dialogue is a particularly appropriate form.

If there is to be an answer to this question which vindicates Wittgenstein it seems likely that it will have something to do with the way in which his particular use of the dialogue form connects with active involvement by the reader. Such involvement is what acceptance of the role of 'you' requires, as does also the fact that questions are posed to us (as readers and participants in the dialogue) to which answers are not directly supplied.

But the thought in this sketchy state does not take us to

full sympathy with Wittgenstein. Any philosophical exposition demands active participation by the reader. Indeed, active engagement is required for any understanding at all; one cannot understand without at least being alert and attentive; no grasp of any new idea is entirely passive and effortless. And this is even more markedly true of Philosophy than of other subjects, since in Philosophy beliefs are not conveyed via some classic Gricean process (of taking someone else's intention that one should believe as a reason for believing) but are presented as needing to be adopted, if they are, not on authority but on the basis of the reader's own appreciation of their force. Reading philosophy is hard work, as we all know, because the ideas are difficult and the arguments intricate. These ideas cannot be understood, let alone assessed and remembered, without constant strenuous effort, for example, to restate the point in one's own terms, to consider potential ambiguities, to anticipate objections, to interrelate with other writers and so forth. These reflections show that active engagement is integral to any philosophical reading and thus fail to show us what particular kind of engagement dialogue is uniquely suited to promote.

Let us try another tack, pursuing the idea of active involvement in another sense. Someone might urge that getting a right stance to the world has practical as well as theoretical aspects, that it is a disputable philosophical thesis that some clear line exists between these, and that rational enquiry is a route to both practical and theoretical positions. So perhaps coming to have the right stance, even on such an issue as the philosophical understanding of 'meaning', is something which has a practical side and which can be intelligibly actualised only in the context of a dialogue.

Here is an example of a case where what we naturally label 'mere acceptance of a description', the kind of thing which can be the outcome of some stretch of reasoned but purely theoretical discussion, leaves us still wrongly placed vis à vis the world. Suppose that I have made offensive and hurtful remarks to you, my friend. Reasoning may show me that an apology is called for.

Unless I acknowledge the meanness and repulsiveness of what I did, show that I care about the damage to our friendship, show that I am willing to make myself vulnerable to the pain of having an attempt at reconciliation rejected – in short unless I apologise and thus throw myself on your mercy — our friendship is doomed and we shall both be worse off. But to realise all this, even to say it to you, is not to apologise. Unless the theoretical realisation has its rational and proper outcome in remorse and attempted action I do not have a right stance to the world. So could it be that Wittgenstein invites dialogue in order to enable the participants, himself as well as the other, to have an appropriate setting for taking up whatever right stance is the outcome of the reflections?

There may be something in this line. But it cannot be right in the simple form suggested by the apology analogy. The dialogue which Wittgenstein invites us to is all in the head. The *Investigations* is something which people read privately in their studies. So whatever that intended upshot, it must be something which can come about privately in a study and not something which requires the presence of some actual other to whom some stance is then and there taken up. But it may still be worth pursuing the idea, of which the above is a particular example, that the dialogue form is particularly appropriate for Wittgenstein not just because it is lively and gets the reader engaged but because of something about the content of 'the message' he is trying to get across, or, better, something about the nature of the state which is the hoped-for upshot of an attentive and sympathetic reading.

Clearly it is not possible to canvass properly here the issue of what the content of the *Investigations* is. But let me offer a brief and unsubstantiated account, one reading at least of part of 'the message', in order for us to have something to focus upon, to see whether the approach just indicated could be illuminating. (The passages quoted earlier are part of the evidence for this reading.)

Sections 1–242 of the *Investigations* have to do with the dismantling of one tempting picture of meaning and the sketching

of another. And the original picture is part of a larger one, of what the world is like and of what human beings are like, which is under pressure throughout the *Investigations*. The picture to be dismantled is one on which for someone to understand a word one way rather than another is for him or her to have before the mind some item, for example an image or formula. This item is to guide the application of the word and set the standard for its correct use. Much of the early part of the *Investigations* seems directed to getting the reader to see that the picture, although deeply attractive, is at bottom incoherent. We are invited to attempt to think through in real detail how things would have to be if that picture were the right one. And we find that we are putting incompatible demands upon the supposed inner bearers of meaning.

The picture offered instead is one on which for someone to grasp the meaning of a word is for him or her (as the result of training) to apply the word with confidence but without appealing to any further guidance. That we can talk of meaning and find that we share understanding are, on this view, rooted in the fact of shared spontaneous responses. At the centre of Wittgenstein's sketch is a kind of occurrence (for example judging 'The next number is 1002' on being asked to continue a series) which has aspects of both activity and passivity. It is active in that it is a response with which the person is fully identified, which he or she finds intelligible and which he or she would wish to defend. Yet it is passive in that it is not the outcome of choice and presents itself as (in a way) forced, since the subject has no alternative to it. What we have drawn to our attention is that we do find ourselves saying with conviction 'But surely this is how things are!' Notions like personal commitment and sincerity have a clear foothold with these occurrences. And we discover further that we cannot make sense either of experiencing meaning or of experiencing an objective world, except as persons who are subjects of this kind of occurrence.

Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that something roughly along these lines is right. What light does this throw on

the appropriateness of dialogue form? The answer I would like to propose is very simple. The difference between one who has read a theoretical non-dialogue version of the thoughts and one who has pursued them via the dialogue route is closely analogous to the difference between one who realises 'All humans are mortal' and one who realises 'I, like everyone else, am mortal'. The dialogue form means that the question 'What is involved in meaning?' is presented not as 'What is it for someone to mean?' but rather as 'What is it for me and for you to mean?' And if one is drawn along to acknowledge the fantasy nature of the original picture and the truth of the reminders that are assembled, that acknowledgement comes with self-application — this is what I do, this is how we act — built in.

And why might the achievement of that upshot of vivid self-application be a legitimate goal for a writer? Very speculatively, I would like to suggest that it could be some sort of prophylactic against that going off in a relativist or conventionalist direction which is so frequently supposed to be the necessary corollary of the dismantling of the original picture. I mentioned earlier that the picture is part of a larger story which (arguably) includes elements like a correspondence theory of truth and the idea that a complete natural science will reveal all the facts there are. Wittgenstein's dismantling of his own Tractarian views has a great deal in common with other late nineteenth century and twentieth century philosophical attacks on similar targets. So parallels between Nietzsche, William James, Heidegger, Sartre, Quine or Derrida, on the one hand, and Wittgenstein on the other, can be fruitfully explored.⁵ But if we approach the issues of meaning, truth and fact in the third-personal theoretical way it is possible

⁵ Such links are made by R. Rorty at numerous places, e.g. in his *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Harvester Press: Brighton, 1982). See also: J. C. Edwards, *The Authority of Language: Heidegger, Wittgenstein and the threat of philosophical nihilism* (University of Florida Press: Tampa, 1990); J. Heal, *Fact and Meaning: Quine and Wittgenstein on the Philosophy of Language* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1989); H. Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, 1984); S. Mulhall, *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects* (Routledge: London, 1990).

to make various errors. For example, we may overrate the individual's power to strike out with his or her own judgement or we may stress too much the grip on us of intellectual tradition or we may underrate the actual seriousness and commitment with which we make at least some of our judgements. The upshot may be that we get swept away from the original picture but end up with something just as unsatisfactory and paradoxical.

Following the Wittgensteinian route we do indeed have to abandon the supposed secure mooring to an independent realm of facts and meanings, items which will impose themselves upon us and keep us in line. The alternative idea that our judgements are our own and that we must take responsibility for them does indeed come into prominence. But because the abandonment of the mooring takes place in the context of one person (even if only in imagination) speaking directly and honestly and unpretentiously to another, the danger of taking off into these relativist and conventionalist fantasies should be somewhat diminished. This is because the fantasies fail to respect the reality of the experience of talking and thinking and because the nature of actual meaningful speech is constantly before our attention if we engage in Wittgenstein's dialogue in the spirit in which he intends it. Of course the danger is not eliminated, since many have taken Wittgenstein himself to be advocating just such relativism or conventionalism. But it is worth noting that those who wish to take Wittgenstein this way have found him as maddeningly indirect and inexplicit as other readers have.

A further feature of Wittgenstein's thought which also helps to explain the appropriateness of dialogue is that his later conception of philosophy is largely therapeutic, in the sense, that for him the impulse to philosophical reflection starts with the feeling that we are flies in a fly bottle, beset with puzzlements which we can neither solve nor dismiss and which, he came to think, were the result of the grip on us of compelling but easily misapplied pictures. Philosophical reflection involves loosening the grip of these pictures, unpicking intellectual tangles, showing the fly the way out of its fly bottle. Such a process of release must involve

both the one who is released and one who is doing the releasing.⁶ It is in this feature of Wittgenstein's thought that we can also begin to find materials to reconcile the 'end of philosophy' strand which undoubtedly exists with the point I emphasised earlier that the enterprise he recommends is, among other things, one of rigorous intellectual application.

But although we can thus defend the Wittgensteinian way of proceeding, it has its own pitfalls. The insistence that we recognise where we stand, recognise that we do make such and such judgments with full sincerity, can lead to the adoption of a kind of bullying tone. One may mistakenly turn the fundamentally naturalistic stance of Wittgenstein's observations on the bedrock of meaning in a moralistic direction. This can result in a demand that we be perpetually vigilant against frivolity and against the irresponsibility of letting the conditions for meaning slip away. It may begin to seem that it is improper to engage in idle chat, or in the ordinary superficial but friendly exercises of social life, or in wide-ranging intellectual speculation, lest we let our language go on holiday and fall into irrecoverable false consciousness. But to think this way is to overlook that sincerity and intellectual integrity are not a matter of how earnest one feels at an instant but of how a whole life is lived. And there are an enormous number of different ways of living a life of integrity. (Of course Wittgenstein's own thought shows that this is so. But this has not prevented Wittgenstein himself or Wittgensteinians falling into the trap.) This overseriousness and persistent stress on questioning whether you really mean what you say may, very understandably, be experienced by some as intrusive and impertinent.

There is also another bad development which the Wittgensteinian approach may encourage. His thoughts can offer a way of conceiving of ourselves and our world which does away with mechanistic images and supplies categories (language game, practice, etc.) in terms of which people may find it possible to defend

⁶ I am grateful to E. J. Craig for drawing my attention to these points.

the importance of responses (e.g. aesthetic or religious) which seem threatened on the view which is dismantled. This can be a very reviving and liberating perspective to acquire. But it is possible to get stuck at this point. Analogous things can also happen with those trying to free themselves from deadening or disabling conceptions of themselves by such things as therapy, encounter groups and personal growth courses. These techniques can produce the liberating realisation that one is not locked into hopeless patterns and can trigger enhanced sense of personal responsibility and freedom. But it is possible to find these experiences so pleasant in themselves that one attempts endlessly to recreate them (and promote them in others) instead of moving on to the more positive tackling of whatever genuine problems there were in one's life. Wittgenstein remarked that philosophy (presumably here his own dismantling and reminder assembling kind) leaves everything as it is. And if this is an exaggeration (since it ought to leave some concealed nonsense unmasked and so less attractive) still it is very much an open question whether a fair number of tensions in our conceptual scheme, and so opportunities for more philosophy, are not left as they were.