SENSE AND NONSENSE

Wittgenstein, Idealism and the Limits of Language

by

Matthew John Densley

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2000
Every word
written
in memory
of my parents:

MICHAEL BERNARD DENSLEY
and
EILEEN ANN DENSLEY
Abstract

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It has become fashionable to describe Wittgenstein as some kind of idealist. Encouraged by the Kantian influence evident in his early *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, commentators have speculated about an implicit commitment to idealism in his mature thought. Unfortunately, the debate has been marred by (a) a lack of an agreed understanding of what it means for a philosophy to be ‘idealist’, and (b) a lack of supporting evidence at the level of detailed exegesis of Wittgenstein’s texts. This thesis endeavours to address these problems and resolve the debate. In part one, I set out to clarify the notion of an idealist doctrine in general, and to define a form of idealism that is most suitable for comparison with Wittgenstein’s work. This involves a brief investigation of the historical significance of idealism, a description of the influence of Transcendental Idealism on the early Wittgenstein, and a discussion of the kind of idealism that is still prevalent today as an approach to metaphysics. Part two provides a fairly detailed exposition of certain aspects of Wittgenstein’s thought. This exposition is used in the first place to motivate the claim that Wittgenstein was an idealist, but finally to argue that he did not, in fact, hold any such metaphysical doctrine. Rather, I defend an interpretation of Wittgenstein’s thought that maintains that he consistently held to his anti-theoretical principles, and thus avoided any of the positive metaphysical commitments that would be entailed by an idealist doctrine. The later Wittgenstein is described as a ‘quietist’ with respect to metaphysical discourse. In part three I illustrate a quietist methodology by arguing that it is the only approach that can settle our intuitions about certain problems in the philosophy of subjectivity.
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Habe nun, ach! Philosophie,
Juristerei und Medizin,
Und leider auch Theologie!
Durchaus studiert, mit heißem Bemühn.
Da steh ich nun, ich armer Tor!
Und bin so klug als wie zuvor;

**Faust**: 354–359.
Introduction

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

Hamlet, Act II, scene V.

At some point in the history of the universe, minds emerged that gradually came to form a picture of the reality that they found themselves in. That picture evolved, not only with the perceptual capacities available to those minds, but also with their intellectual abilities. Most importantly, the understanding we humans have gained of the universe has depended on our ability to use language: to formulate and share new ideas, to reflect on them and test them against the world. As new and better scientific theories are proposed, our picture of reality continues to evolve. But perhaps what is most striking about the increasingly rapid advance of human knowledge is just how little we comprehend. The task we have set ourselves seems endless, and a complete understanding of the universe continues to evade our limited minds. We are but a tiny fragment of the cosmos, and we struggle to understand.

When one begins to reflect philosophically on these platitudes, however, it is natural to form a conception of reality and its relation to mind that, while the most obvious, is not beyond questioning. That conception is this. Reality is essentially independent of our minds and our capacity to think about it. However
sophisticated our picture of the universe becomes, a true and complete picture may always remain beyond the reach of our concepts. This is not only because of the limited abilities of us as thinkers, with our limited memories and attention spans, but because of the kind of concepts that are or could be available to us. Reality may outstrip our ability to think about it because the kind of creatures we are does not allow the correct concepts to be formed. There may be other creatures that have a fundamentally different conceptual scheme to ours. That other conceptual scheme may be more suitable for correctly characterising the world.

The idea that reality is independent of our conception of it I shall call 'conceptual realism'. It is the most natural starting point to philosophical reflection on the world, and is popular enough to be called the traditional view. It finds expression in doctrines as diverse as Platonism, Empiricism and the Cartesian view of the mind. But it is not the only view.

One reason for questioning the assumptions of conceptual realism is that it leads to intolerably strong forms of scepticism about our grasp of the world. If the world is independent of our ways of thinking about it, then how do we know that our conception of it is, or ever will be, adequate? The best we can say is that our scientific world picture has served us well to date. It is 'true for us'. But what about reality as it really is? How can we say anything about the way things really are, rather than the way they seem to us, from our small epistemological corner of the universe? In short, how is it possible to do metaphysics?
There is a Kantian answer to this question that, through a variety of modifications and adjustments, has become very popular. The answer is to reject the natural picture of the universe as independent of our concepts. This position I will call 'conceptual idealism'. It should not be confused with what Kant called 'empirical' or 'material' idealism. It does not maintain that minds somehow create the world we live in, or that material objects are reducible to mere ideas. It simply rejects the picture of a reality that is independent of our concepts. It is essential to things that they can be made sense of.

Conceptual idealism is an heir to Kant's 'Copernican revolution' in philosophy, but it is not transcendental idealism. Kant employed the notion of 'the given' in his philosophy, that which is independent of the conceptual scheme imposed by the understanding. Conceptual idealism, on the other hand, maintains that we cannot consider anything as not having conceptual shape. This line of thought can best be understood as a reaction to the empiricist philosophy of mind that can seem so natural given the picture of our place in the universe sketched at the start of this introduction. For it is clear that we can misunderstand the world and that we can fail to apply the correct concepts to that which experience presents to us. It also seems clear that experience must be the final arbiter in our judgements about the world. These two facts suggest that a non-conceptual world impinges on a conceptual scheme, and that the upshot of this interaction is thought about the world. But as Wilfred Sellars has argued at length, this picture

1 Wilfred Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind.*
will not work. In order to justify or provide warrant for our lowest level conceptualisations, the impinging world must be thought of as already having conceptual shape. Only something that has conceptual shape can stand in a rational relation. The picture of the mind as a small part of the universe has its place, but perhaps it is misused by this form of conceptual realism, in that it commits a 'naturalistic fallacy'. For it assumes that the connection between mind and world can be captured simply in terms of a causal relationship, and this is insufficient. When we think of the mind as a rational agency, we cannot separate it from a rational world — a world that we cannot help but describe under conceptual constraints.

A further reason for accepting conceptual idealism is that it can support certain 'naïve' realist intuitions. The picture of reality painted by the conceptual realist has the frightening consequence that the things one normally takes to be the very paradigms of reality — people, tables, chairs and other medium sized objects — may turn out not to be 'real' at all. Our ordinary concepts may fail to pick out the real furniture of the universe. We can only hope that further paradigm shifts bring us closer to the truth. It has been argued, for instance, that since the ordinary conception of a table is of a solid object, and science has now shown that tables are not solid, tables as they are ordinarily conceived do not exist. Whatever is

\[\text{\footnotesize 2 One way to counter this attack on empiricism is to deny that the naturalisation of the mind is a fallacy. Such a position, which McDowell labels 'bold naturalism', argues that rational relations are reducible to natural relations. I think bold naturalism is an attempt to put the cart before the horse, though I shall not argue that here. McDowell has argued against this view extensively. See, for example, Mind and World.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 3 That is, what we normally take to be a solid object is made up mostly of empty space, the distance between the particles that make it up being vastly greater than the size of those particles. Putnam criticises a Scientific Realism that implies this eliminativism in \textit{The Many Faces of Realism}, p. 3.}\]
wrong with this reasoning (and I think there is a great deal wrong with it) the very idea that the most ordinary elements of our vocabulary may be empty terms may strike one as nothing short of ludicrous. If the roots of our language are rotten, what help can the new branches of science be? Conceptual realism seems to put reality forever beyond our reach. Conceptual idealism attempts to give the term ‘reality’ a humbler meaning, one that can be properly understood and that is useful for philosophy. It claims that the world is not independent of the way we ordinarily conceive it to be. While each of our concepts may be corrigible to experience and accountable to scientific investigation, our ordinary use of words underwrites that investigation. On this view it is nonsense to suppose that we may be wrong \textit{en mass} about the concepts we use and the judgments we make with them.

A concise definition of conceptual idealism would be that things (properties, objects and facts) are not independent of the concepts that are used to pick them out. This is to be taken in such a way that it follows that it is essential to all things that they can be correctly described, in that they can be brought under a concept. By the term ‘concept’ I mean that which is employed in a (potentially) shared linguistic practice. I employ the concept table when I refer to tables or to a particular table. I take it that the concept ‘table’ is also involved in any propositional attitude that has a table or tables as its object.

It is tempting to describe a concept as a linguistic \textit{entity}. Such a description can mislead in at least two ways, however. The first is that the term ‘entity’ suggests
something that can come into and pass out of existence. This would make the
doctrine of conceptual idealism, that things are not independent of our concepts,
into an absurd form of empirical idealism. Concepts are not here understood as
temporal entities. Hence conceptual idealism is not committed to the absurd
assertion that, should all our concepts be removed from the world, the world
would cease to be or become void of objects. The conceptual idealist is free to
hold that it makes no sense to talk about concepts being ‘removed from the
world.’ But this clarification can invite a second misconception: that concepts are
somehow akin to Platonic forms. The latter are mind independent entities, and
the problem of how the mind grasps them is just the problem of how the mind
can grasp a mind independent reality. Concepts, as they are here understood, are
not grasped or ‘perceived’ by some mental sense, but employed. Platonism is one
form of conceptual realism.

Conceptual Realism holds that the concepts that correctly describe the world are
(like Platonic forms) mind-independent. Conceptual Idealism holds that they are
in some way mind-dependent. The question “In what way?” is one of the
questions to be investigated here. A third position, quietism, denies that there is
any possible justification of there being a more ‘correct’ way of describing the
world.

Conceptual idealism can also be crudely characterised as maintaining that what
there is must potentially be conceivable by us. This view is based on an argument
to the effect that “the notion of what cannot be thought about by us or those like
us makes no sense. The kind of argument in question claims that if we try to make sense of the notion of 'what we could never conceive', we must use some general notion of something being true (or being the case, or existing etc.), where we could not in principle apply any further concept. The conceptual idealist objects that to conceive of something in such vague terms is not to conceive of it adequately at all. Hence, where we thought we could conceive of a notion that we could not understand, we discover we understand nothing by this empty conception. Put simply, the claim is that we have no conception of something of which we could not conceive. Any attempt to speculate about what exists beyond our understanding should be rejected as nonsense. Conceptual idealism maintains that everything there is can be described and understood, on the basis that our concept of what can exist is bound up with the concept of what can be described and understood. The strength of this position can be summed up with the following truism: It makes no sense to speak of that which cannot be spoken of.

This still leaves a number of questions concerning the nature and implications of conceptual idealism. Some of the most important of these issues will be addressed in the first part of the thesis, and I think many objections can be countered or accommodated. But however one deals with the problems that are faced by this approach to philosophy, conceptual idealism remains subject to a powerful and intuitive objection. It is based upon the assumption that there is nothing (at least nothing that we can speak of) that cannot be conceptualised and

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4 This is how Nagel puts it in his critical discussion of 'Idealism' in The View From Nowhere, p. 93. Nagel goes on to argue against the 'idealism' of Davidson, Kant, Strawson and Wittgenstein.
hence described using publicly sharable concepts. But there does seem to be something that we can speak about in general terms that resists analysis and description in particular cases. For it is most natural to assume that our experience itself is made up of elements that are not captured fully by the public domain of discourse. While we are able to talk in general about the way things seem to us as individuals, the first-personal nature of experience seems to preclude any justified public agreement on what it is actually like. For that we need to be acquainted with our own experience; we have no access to anyone else's. One of the aims of my thesis will be to assess the credibility of conceptual idealism by investigating how it can be defended against what seems to be the most important objection to it. Namely, that however fully I describe the world, there will always be something missed out of that description: the way it seems to me.

It is important to realise that however we assess conceptual idealism, it is to be assessed as an answer to the question, "How is metaphysics possible?" If one assumes that conceptual realism cannot answer this question\textsuperscript{5}, then the fate of metaphysics itself will hang on the answer. If we conclude that conceptual idealism cannot provide a satisfactory answer to the Kantian question, though we may not thereby provide a knock down argument against the tendency to do metaphysics, we may throw some light on the history of post-Kantian philosophy and the twentieth century disenchantment with metaphysics. It will also serve as

\begin{footnote}{5} Though that assumption is not argued for conclusively here, the issue is discussed at length as part of Wittgenstein's rejection of Platonism in chapter 4.\end{footnote}
a caution to the current resurgence in metaphysical theories that use some form of conceptual idealism as their justification.

Now, I must confess that all these question concerning the nature of idealism and the reasons for holding it, though interesting and important in themselves, are raised here with additional motives in mind. I am also interested in Wittgenstein's alleged commitment to this philosophical tradition. It has become fashionable to argue that Wittgenstein, even in his later work, held some kind of idealism, somehow related to transcendental idealism. The issues of conceptual idealism are raised as a way of motivating and clarifying this claim. For it seems that if the later Wittgenstein held any form of idealism at all, he held something akin to conceptual idealism. In particular, Wittgenstein's views on meaning seem to amount to a rejection of conceptual realism, and he presented arguments directed at the notion of privacy that could be construed as being motivated in a way analogous to the conceptual idealist rejection of the dualism of scheme and content. In any case the conceptual idealist may be tempted to argue that Wittgenstein's "private language argument" saves his own doctrine from embarrassment with respect to the possibility of inherently private objects.

Despite these prima facie reasons for associating Wittgenstein's mature thought with idealism, I will eventually argue that Wittgenstein's work is not best understood as a continuation of that tradition. On the contrary, Wittgenstein is better understood as rejecting the dichotomy of conceptual realism and conceptual idealism. While these are both general answers to the Kantian
question “How is metaphysics possible?”, Wittgenstein’s central concern was to show that it is not.

Although this exegesis is the focus of this thesis, it is achieved in three separate stages. In part one the scene is set by describing the history of conceptual idealism – including Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* – as a dissident heir to Kant’s transcendental idealism. Part two deals with Wittgenstein’s mature thought proper, and concludes that Wittgenstein held a kind of quietism. Part three endeavours to illustrate such quietism by arguing that it provides the best approach to an area of philosophy to which Wittgenstein gave a great deal of attention: the philosophical problems of the self and subjectivity. The following section describes each of these parts in more detail.
Part One: Conceptual Idealism

Conceptual idealism can be seen as developing in the post-Kantian tradition of the first half of this century: it is characterised by an acceptance of a certain role of philosophy as delineating the limits of language, but it rejects the role of the given in this task. Indeed, it is tempting to view a great deal of analytic philosophy as an adoption of the Kantian project where the philosophy and analysis of language has replaced the epistemology of the original. Such a history includes Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the Vienna Circle, the rejection of the given by such thinkers as Wilfred Sellars, as well as a great deal of current work in analytic philosophy. Whether or not the later Wittgenstein can be properly understood to be a part of that tradition is to be addressed in the second part of this thesis. But if it is to be examined properly we must first settle the question as to which ideas constitute this post-Kantian tradition. This is the aim of the first part of my thesis.

The whole history of conceptual idealism is too wide a subject for this work, but some investigation of its origins will prove useful to clarify it, and to relate it to and distinguish it from other forms of idealism. This is especially desirable since 'idealism' is more often than not used as a term of abuse. It is associated with the errors of Berkeley and with Humean phenomenology. It is used to describe any

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1 See, for example, Michele Marsonet, who argues that the "linguistic idealism" developed by the early Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle, underlies much of analytic philosophy (including Quine). "Linguistic Idealism in Analytic Philosophy of the Twentieth Century" in Coates and Hutto (eds.), 1996.
attempt to reduce the external world to an internal one. But the position I want to explore attempts no such reduction. Indeed, according to conceptual idealism, such reduction is evident nonsense. Our ordinary public concepts, which are the focus of conceptual idealism's realist claims, primarily pick out external objects, and only secondarily an inner realm. It is the inner, not the outer, that is problematic on this view. Why then use the term 'idealism' at all? One reason is that the real assumption at the bottom of idealism can be maintained when one rejects Berkeley's mistakes. Or so I argue in chapter 1. For even though the idea that 'everything is mind and mental content' is woefully wrong, it seems that the temptation to think in such far fetched ways may have some truth lying behind it. Thus in developing and defending the position of conceptual idealism, one of the questions that I will be addressing is, "what is right about idealism?"

The purpose of the first chapter is to explore the history of idealism in order to develop a characterisation of idealistic philosophy that is both general and informative. This characterisation should be general enough to cover a variety of doctrines that nevertheless have an important core element in common, while being precise enough to avoid the charge of being empty or too vague. The exploration should emphasise both the important similarities between diverse doctrines, and the ideas that set them apart. Most importantly, we should mark those ideas that have been of greatest influence to more recent philosophy. With this final point in mind, the emphasis is placed firmly with Kant, arguably the most influential of all modern philosophers. As we shall see, conceptual idealism was preceded by, and developed from, Kant's transcendental idealism. The final
aim here is to sketch the connections between the notion of idealism in general, transcendental idealism and conceptual idealism. In this way we may arrive at an understanding of conceptual idealism that puts it in an historical context. It should be noted from the start, however, that a detailed exposition of this history is not the aim of this somewhat introductory chapter, nor could it be. The presentation of Kant's ideas will be brief, and will therefore constitute little more than a rough caricature of a subtle and complex philosophy. Furthermore, I am aware that there exists a wide range of views on how Kant should be interpreted. For the purposes of this first chapter, however, such exegetical debates have been ignored. I have simply presented an interpretation that is conducive to my aim of throwing light on certain twentieth century views in analytic philosophy. These views were influenced, one-way or another, by Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Or rather, because of the difficult and sometimes downright obscure nature of Kant's work, it would be better to say that they were influenced by a certain *reading* of Kant's work. It is this reading that I have tried to capture.

The second chapter looks at a work that was subject to that influence: Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. The main aim here is to present a relatively detailed exposition of the 'transcendental idealism' of the *Tractatus*, thus illustrating its relation to conceptual idealism. One of the most salient differences between the early Wittgenstein and Kant is that the former's views are openly mystical: transcendental idealism (or something akin to it) is not a doctrine that can be expressed, according to Wittgenstein, but something that makes itself manifest.
The idealism of the *Tractatus* is still not conceptual idealism: the category of that which 'shows itself but cannot be said' is not compatible with the insistence that everything is in principle describable (though the non-factual and mystical status of this category places Wittgenstein close to this maxim). And under this category fall the simple objects that Wittgenstein argued can be named but not described. They play a role in Wittgenstein early philosophy that is in some way parallel to the role of the given in Kant's transcendental philosophy. The final phase in the development of conceptual idealism is the twentieth century rejection of the given, including Davidson's rejection of the dualism of scheme and content. Part 1 will be concluded with a discussion of conceptual idealism proper and the arguments that have been brought against it. Those objections that are based on misunderstandings can be quickly cleared away. More important objections arise when one considers the clash of intuitions between the conceptual idealist and the conceptual realist. Unfortunately this debate has the problem shared by so many questions at the foundations of philosophy: how one interprets the various relevant examples depends on the very question at issue. So it seems that the debate is irresolvable. It cannot be settled in favour of one or the other camp without assuming a stance on the issue in question.

There is one objection, however, that cannot so easily be accommodated by the conceptual idealist: the problem of subjectivity. Conceptual idealism, with its emphasis on objectivity, goes hand in hand with a third person point of view of the mind, and this can strike one as deeply unsatisfactory. It seems that however fully I describe the world, including all my mental states – insofar as these can be
described – there will always be something missed out of that description: the way things seems to me. Thus Davidson’s rejection of the distinction between conceptual scheme and content is put into question by the temptation to think that there is something that is excluded from, or that precedes, our conceptualisation of the world.

**Part Two: The Later Wittgenstein**

Even if the early Wittgenstein can be said to be a transcendental idealist, it remains to be seen to what extent Wittgenstein’s later views can be also be characterised as idealist. Chapters 4 and 5 explore the parts of Wittgenstein’s later work that are relevant to the development of conceptual idealism. Chapter 4 looks at his views on meaning, and chapter 5 looks at the consequences of these views for any account of subjectivity. Wittgenstein’s work in this area was influential in the development of conceptual idealism because of its rejection of the given, of the ineffable elements of experience. His views on meaning also seem to involve a rejection of conceptual realism. However, this does not mean that the later Wittgenstein was indeed a conceptual idealist, though it has seemed to many commentators that Wittgenstein did hold a kind of post-Kantian idealism.

In chapter 6 the rather vexed question of whether Wittgenstein was a ‘transcendental idealist’, given so much attention in the recent literature, is replaced by the less ambiguous question of whether Wittgenstein can be described as a conceptual idealist. The discussion concentrates on the way in

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3 A discussion that was fuelled by William’s interesting paper “Wittgenstein and idealism”, reprinted in Moral Luck, pp 144 - 163.
which the later Wittgenstein wanted to outline the limits of language. The
continuity with the overall project of the *Tractatus* is emphasised, since
Wittgenstein's aims remained essentially the same in the most salient respect: both
works try to point out the limits of language, and in particular try to show that
much of philosophy is a transgression of those limits. Thus if the later
Wittgenstein held some kind of idealism, it is not distinguishable from
Wittgenstein's anti-explanatory views with respect to philosophy. His views on
meaning are also discussed as an instance of his anti-theoretical stance. These
views also provide further basis for a comparison with conceptual idealism, in
particular with the idea that the natures of things are not independent of our
concepts of them. However, it is argued that Wittgenstein cannot be
characterised as a conceptual idealist, since he does not hold the thesis that reality
is constrained by our conception of it. What our concepts pick out is, of course,
determined by our concepts, but Wittgenstein is keen to demonstrate that there is
nothing special about our way of looking at the world. His meta-philosophy can
be summed up with the slogan that the philosopher has no special insight into the
nature of reality.

The primary purpose of this part of the thesis is to throw light on Wittgenstein's
philosophy. In accordance with this aim, I have been selective in sampling from,
and responding to, the huge body of secondary literature on Wittgenstein. Those
commentators that are discussed, such as Kripke and McDowell, fill the role of
foils for the purpose of exposition. Even answering the question of whether
Wittgenstein was an idealist is secondary to that aim. The question strikes me as
suitable for directing our attention to the real heart of Wittgenstein's thought: his quietism.

**Part Three: Quietism and Subjectivity**

Quietism is a way of rejecting conceptual idealism without accepting the ultra-realism that stands in opposition to it. It accepts the intuition behind conceptual idealism that philosophy is a conceptual or linguistic investigation, but rejects the idea that this investigation provides us with a general or special understanding of reality. In part three I argue that only quietism can provide a satisfying response to the problem of subjectivity faced by conceptual idealism, or more generally the perplexities one faces when one considers the limits of language. Conceptual idealism seems to deny something undeniable, while the conceptual realist postulates something incoherent. I want to urge that the correct response to such antinomies should be *silence*. While the mind that has a natural bent for philosophy often finds this call for humility somewhat frustrating, demanding more in the way of explanation, I argue that this frustration will only be quelled by a change in attitude.

Arguments for general quietism in philosophy will inevitably arouse suspicion. To argue that we can never provide theories in philosophy will always risk the charge of being self-contradictory. In order to express any quietist doctrine, one must always specify and restrict the domain for which the claim holds. The domain of discourse to which I would like to argue for quietism concerns certain philosophical problems of subjectivity and the self.
In the final chapter I endeavour to draw together the various philosophical problem of the self and subjectivity that I otherwise deal with separately. I argue that various lines of thought that result in philosophical doctrines concerning the self, the tendency to idealism and solipsism (both material and transcendental), and the postulation of qualia or sense data, are all based on a common mistake. They each try erroneously to point beyond our concepts to something we cannot articulate. The important thing, when treating this mistake, is to understand the strength of the temptation to reason in these erroneous ways. It is not enough to point out the inconsistencies in the theories in question, and then suggest dispensing with them in a Quine-like fashion. Proper understanding of these philosophical problems can only be achieved when one pays careful attention to the idea of nonsense, and what it means to claim that a certain utterance is nonsensical. It must be remembered that to deny a nonsensical proposition is merely to utter more nonsense. It is not to assert that such-and-such a thing cannot exist. All we can do is examine where we go wrong in philosophy, and bring our investigations back to where we can say something. And in doing this we must have sufficient respect for the temptation to utter nonsense.

The quietist response to the temptation to posit an ineffable element of experience (such as qualia) is to suggest that both the assertion of the disputed entity, and therefore its denial, are not significant propositions. The task of philosophy at such an impasse is to accept that no further explanation is available through philosophical investigation. The discovery that 'nothing more can be said here' is one of the most important discoveries in philosophy. In general, any
intuition that suggests that there is something beyond our capacity to conceptualise can never be specified, and the only correct response is to offer no theory or explanation at all. The problematic concepts that such intuitions give rise to should not be rejected out of hand, however. They serve an important role in philosophy. They are markers at the bounds of sense.

It is the emphasis placed on these markers that distinguishes the quietist from the conceptual idealist. In his eager dismissal of all things beyond the limits of our conceptual scheme, Conceptual idealism actually crosses that boundary. By setting a limit to what there can be (rather than what can be said), the conceptual idealist implicitly denies that there can be anything else. He denies, that is, the claims of the conceptual realist. But if the conceptual realist's claims are nonsense, so is their negation. I conclude that neither conceptual idealism nor conceptual realism can adequately articulate the limits of meaning and metaphysics. At least sometimes when doing philosophy, we must accept that we have reached the limits of language, and admit that 'nothing more can be said here.' Beyond the limits of language, we cannot assert or deny anything. Where our concepts and explanations end, there should be silence.
Part one

Conceptual Idealism
Chapter 1

THE FUNDAMENTAL VIEW OF IDEALISM

Objectivity and Conceivability

1.1 Kant’s Transcendental Idealism

In *The Critique of Pure Reason* Kant addressed the problem of objective validity. He set himself the task of investigating what it meant for a concept to be valid such that genuine knowledge might arise from its application in judgement. One way of gaining knowledge about the world is to derive concepts from experience, and to apply them within experience. This is the usual method, for example, for discovering the contingent propositions of the sciences. On the other hand, certain concepts and the propositions derived from their application, have the status of being *a priori*, of not being so derived from experience. Both mathematics and physics contain *a priori* concepts and judgements; the former being a thoroughly *a priori* discipline in its pure form, and the latter having certain *a priori* concepts embedded in its basic principles.

Kant’s primary concern was with what he called synthetic *a priori* judgements: judgements that provide objective knowledge, which are nevertheless made independently of any particular experience. Synthetic judgements are contrasted with analytic judgements, which proceed purely by analysing the concept
involved. This analysis shows that the concept contains the predicate that is judged of it. Thus, logical reasoning proceeds analytically on the basis of the law of non-contradiction\textsuperscript{1}, while empirical propositions, which are not merely an analysis of the concepts involved, are synthetic. One way to put this distinction is to say that synthetic judgements generate knowledge, while analytic judgements only expand on that which is already known (in the sense that the judged predicate is already contained in a concept which one already has mastery over). Synthetic \textit{a priori} judgements are therefore intended to provide genuine knowledge, while being based on pure reason rather than experience. Such is the task of metaphysics.

The necessity to examine the possibility and foundations of synthetic \textit{a priori} knowledge was made all the more pressing by Hume, whose critical attention to experience had found it unable to support the propositions of metaphysics. He could not find anything in experience that justified such basic metaphysical assertions as “every event has a cause”. Supposing that all \textit{a priori} propositions were analytic, and that the propositions of metaphysics were not, he concluded that the latter were based on psychological habit rather than sound reasoning. This sceptical conclusion overlooked the possibility, however, that propositions might be both synthetic and known on \textit{a priori} grounds. Kant therefore placed special emphasis on the notion of the synthetic \textit{a priori}, since he held that judgements of this kind were known to exist in the form of mathematics. While we know that 5+7=12 on \textit{a priori} grounds, Kant claimed that this knowledge

\textsuperscript{1} A6/B10
could not be gained analytically. He contended that the concepts of 5, 7 and addition could not be said to 'contain' the concept of 12. Such mathematical propositions must therefore fall into the synthetic a priori category. An explanation of how such propositions are possible thus became of paramount importance to philosophy, and Kant's central question of The Critique of Pure Reason was "How are synthetical a priori judgements possible?" How could pure reason transcend the limits of experience, while still providing knowledge? If this could be solved for mathematics, then we might gain some insight into how to do metaphysics.

It was Kant's radical solution to this problem that gave his philosophy its idealistic nature. He ventured to produce what he called "the Copernican revolution in philosophy" by questioning one of the most fundamental assumptions of metaphysical thought. He questioned the assumption that our knowledge must conform to objects, and suggested that more progress might be made if we thought of things the other way about: that objects must conform to our knowledge.

Kant explored this novel approach by making a distinction between things as they appear, or 'phenomena', and 'things as they are in themselves', or 'noumena'. This is not to be confused with a distinction that is commonly made between how things seem and how they really are (according, say, to some completed scientific theory), or between representation and thing represented. (A distinction

\[\text{B17}\]
of the latter kind does indeed underlie a kind of idealism — Berkeleian idealism.

We shall return to differences between this doctrine and Kant's below. Phenomena are not our (mental) representations, but that which must conform to our representations. By requiring that objects must thus conform, the problem of knowledge a priori of these objects becomes soluble: we can know a priori the contribution that our own nature makes to synthetic knowledge. That is, we can investigate the conditions on which the possibility of knowledge rests. This investigation, which Kant calls a 'transcendental inquiry', is supposed to reveal how concepts and formal intuitions (forms of experience) that are not derived from experience, are nevertheless to be found within experience, as part of its structure. They are presupposed by experience, and according to Kant, the possibility of their application as a priori knowledge can be revealed by a critical examination of the nature of experience and its conditions.

This critical examination has two parts, which correspond to the different kinds of explanation Kant thought were needed for the synthetic a priori: in mathematics on the one hand and metaphysics on the other. The first part, presented in the Transcendental Aesthetic, deals with the formal 'intuitions' of time and space, which provide the basis of mathematical and geometrical reasoning. This is an analysis of 'sensibility', the ability to receive representations by being affected by objects. The second part, presented in the Transcendental Analytic, gives an

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3 By mental representation I mean something existing within a mind. Kant sometimes refers to phenomena as 'Vorstellungen', which can be translated as 'representations' (or 'presentations') but I take it that he means not mental entities but objects considered as subject to the conditions of knowledge.

4 Kant's thesis is not that all (synthetic) a priori knowledge is transcendental. Rather transcendental knowledge arises from transcendental inquiry into how a priori knowledge is possible.
analysis of the 'understanding'. Objects are 'given to us' through sensibility, but they are only thought about by means of the understanding, which is the source of synthetic \textit{a priori} concepts. Both the faculty of sensibility and the faculty of understanding play necessary roles in experience, which is a synthesis of the two. “Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without the understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind.”

The Transcendental Analytic presents the categories that are employed by the understanding, and argues that their employment is the source of synthetic \textit{a priori} knowledge. These categories are the twelve ‘pure’ concepts of the understanding. Our ordinary concepts are determinations of these pure concepts. The concept of a book, for example, is a determination of the concept of an artefact, which in turn is a determination of the category of a substance. In this way, at least one of the categories is employed in any judgement. So if knowledge involves judgement, there can be no knowledge that does not involve one or more of the categories. This already makes them an integral part of what it is to have knowledge of the world, for that world must conform to the categories in order to be known. For Kant it is a \textit{fact}, therefore, that knowledge involves certain concepts, and these concepts can be known on purely \textit{a priori} grounds. But Kant’s justification of their employment does not end there. He argues in the Transcendental Deduction that not only is it a fact that we do and must use the

\footnote{A51 / B75.}
categories, but that we also have a right to do so. That is, he argues that the world must be such that it really does conform to the categories.

So transcendental idealism involves an analysis of what it means to have knowledge and experience of an objective world. The analysis of the understanding is supposed to say something about what it means to make judgements: it involves, or presupposes, certain categories. It is important to Kant's project that these categories constitute synthetic a priori knowledge that is objectively valid. Not only was the analysis supposed to hold for the notions of judgement and knowledge in general (or at least as far as those notions are comprehensible to us) but he argued separately for their objective validity in the Transcendental Deduction.

This view of transcendental idealism, with its emphasis on objectivity and the world, is not the only view however. Schopenhauer considered himself the true heir of Kantian philosophy, and yet he criticised Kant for neglecting the fundamental truth of idealism. So I will turn now to a discussion of his work in order to investigate the fundamentals of idealism, and how it relates to transcendental idealism.

1.2 Idealism in Schopenhauer, Kant and Berkeley

Schopenhauer begins his principal work by expounding "On The Fundamental View of Idealism". He urges that the world as it is known has been shown

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6 The Transcendental Deduction is described briefly below, on page 41 ff.

7 See sections 1 - 7 of The World as Will and Representation, volume 1, and chapter 1 of volume 2.
through modern philosophy, especially through Berkeley and Kant, to be only a “phenomenon of the brain”, encumbered with subjective conditions. Thus, “the world is my representation” is the first axiom of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics. He takes his cue in part from Descartes, who, recognising the role of the intellect in moulding the world, made his starting point in philosophy here with his *cogito ergo sum*. Thus what is most certainly and immediately known is one’s own consciousness. For this reason Schopenhauer endorses Berkeley’s idealism.

The idealistic starting point is taken as an attempt to ensure truth and certainty in philosophy. The greatest influence on Schopenhauer was Kant, whose project was, as we have seen, to discover firm foundations for philosophy. But Schopenhauer saw no conflict between Transcendental Idealism and Berkeley’s idealism, despite the fact that Kant did. Schopenhauer accepted the propositions of the Transcendental Aesthetic, which presents Kant’s first and perhaps most radical statement of Transcendental Idealism, as numbering “among the incontestable truths”. And while he claims that the Antinomies do *not* provide the proof that Kant intended, that the objective order in time, space, causality, matter etc. cannot even be *conceived* as a self-existing order, he nevertheless accepts his conclusion. He goes on to say that, “Kantian teaching, even without the antinomies, leads to the insight that things and their whole mode and manner of existence are inseparably associated with our consciousness of them.”

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* P. 437, volume 1 of the E. F. J. Payne translation.
* p. 8, chapter 1, volume 2 of the E. F. J. Payne translation.
True idealism, for Schopenhauer, is ‘transcendental’, but he takes the idealism of Berkeley to be included under this title as well as Kant’s. Both “leave empirical reality untouched”\(^\text{10}\), but differ in the way in which they claim objective reality, (hence the empirically real in general), is conditioned by the subject:

(1) “Materially, or as object in general, since objective existence is conceivable only in face of a subject and as the representation of a subject.” This corresponds to Berkeleian idealism.

(2) “Formally, since the mode and manner of the object’s existence, in other words, of its being represented (space, time, causality\(^\text{11}\)), proceed from the subject, and are predisposed in the subject.” This is attributed to Kantian idealism.

Both kinds of idealism are implied when he claims “the objective existence of things is conditioned by a representer of them, and that consequently the objective world exist only as representation”. The representation of the subject, is “conditioned by the subject, and moreover by the subject’s forms of representation, which belong to the subject and not the object.” Thus, for Schopenhauer, the most important aspect in transcendental idealism is a general
recognition "that things and their whole mode and manner of existence are inseparably associated with our consciousness of them."

In trying to reconcile these two approaches, Schopenhauer's work obscures some important differences that I would like to examine. The true nature of Kant's Transcendental Idealism is done violence in overlooking the important differences between it and Berkeley's empiricism. Having given attention to these differences, we will be in a stronger position to consider the real nature of transcendental idealism, and how it is related to the fundamental view of idealism.

Kant's philosophy famously arose as a considered reaction to the two predominant philosophical schools of thought of his time: the empiricism of Hume and Berkeley on the one hand, and the rationalism of Leibniz and Wolff on the other. The dispute between them can be characterised with the question, "How can we know the true nature of things?" The empiricist responds with an appeal to experience, the rationalist with an appeal to reason. The Critique of Pure Reason can be seen as an attempt to both reconcile and criticise these two positions by answering the question in a novel and ingenious way. One must understand the originality and significance of this answer if one is to understand what Kant meant by 'transcendental idealism', and the affect this idealism had on twentieth century analytic philosophy.

The problem that both empiricists and rationalist were responding to derived its distinctive character from Descartes' methodological scepticism. The question becomes, "How do we know that the world really is the way it appears to us?"
Indeed, in his *Meditations* Descartes' scepticism even extends to the very existence of the objective world beyond appearances. The empiricist takes this scepticism seriously, and in the philosophy of Hume and Berkeley, we find a denial that there is anything known about that which is beyond experience, or even that it makes sense to speak of such things. For if all objective knowledge (i.e. knowledge of what there is, or of which concepts are 'objectively valid') comes to us through experience, how could that knowledge ever transcend experience? We are left with an impoverished conception of reality, containing only minds and mental entities. The rationalist, on the other hand, puts his faith in reason, and following Descartes, uses it as a tool to investigate the 'true nature' of things. Leibniz made extensive use of this tool, and developed a philosophy of metaphysical individuals ('monads') that were known by reason alone, and thus did not bear a straightforward relationship to the mere appearances found in experience. It was this metaphysical picture that Kant subscribed to, until Hume's scepticism shook it to its foundations. On what grounds is this faith in pure reason justified?

Superficially, Kant's response had much in common with the empiricism of Hume and Berkeley. Reason must somehow be constrained by experience, and one way it can be so constrained is by applying its concepts only *within* experience. Kant follows the empiricist in claiming that the only objects that we can refer to are possible constituents of sense-experience. Unique to the Kantian response, however, was the provision for a further way that concepts might be objectively...

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12 Berkeley includes the mind of God in his ontology, as the sustaining force of the universe. Hume's scepticism brought him to question the concept of a subject, so that at its most extreme his view constituted a radical form of phenomenalism, including only phenomenal entities in his ontology.
valid. A concept is to be considered objectively valid if it is a transcendentally
valid concept, that is, one that is derived by considering the necessary conditions
for human experience to be as it is. This new grounding for synthetic a priori
knowledge allowed him to argue for a position that is distinct from both the
empiricist idealism of Hume and Berkeley on the one hand, and the speculative
rationalism of Leibniz and Wolff on the other. He developed transcendental
arguments against the Cartesian dualism that brought about scepticism about the
external world, and thus challenged the notion of experience that brought Hume
to his sceptical conclusions.

While nothing can be known of the thing-in-itself, the elusive reality beyond the
subjective conditions of experience, this should not be taken to deride the
knowledge of 'mere phenomena' that we gain through experience. His
philosophy involves a rejection of the separation of the world as it is from our
experience of it. He attempts to overcome this dualism by arguing that
appearances and objects are not two distinct kinds of entities, but are such that
they can only be understood in relation to each other. The world is necessarily
capable of being experienced by us, and we can describe appearances only in so
far as they are appearances of an objective world13. Thus Kant rejects the
epistemological dualism that underlies the philosophies of his predecessors. This
dualism of world and experience is connected with ontological dualism, which
postulates a Cartesian ego that separates the private world of experience from the

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- xxx.
objective world external to it. Kant also rejects ontological dualism. The subject
is not a part of the objective world, as the Cartesian ego is, but one of the
transcendental conditions of that world. However, simply rejecting the ego as a
substance is not enough to free one's philosophical investigations from
epistemological dualism. Hume also rejected the Cartesian ego, on the basis that
nothing that he found within his experience corresponded to it, but still found
'himself' trapped within that experience. Nevertheless, ridding one's philosophy
of the Cartesian ego is an important part of escaping from the limitations of our
consciousness. Hume and Berkeley differ from Kant in a very important respect.
They assume we have access only to ideas (the contents of our minds) rather than
to a (phenomenal) world that is in some sense 'external' to our minds.

In what sense external? Part of the answer to this question lies in the fact that
Kant makes a distinction between the representation of sensibility and the object
of that representation which is known through the understanding. In his critique
of Kant\footnote{This critique forms an appendix to volume one of \textit{The World as Will and Representation}, in Payne's translation. The rejection of the distinction between representation and object of representation is stated on p. 444.}, Schopenhauer rejects this distinction, referring the reader to both
Berkeley's and his own discussion of idealism\footnote{He refers to the first chapter of the supplementary volume of \textit{The World as Will and Representation}, 'On The Fundamental View of Idealism', a chapter in which he uses a version of Berkeley's so called 'Master argument'.}. And this rejection is connected
with Schopenhauer's rejection of the Transcendental Analytic, which deals with
the categories. All but one of them is rejected, and only the category of causality
remains in Schopenhauer's metaphysics. He argues, perhaps rightly, that causality
cannot be dealt with separately from sensibility, as it is in Kant's philosophy, for it is required in perception.

In so emphasising the importance of perception, Schopenhauer's rejection of a separable role for the understanding brings him closer to the idealism of Berkeley. The sole role of the understanding is the application of the law of causality in order to derive a cause of the sensations within experience. This cause is both object and representation of the subject: object because it is taken to be cause of sensation, and representation because the law of causality is of "subjective origin, just as is the sensation itself". He goes on to claim that Kant's confusions on this matter were due to "his fear of Berkeleian idealism".17

But Kant was not just motivated by a mere fear or aversion to Berkeleian idealism. It was part of his purpose to refute it. Specifically, he wished to defend the idea, attacked by Berkeley and Hume, that certain notions, such as (non-mental) substance, are objectively valid. The separation of the object from the representation in Kant's philosophy is part of this defence. While Berkeley infamously claimed that to exist is to be perceived, Kant's idealism claimed only that to exist is to be perceivable. I take it that this is one of the consequences of the 'idealism' of the Transcendental Aesthetic. To exist (as phenomenon) is to be in time and space, and since these are 'forms of intuition', being in them entails that something can be the object of intuition [perception]. This may seem a

16 p. 447.
17 Ibid.
contentious claim to the modern scientist (who posits imperceptible sub-atomic entities\textsuperscript{18}), but it is nevertheless at least minimally realist: objects are not dependent on actually being perceived.

Now while Schopenhauer may well have been right to question the distinctness of the sensibility and the understanding, the Berkeleian conclusions he draws do not follow from this criticism alone. The same distinction has been criticised by a range of commentators of Kant's work, from Hegel to the modern day. Politis, for example, refers to the distinction as the "Achilles heel of the Critique."\textsuperscript{19} But this rejection is seen to have very different consequences.

Politis' concern is that a separate treatment of the sensibility leaves Kant open to the charge of not succeeding in his effort to free himself from phenomenalism. The separation of sensibility and understanding implies that we can refer to objects within sensibility alone, and this is at odds with Kant's claim (in the Analytic of Concepts) that a phenomenal language is not sufficient to describe our experience. To do this we must make judgements on how things or substances are, and this is not possible with the use of a language that refers only to the fleeting objects of phenomenal experience. Kant was aware that the separation of the understanding from sensibility left open the possibility of phenomenalism: that experience was independent of our concepts. Such a possibility, with the corresponding threat of Humean scepticism, was the target of

\textsuperscript{18} Though even the imperceptible entities of modern science must be 'indirectly perceptible' — they must have effects that are perceptible — or they would play no role in explaining the world we observe.

\textsuperscript{19} Vasilis Politis, p. xlvi.
the Transcendental Deduction. The details of this argument are obscure, and for this reason alone it has been found less than convincing. But the general strategy used by Kant contains a simple and powerful idea. In order to pose the question of whether the world is as it seems, the sceptic must have a certain point of view on the world. He must be able to identify his experiences as *his* experiences. It must be the case that the thought 'I think' can be prefixed to all of his thoughts and representations. This fact, which Kant called the "transcendental unity of apperception", is a transcendental fact: it is a subjective condition of experience. From this subjective condition Kant argued, though perhaps with some difficulty, for an *objective* world: a world that necessarily can be different from the way it seems. He argued that, as a reflector on self-conscious experience, I could have no knowledge of experience without assuming that I persist in time, and that my experience is of objects that persist independently of me. What I experience is not merely sensation, but an objective world that must be described with the use of certain categories, such as enduring substance and causality.\(^20\) Kant went on to argue\(^21\) that "our internal and, to Descartes, indubitable experience is itself possible only under the previous assumption of external experience."

So while the categories, like the 'pure intuitions' of time and space, were granted a subjective status by Kant, it is important to consider the nature of this subjective

\(^{20}\) For a concise description of the Transcendental Deduction, see Scruton, *Kant*, p 33 – 35. Scruton makes the Humean point that Kant's argument is not quite successful since "it involves a transition from the unity of consciousness to the identity of the object through time." (p. 34). The point relevant to the discussion in hand, however, concerns what Kant was trying to do.

\(^{21}\) In his 'Refutation of Idealism', B274. 'This section of the *Critique* was added to the second edition in order to distance his Transcendental Idealism from Cartesian and Berkeleyan idealism. It underlines his concern with objectivity.
status carefully. As already discussed, it was part of this idealism not to confine the phenomenal world to a mental realm. Rather, he aimed to show that the subjective and the objective ways of describing experience are not independent of each other. And this dependence goes both ways. While subjectivity is formulated as the conditions of experience, that experience cannot be described without it being experience of an objective world. A world that may be different from the way it seems. This emphasis on the dependence of subjectivity on objectivity constitutes a rejection of Cartesian dualism. Experience is not confined within a 'private realm' of the mind, since it presupposes the public world it is experience of. The idea of an ego, an object that is both within the world, and yet separated from it, is rejected as a 'paralogism of pure reason'.

The point about the categories and the pure intuitions being of subjective origin was not to reject a world external to our minds, but to show that this world is not independent of the subjective conditions of knowledge. His aim was to demonstrate the possibility of objective \textit{a priori} knowledge of this world. Kant rejects the suggestion that any ideality belongs to other representations, such as sensation, for sensation does not provide us with objective \textit{a priori} knowledge\textsuperscript{22}. If subjective forms of intuition are to provide us with knowledge that is truly objective, then the object must be regarded as distinct from the subject, and yet its form must be dependent on the form of objective knowledge in general. The

\textsuperscript{22} A26 / B43. Sensation is regarded as being merely changes in the subject, and therefore not a form of knowledge of the object.
object is not merely 'my representation', for it is not dependent on me for its continuing existence. If I ceased to exist, the object would not thereby disappear.

Kant's purpose was to show that certain concepts that we possess \textit{a priori} are nevertheless objectively valid, and that the way things seem to us does in fact provide us with real knowledge. As he put it in the Transcendental Aesthetic, appearance is not mere illusion, for a proper conception of experience presupposes that our representations are of something external to our minds:

For in an appearance the objects, nay even the properties that we ascribe to them, are always regarded as something actually given...23

Furthermore, the ideality that Kant ascribes to time and space is supposed to support the idea that the objects that appear in them are 'real' (i.e. not illusory):

It is only if we ascribe \textit{objective reality} to these forms of representation that it becomes impossible for us to prevent everything being thereby transformed into \textit{mere illusion}.24

His point seems to be that if time and space "inhered in things themselves" then they would become strangely incoherent: both necessary for, and external to, experience. In which case the objects we were aware of would have to be regarded as merely (made up of) mental entities, and we would not be able to "blame the good Berkeley for degrading bodies to mere illusion."

It seems to me that Schopenhauer did not see the central importance of some of these ideas because he interpreted Kant as reacting first and foremost to the

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23 B69.

24 B70.
"dogmatic philosophy" of his rationalist predecessors. This was only part of his project, which could be characterised more correctly as a middle way between sceptical empiricism and speculative rationalism. In addition, Schopenhauer failed to see the importance of the rejection of Cartesian dualism for this project. It was the underlying assumption common to both empiricism and rationalism that set up the problem they were trying to solve: "How do we know that the world really is the way it appears to us?" It is this rejection of the sharp distinction between experience and objective world that most strongly characterises transcendental idealism, which ultimately claims both that the world is the way we experience it, and that we experience it the way it is.

1.3 Three Kinds of Idealism: Empirical, Transcendental and Conceptual

Idealism is a doctrine of dependence. It can be variously characterised as asserting dependence between world and mind, object and subject, or objectivity and subjectivity. None of these characterisations make clear a particular view without a further explanation of the terms involved, and most importantly, a further explanation of what is meant by 'dependence'.

There is in Schopenhauer and Berkeley a dependence between object and subject that is best characterised as existential or empirical. That is to say, the continuing existence of a particular object is dependent on the continuing existence of a subject as a substance. The subject plays this supporting role as a particular in the world. It is a dependence between contingent states of affairs. This is evident from the conclusions they draw from certain arguments. Berkeley's so-called 'Master
Argument', for example, claims that we can no more conceive of something existing unconceived than we can see something unseen:

HYLAS. ...What more easy than to conceive a tree or house existing by itself, independent of, and unperceived by any mind whatsoever? I do at this present time conceive them existing after that manner.

PHILONOUS. How say you, Hylas, can you see a thing which is at the same time unseen?

HYLAS. No, that were a contradiction.

PHILONOUS. Is it not as great a contradiction to talk of conceiving a thing which is unconceived?

HYLAS. It is.

PHILONOUS. The tree or house therefore which you think of, is conceived by you.

HYLAS. How should it be otherwise?

PHILONOUS. And what is conceived, is surely in the mind.

HYLAS. Without question, that which is conceived is in the mind.

PHILONOUS. How then came you to say, you conceived a house or tree existing independent and out of all minds whatsoever?25

Note that Berkeley begins with a claim about the inconceivability of something unconceived and concludes that it must be existentially dependent on a mind — that it must exist in a mind. Schopenhauer offers a similar argument:

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That the objective world would exist even if there existed no knowing being at all, naturally seems at the first onset to be sure and certain, because it can be thought in the abstract... But if we try to realise this abstract thought, in other words, to reduce it to representations of perception, from which alone (like everything abstract) it can have content and truth; and if accordingly we attempt to imagine an objective world without a knowing subject, then we become aware that what we are imagining at that moment is in truth the opposite of what we intended, namely nothing but just the process in the intellect of a knowing being who perceives an objective world... and so in the assumption that the world as such might exist independently of all brains there lies a contradiction.26

Again we start from the natural thought that things could exist unconceived, followed by a questioning of the validity of this assumption on the basis of a conceivability (i.e. imaginability) argument, and finally we have an existential dependence claim drawn from this argument. The conceivability argument used by Schopenhauer, like the one used by Berkeley, involves an appeal to perception, but whereas Berkeley's appeal is by way of analogy, Schopenhauer's is more direct. He claims that the content and truth of an abstract thought must come from its realisation in the representations of perception.

Both arguments share some serious problems. For example, both are apparently far too strong, in that if they work, they prove far more than their authors intended. It is true that I cannot see a tree that is unseen, but if this analogy carries over to the case of what is conceivable, then why not the fact that I cannot see any tree that is not seen by me? This thought brings us to the unhappy position of solipsism, for I cannot conceive, on Berkeley's and Schopenhauer's notion of conceivability, of anything that is not conceived by me. Berkeley only avoids solipsism by an appeal to the mind of God, but it seems that I can no

26 The World as Will and Representation, chapter 1 of the first supplementary volume, p. 5 of Payne's translation.
more conceive of something conceived by God but not me than I can conceive of something unconceived by any mind. Indeed, the mind of God itself is quite unimaginable to me, and so would be excluded from existence by Berkeley’s own reasoning27. Schopenhauer also rejects solipsism, but offers no argument for this rejection. He merely claims that those convinced of its truth must surely be confined to the madhouse, but admits that “theoretical egoism”, as he puts it, is irrefutable28. He should have done more to defeat it, for if it is implied by his philosophy, this can only tell against it.

This unwanted solipsism is implied by the notion of conceivability used by Berkeley and Schopenhauer. On this notion, if I imagine anything, I must count myself, as knowing subject or mind, as part of what is imagined. A defender of realism might question this notion of conceivability. This is the position taken by Bernard Williams in ‘Imagination and the Self’29, where he argues from analogies between the act of imagining and the act of watching a theatrical performance such as a play or film. When one watches a play, there is a very real sense in which one sees the events and characters that form the elements of the play. One ‘sees’ Othello, and one ‘witnesses’ Othello strangling Desdemona. Yet these truisms involve a deviant use of ‘sees’ and ‘witnesses’ that is analogous to changes of meaning when one talks of ‘seeing’ in the case of imagination. What one sees

27 And just as Berkeley’s argument seems to exclude God, Schopenhauer’s insistence that truth and content require the reducibility of thought to the “representations of perception”, leads to the exclusion of the noumenal world. The thing-in-itself, which he uncritically inherits from Kant, and which does so much work in his philosophy, is defined as that which is independent of experience and its conditions.


when one attends a performance of *Othello* is a cast of actors and actresses playing
the parts of characters in a play. While Emila discovers Desdemona’s dead body,
it does not follow that the actress who plays her then sees a dead body, and
neither do the audience. If we follow this line of argument, we come to the
conclusion that one can conceive of something unconceived\(^3\), for one is not
necessarily part of what is imagined, even as subject.

Williams’ point is well taken, for what I imagine does not include me. If we accept
Hume’s insight that no part of one’s experience corresponds to the subject, then
it follows that no part of one’s imagination corresponds to the subject. I am not a
necessary part of the content of what is imagined. So it cannot be the case that
such conceivability arguments of the kind put forward by Berkeley and
Schopenhauer show that minds must exist in the world in order for objects to
exist. In fact, despite Schopenhauer’s conclusion that the world depends on the
operation of brains, his discussion of the dependence between subject and object
often sounds more conceptual\(^4\) than existential. Insofar as the knowing being
appears as object, he would have to concede that it could be eliminated from our
imagination. And what is left when we remove the self that is known as object?
It cannot be the Cartesian ego, for that is supposed to be some kind of object in
the world\(^5\). The Kantian alternative is that it is just the transcendental conditions
for a world that can be known and experienced. But if such conditions are not to

\(^3\) Williams actually takes the argument to be an attempt to prove that something cannot exist unperceived. The
confusion is caused by Berkeley, who seems to equivocate between perceivability and conceivability.

\(^4\) The term ‘conceptual dependence’ will be clarified in due course.

\(^5\) Though not, of course, part of the material world.
be considered as objects in the world then nothing can be existentially dependent on them. Existential dependence, if it is to make any sense, must be a relationship between particulars. To say that something is existentially dependent on something else implies that both entities could come into and pass out of existence. At least, it is extremely unclear what it would mean for something to depend for its existence on something that was outside time and space. It cannot mean, as Schopenhauer suggests, that if the conditions ceased to be, then so would the dependent entity, for it makes no sense to talk about timeless conditions ceasing to pertain.\footnote{This issue is revisited in chapter 3, in the discussion of Morris' Conceptualism, which he defines in terms of a dependence on the timeless conditions for possessing a concept.}

Concentrating on Schopenhauer's claims of existential dependence may, in any case, produce a misleading picture of his philosophy. His love of flamboyant language and powerful imagery obscures what this existential dependence is supposed to consist in. It is a dependence that occurs on the 'transcendental level', and it is not clear what this means (and is not much clearer in Kant's work) but it is supposed to imply that it leaves empirical truths untouched. The coming into being and passing away of things, and the dependencies between such events, surely constitute empirical facts.

Kant comments in the appendix of the \textit{Prolegomena} that he would rather that transcendental idealism were known as “formal” or, better still, ‘critical’ idealism, to distinguish it from the dogmatic idealism of Berkeley and from the skeptical
idealism of Descartes."34 In what does its being formal or critical consist? Part of the answer lies in Kant's repeated insistence that the analysis of the understanding is not a kind of empirical psychology. He was not offering a theory of how the human mind makes judgements, but rather an analysis of what it is to make judgements at all. The dependence between subject and object is not existential, between actual minds and particular objects, but formal, between concepts and their objects.

One way to put this is to say that Kant was interested in the relationship between 'thought' and the world. The objects of knowledge must conform to the structure of thought, but the world would continue to have that structure if every thinking being were eliminated from it. We can think of thought in this sense as independent of empirical psychology. It is tempting then to think of idealism as asserting an existential dependence between thought and the world. But to think of this as an existential dependence is to introduce strange Platonic entities, both abstract and existent, that are simply not needed. Indeed, this seems to be a case of applying the concepts of the understanding without regard to the limitations of experience that Kant was at such pains to delineate35. The temptation to posit them stems, I think, from a tendency to model all dependence in terms of dependence between objects (as the body is dependent on the heart). This, it seems to me, is the real root of confusion in Schopenhauer's treatment of idealism.

34 Prolegomena, 375.

35 See, for example B370, where Kant criticises Plato's use of the term 'idea'.
Kant was engaged in an analysis of how concepts are employed in knowledge, and his work was based on the idealistic assumption that the natures of things as they are known are not independent of our ways of knowing about them. Thus Kant was engaged in a conceptual analysis that placed epistemology at its foundation. This approach to conceptual analysis has been largely rejected by analytic philosophy, which has rejected the 'psychological idiom' and emphasises the philosophy of language rather than epistemology. We might note, however, that Kant himself considered his method to be closely connected with linguistic analysis. He comments in the Prolegomena that the analysis of a priori concepts "presupposes neither greater reflection nor deeper insight than to detect in a language the rules of the actual use of words generally and thus to collect elements for a grammar". While his inquiry is primarily an analysis of knowledge, rather than language, he acknowledges that "both inquires are very closely related"36.

Let us take the term 'conceptual dependence' to mean a dependence between concepts. Thus there is a conceptual dependence between the concept 'substance' and the concept 'table': the latter being a subcategory or determination of the former. No doubt there are other kinds of conceptual dependence. Analytic dependence (containment) and synthesis (as some kind of combination) are both candidates. But we might also take the term 'conceptual dependence' to include dependences between concepts and objects. Take the 'form' of an object be the concept or intuition that corresponds to it. Then we can use the term

36 p. 323
'formal dependence' to mean a conceptual dependence between a concept and the object, property or fact it picks out, such that there is a formal dependence between any object (property / fact) of kind $A$ and the concept $C$ that picks it out as an object of kind $A$. When we think about a table as a table, we necessarily employ the concept 'table' (and, by implication, the concepts on which 'table' conceptually depend, such as 'substance'). The concept $C$ tells us something about the kind $A$. The nature of an object is thus dependent on the sortal concepts that correctly individuate it. So, on Kant's view, all phenomenal objects are formally dependent on the categories and the forms of time and space. And that is to say that the natures of objects are in part prescribed by certain abstract conditions. Note that while the dependence relation in Berkeley and Schopenhauer is between contingent states of affairs, this is not the case for conceptual dependence. This is because concepts and intuitions do not have to be regarded as contingent particulars, but can be regarded transcendentally as the conditions for thought (regardless of whether any being happens to fulfil those conditions).

We might say that at the heart of Kant's Transcendental Idealism is a doctrine of formal (and other conceptual) dependence. While describing Kant's philosophy in such terms is a somewhat incomplete characterisation of Transcendental idealism, it does allow us to see how it is related to what I shall call 'conceptual idealism', the doctrine that the world is limited by our possible concepts. A full discussion of this view will have to wait until chapter 3, but we can already point out some differences between it and Kant's idealism. Both the acceptance of the
thing-in-itself and the role of the given in Kant's philosophy, however restricted, set
his doctrine apart from conceptual idealism. These two conceptually real aspects
of Transcendental Idealism are related.

Let us take first the notion of the noumenal world. In Kantian philosophy, the
world limited to our possible concepts corresponds to what he calls the
'phenomenal' world. Kant contrasted this world with the 'noumenal' world,
which is independent of the understanding and the subjective conditions of
knowledge. One way to view transcendental idealism is as a combination of
conceptual idealism (with respect to the phenomenal world) and conceptual
realism (with respect to the noumenal world). The acceptance of the thing-in-itself
represents a departure from full idealism, though the extent of this departure
is not altogether clear from Kant's work. Conceptual idealism is committed to
saying that it makes no sense to refer to that which is independent of our
concepts. The true nature of reality is not hidden by our inability to comprehend
it. This mistaken way of thinking comes about by thinking of 'true reality' as
something independent of our concepts: a 'pre-conceptualised reality' that we
must 'interpret'. According to conceptual idealism, nothing corresponds to this
empty conception of an independent reality of things-in-themselves.

If the categories provide the concepts of thought, the role of the given will also
make Kant's philosophy distinct from conceptual idealism. The given is not
subject to such transcendental conditions – hence Kant's insistence that no
ideality belongs to sensation. While Kant argued in the transcendental deduction
that we cannot make sense of the unity of experience simply in terms of the
given, he still saw the given as something that imposed upon the sensibility. His
point in the transcendental deduction was that this was not a *sufficient*
characterisation of experience. But since the given is formed by the sensibility
and synthesised by the understanding, it is not understood as having conceptual
form prior to apperception. This again brings Kant into opposition with the
conceptual idealist.

One way to view the relationship between Transcendental Idealism and
conceptual idealism is in terms of the critique of the separable treatment of the
sensibility and the understanding that I discussed in the previous section. We
noted that this separable treatment has also been stoutly criticised by many other
commentators on Kant, from Hegel to the present day. One of the consequences
of this rejection, acknowledge by Schopenhauer, is that there is no longer scope
for a pre-conceptual 'given' that impinges on the faculty of sensibility. But there
is also a consequence that was not anticipated by Schopenhauer. For one may
draw conclusions about the very notion of the noumenal, which is beyond our
power to objectively apply the categories of the understanding. Kant maintained
that, while we could have no knowledge of the 'thing-in-itself', noumena are
nevertheless 'intelligible'. According to Kant, the understanding "*problematically*
extends further than sensible intuition, "but we have no intuition, indeed not even
the concept of a possible intuition, through which objects outside the field of
sensibility can be given, and through which the understanding can be employed
assertorically beyond that field." Thus we can think, but have no knowledge, beyond the limits of sensibility. But then to question the separation of the understanding from the sensibility is also to question the notion of noumena. If one replaces the analysis of the faculties of understanding and sensibility with a single analysis of, say, conceptual experience, one has no understanding left over, so to speak, to make 'noumena' intelligible. This thought leads to philosophies that not only limit knowledge within the bounds of sensibility, but also limit truth and thought within those bounds. Conceptual idealism sees experience and the world as essentially conceptual. We cannot make sense of something without conceptual form (such as the so called 'given') or something existing outside time and space (such as so called 'noumena').

Transcendental idealism nevertheless has an important relationship to conceptual idealism, not least from an historical point of view. Many of the philosophers influenced by Kant, including, for example, Hegel and the Absolute idealists, rejected the notion of the noumenal world. More importantly, analytic philosophy can be seen as the programme of linguistic analysis hinted at by Kant in the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. Any analytic philosopher who accepts that the world is necessarily conceivable on the basis that the idea of a reality that is inconceivable is nonsense, is an idealist as I am using the term.

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37 A255/B310

38 In verificationism, for instance, one finds the idea that there can be no meaning or truth where there can be no knowledge.

39 See the remark quoted above which is from p. 323 of the *Prolegomena*.
1.4 The Fundamental View of Idealism

Idealism then, comes in many different forms, each with very different commitments. Is there some idea that underlies these diverse doctrines? I think that Schopenhauer’s discussion of idealism, though it involves many mistakes, can still point the way to the fundamental view of idealism in general. The claims of existential dependence in Schopenhauer and Berkeley are the results of arguments, but the fundamental truth of idealism is not supposed to be something that one needs to argue for. The fundamental view should be something that all idealists can agree on as a starting point, while disagreeing on its implications. According to Schopenhauer, it is something that should be clear to all once we have turned our reflective attention to it. For him, this fundamental truth concerns the division into subject and object, on which he says, “it is that form under which alone any representation… is generally possible and conceivable.”

But as we have already seen, what counts as subject and object is an issue of dispute amongst idealist. In any case, it is not the division of subject and object that is most fundamental in Schopenhauer’s reasoning, but the basis on which he puts this suggestion forward: the implied connection between the possible and the conceivable.

The existential dependence between subject and object may be the conclusion of an argument in Schopenhauer’s work, but it would be a mistake to think of him as arguing for the idealistic starting point. Both the passage quoted above, and the

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40 The World as Will and Representation, §1 of the first volume, p. 3 of Payne’s translation. Italic added.
argument based on Berkeley's Master argument, already contain an idealistic assumption, and one that is not so much argued for, as taken for granted. That is the assumption that reality is limited by our ability to conceive it, or that if something is in principle inconceivable, then it must be regarded as impossible. It is this assumption that seems to be the fundamental idea of idealism. So one general way to use the word 'idealism' is to use it (as Nagel does) as an adherence to this principle. Differing claims of dependence, both in respect to the nature of the dependence, and what the dependence holds between, can be seen as deriving from differing notions of conceivability. Conceptual idealism, for instance, claims that the possible is coextensive with our possible shared public concepts.

Kantian idealism can also be characterised as a conceivability claim, for this is a general consequence of formal dependence. If the nature of things is not independent of our knowledge, then the world is limited by what judgements we could make. Note that while this could in some sense be described as an 'existential' dependence claim, in that what could exist is said to be dependent on what concepts there could be, this is not an existential dependence in the sense attributed to Berkeleian idealism. As we have already seen, Kantian philosophy does not have the implausible implication that things are merely representations of our minds. It is a conceptual dependence between world and understanding.

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41 Or better put: there is nothing that is inconceivable. The impossible is not a something, and 'the impossible' is not a referring expression.

42 Nagel attacks the idealism which "holds that what there is is what we can think about or conceive of, or what we or our descendants could come to think about or conceive of—and that this is necessarily true because the idea of something that we could not think about or conceive make no sense." (The View From Nowhere, p. 90) See chapter 3 of this thesis for a discussion.
This concludes our brief review of transcendental idealism and its relation to the fundamental idea of idealism. Of course, there is more to transcendental idealism than a claim about the limits of the phenomenal world. Nevertheless, this idea is at the heart of Kant’s transcendental idealism. It is also this idea that we can discern in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which has been described as Kantian by many commentators. It is to the work of the young Wittgenstein that we shall now turn to get a more detailed view of the development and influence of idealism in twentieth century analytic philosophy.
IDEALISM AND REALISM IN EARLY ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

Kant began a new era in German philosophy, but it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that idealism had a profound affect on British philosophy. The golden age of British idealism was led by T. H. Green, who put forward a Kantian critique of empiricism. He argued that certain formal conceptions, or ‘categories’, were necessary conditions for the possibility of experience. By conceiving of the real as totally independent of the mind, the empiricist makes it inaccessible to knowledge and thought, and thus makes it the ‘meaningless, the empty, of which nothing can be said’¹. But like Schopenhauer, Green thought that Kant had not held firmly to his idealist principles. For Green, this failure was not only manifest in Kant’s acceptance of ‘the given’, but also in Kant’s talk of the thing-in-itself, the noumenal world beyond the conditions of experience. His rejection of these aspects leaves Green with a philosophy that could be described as ‘Hegelian’.²

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¹ *Wörter*, vol. 1, p. 41.
² See Hylton, p. 32.
Central to the 'absolute idealism' made popular by philosophers such as Green and Bradley was adherence to some form of the coherence theory of truth. Propositions, it was claimed, cannot be assigned truth-values independently, but must be considered as part of 'an organic system'. And in contrast to a correspondence theory of truth, a coherence theory claims that propositions cannot be considered as only externally related to facts. Rather, both facts and propositions are considered as abstractions from judgement.

As a follower of Bradley, Bertrand Russell was himself an idealist for a period, but as he became more involved with the philosophy of logic, he turned away from idealism. His initial 'refutation' concentrated on attacking the coherence theory of truth. One problem emphasised by Russell was that, since a proposition cannot be considered in isolation from the system of propositions, it could not be considered absolutely true. Propositions were said to be 'more or less true', a view that Russell found to be absurd, for it was self-refuting. The very suggestion of a coherence theory turns out not to be absolutely true, but only more or less true. Thus Russell insisted that beliefs were true independently of each other. Furthermore, they were made true by mind independent facts to which they were externally related.

The traditional theory of truth more often favoured by empiricists is the correspondence theory, according to which a proposition is true if and only if it corresponds to the facts. While Russell initially rejected this alternative, he later

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3 See 'The Nature of Truth', 1905.
formulated his views in terms of correspondence. In 'The Nature of Truth and Falsehood' (1910) he uses the term 'correspondence' somewhat cautiously, but in *The Problems of Philosophy* he says that 'a belief is *true* when it *corresponds* to a certain associated complex, and *false* when it does not.' Above all else, this way of putting the matter allows him to emphasise his main point that while beliefs depend on minds for their existence, they do not depend on minds for their truth.⁵

It was soon after his rejection of idealism that Russell met and taught Ludwig Wittgenstein. In the opening sections of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* one can see Russell's influence in an apparent commitment to something like Russell's realism. "The world is the totality of facts," states Wittgenstein, and it is these facts that make a proposition true or false. The theory of meaning that emerges from what follows involves some elements that one might find in a correspondence theory of truth. Wittgenstein does not define truth as correspondence with the facts, but on his theory of meaning, propositions are pictures of facts, and the elements of the picture correspond to the elements of the fact it represents. A picture either agrees or disagrees with reality⁶, and its truth consists in the agreement of its sense with reality⁷. Furthermore, elementary

⁴ p. 74 (Italics supplied.) C.f. the somewhat more cautious expression in 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism', where he says a proposition can correspond with a fact in either a true or a false way.

⁵ *Ibid* p. 75.

⁶ *Tractatus* 2.21.

⁷ *Tractatus* 2.222.
propositions are independent of one another, in that their truth-values do not depend on one another.

This is by no means the only influence Russell had on Wittgenstein's early work. Wittgenstein inherited from Russell and Frege a certain conception of philosophy that placed the philosophy of language at the centre, with the logical analysis of both language and mathematics providing the foundations. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is largely a work in the philosophy of language and logic, and much of the detail can be attributed to the influence of Russell and Frege, or to a reaction to their work. It would be a mistake however, to see the *Tractatus* solely in relation to the philosophies of Russell and Frege. While Wittgenstein inherited the conception of philosophy with linguistic analysis at its centre, the nature of its importance is given a distinctive character by Wittgenstein. And this character, I will argue, is both Kantian and mystical.

It is often remarked that the *Tractatus* was influenced by Kant 'through Schopenhauer', who he was known to have read extensively. Certainly Schopenhauer's influence can be seen throughout the *Notebooks* and in the section of the *Tractatus* that deals with solipsism. But I think it is implausible that the Kantian character of the *Tractatus* derives exclusively from Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*. Perhaps Wittgenstein had already read Kant

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8 The influence, at least at the time that many of the ideas of the *Tractatus* were being formulated, went both ways. At the beginning of 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism', Russell attributes the ideas that were to follow to Wittgenstein. In fact Russell admits that he had not seen Wittgenstein since 1914, and the lectures were as much a presentation of his own views as Wittgenstein's.

9 Although some understanding of Kant's work can be gained from the Appendix 'Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy' in Schopenhauer's work.
before he wrote the *Tractatus*\(^\text{10}\), or perhaps he learnt of his work through
discussion, possibly with Russell. Either way, the general approach of the
*Tractatus* has more in common with Kant's work than Schopenhauer's. It is
primarily concerned with the limits of the world and the bounds of metaphysics.
The *Tractatus* argues that the world is limited by the conditions, not of experience,
however, but of representation. The parallel with Kant lies in the combination of
this idealism with the conceptual realism that supports it. According to
Wittgenstein, the subject matter of philosophy is just those conditions of
representation, but those conditions are not subject to themselves. Strictly
speaking then, they are not describable at all. They make themselves manifest.
And therein lies the mysticism of the *Tractatus*. The combination of conceptual
realism and conceptual idealism in Wittgenstein's philosophy results in a third
position: quietism.

2.1 The Metaphysics of the *Tractatus*

The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is based on some fundamental assumptions about
the connection between logic, philosophy and the world. Wittgenstein presents a
picture of the logical form of the world and language — a form that the world
and language must share if language (and thought) is to be possible at all. The
picture Wittgenstein presents at the beginning of the *Tractatus* goes something like
as follows.

\(^{10}\) He was certainly reading *The Critique of Pure Reason* shortly afterwards. See Monk's biography of
Wittgenstein, p 158.
The world is the totality of facts. Facts are constituted by atomic facts and atomic facts consist of objects standing in relation to one another. Analogously, descriptive language is the totality of propositions, propositions are constituted by (are truth functions of) elementary propositions and elementary propositions consist of names standing in relations to each other.

The link between language and the world is made by two semantic relations: naming and picturing. Both are forms of representation: Names name objects and propositions picture possible facts. The elementary propositions picture possible atomic facts:

4.311 One name stands for one thing, another for another thing, and they are combined with one another. In this way the whole group — like a tableau vivant — presents a state of affairs.

If the picture presented by elementary propositions agrees with reality, then that picture (and thus the proposition) is true. It is false if the possible atomic fact that it represents does not exist in the actual world.

All this metaphysical mechanism underlies ordinary language. The 'Names' are not the proper names or definite descriptions of ordinary language, and 'Objects' are not the ordinary objects\(^1\). Rather, they are to be found at the theoretical limits of analysis. A fully analysed sentence of English is supposed to consist of groups of simple Names concatenated, which in turn are related to one another by some

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\(^1\) I use capitalisation to indicate that the terms 'Name' and 'Object' refer to theoretical, rather than ordinary, entities.
truth functional operator. Thus we have the three levels of analysis shown in figure 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordinary language propositions</th>
<th>Arrangements of ordinary objects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(are true functions of) elementary propositions</td>
<td>(are constituted by) atomic facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(are combinations of) 'Names'</td>
<td>(are combinations of) 'Objects'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1: Levels of analysis in the metaphysics of the *Tractatus.*

The bottom two levels are theoretical requirements to a theory of meaning. Objects, for instance, are 'simples'. They are rather puzzling theoretical entities, and Wittgenstein, it seems, never made up his mind what they were besides specifying some of their properties in a rather abstract manner\textsuperscript{12}. Neither did he think it was necessary to specify them in more detail in order to see that they exist (subsist). They were required on transcendental grounds.

### 2.2 The Realism of the *Tractatus*: Objects as 'the Given'

According to Wittgenstein, there subsist simple objects that cannot be broken down into constituent parts:

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\textsuperscript{12} Though he did think, at least at one point after writing the *Tractatus*, that we were acquainted with them. We learn the use of names by examining them. See 'Some Remarks On Logical Form', and chapter 4 of this thesis for a discussion.
2.02 Objects are simple.

2.0201 Every statement about complexes can be resolved into a statement about their constituents and into the propositions that describe the complexes completely.

Object are absolutely simple so that we can (at least in theory) reduce statements about ordinary objects down to elementary propositions that relate to the world. To say that Objects are simples that make up the substance of the world is to say that this theoretical limit of analysis exists, and that it corresponds in some primitive way to the structure of the world. Wittgenstein's point is that it must exist if language is to picture the world. The world and language must share a structure: they must share their logical form. The requirement that objects are simple and unalterable (2.026 – 2.0271) is the requirement that they cannot be described by means of a further (contingent) proposition. That words stand for objects must be a necessary truth. It cannot depend on whether another (empirical) proposition is true, for then it would be a contingent matter whether or not it had sense. And this cannot be the case if language is to depict the world. That propositions already have sense is a necessary condition on them being true or false:

2.021 Objects make up the substance of the world. That is why they cannot be composite.

2.0211 If the world had no substance, then whether a proposition had sense would depend on whether another proposition was true.

2.0212 In that case we could not sketch any picture of the world (true or false).

This point can also be made in terms of possibility. What is possible is equivalent, for Wittgenstein, with what is thinkable (what is imaginable, 2.022), and this is
equivalent to what is representable (that which we can picture to ourselves, 3.001). 
The conditions for representation are thus given for all possible worlds, so these 
conditions cannot be given by what happens to be the case in this or that 
particular possible world. These conditions, which include the requirement that 
there are simple Objects, are also the conditions that a proposition has sense. 
Thus, whether there are objects cannot depend on any empirical proposition 
being true or false. It is a necessary condition for us to be able to describe the 
world (2.211):

2.022 It is obvious that an imagined world, however different it may be 
from the real one, must have something—a form—in common with it.

2.023 Objects are just what constitute this unalterable form.

The requirement that there are simple objects could also be called a 
‘transcendental’ condition. While there is some controversy concerning what 
properly constitutes a ‘transcendental argument’, a rough characterisation will be 
sufficient for our purposes. Kant uses the term for anti-sceptical arguments for 
(synthetic) a priori claims established on the basis that their truth is necessary for 
the possibility of experience. But more generally, a transcendental argument is 
any argument where a certain phenomenon \( p \) (or the structure of this 
phenomenon) is argued to have a set of conceptually necessary conditions \( S \), 
thus establishing the ‘transcendental validity’ of the concepts included in those 
conditions. Whilst Kant was interested in the conditions of knowledge, the

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13 To put this in terms introduced in the previous chapter, a phenomenon is argued to be formally dependent 
on the concept of \( p \), and the concept of \( p \) is conceptually dependent on the (transcendently valid) concept \( C \). 
See chapter 1, p. 25.
Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* was interested in the conditions for describing the world. These necessary conditions included the idea that the sense of propositions must be independent of whether they are true or false (2.22 What a picture represents it represent independently of its truth or falsity, by means of its pictorial form.) There must be contact between language and the world that is prior to the truth or falsity of any proposition about the world. This contact he characterises with the relations of naming and picturing, relations that presuppose a certain logical form that is shared by language and the world.

The Objects of the *Tractatus* play a role that is in some ways analogous to the role played by 'the given' in Kant's Transcendental Idealism. According to Kant, the faculty of sensibility is distinct from the faculty of the understanding. It is through the sensibility that the mind has a 'receptivity' to the given, and through the understanding that they are thought about. Both are required for meaningful thought. "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind".14 A thought without content is a thought that does not take in elements of the given. Such thoughts are merely representations, produced by the understanding, but without real application. The psychological idiom in which this idea is cast by Kant is completely missing from Wittgenstein's philosophy of logic and language, but a similar idea is central to his thinking. Any thoughts that do not picture possible states of affairs are senseless precisely because they do not picture combinations of objects.

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14 A51 / B75.
Now this idea that Kant and Wittgenstein share contains a problem. The thought that 'thoughts without content are empty' is devoid of any specific reference to the given. It is without content, and therefore empty. Similarly, the thoughts about Objects in general are presumably not combinations of names that refer to specific Objects.

Both the given and tractarian Objects are transcendentally 'real' in that they are independent of the subjective conditions of thought and representation. The given cannot be considered to have conceptual form since it provides the raw data on which the understanding grounds its lowest level conceptualisations. Elements of the given form part of the very conditions for meaningful (non-empty) thought. Likewise, tractarian Objects are not part of what can be described, but are part of the conditions for being able to describe anything. But then how can we speak of them at all? Wittgenstein considered his radical solution to this problem as the central point of his early philosophy. Strictly speaking, we cannot speak of them (and Wittgenstein acknowledges that his own propositions are nonsense, 6.54), but the fact that we can speak at all, shows that they exist. They make themselves manifest.

\[\text{Other than, of course, naming them.}\]
2.3 Showing and Saying

After receiving Russell's comments on his work, Wittgenstein responded by writing that Russell had not understood his 'main contention, to which the whole business of logical propositions is only corollary.' He goes on:

The main point is the theory of what can be expressed (gesagt) by propositions — i.e. by language (and what comes to the same, what can be thought) and what cannot be expressed by propositions, but only shown (gezeigt); which, I believe, is the cardinal problem of philosophy...  

This 'cardinal problem' is related to the task that Wittgenstein claims to be addressing in the preface to the *Tractatus*. His work is an attempt to 'draw a limit to thinking, or rather—not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts'. The distinction between saying and showing is Wittgenstein's solution to the problem of critical philosophy: to draw the limits on what can be meaningfully said, 'and what lies on the other side of the limit will be simply nonsense.'

Wittgenstein only uses the word 'transcendental' twice in the *Tractatus*. Once (in 6.421) to consign ethics to the transcendental, and once with regard to logic:

6.13 Logic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror-image of the world.
Logic is transcendental.

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16 Quoted in Anscombe's *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, p 161.

17 It could be argued that this is distinct from the Kantian problem of critical philosophy, which was to draw the bounds on what could be known. Kant wanted to restrict knowledge in order to 'make room for faith'. Thus, for Kant, it makes sense to ask questions about things-in-themselves, it is just mistaken to think we can answer them. We cannot talk 'assertorically' about noumena (A255 / B310). This is in contrast with the Wittgenstein who claimed that where there can be no answer, the supposed question is really meaningless (*Tractatus* 6.5).
Despite this frugal use of the word, it is enlightening to compare the 'transcendental' in Wittgenstein with that which 'shows itself' as opposed to that which can be said. It is clear, especially from the Notebooks, that Wittgenstein was greatly influenced by Schopenhauer, but it could not be said that the final form of the Tractatus has any straightforward correspondence to the idealism of Schopenhauer. The most striking aspect of Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy is his concern with the limits of sense, and this is closely related to the problem that Kant addressed in The Critique of Pure Reason. Kant used his transcendental philosophy to delineate what could be known. Wittgenstein was interested in the limits of what could be said (by which he seems to mean what could be described or asserted), and his transcendental philosophy is an attempt to draw these limits. But therein lies a problem, for to see a boundary one must see the other side, or at least confront its impenetrability. What marks the boundary of meaning is not something that can be, strictly speaking, described. Thus the transcendental philosophy of the Tractatus is inherently 'mystical':

6.522 There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical.

For Wittgenstein, the transcendental cannot be expressed, but shows itself — it makes itself manifest in the 'unalterable form' (2.022 - 2.023) of the world and language, but any attempt to express explicitly [sagen] what that form is, necessarily results in nonsense. The propositions one tried to produce in such an enterprise would not be propositions at all, for they would be nonsensical, and genuine proposition cannot fail to have sense. This enterprise is, in fact, what
most of philosophy consists in, and consequently its propositions and questions more often than not turn out to be not propositions or questions at all: they are nonsense and the questions neither have answers nor require them.18

The connection between what can only be shown (the form of logic, language and the world that makes itself manifest) and the transcendental can best be understood if we bear in mind the emphasis Wittgenstein placed on the philosophy of language. Just as Kant sought to uncover the subjective conditions of the possibility of knowledge and experience, Wittgenstein's early philosophy sought to discover the conditions for the possibility of language and thought. Wittgenstein thought that it was precisely because these conditions were always presupposed in language that they could not themselves be represented:

4.12 Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it—logical form.

In order to be able to represent logical form, we should have to be able to station ourselves with propositions somewhere outside logic, that is to say outside the world.

In order to consider the conditions of language and the world, one must take up the transcendental perspective that is outside logic and the world. But in taking up this perspective, we necessarily leave behind the conditions that give our

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18 See Tractatus 6.5. Between meaningful propositions (Gedanke) and nonsense we have the propositions of logic and mathematics, which are pseudo-propositions. While they lack sense (sinnlos) in that they say nothing about the world, they are not nonsensical. They are tautologies and contradictions, and have truth-values — without being contingently dependent on their truth conditions. (One might say that a tautology has no truth-conditions, since it in unconditionally true; and a contradiction is true on no condition (4.461)). They are not nonsensical. They are part of the symbolism of logic, and therefore of language (4.4611), and they show the formal (logical) properties of language and the world (6.12)
thoughts meaning. The best we can do is to allow those conditions to make themselves manifest as a part of our ordinary thoughts:

4.121 Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them.
What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent.
What expresses itself in language, we cannot express by means of language.
Propositions show the logical form of reality.
They display it.

Now, despite the claim that logical form cannot be stated by means of propositions, this is exactly what Wittgenstein attempted to do from the first page of the Tractatus. He built a picture of language and the world that makes clear how both can share their logical form. This picture building is presumably an attempt by Wittgenstein, not to say what logical form is, but to bring the logical form of language and the world into focus for the reader: to show us the logical form of language and the world.

2.4 The Idealism of the Tractatus: Logic and the World

We now have a certain picture of the relation between language and the world in terms of a common logical form. It is worth pondering for a moment just how tight a connection between the world and language Wittgenstein has proposed. 'The world is all that is the case'\textsuperscript{19} and nothing more\textsuperscript{20}. And what is the case can be represented:

\textsuperscript{19} Tractatus 1.

\textsuperscript{20} 2.05 "The totality of existing states of affairs also determines which states of affairs do not exist"
2.18 What any picture, of whatever form, must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it—correctly or incorrectly—in any way at all, is logical form, i.e. the form of reality.

2.181 A picture whose pictorial form is logical form is called a logical picture.

2.182 Every picture is at the same time a logical one. (On the other hand, not every picture is, for example, a spatial one.)

2.19 Logical pictures can depict the world.

Moreover, we cannot even conceive of a state of affairs that cannot be pictured, for to conceive of a state of affairs is just to picture it:

3 A logical picture of facts is a thought.

3.001 'A state of affairs is thinkable': what this means is that we can picture it to ourselves.

And language is a pervasive phenomenon. To think of the world at all, to project a proposition, is to use 'language' in some sense. All thoughts (Gedanke) also have logical form.

4 A thought is a proposition with a sense.

4.001 The totality of propositions is language.

Now it is becoming clear why I thought that thinking and language were the same. For thinking is a kind of language. For a thought too is, of course, a logical picture of the proposition, and therefore it just is a kind of proposition. (Notebooks 11.9.16)

Now, I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that Wittgenstein’s picture theory appeared to have much in common with a correspondence theory of truth, but several other elements are now in place that distinguish it from this kind of realism.
The realist insists that propositions must correspond to an independent world, and the idealist contends that we have no access to that which is mind independent. Limited by our own consciousness, we cannot make the distinction between the ideal and the real. The transcendental idealist, however, claims that this distinction can be made, but one must bear in mind on what level it is being made. At the empirical level it is simply the distinction between minds and mental content on the one hand, and the rest of the real world those contents correspond to on the other. At the transcendental level, however, the distinction is between the world that we experience and represent, and which is therefore necessarily subject to the conditions of experience and representation, and the world considered (as far as it can be) as independent of those conditions. It is at the transcendental level of analysis that these conditions are considered as forming the necessary structure of both knowledge and the world. Wittgenstein’s approach in the Tractatus can be seen as a kind of transcendental idealism. The world, under this conception, is the phenomenal world, where to be part of the phenomenal world is to have logical form. It is the world considered as subject to the conditions of description and representation – the world that has logical form. It is therefore this logical form that limits the world.

2.5 The Solipsism of the Tractatus

By now, the meaning of 5.6 and 5.61 should be clear:

5.6 The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.

5.61 Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits.
So we cannot say in logic, 'The world has this in it, and this, but not that.'

For that would appear to presuppose that we were excluding certain possibilities, and this cannot be the case, since it would require that logic should go beyond the limits of the world; for only in that way could it view those limits from the other side as well.

We cannot think what we cannot think; so we what we cannot think we cannot say either.

The limits of the world are its logical limits, which are given by its logical form. According to the metaphysics under discussion, nothing in the world, or in language, can fail to have logical form. That form therefore marks the limits of both language and the world. Thus the first line of 5.61 can be taken to be an expression of the transcendental idealism already evident in the metaphysics of the *Tractatus*\(^{21}\). What follows can then be seen as a rejection of the idea that one can talk about the transcendently real: we cannot say, in a language that is based on logical form, what there is that is independent of logical form. The transcendently real falls outside of logic, language, and the world.

And of course 5.6 follows from 5.61: the limits of both my language and my world are given by their logical form. But why introduce the first person at all here? Why speak of *my* world and *my* language?

Consider again the picture of the relationship between language and the world in terms of logical form. Where does the subject fit into that picture? One answer, suggested by 5.542, is that the subject contains the names that are configured in such-and-such a way. The *empirical* subject must be a part of the world, and

\(^{21}\) Indeed, it is a clear statement of that part of transcendental idealism that constitutes a kind of *conceptual* idealism. See chapter 1.
therefore consist of objects standing in relation to one another. (And some of the facts of which it consists will constitute propositions). But this would, at best, only be the empirical subject — which is not the metaphysical subject discussed in §5.6ff. (In any case, 5.5421 indicates that this empirical 'subject' is not considered a subject (soul) at all by Wittgenstein, on the basis that it is composite).

What then is the metaphysical subject discussed here? The possibility of language is the possibility of thought about the world. But what does this possibility consist in? It consists in the world and language having logical form. The subject is introduced as a kind of transcendental subject: it is the boundary of the world and language in that it is presupposed by the possibility of world and language. This is what is revealed in the fact that the world is my world and language is my language.

Wittgenstein eventually admits (in 6.54) that his propositions are nonsensical, stating that their value lies not in their literal meaning, but in their power to elucidate. The picture of language and the world that emerges from his philosophy is not one that can be described, but rather one that makes itself manifest to someone who follows Wittgenstein's thoughts. Wittgenstein is trying to show us that which cannot be said. But whose language emerges as connected with the world in this way? Whose language shares its limits with the substance of the world? If this picture is made manifest to me, by my reflection on my

22 Though not one that is to be equated with 'the self proper, as it exists in itself' as it is in Kant's Critique of Pure Reason A492/B520. It at least has something in common with the transcendental subject of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason, which must be assumed but of which nothing of metaphysical significance can be said. It is transcendental because, like Kant's subject, we must posit it, but cannot observe it. And, as Williams ('Wittgenstein and Idealism', in Moral Luck, pp. 145-146) has pointed out, it is not that, with Hume, we happen to find nothing in our experience that corresponds to the subject, but that the subject is necessarily not a part of experience. It is presupposed by experience.
language and *my* world, then there can be only one answer to that question. It is
my language. Furthermore, I am stuck within the bounds of this language:
anything that counts as a proposition for me will be a proposition in my language.

This is how Wittgenstein first explains how solipsism is made manifest in 5.62:

> The world is *my* world: this is manifest in the fact that the limits of
> *language* (of that language which alone I understand) mean the limits of
> *my* world.

"of that language which alone I understand" is a translation of “der Sprache, die
allein ich verstehe”. Both in the German and in the translation given by Pears
and McGuinness, this is an ambiguous description. One obvious translation
emphasises the 'I' to produce a statement of crude solipsism: no one else can
understand my language and my thoughts — they are 'private'. On this reading,
solipsism is supposed to follow from this privacy of language. I will call this
reading the 'privacy of language' reading. It has something in its favour, since one
might think that the privacy of language is implied by Wittgenstein’s picture
theory. While all language shares the same logical form, my language is not the
same as your language. The analysed form of sentences that attribute mental
predicates to me will presumably be different to those attributing mental
predicates to others. For example, there will be an asymmetry in my language
between the proposition that says, “I am in pain” — or better, “There is pain” —
and the proposition that you are in pain. This is the asymmetry that is
emphasised in Wittgenstein’s later work. The point is that my language has a

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23 See, for example, *The Blue and Brown Books*, pp. 66 - 69.
certain 'perspectival' relation to the world. It is not clear, however, to what extent this perspectival nature implies privacy of language. The strongest kind that could possibly be attributed to Wittgenstein would be if all the objects of the world were private to a particular subject, as the sense data of acquaintance are private in Russell's version of logical atomism\(^24\). Indeed, a comparison with Russell's logical atomism would seem to provide the most persuasive evidence that what is at issue in this passage is precisely the question of privacy. Russell's objects are those that are named with the word 'that'. That can be, as it were, pointed to inwardly, and Russell admits that this inward acquaintance is private. While the Objects of the \textit{Tractatus} are not introduced in the same fashion, but are rather required on transcendental grounds, Wittgenstein did seem to believe that it was possible to examine them as private objects: he thought that that we learn how to form propositions from names by examining the Objects they corresponded to\(^25\).

While the view in question does not strictly imply privacy, one would suspect the early Wittgenstein of holding that this examination goes on in private from the extent of his attack on private definition in his later work, which to a great extent is a critique of his earlier views.

Be this as it may, the privacy reading of §5.6ff is flawed in a crucial respect: that the kind of privacy in question does not lead straightforwardly to solipsism. To get there requires the addition of a kind of scepticism that one would rather


associate with empirical (rather than transcendental) solipsism or idealism. Having distinguished my language from everyone else, I must then use an epistemological scepticism of the kind used by Descartes and Hume: I deny the existence of other subjects on the basis that I have no evidence of them. Not only does this seem to be far removed from Wittgenstein's thoughts in §5.6, it is not even consistent to use the notion of privacy here either. For while I have distinguished my experience on the basis of privacy, that concept is undermined by the scepticism that follows from it. There can be no privacy where there are no other subjects to 'not get a look in', so to speak.

Perhaps it is more in line with the spirit of §5.6 if we disambiguate the description in the other way, by binding the 'allein' ('alone') to the language. As the later version of the Ogden translation puts it, it is "the language I understand". That is, the only language I understand is my language, and I have no way to climb outside it, and view the world from some point external to my thoughts. My language is the only language I have, and it represents the only world I can think about: my world.

Now, this could be seen as another way of endorsing a perspectival view of language. One might say that this is required to emphasise the uniqueness of my

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26 Neither Descartes nor Hume derives solipsism from this scepticism. Descartes considers that he has overcome his scepticism with rational argument, and has thus broken out, if only in thought, of the confines of his consciousness. Hume goes on to deny that his experience is owned by anything at all, since nothing in his experience corresponds to an owner. This phenomenalism is different, if related to, empirical solipsism.

27 Though the suggested change was not discussed in the written correspondence between Wittgenstein and Ogden, it appears to be in Wittgenstein's own handwriting on a script of the English translation. Russell translates the phrase as "the only language I understand" in his introduction, p. 18.
language, and thus justify the introduction of the first person. Furthermore, one might want to express this in terms of the privacy of my language, thus blurring the distinction we made between the two interpretations of 5.62. But such an interpretation must be treated with caution: the solipsism of §5.6 does not individuate my language from many. It does not pick out my world from the worlds of other subjects. My language is the only language I have, and it holds me captive inside my world.

The most important distinction between the private language interpretation and the kind of interpretation that I would like to advocate is that former uses the notion of privacy as an antecedent in the argument to solipsism. This leaves it mysterious why Wittgenstein would want to argue for such an esoteric position, and indeed why he introduces the subject at all. On the other hand it is clear that, since Wittgenstein does introduce a metaphysical subject, the question of subjectivity is at issue. Perhaps the issue of privacy should be seen, not as explanans, but as explanandum.

After all, Wittgenstein's idealism has a certain problem. There does seem to be something inherently private about my experience. It is not so much that my language is inherently private, as that my language is inherently public. If the limits of language are the limits of the world, then what of the facts that seem to fall outside of language? What about the facts that I cannot describe, namely the way thing seem to me? As David Bell has put it, the whole of subjectivity seems to fall
outside of the machinery of objectivity\textsuperscript{28}. But of course Wittgenstein has an obvious answer to this problem. Subjectivity is part of that which shows itself. That which shows itself but cannot be said constitute the subjective conditions of language and the world.

Logical form is made manifest in the fact that there is a world at all. That there is a world at all is connected with the fact that I live. Wittgenstein expressed this at one point in the \textit{Notebooks} by noting that the subject is not a part of the world but a presupposition of its existence (NB 2.8.16)\textsuperscript{29}. He expresses it in the \textit{Tractatus} by saying, "The world and life are one" (5.621), "I am my world" (5.63) and by saying that the subject is not a part of the world, but a limit of it (5.632). And if the subject is a necessary condition of the world, it cannot be a contingent part of that world. (And if it was, we would not have transcendental solipsism, but empirical solipsism - things would depend on my perceiving them). This, I take it, is the main point of the metaphor of the eye in 5.633, and at least partly explains the remarks of 5.634:

5.634 This is connected with the fact that no part of our experience is at the same time \textit{a priori}.

Whatever we see could be other than it is.

Whatever we can describe at all could be other than it is.

There is no \textit{a priori} order of things.


\textsuperscript{29} Here it seems that Wittgenstein was influenced more by Schopenhauer than by Kant. Schopenhauer put more of an emphasis on the subject. It is worth comparing 5.63 with Schopenhauer's talk of "the thread of consciousness" in the first chapter of \textit{The World as Will and Representation II}. Schopenhauer's influence on Wittgenstein's thought is evident throughout the \textit{Notebooks}. (See, for example, 2.8.16).
Wittgenstein held the general principle that if something is known *a priori*, it cannot also be part of the world. *A priori* propositions are not meaningful in that they say nothing about the world. The only propositions with sense are empirical\(^{30}\). Nevertheless, thinking of the subject as that which is presupposed by the possibility of representation and the world is a kind of transcendental solipsism: A transcendental idealism considered for my world and my language. This form of expression fits with Wittgenstein’s own report of the development of his ideas:

> This is the way I have travelled: Idealism singles men out from the world as unique, solipsism single me alone out, and at last I see that I too belong with the rest of the world, and so on the one side nothing is left over, and on the other side, as unique, the world. In this way idealism leads to realism if it is strictly thought out. (NB15.10.16)

Transcendental Idealism leads to solipsism, but not a solipsism that can be expressed, but one that shows itself. The transcendental cannot be said, and yet the world consists only of what can be said. (The world is the totality of facts, and facts can be described). So we are left only with the empirical facts, and hence a kind of empirical realism.

Now, this interpretation still leaves us with a problem, for it is still unclear in what sense the subject can be considered as a ‘limit’ of the world. In 5.6 — 5.62, when Wittgenstein refers to the limits of language and logic also being the limits of the world, he must surely be referring to the limits he discusses elsewhere in the *Tractatus*: limits that are ‘logical’ limits in quite a narrow sense. Contradictions,
propositions with sense, and tautologies correspond to the notions of impossibility, possibility and (analytic) necessity. The limit of the world is given by what is possible, and that, according to Wittgenstein, coincides with what can be pictured. Since contradictions and tautologies picture nothing (any pictures—propositions—contained within them 'cancel out'), they say nothing about the world. But they show the logical form of the world by showing something about what is essential to picturing it.

By 5.632, however, Wittgenstein refers to the subject as 'a limit of the world'. Again in 5.641 Wittgenstein talks of 'the metaphysical subject—the limit, not a part of the world.' I have claimed that this is because the subject must be presupposed by the possibility of the world. But how does this idea fit with Wittgenstein's conception of logic? Moreover, some of the statements of §5.6ff do not seem, at first sight, to be consistent. How can the subject (me) be a limit of the world, while at the same time 'I am my world' and 'The world is my world' (from which we can derive 'I am the world')?

The first point to note is that the word 'limits' ['Grenzen'] can be given a more general meaning that the strict logical limits of tautology and contradiction. The limits of the world include the logical form of the objects, for example. In general, the limits of the world are the limits of language: that which can be shown but not said. For this showing takes the form of deriving the conceptually necessary conditions of language (and the world that can be described by means of this language). Being necessary conditions of that world, they are neither a part
of it, nor independent of it. They manifest its limits. Thus, all the transcendental concepts in the *Tractatus*, including 'objects', 'logic', and even 'language' and 'the world' are limits of language and the world. The world in its entirety is not something that can (strictly speaking) be referred to, but lies at the limit of what can be said.31

The second point is that when Wittgenstein relates solipsism to his discussion of the limits of language he is working together two separate lines of thought from his notebooks. In fact, the *Notebooks* contain a huge variety of ideas, which Wittgenstein tries to draw together, linking each one back to his ideas on logic. This is as one would expect from the ambitious nature of the project. Wittgenstein was trying to settle *all* of the questions of philosophy once and for all. The sources of the various ideas he looks at are diverse, but he constantly tried to unify them in a single scheme of ideas, so that they can all be ultimately settled in a similar fashion. For example, the ideas on solipsism can be found in the coded sections of his notebooks — that is to say his more private diary — long before they appear in his philosophical notes. So at least one motivation for taking solipsism seriously seems to have been the loneliness and isolation he felt while serving on the eastern front. At one point in his coded diary he remarks on

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31 The concepts of 'what can be shown' and 'what is transcendently presupposed' and the notion of a 'limit' are all roughly equivalent for Wittgenstein. Thus the concepts of 'the world' and 'the limit of the world' do indeed coincide. This may be vague, but it is at least not a manifest contradiction. One must remember that Wittgenstein is at his most mystical in §5.6ff. More than anywhere else in the *Tractatus*, one gets the impression that here Wittgenstein is making the deliberate attempt to say what cannot be said.
these solipsistic ideas that, 'Oddly enough,' he could not make the connection
with his 'mathematical modes of thought.'\(^{32}\)

But in the next few weeks we find that connection being forged in the
philosophical notes in the ideas that eventually formed §5.6. Wittgenstein, I
believe, linked his ideas in the following way: language and the world make
manifest a picture of their own form. This form implies a kind of solipsism, and
this explains the philosophical tendency to solipsism: the fact that solipsism is also
made manifest in our ordinary experience. The fact that everything seems to be,
at one and the same time, both part of my subjectivity, and part of the world.

The connection between these ideas can best be made by stressing the sense in
which the solipsism of the *Tractatus* also concerns subjectivity. When
Wittgenstein says that what solipsism means is quite correct, only it cannot be
said, but makes itself manifest, he is inviting us to reflect on the world in a certain
way. Transcendental reflection here becomes at once both the reflection of the
necessary structure that the world and language must share, and reflection on the
world *as experience*: 'The microcosm'. And when we reflect on the world in this
way, what we want to say is this: that the world is *my* world. It is not that it is my
world as opposed to yours. That is not the point. The point is that I am struck
by a certain limitation on the world: that everything in it is in some sense mine.
When I reflect on the world as experience, I only have my experience to reflect
on. But of course, this way of expressing the matter will not do. On

Wittgenstein's theory of meaning, this kind of reflection cannot be expressed at all. It is part of what makes itself manifest. And that this particular way of trying to express it will not do is shown by the fact that, once I have started to reflect on the world in this way, there can be no me in this experience to own it.

The expression 'I am my world' will not capture this form of reflection either. The 'I' of this expression refers to nothing in the world. Again, on Wittgenstein’s theory of meaning, this makes the expression meaningless. Furthermore, we cannot refer to 'the world' either. Nevertheless, in following this meaningless line of thought we come up against 'something' that shows itself but cannot be said. We are confronted by it. And that we are confronted with it explains why a certain philosophical line of thought is tempting.

Now the more analytically minded readers will find some of this reasoning unsatisfactory. Compared to the tight logical reasoning of much of the _Tractatus_, the comments in §5.6 have struck many readers as incomprehensible, or unnecessarily mystical. And I must admit that, even if the interpretation given here is correct, it leaves a great deal mysterious. For example, for all the flesh I have tried to put around the idea that the limits of the world are the limits of my language, it remains mysterious why Wittgenstein felt entitled to introduce a metaphysical subject at all here. Ultimately one is tempted to resign oneself to the idea that Wittgenstein simply made a mistake. Given that the metaphysical

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33 This was Russell's reaction – see his introduction, which was published with the English version of the _Tractatus_, where he refers to Wittgenstein's 'curious discussion of Solipsism' (p. 18).

34 This point was repeatedly emphasised to me by Malcolm Budd.
subject and solipsism seem to be the target of a great deal of Wittgenstein's later critique of his early work, it is clear that he came to think this himself. (But by the same token, it shows that he continued to think that the temptation to think that way was important). We will return to this matter in Part 3 of this thesis, when we discuss quietism with respect to subjectivity. For now we will get by with a brief discussion of that element of the *Tractatus* that I think provides the greatest clue to understanding these matters, and indeed his approach to metaphysics throughout his work. This is the fact that Wittgenstein eventually concedes: that one can, strictly speaking, say *nothing* on these matters.

### 2.6 The Quietism of the *Tractatus*

We have seen that the transcendental idealism of the *Tractatus* combines both a conceptual idealism and a conceptual realism in its metaphysics. It presents a conceptual idealism in that the world is limited by the conditions of representation. The world is all that is the case, and the possible facts correspond to that which can be pictured. But in order to discuss the transcendental conditions of representation and the world, Wittgenstein had to discuss those conditions themselves, such as the necessary existence of objects, which could not be themselves subject to those conditions. In order to combine this realism with idealism, Wittgenstein made a distinction between that which can be said and that which makes itself manifest. For the most part the subject matter of Wittgenstein's metaphysical statements is the latter, that which can only be shown. So these propositions themselves are nonsensical, since the subject
matter of any meaningful proposition can only be that which can be said. Their value, according to Wittgenstein, lies in their elucidatory power:

6.54 My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognises them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.

Seeing the world aright, the reader is supposed to be cured of the temptation to utter nonsense. The final position we are left with is neither idealist nor realist, since neither of these positions can be meaningfully stated. The final metaphilosophical outcome is quietism: “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent.”

We are still left, of course, with a feeling of discomfort: a feeling that a trick has been pulled. There is a contradiction, of which, I think, Wittgenstein was perfectly aware. To say that we have come up against something that cannot be said is to contradict oneself. *Something that cannot be said?* But have I just not said it, by referring to it as a ‘something’? And there is no way to re-express the matter so that the ‘something’ drops out, and the contradiction with it35.

Sometimes this contradiction appears to be a tautology: ‘We cannot think what we cannot think’ (5.61). But the contradiction always remains, even in the final proposition of the *Tractatus*, when Wittgenstein uses the phrase ‘Whereof we cannot speak’. So right to the end, even after Wittgenstein has ‘pulled up the

35 The final ‘proposition’ from the Ogden translation.
36 At least, not on Wittgenstein’s theory of meaning.
ladder,' he leaves us with a contradiction. But I think it is a contradiction that bears reflection. For that very contradiction makes manifest the limits of what can be said.
Chapter 3

CONCEPTUAL IDEALISM

Twentieth Century Idealism and the Possibility of Metaphysics

We are now in a position to describe and discuss the doctrine of ‘conceptual idealism’. In so doing I want to characterise a certain prevalent approach to philosophy as being roughly Kantian, or at any rate post-Kantian, in interesting respects. Not that every aspect of transcendental idealism has an echo in conceptual idealism, or vice versa. It is rather that the latter can be seen as an heir to Kant's philosophy. More precisely, conceptual idealism is an heir to the question ‘How is metaphysics possible?’ and to the ‘Copernican revolution’ that formed the basis of Kant’s answer.

The assumption that Kant questions at the beginning of his critical philosophy is ‘that our knowledge must conform to the objects’. Since nothing, Kant claimed, had been achieved on this assumption, it is worthwhile pursuing the path that starts with its converse: that objects must conform to our knowledge. Given the linguistic-analytic turn of the twentieth century, this starting point becomes: ‘things must conform to our concepts’. This is the central tenant of conceptual idealism.

1 BXV.
We are in immediate danger of several misunderstandings. Most importantly, the conceptual idealist shares Kant’s aversion to any form of empirical idealism, such as Berkeley’s immaterialism. Indeed, so averse are most conceptual idealists to any philosophy that implies that things are dependent on actually being perceived or thought about, that they eschew the label of ‘idealism’ completely. While this hides the debt that their philosophies owe to Kant, the move is understandable. Witness the difficulty that Kant himself had distinguishing his idealism from that of Berkeley’s. And since the demise of both German and British ‘Absolute Idealism’, the label has fallen on even harder times. Nevertheless, we will call those philosophies ‘idealist’ just in case the ‘fundamental idea of idealism’ (which we formulated in chapter one) can be discerned in them. A doctrine will be called idealist just in case it presupposes that reality is somehow constrained by (or corresponds with) our ability to conceive it. A doctrine will be awarded the title of ‘conceptual idealism’ just in case it maintains that reality is somehow constrained by our publicly shared concepts. Different forms of this idealism can be differentiated by the sense they purport to give to the terms ‘reality’ and ‘concept’.

A second point to note about conceptual idealism is that it is not committed to the claim that objects are necessarily perceivable as Kant’s idealism of time and space implies. The claim is that things are necessarily conceivable, or better still, describable. The latter way of putting the matter has the advantage of making it clear that what is at stake here is not the ability of some individual at some point

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3 See chapter 1.
in time to be able to conceive of a thing (a claim of a kind with empirical idealism). The claim is that things must necessarily fall under some possible concept. How the phrase ‘possible concept’ is cashed out will determine how credible a particular version of conceptual idealism is.

3.1 Conceptualism

We can illustrate these issues by discussing a version of conceptual idealism that has been presented in an admirably clear and explicit form: the ‘Conceptualism’ of Michael Morris. This is the conjunction of two (related) claims:

(A) There can be interesting metaphysical explanations.

(B) The nature of the objects, properties, and facts to which our concepts correspond is not fixed independently of the nature of the concepts which correspond to them.

What does the phrase ‘not fixed independently of’ mean here? Morris rephrases (B) as ‘there would not have been those objects, properties, and facts, if they had not corresponded to those concepts’. And he expands this a little further with ‘It follows that the nature of the world we think about is at least partly determined by the thoughts we have about it.’ Someone who denies (B) is labelled ‘Platonist’ by Morris, a term he borrows from discussions of Wittgenstein’s views on meaning (that is, Platonism, in Fregean guise, is one of the views of meaning that

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3 See his *The Good and the True*, Oxford University Press, 1992. See especially chapters 1 and 2. Morris borrows the term ‘conceptualism’ from Wiggins, and though he stresses its Kantian nature, he avoids the term ‘idealism’.

4 *Ibid* pp. 15 – 16.
Wittgenstein attacks in *Philosophical Investigations*. The third major position is the No-theory view, which denies (A) for non-Platonic reasons. Since the conceptualist proposes (B) partly because she does not see how metaphysics is possible given the assumptions of Platonism, claim (A) is an important part of conceptualism. Above all else, conceptualism is a starting point for metaphysical theorising.

A couple of points about the dependence relation specified in (B) are worth stressing. Firstly, the connection between a concept and a fact is not to be seen as a completely determining relation from the former to the latter. (B) allows for an externalism that goes the other way. The natural kind that I refer to when I say 'water', may partly determine what the word 'water' means in my mouth. Secondly, there must be a gap between concept and object, on Morris' account, in order to allow for interesting metaphysical explanations. He goes on to specify a condition for factual equivalence for expressions in order to constrain metaphysical reductions. If there was no 'space' between fact and concept (if two concepts could not count as concepts of the same fact), the only condition for factual equivalence could be conceptual equivalence. But this would not allow for interesting reductions. Morris therefore wants to allow for different concepts to count as concepts of the same thing.

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5 See chapter 4. The term 'Platonism' is not meant to imply all of the doctrines that were advanced by Plato. It is important, however, that in order to maintain the distinction between conceptualism and Platonism, the timeless existence of concepts is not conflated with Platonic forms. The latter, and not the former, are mind independent. Morris is committed to the existence of abstract objects (i.e. atemporal concepts), though he reduces them to what is involved in having a belief involving them.
In order to avoid the charge of empirical idealism, Morris makes it clear that what he is talking about is not a connection between some psychological particular (a 'concept' or 'thought' that exists in some mind) and the nature of things. The world existed, and contained many of the things with which we are familiar (rocks, trees, etc.), long before anyone was around to think about it. Conceptualism avoids denying this truism by insisting on an atemporal notion of concepts. A particular concept, for Morris, is that which is common to anyone who possesses that concept. Someone possesses a concept just in case they can have a propositional attitude that involves that concept in its contents. The timeless existence of concepts is then explained as 'a matter of there being something which it would be to possess that concept'. One important consequence of this notion of timeless concepts is that the sense in which (B) suggests that our concepts 'determine' reality cannot be an 'empirical sense'. It should not be taken that (B) suggests that we 'construct' the world with our concepts, or that our concepts 'carve up' the world. But this way of putting the matter is not very informative. If 'determines' can be given a non-empirical sense, then why not 'constructs' and 'carves up'? And it leaves open the question of what non-empirical sense we can give to 'determine'.

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7 Morris, op. cit. p. 18: "the existence of a concept is a matter of there being some condition which would have to be met by anyone for her to count as having a belief involving that concept. And that there is such a condition in the case of any given concept is timelessly true." It seems to me that this unnecessarily commits Morris to the thesis that there exist necessary conditions for possessing a concept. Whether or not this is a contentious claim depends on what one takes as counting as a 'condition'. The conditions of meaning will be considered in detail in chapter 4.

8 Ibid. p. 19.
One apparent answer to this question that Morris has to offer is a reformulation of (B) as the statement that there would not have been those objects, properties and facts if there had not been those concepts. Given the notion of concepts as timeless, however, Morris also concedes that conceptualism (and its denial, Platonism) is thereby committed to the view that there can be subjunctive conditionals with impossible antecedents that are nonetheless non-vacuously true. But this is controversial, to say the least.

Is it meaningful to claim, for instance, that 'if 2+2 was not equal to 4, then not \( p \)', for any filling in of \( p \)? A good reason to think that this is not meaningful is that \( p \), it seems, is not going to affect the overall truth-value of the 'statement'. It maybe that there is an analysis of subjunctive conditionals that admits of interesting cases of impossible antecedents, though Morris gives none⁹. In any case this way of expressing conceptualism remains obscure, to say the least¹⁰. Is there not an alternative way of spelling out the difference between it and Platonism? One other formulation given by Morris is worth considering, since it illustrates more clearly what I mean by 'conceptual idealism':

[If the world is capable of being thought about at all, it must be essential to the world that it is such as to be thought about... it is essential to the world that the world can be made sense of.¹¹]

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⁹ Though he does present some reasons why he thinks subjunctive conditional with impossible antecedents are not vacuous. In brief: in some cases, we entertain subjunctive conditions with impossible antecedents in order to convince ourselves that the antecedent is indeed impossible. The demonstrative power of such conditionals depends on the meaning of \( p \), not just its truth-value. *Ibid.* pp. 62-67.

¹⁰ One point that it obscures is that Platonism, at least as it is traditionally understood, holds that there are certain abstract forms that do have the dependence relation with objects, properties and facts that Morris is struggling to spell out. In contrast to concepts, however, these forms may be unknowable.

¹¹ Morris, *op. cit.* pp. 16 - 17.
Morris points out that this way of putting the matter suggests a link with (A) (the claim that there can be interesting metaphysical explanations) which he goes on to exploit. His understanding of (A) demands an operable condition of adequacy for metaphysical explanations. This operable condition is given in epistemological terms: different concepts of the same object, property or fact are distinguished by different ways of knowing about that object (different ‘modes of presentation’). All this is in line with the roughly Kantian nature of conceptualism that Morris emphasises\(^{12}\). However, I wish to pursue a different line of argument from (B) to (A) that replaces epistemological concerns with issues in the philosophy of language. This ‘linguistic turn’ is in line with the development of conceptual idealism in the context of twentieth century analytic philosophy, and it also brings us into line with the discussion of idealism in chapter 1. The idea that ‘it is essential to the world that the world can be made sense of’ can be then put like this: ‘it is essential to the world that it can be described’, where describing something means to bring it under a public concept. That is to say that the determining relation in (B) (‘not fixed independently of’) is to be taken in such a way such that the world (that we can think about at all) is limited by our possible concepts. All objects, properties and facts necessarily fall under some possible concept, since to be an object, property or fact just is to fall under the relevant concept.

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\(^{12}\) Although Morris is keen to distance himself from some aspects of Transcendental Idealism that he associates with empirical idealism, for example that ‘the order and regularity in the appearances, which we entitle nature, we ourselves introduce.’ (Critique of Pure Reason, A125). He also rejects the idea that we cannot have knowledge of things as they are in themselves. (Op. cit. p. 68.)
3.2 A Topology of Metaphysics

I would like to adapt the characterisation of approaches to metaphysics provided by Morris to my own ends. Instead of the term 'conceptualism' I will make use of the label 'conceptual idealism' as the denial of the approach called 'conceptual realism'. Any approach that denies the possibility of metaphysical explanations or philosophical theories in one or more areas of philosophical reflection will be regarded as 'quietist' with respect to that area. I make this change in terminology in order to avoid any unnecessary commitments to the details of Morris's own philosophy, and also to avoid falsely attributing commitments to him. The positions are supposed to be quite general, since my aim is to reflect on the nature of philosophical theorising as generally as possible. I call this a 'topology' of metaphysics since I intend to map out some fixed points to which particular theories can be seen as relative to, rather than strictly subordinated to. Any metaphysical system can be located on the map by examining how it attempts to deal with the problems of metaphysical theorising that one can identify at this general level.

A conceptual idealist approach to philosophical explanation maintains that

(i) there can be interesting metaphysical explanations;

(ii) there is a necessary correspondence between the concepts we use and the natures of the objects, properties and facts picked out by them; such that,

(iii) insofar as a thing can be thought about at all, it necessarily falls under some possible concept.
By ‘interesting’ in (i) I mean non-trivial and justifiable. That is to say, metaphysical explanations generate knowledge. A metaphysical explanation is one that explains the way things seem (or happen to be conceptualised) on the basis of the way things really are. While the conceptual idealist will help herself to such a distinction, she disregards the idea of a thing-in-itself that cannot be thought about or predicated in judgement. Conceptual realism denies (ii) and consequently (iii). While the conceptual realist maintains (i), he holds that the true nature of reality is described truly by mind independent concepts, such as platonic forms. It is therefore a contingent matter whether or not that description can be understood, or even recognised by us. Quietism denies (i) with respect to a particular area of philosophical discourse. Note that this might simply be a claim about the nature of the discourse, denying the possibility of philosophical explanation in terms of the nature of reality it purports to describe. It is not self-evidently refuting (in the way the verification principle is). This topic will be taken up again in chapter 6. The possibility of quietism with respect to subjectivity will be examined in part 3 of this thesis.

There is a certain conception of reality that does not fit neatly into the topology. According to Kant, the noumenal world, things-in-themselves, are necessarily beyond the reach of the understanding, and therefore knowledge. The conceptual realist wants to maintain a contingent relationship between the understanding and things-in-themselves, the conceptual idealist a necessary one, whereas the Kantian position apparently denies any possible connection. One reason for not immediately granting this position a separate location on the
topological map is that it is apt to strike one as nonsense. It is at least arguable that the idea of something of which we can necessarily have no knowledge whatsoever is not, as Kant claimed, intelligible. A second reason for denying it independent status is that, depending on further assumptions, the position collapses into one of the others. Such a position holds that the notion of ‘being’ is independent of our concepts in general, though the latter presumably presupposes the former. If, when pressed, the proponent of such a view wants to admit that, say, the progress of science or philosophy provides us with a glimpse of ‘an actual, mind independent reality’, then he is really being a conceptual realist. If, on the other hand, he maintains that nothing can be known of the thing-in-itself, but that we can nevertheless produce metaphysical explanations within our understanding of the phenomenal world, then the thing-in-itself plays no apparent role whatsoever, and he has turned to conceptual idealism. Finally, if he admits that metaphysical explanation must refer to the thing-in-itself, while maintaining that such a thing must remain mysterious to us, he has offered a general argument for quietism. But I do not wish to argue conclusively for the instability of a Kantian position here. Whether or not it collapses into one of the other three positions under pressure of argument, transcendental idealism at least begins by staking a claim for the middle ground. I use the term transcendental idealism to mean any doctrine that maintains that the world that is knowable or representable at all is necessarily knowable or representable, and that anything else is necessarily beyond the reach of knowledge or representation. While Kant first advanced such a position in part to constrain free wheeling metaphysics, he also did so to
defend the idea that certain philosophical justifications are possible. In so far as these justifications involve metaphysical commitments, this position is distinct from quietism.\textsuperscript{13}

Conceptual realism denies (ii). This allows for considerable scepticism about our knowledge of Reality. If the connection our knowledge and conceptual scheme have with the true order of things is merely a contingent one, then there is always room for doubt as to the absolute validity of our metaphysical conclusions. If there is more than one conceptual scheme, and some of those conceptual schemes are inaccessible to us lowly humans, it remains a distinct possibility that we will never gain knowledge of the real, mind independent world. One attempt to contain this scepticism is to claim that the mind independent concepts that are manifest in the things we take ourselves to be talking about are involved in bestowing meaning on our words, albeit in a contingent manner. Such a conceptual realist theory of meaning holds that the meaning of our terms is given by the things they refer to. This idea introduces a further complication to our topology. The conceptual realist may make some concessions to conceptual idealism in order to give his thesis some justification. He may allow that certain general considerations (for example, about the nature of representation) will constrain both the shape of our propositions and the nature of those objects and facts he takes to be the referents of those propositions. The existence of internal, necessary relations between the form of propositions and facts is suggested to

\textsuperscript{13} A position that has much in common with transcendental idealism is discussed briefly in longer footnote 0.1 in the appendix.
answer certain sceptical worries about how our thoughts can really be about a mind independent world. This produces the hybrid between conceptual realism and conceptual idealism that denies (ii) but accepts some correlate of (iii). On the one hand, such a theory of meaning will involve abstract objects that are beyond our conceptual reach, in the sense that they cannot be subordinated to our concepts (they cannot be described, other than perhaps by ostensive definition). The objects are presupposed by any description. On the other hand, the nature of those objects, which necessarily coincides with representational form, limits the nature of the world. Such a hybrid would be a form of the transcendental idealism discussed above, and the most notable example is the theory of meaning in the *Tractatus*. That this particular attempt fails is evidenced by Wittgenstein's later rejection of it, as will be discussed in chapter 4. But what is most significant about the metaphysics of the *Tractatus* is that it collapses into quietism.

There is one final point about the formulation of conceptual idealism given above that I would like to note. So put, (iii) is a fairly minimal way of disambiguating the dependence relation in (ii). It suggests only that there could be no object, property or fact that has no conceptual form. This is what rules out the given for the conceptual idealist: it doesn’t have the richness of structure that (iii) requires. But the conceptual idealist may have something stronger in mind. (ii) is an instance of the ‘formal dependence’ relation I defined in chapter 1\(^{14}\). If one also rejects the idea that the task of philosophy is to find some remotely reductive level

\[^{14}\text{There is a formal dependence between any object (property / fact) of kind } A \text{ and the concept } C \text{ that picks it out as an object of kind } A. \text{ The concept } C \text{ tells us something about the nature of the kind } A.\]

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of analysis (such as the level of quantum mechanics or sense data), then (ii) can also be taken to imply that the essences of objects, properties and facts that we normally talk about are formally dependent on our ordinary concepts. Such a conceptual idealism holds that radical scepticism is misguided (and the idea that most of our ordinary terms fail to refer does seem intolerable, since it thereby makes language vacuous). It can therefore use ordinary language as a source of metaphysics.

3.3 A Conceptual Idealist Argument for the Possibility of Metaphysics

Conceptual realism allows for considerable scepticism about metaphysical theorising. For if it is merely contingent whether our concepts correspond to the true nature of reality, it remains mysterious how we could come to any firm conclusions about that true nature. Experience, at least on the empiricist conception, remains hopelessly ambiguous as a basis for our metaphysical judgements. (Humean scepticism, like all forms of empiricism, is a kind of conceptual realism. Empiricism allows that experience can get between the world and our conception of it). Such considerations may motivate the advocate of (i) to accept (ii), and consequently (iii), in the search for some justification of (i). One argument from (ii) to (i) goes like this. The first step is to argue that the concepts that we use to describe the world are, by and large, the ‘correct ones’. That is, there is no interesting conceptual relativism with regard to truth. This view goes naturally with conceptual idealism because it rejects a world that is independent of our concepts. The second step is to argue that the ‘large features’ of language, which embody our concepts, reveal the large features of reality. The
task of metaphysics is thus to decide what those large feature of language are (and of course there is room for disagreement here). Both these steps can be found in the work of Donald Davidson.

3.3.1 Step 1: The Rejection of Conceptual Relativism

In the discussion of idealism in chapter 1 we identified the fundamental idea of idealism as the claim that "what there is must be possibly conceivable or describable by us". This claim can be given support with an argument to the effect that the notion of what cannot be thought about or described by us, or those like us, makes no sense. The kind of argument in question claims that if we try to make sense of the notion of what we could never conceive, we must use some general notion of something being true (or being the case, or existing etc.), where we could not in principle apply any further concept. The conceptual idealist objects that to conceive of something in such vague terms is not to conceive of it adequately at all. Hence, where we thought we could conceive of a notion that we could not understand, we discover we understand nothing by this empty conception.

Davidson, in rejecting 'the very idea of a conceptual scheme', presents an argument to this effect. He asserts that we do not possess a general notion of truth that goes beyond the truth of all possible sentences in any language that we

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15 See Nagel's critical discussion of Davidson's views in *The View From Nowhere* (pp. 93 – 99), from where this characterisation of Davidson's argument in 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme' is derived. The view that Nagel advocates is what I am calling conceptual realism.
could understand, or that could be translated into a language that we could understand.

The criterion of a conceptual scheme different from our own now becomes: largely true but not translatable. The question whether this is a useful criterion is just the question how well we understand the notion of truth, as applied to language, independent of the notion of translation. The answer is, I think, that we do not understand it independently at all.16

Now Davidson’s concern here is to reject conceptual relativism: the idea that we can make sense of there being a conceptual schemes that is not our own, to which truth would be relativised. His claim is not that our conceptual scheme is the only true conceptual scheme, for, as he put it, ‘even monotheists have a religion’. If it does not make sense to talk of different conceptual schemes, it does not make sense of all conceptual schemes being one. Rather, Davidson would reject the very idea of a conceptual scheme at all: he argues against the idea of a conceptual scheme that is somehow separate and independent of the empirical content (‘experience’, ‘the given’) to which it is then applied:

[Conceptual schemes (languages) either organize something, or they fit it… As for the entities that get organized, or which the scheme must fit, I think again we detect two main ideas: either it is reality (the universe, the world, nature), or it is experience (the passing show, surface irritations, sensory promptings, sense-data, the given).17

Davidson describes the dualism of scheme and content as the third and final dogma of empiricism, and in rejecting it he sees himself as severing his ties with that tradition. But this dualism is also to be found in Kant (‘the given’), so

Davidson is also a long way from Transcendental Idealism. Indeed, we can see some important differences. From his denial that we can make sense of the concept of truth independently of the concept of translation, it seems that Davidson is committed to reject not only the given, but also the (Kantian) idea of the thing-in-itself. To speak of reality free of our conceptual scheme, however generally, would be a misuse of language that returns to the dualism of scheme and content.

As already discussed, both the rejection of both the given and the noumenal world is an essential part of conceptual idealism. In the case of the latter, the rejection is explicit and straightforward. Conceptual idealism is committed to the idea that things are not independent of our concepts of them, and the Kantian idea of a thing-in-itself is just the notion of things considered independently of our concepts. The rejection of the given also follows from the rejection of things independent of our concepts, for the given is supposed to be that which enters our experience yet cannot be described. Davidson, in rejecting the given — that to which our conceptual scheme is supposed to be applied\(^\text{18}\) — is stating his conceptual idealist credentials.

3.3.2 Step 2: The Connection Between Language and Reality

The second step in the argument from (iii) to (i) is to spell out the connection between language and reality to establish conceptual investigation as a method of

\(^{18}\) In 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme'.
metaphysics. Davidson's contribution to this debate is set forth in 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics'. The central idea is a simple one:

In sharing a language, in whatever sense required for communication, we share a picture of the world that must, in its large features, be true. It follows that in making manifest the large features of our language, we make manifest the large features of reality. One way of pursuing metaphysics is therefore to study the general structure of our language.¹⁹

He then goes on to argue for the importance of such a method, before describing what he takes that method to be. Firstly, he has to erect the notion of a shared picture of reality to replace the 'very idea of a conceptual scheme' that he rejected earlier. The connection between the two notions can be easily discerned in his argument for a shared world-view. 'Those who understand one another's speech must share a view of the world' (correct or incorrect) because 'we damage the intelligibility of our readings of the utterances of others when our method of reading puts others into what we take to be broad error.' In other words, the common picture is required to interpret others utterances, and it is assumed that another person's utterances can be translated into words that we understand. The salient difference between a conceptual scheme and a world picture would seem to be the fact that the latter can be considered (largely) true or false, rather than something to which truth must be relativised. But Davidson goes on to argue that we can make little sense of our shared picture being largely false²⁰:

¹⁹ Donald Davidson, 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics', reprinted in Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation, OUP, p. 199.

²⁰ One worry here is that if we cannot talk of it being largely false, we cannot talk of it being largely true, either. But perhaps it does make sense to say that a world picture is 'largely true' in the following respect: it consists of a number of truths, rather than concepts. The latter cannot be considered true or false apart from their application in judgement. Davidson's point is that most of our beliefs must be true. If the concept of a world picture is problematic, it could probably be dispensed with.
Objective error can occur only in a setting of largely true belief. Agreement does not make for truth, but much of what is agreed must be true if some of what is agreed is false... too much actual error robs a person of things to go wrong about.  

There follows the rather curious argument of the omniscient interpreter:

[H]e attributes beliefs to others, and interprets their speech on the basis of his own beliefs, just as the rest of us do. Since he does this as the rest of us do, he perforce finds as much agreement as is needed to make sense of his attributions and interpretations; and in this case, of course, what is agreed is by hypothesis true. But now it is plain why massive error about the world is simply unintelligible, for to suppose it intelligible is to suppose there could be an interpreter (the omniscient one) who correctly interpreted someone else as being massively mistaken, and this we have shown to be impossible.  

I will not defend or dispute this argument here, though it is worth making a couple of comments on it. Firstly, the argument assumes that the omniscient interpreter can interpret the speaker. This is not adequately explained by merely pointing out that the interpreter is omniscient. By hypothesis, the interpreter does not use his 'all-seeing eye' to ascertain the beliefs of the speaker, for if he did that, there would be no need to interpret at all. The assumption is that the interpreter does not have a conceptual scheme that is incommensurable with the speakers. Thus this argument rests on the previous commitment (in step 1 above) that truth is not relative to a conceptual scheme. The second point worth making is that Davidson's view excludes the kind of radical scepticism that Descartes contemplated. It cannot be that our beliefs about the world diverge en mass from the objective order of things, for the notion of truth only has meaning for us

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21 Ibid. p. 200.
22 Ibid. p. 201.
against the background of the actual judgement that we make and in general agree
on. If we are radically wrong about the meaning of our words, nothing we say
can make sense, and hence Cartesian scepticism is not possible. This rejection of
an objective order somehow beyond all our ordinary judgements about the world
is, of course, just the rejection of conceptual realism that marks Davidson as a
conceptual idealist. Conceptual realism on the other hand, to the extent that it
allows for a notion of truth external to our conceptual scheme, allows that we
might be massively in error. Hence brains-in-a-vat scepticism is a real problem
for conceptual realists.23

3.4 An Irresolvable Dispute

Having made the case for the study of language as a method for metaphysics,
Davidson presents his own slant on conceptual investigation. His method
involves a theory of truth as a constraint on metaphysical theorising. Rather than
using metaphysical considerations to decide issues in the philosophy of language,
he suggests we do things the other way around: a 'comprehensive theory of truth',
he says, 'makes its own unavoidable demands.' This should not blind us to the
fact, however, that using such a method is based on some major metaphysical
assumptions.

The central features of his philosophy of meaning and truth are well known, and
for the most part they do not concern us. Conceptual idealism is not restricted to
the kind of theory of meaning that Davidson favours. But there is one feature of

23 A point made by Hilary Putnam in his arguments against 'external realism'. 'Two philosophical
this theory that is relevant to the discussion of conceptual idealism in general. Davidson argued in ‘The Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’ that we have no notion of truth that goes beyond the sentence of our language that we take to be true. The notion of truth, he claims, is dependent on the notion of translation into a familiar idiom, and this is dependent on a theory of meaning. The most important restriction on this theory of meaning for Davidson is that it must be learnable\(^\text{24}\). It must explain how an infinite number of sentences can be potentially understood by a finite mind. The notion of truth is therefore tied to what is potentially learnable by finite minds like ours. This makes his philosophy somewhat more obviously idealistic. What is real for Davidson is restricted to what is learnable (in terms of competence, not performance based criteria). This can strike one as counter-intuitive, to say the least.

The intuitions this conflicts with are good old-fashioned conceptual realist ones. They are the intuitions that have been defended by the likes of Nagel and Williams. Nagel argues that we can easily imagine that there are minds that are superior to ours in an analogous fashion to the way our mature adult minds are superior to the undeveloped minds of twelve year olds. The vast majority of twelve-year-olds would not be able to grasp the concept of relativity as it features in theoretical physics. We could imagine a species of beings whose mental capacities were restricted in a similar way, and who could therefore not grasp

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\(^{24}\) See, for instance, ‘Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages’, (1965), reprinted in Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation.
sentences and concepts that we take to be meaningful. If one of these beings (Realist Junior) were to postulate that there were concepts and truths beyond their comprehension, we would have to agree with him. And if one of these beings (Idealist Junior) were to disagree, arguing that they had no notion of truth beyond what they could comprehend, we would be inclined to object. There are truths that are (by hypothesis) not understandable by the race of mentally-nine-year-olds. So is it not comprehensible that we might be in the same position with regard to some superior alien minds? Might some alien race have concepts that were beyond our comprehension?

To be consistent with his anti-relativism, Davidson must allow that the sentence uttered by the junior idealist is translatable into a sentence in our idiom with the same truth-value. Since the sentence ‘there are no truths beyond their comprehension’ is clearly false in our idiom, Davidson cannot allow this as the correct translation while maintaining that the junior idealist is right. The possibility of claiming that the junior Platonist is right but conceptual idealism is correct in our idiom is merely chauvinistic given the possibility of the superior alien minds. The one plausible claim open to the conceptual idealist is that the meaning of the sentence ‘there are no truths beyond our comprehension’ is exactly the same whether spoken by a junior, a human or an intellectually superior alien. On this account, talk of ‘comprehension’ is somewhat misleading. Davidson is committed to claiming that all three groups have the same conceptual scheme (or rather, that there is no such thing as a conceptual scheme, but we shall put that point to one side as a mere terminological dispute). Admittedly, some of the
concepts of this ‘scheme’ are not fully grasped by all members of this three-tiered group of language speakers, but that is just to point out a limitation in the relative performance of their minds, not their potential capacity. Furthermore, given the possibility of trustworthy communication between the groups, a member of one of the lower two tiers has epistemological access to the truths discernible by their intellectual superiors. Just as I can know the difference between gold and fool’s gold by consulting an expert, so the race of nine-year-olds can consult a theoretical physicist on matters pertaining to relativity. What prevents them grasping these matters more directly is merely their limited attention span, lack of general intelligence and mental acuity, and so on.

Davidson is already committed to the claim that any sentence used by the aliens is translatable into English, and into the language of the Juniors for that matter. The translation maybe unbearably difficult to understand, but it must be possible. No doubt there are some theoretical concepts understood by a small elite of actual humans. These concepts will be forever out of the grasp of the masses, but they are nevertheless, in principle, understandable. The defence of the conceptual idealist might be that at most our failure to grasp the concepts of an imaginary alien race is comparable to the failure of some of us to master the subtleties of theoretical physics.

While this response does just enough to meet the realist objection formally, it hardly settles the matter. The conceptual realist is going to continue to insist that

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25 It follows that Davidson would have to claim that any language that does not have the expressive power of English cannot be considered a fully-fledged language.
the aliens could have concepts that we could not grasp in principle, and it is
difficult not to feel some sympathy with the intuitions behind this thought. On
Morris' account of concepts, a concept exists just in case there is something that
there is to have a propositional attitude involving that concept. Could there not
be something that there was to believe \( p \), even though human minds could not
instantiate those conditions? The matter seems irresolvable, since to prove his
case the conceptual realist must come up with an example of a concept that we
cannot understand, and this, by the very nature of the required example, he
cannot do. For what is there to show that there is a concept at all there, if not
that we understand it? Of course, the realist can complain that the idealist has not
spelt out what it means to say that all concepts are 'in principle' understandable by
us. But we can imagine possible answers. The Davidsonian response would
presumably be that the concept is expressible in our language, allowing that the
resulting sentence maybe so long as to render it practically ungraspable^{26}. In any
case the realist is no better off, for he cannot spell out what it would be for a
concept to be 'in principle' ungraspable. He can merely gesture in the direction of
other kinds of minds. We must concede at least this much to Davidson: the
concept of a conceptual scheme, applied at a very general level, is not entirely
clear.

In any case the response I have proffered for the conceptual idealist does not go
to the heart of his claim. His point is rather that what we take to be meaningful

^{26} We might note that Davidson's general restrictions on a theory of meaning (namely, learnability) apply with
no greater or lesser force to the language of the 9 year olds.
and concept-involving behaviour is bound up in our own use of concepts. The fact that we cannot make sense of some behaviour would amount to evidence that the behaviour was not intelligent.

But what about the following situation: we come across a strange group of creatures, who appear to be communicating with each other, though all our best efforts fail to throw any light on what they are communicating. The noises they make seem to bear no consistent relation to the things they do. If we gag them however, their behaviour is thrown into confusion (as our behaviour might be if we were prevented from communicating). That is to say, we have evidence that they are indeed communicating in a language that we could not understand. Merely pointing out that nothing “could count as evidence that some form of activity could not be interpreted into our language that was not at the same time evidence that that form of activity was not speech behaviour,” will not suffice, as Davidson admits. He concedes that to be convincing, this should be the result of an argument.

To the extent that Davidson does go on to present an argument, it involves rejecting the idea of a pre-conceptual ‘something’ that is independent of the conceptual scheme, the mysterious given or thing-in-itself. He claims that the various ways that have been proposed to make sense of the idea of interpreting or organising the world involve some notion of the world that is beyond comprehension. But this is just to restate the belief that there can be nothing beyond our conceptual scheme. (Or rather, that thinking of the world as
something interpreted or organised by our conceptual scheme is a mistake. The notion of a 'conceptual scheme' is not meaningful at this abstract level.) So finally we come up against the intuitions that mark the fundamental distinction between conceptual realism and conceptual idealism. It would seem that the debate is irresolvable without recourse to the very assumptions that are at issue.  

3.5 The Problem of Subjectivity

But there is a simple objection to conceptual idealism that cannot be so easily deflected as begging the point at issue. Put simply, it is this: there are some things with which we are acquainted, that necessarily evade any effort to fully conceptualise them; namely, sensations. The traditional Cartesian view is that sensations are inherently private in a philosophically significant sense. Since my sensations are only known to me, and are known only by 'acquaintance', they remain forever beyond the reach of public discourse. There is something 'ineffable' about them. No matter how sophisticated my descriptive (public) language, nothing I say seems to capture the true essence of 'the way things feel to me'. Of course, it comes as no surprise that conceptual idealism is incompatible with the Cartesian view of experience. Transcendental idealism involves, as we saw in chapter one, a rejection of this picture of the mind, and conceptual idealism reinforces that rejection. Cartesian philosophy is a form of conceptual realism, and it is the apparent insolubility of Cartesian and Humean scepticism that lends the first support to conceptual idealism. But the notion of sensations

27 One way to try to resolve the debate is to try and find some compromise between the two extremes of conceptual realism and conceptual idealism. See longer footnote 0.1 in the appendix for a brief discussion.
being private and ineffable is a very hard one to shake off. Surely it is true that I can only know how something feels by actually feeling it, and no mere concept can stand in place of that direct acquaintance. So is there not something very real that I could never conceptualise in a public manner? Does this not show conceptual idealism to be wrong?

This is not the traditional 'problem of privacy'. The traditional problem is a sceptical problem in the philosophy of mind. It comes about by reflecting on the nature of experience with the thought that 'you can't see what I can see'. This leads one into philosophical problems that it is hard to free oneself from. It leads to scepticism about other minds, or even about mind-independent reality in general. Whatever the difficulties involved with such philosophical reasoning, they are not the problems faced by the conceptual idealist. The traditional problem of privacy is set up using something like the Cartesian conception of mind. It presupposes that the world is distinct from my impression of it. The problem for the conceptual idealist is that this traditional problem, while it seems to make sense at least as a philosophical problem, cannot even be expressed without making concessions to conceptual realism. Conceptual realism makes sense of scepticism about other minds, while conceptual idealism simple denies there is a problem.

The problem for conceptual idealism can be made vivid by considering two related questions in the philosophy of mind that lead one to believe that the world...
necessarily outstrips our conception of it. Nagel raised the first question when he asked, "What is it like to be a bat?"\textsuperscript{28} Simply contemplating the mind-boggling difference between a bat's form of life and our own can bring one to the conclusion that such a different form of subjectivity must be completely alien to us. And this is such that it suggests that the bat's subjectivity must necessarily be missed out of our objective world-view. The point is not that we do not yet have the relevant objective facts about the bat's perceptual and nervous systems. The intuition that is invoked by this example is that there are some facts (some 'subjective facts') that are fundamentally inaccessible to creatures that do not navigate by sonar. Call this the 'inter-species problem of subjectivity'.

In addition to this, a further problem that privacy presents to the conceptual idealist might be called the 'inter-personal problem of subjectivity'. For while considering alien forms of life may vividly demonstrate the limits of our conceptual scheme, the problem arises much closer to home. My conception of what it is like to experience, say, red, has been learned through my own experience: by looking at red things. But nothing about those experiences demonstrates that they are just like the way other people experience red. Sure, we may agree on what things are to be called 'red', and have similar reactions to its presentation (e.g. the tendency to describe it as a 'warm' colour and to act more aggressively in red environments). But how do I know that it feels the same for you as it does for me? I only have my own experience to go on. (The answer that I have the same reactions does not settle the matter: for how do I know that

\textsuperscript{28} Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like To Be A Bat?" \textit{The Philosophical Review}, 83, 1974.
it feels the same way to have those reactions). And nothing that we say about our experience will settle the matter. For what we say will eventually be rooted in our experience, and any amount of agreement will always leave room for a systematic difference between the way it seems to me and the way it seems to you. And this is because there seems to be something missed out of our inter-subjective ways of describing things. It seems that, contra to the claims of the conceptual idealist, there does indeed seem to be something that is missed out by our conceptual scheme. And that is the very thing that makes that conceptual scheme possible: subjectivity.

The tempting answer for the conceptual idealist to give is that Wittgenstein has already dealt with the illusion of privacy, most famously in the “private language argument”. But it is easier to pay lip service to a philosophy as subtle and complex as Wittgenstein’s than to demonstrate its validity or persuasive power. In the next part of this thesis I will look closely at the ideas in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy that may give support to the conceptual idealist, and may have influenced present day idealism. I will argue, however, that they can only be understood (and are therefore only persuasive) as part of Wittgenstein’s philosophy as a whole. And that philosophy is not idealist, but quietist. Eventually I will argue (in part 3) that it is not possible to solve the problem of subjectivity without giving up the claim to substantial metaphysical theories.
Part two

The Later Wittgenstein
"I set the brake up by connecting up the rod and lever."—Yes, given the whole of the rest of the mechanism. Only in conjunction with that is it a brake-lever, and separated from its support it is not even a lever; it may be anything, or nothing.


The initial problem investigated in the *Tractatus* was the question of meaning: how can our words signify anything? On the basis of the assumption that, in order to say anything at all, our words must have a determinate meaning¹, Wittgenstein constructed a metaphysical theory that had far reaching consequences. The result was not just a treatise on the central question of meaning, but a work that made concise pronouncements on a wide range of metaphysical disputes: on the self and subjectivity, ethics and religion. Furthermore, it was intended to act as a kind of 'Prolegomenon to Any Future Metaphysics', albeit one that was more radical and restrictive than most other philosophers would want as a solution to the 'problem of metaphysics'. Metaphysical truths, Wittgenstein concluded, cannot be expressed in meaningful discourse, which is restricted to the statements of natural science². That Wittgenstein went on to draw such conclusions from the

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¹ This is not entirely accurate: while our ordinary use of words may be indeterminate, underlying that use is a more precise and logically regular set of names that have determinate meanings (in the 'nexus of a proposition'.)

² See *Tractatus* 6.53.
original question of ‘what is meaning?’ shows how central he took this question to be. The answer to this question, he assumed, must surely provide the key to all metaphysical problems. Under the influence of Russell, Wittgenstein took the question of meaning to be the metaphysical investigation *par excellence*. And the solution to the problem of meaning was to provide the key for a general solution to the problems of metaphysics.

*Philosophical Investigations* begins with ‘a particular picture of the essence of language’ provided by a passage from Augustine. ‘The individual words in language name objects—sentences are combinations of such names’. This picture, whether or not it was one held by Augustine, was certainly held by Wittgenstein himself during the period of the *Tractatus*. It is presented at the beginning of *Philosophical Investigations* as a target to be attacked, which Wittgenstein does by pointing out inadequacies in this picture: it is too narrow a characterisation, for instance, for not everything we call language can be so simply described. The assumption that words must have a determinate and precise meaning is also brought into question, as is the idea that language must consist of simple names that stand in a pictorial relation to simple objects.

Some commentators have wondered why so much fuss is made of this obviously inadequate picture of language, one that was not even really held by Augustine. In particular, why did Wittgenstein choose to begin his work in such a way? The

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3 *Philosophical Investigations*, §1.
standard view is that the extent and rigour of the attack on the 'Augustinian picture' reflects the extent of Wittgenstein's break with his earlier thought. It seems clear to me, however, that the picture of meaning in question, and the emphasis Wittgenstein places on its rejection, has far more significance in his later work than this simple view suggests. It does show a rejection of the Tractarian notion of meaning, but the importance it is given also shows a salient continuity with his previous work. Meaning is still seen as central to philosophical theorising, and since Wittgenstein's concern is still to show how this enterprise is misguided, he again begins with the concept of meaning. One difference between the two approaches is this: in the earlier work he tried to show that the philosophical concept of meaning necessarily excluded itself, along with all other metaphysical notions, from the realm of meaningful discourse. This is presented as an inevitable consequence of correct metaphysical investigations. In the later work, however, metaphysical theorising is attacked at a more fundamental level. His aim is to question the intuitions and motivations that bring us to suggest philosophical theories in the first place. He examines the tendency to produce theories, and the result is a series of remarks on where we go wrong in philosophy. It is only natural then, that Wittgenstein should take the tendency to theorise about meaning as his departure point. Just as in the Tractatus metaphysics begins with a theory of meaning, so Philosophical Investigations takes as its starting point the tendency to provide metaphysical answers to questions about meaning. These metaphysical misconceptions all have one thing in common: they take the meaning of a word or proposition as something independent of its use. The
model of meaning that Wittgenstein rejects places too much emphasis on the things that we talk about, and treats them as if they were all objects, with essences that are independent of our concepts. Wittgenstein's remarks amount to nothing less than a rejection of conceptual realism.

4.1 Wittgenstein on Applying A Rule

At the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations* we are introduced to the notion of a primitive language-game in which we can see clearly the functions of the words and phrases used by those involved. In particular, Wittgenstein pays special attention to the use of the words that function as names in these language games, emphasising the contexts and conditions under which it is appropriate to apply names to objects, and what role their application might play. In section 43 he makes the following observation from his reflections:

> For a large class of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.

> And the meaning of a name is sometimes explained by pointing to its bearer.

It is worth emphasising that Wittgenstein did not see these observations as constituting some sort of theory of meaning. They are simply meant to be observations. But describing the meaning of a word as its use does bring it into conflict with a certain prevalent *philosophical* notion of meaning: that the meaning of a word is given solely by the object it refers to. On this philosophical conception of meaning, how a sign should be used (its rule for use) is provided by the nature of the object it refers to. But then the use is not its meaning, but
something derived from it meaning. Wittgenstein thinks this false conception of meaning comes about when we make too much of the fact that the meaning of a name is sometimes explained by pointing to its bearer. This thought tempts us to confuse the meaning of the word with its bearer, and to generalise this misleading model of 'object and designation' for the whole of language.

This conflict between meaning as use and the rejected model can be stated more generally using the notion of rule following: one applies a word correctly if one applies it in accordance with a rule, and this implies the possibility of using it incorrectly, in conflict with the rule. But what is this rule, and what counts as acting in accordance with it or against it? The answer that tempts us supposes that the rule is always determined by something external to its use (as if it were latent in the 'object' that a sign refers to). The thought is that unless the rule is determined by something independent of my actual application of a sign, that rule could not justify that application. (It must provide an independent standard of correctness).

Consider the way this question was dealt with in the *Tractatus*. The central question there was 'what (metaphysical) facts determine the meaning of a sentence?' The answer was that names refer to objects, and these objects are the meanings of the names. So the meaning of a name (the object to which it refers) is something external to it. But then how can we guarantee that the name has the meaning we suppose it to have? Well, Wittgenstein supposed that the logical form shared by a fact and a corresponding proposition constituted a set of
isomorphic relations between names and objects. A name refers to an object so long as that name is part of a logical picture that corresponds to the state of affair to which the object belongs\(^5\). More generally, a sign has meaning \textit{in virtue of} having a logical syntax (in virtue of being used in accordance with a rule) that matches the internal properties of the object that it refers to. But the meaning itself is the object referred to\(^6\).

At one time after writing the \textit{Tractatus} Wittgenstein talked about the possibility of a certain 'phenomenology'\(^7\). The logical form of elementary propositions is not revealed by ordinary language use, which uses the same forms for grammatically quite different propositions ("This paper is boring" and "The weather is fine" have the same superficial subject-predicate form). Since he held that the logical grammar of analysed language reflects the nature of the objects it refers to, he also held that the analysis of phenomena could provide an insight into the grammar that ordinary language disguises. So Wittgenstein held that the grammatical form of words could be \textit{derived from} the phenomena (objects) that they refer to. In this paper he expresses a change of opinion from a certain tractarian position (that the elementary propositions are independent of each other), but in the main the model of meaning from the \textit{Tractatus} is still presupposed. Though more complex in its details, it is the same model of language that is presented at the beginning of \textit{Philosophical Investigations}. Given a proper analysis of the way we use words, the

\(^5\) For a fuller discussion of the theory of meaning in the \textit{Tractatus}, see chapter 2.

\(^6\) \textit{Tractatus} 3.203: 'A name means an object. The object is its meaning.'

underlying grammar must accord with the objects that they signify. So when we learn to use words, we do so on the basis of examining the objects they refer to. One might say that Wittgenstein assumed that the objects that our words refer to present us with rules for the use of those words: that the rules we use in language must somehow be answerable to the natures of objects. By examining the nature of objects directly — that is their logical form — one learns how to use a name such that it will have the same logical form and hence refer to that object. At the time of writing, however, Wittgenstein gave little in the way of detail of how this derivation might take place. He took for granted our ability to grasp essences that are somehow intimated to us by external objects. But how do we know that we have grasped a logical form (and thus discerned a rule for the use of a name) correctly? The Tractatus left unanswered the question of how we know we are using a sign correctly; how we know we are applying a rule in accordance with the object we take it to signify.

He reassesses this question in more general terms in Philosophical Investigations by introducing the concept of interpreting a rule. How are we to know how we are to interpret a given expression of a rule? Philosophical Investigations offers a new description of meaning—that it can often be defined as its use. But if the meaning of a word is its use, what does understanding the meaning of a word consist in? The answer that tempts us drags us back to the tractarian conception of meaning: that what we grasp is something external to our use of a sign. When we are taught the meaning of a sign (or asked to guess it from examples of its use)
we often have the feeling that we have caught hold of something that 'lies behind' the examples that we have been shown.

The notion of 'grasping' a rule is problematic for Wittgenstein's later conception of meaning as use, for clearly we can grasp the meaning of a word 'in a flash'. "We understand the meaning of a word when we hear or say it." What kind of strange mental state is it that constitutes grasping a whole use of a word, or more generally, the whole application of a rule, which is extended in time? What does one grasp then? The obvious answer is that what one grasps is an interpretation of some kind. But any interpretation of a rule that we have in mind is apparently nothing more than a rule for how the first rule should be followed. It too must be grasped, and this seems to only deepen the regress.

Consider what we mean when we say, 'I now understand how to go on,' in the case of being given a segment of a series of numbers. Perhaps a formula comes to mind. We are given, say, the numbers '1 3 5 7' and the formula 'x_{n+1} = 2n + 1' occurs to us. Does this constitute our understanding how to go on? The formula is a symbolic expression, and as such can be interpreted in an indefinite number of ways. For now we need rules for how we should interpret the signs of this expression. Any rule, or expression of that rule, can be interpreted in any number of ways. Even an arrow, which points in one direction, could be interpreted as meaning, 'walk in the opposite direction', and this interpretation in turn could be given a further interpretation. Eventually we must just act, and the meaning of

*Philosophical Investigations, §138.*

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the last interpretation can only be given in terms of our following it or going against it. But what counts as following it or going against it here?

4.2 The 'Sceptical Paradox'

In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein asked the question 'what is meaning?' In *Philosophical Investigations* he reassessed the assumptions that brought him to his earlier conclusions. He had assumed that for a proposition to have meaning it must have a determinate sense. From this he concluded that certain (inexpressible) metaphysical facts must determine unambiguously what our words mean. But the later Wittgenstein realised that this requirement amounted to a kind of scepticism. And once one expresses this scepticism explicitly, it seems to have no answer. For if we consider the theory offered in the *Tractatus* more carefully, we realise it will not solve the problem that it was designed to. The picture theory of meaning demonstrably fails in its task, for any arrangement of (mental) elements can be taken in any number of ways. We still have the problem of how the arrangement of (mental) elements should be taken as one picture rather than another. Any image or picture can always be applied in a different way.

In *Philosophical Investigations* the question 'what is meaning?' has been replaced by the more general question 'what is it to follow a rule?' The scepticism that brought him to his earlier (flawed) solution can then be made explicit in the following way: what is it that justifies me in thinking that, in using a sign on a particular occasion in a particular way, I am using it in accordance with a rule that

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*Philosophical Investigations*, §139.
endows it with meaning? But note that this way of reformulating the question presupposes a notion of meaning analogous to the tractarian model of 'object and designation'. It demands that meaning has the form of a 'justification' of the use of the word in the sense that it must both (a) be something (some 'object') that is independent of that use, and (b) provide me with reasons for using it (it must guide my use, or determine how I ought to use it). So it seems that an independent standard of correctness\(^{10}\) must be compared to any particular application of a word. But whatever this standard is, it must also fill the role of the thing that guides my application of a rule. So the search is on for this thing that we grasp when we understand a rule. But every time we think of a way of grasping the rule, it seems to slip away from us as we think of new ways of interpreting what we have grasped.

As well as rejecting the picture theory of meaning, Wittgenstein also rejects a series of other natural proposals. The application of a rule cannot be fully determined by some kind of look up table, for it could always be read in another way\(^{11}\). Neither can meaning be fully determined by a mental process, or some kind of formula or logically pure expression of a rule. Any formulation could always be interpreted differently. None of the proposed solutions are up to the job of determining how a rule should be applied, for the scepticism that was first

\(^{10}\) Note that this independence does not imply mind independence, but merely independence from my decisions to apply a sign in a particular case, in the sense that an object is independent of my perceiving it as an object.

\(^{11}\) *Philosophical Investigations*, §86.
raised can be reformulated for any proposed solution. Nothing in my act of understanding a rule seems to justify my application of it.

The strangeness of the act of understanding a meaning is also reflected in the case of intending. If I intend to play a game of chess, I surely know what I intend to do. But the meaning of the word 'chess' is wrapped up in the fact that chess is defined by its rules. Does the whole set of rules then flash before my mind? Surely not. Then do I not really know what I intend until I have played the game? Surely I do. So what is the connection between my act of intending to play chess and the rules of the game? Wittgenstein answers, “Well, in the list of the rules of the game, in the teaching of it, in the day-to-day practice of playing.” That is to say, in the actual rules, teaching and practice of the game, not in a mental shadow of them. Once I have learned to play chess, I am in the position to intend to play chess (as opposed to merely intending to play the game that everyone refers to as ‘chess’, however that is played).

The significance of this simple answer is easily overlooked. Indeed, it may not strike one as an answer to the sceptical problem of meaning at all. The problem was how a rule can show me how to proceed at any particular point, and whatever one does is in accordance with the rule on some interpretation. What this shows, says Wittgenstein, is that interpretations do not support rules. The connection between a rule and following it in the correct way lies in the training one receives, and the actual instances of following it. This is not to merely give a causal

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12 *Philosophical Investigations*, §197.
connection, he insists, for a use exists for a rule only in so far as there exists a regular use for the rule – a custom. Thus language is characterised as an activity, which in turn is characterised in terms of an ability to act. And, he adds, there is no such thing as a single isolated act. There is only action in the context of a common custom. This is the only way we can give meaning to a particular application of a rule, and we should neither look for a more independent measure of correct application, nor think we can give meaning to a word without the possibility of a regular use.

But how does this answer the sceptic? The short answer is: it does not. Wittgenstein did not intend to answer scepticism, but to reject it. The real question is ‘what is it to follow a rule?’ and this is what he has answered. It was the sceptic who demanded that this question must be taken to mean ‘what justifies my using a sign this way?’ This sceptical question has been rejected. We have looked for justification behind justification, and finally the “spade is turned” and we are inclined to say, “This is simply what I do.”

Before I give a longer answer, it will help to examine the somewhat different interpretation of Wittgenstein given by Saul Kripke. Kripke has characterised Wittgenstein as offering “a sceptical solution to a sceptical problem”. A ‘straight solution’ would be an argument to the effect that the sceptic has overlooked some justification. A ‘sceptic solution’, on the other hand, starts by admitting that there is no answer that will meet the sceptic’s challenge. Kripke reads Wittgenstein as

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13 *Philosophical Investigations*, §217.
reaching a sceptical conclusion: nothing determines meaning, and there is no fact of the matter as to what I mean with my words\textsuperscript{14}. Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein is wrong, but wrong in an interesting respect.

4.3 The Sceptical Paradox and Wittgenstein's Rejection of Scepticism

Kripke has endeavoured to reformulate Wittgenstein's problem of meaning and the sceptical paradox that it gives rise to in a more precise form. Take 'quus' to be an operation defined as follows: $x \text{ quus } y$ is the same as $x$ plus $y$, so long as $x$ and $y$ are both less than 57, otherwise $x \text{ quus } y$ is 5. So for numbers less than 57, the results of 'quaddition' are identical to addition, and thereafter they are radically different. Assume for the sake of argument that I have not previously added numbers greater than 57 (or move the point at which plus and quus diverge to a point greater than any actual addition I have so far performed or considered).

The 'sceptical problem of meaning' can be raised with the following question: How do I know that in the past I meant plus and not quus? And if there is nothing that distinguishes these two cases, what makes it the case that I am carrying on as before? For we feel that some fact about my past intentions to use the plus function must justify my current responses to certain arithmetic question in that it must determine what I ought to say.

Saul Kripke claims that his version of the 'sceptical paradox' is somewhat more carefully formulated than Wittgenstein's problem. He has indeed defined a more precise sceptical problem. But in doing so he has lost sight of Wittgenstein's

\textsuperscript{14} Saul Kripke, \textit{Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language}, p. 70 – 71.
motivations for raising the problem in the first place. Kripke is one of many commentators who find a strong sense of tension in Wittgenstein\textsuperscript{15}. On the one hand Wittgenstein is explicitly and ardently opposed to any kind of philosophical theorising. On the other, these commentators find substantial philosophical projects that are (at least partly) undertaken in his work, but because of Wittgenstein's anti-philosophical attitude, they claim, he is unable to acknowledge them as such. Thus Kripke talks enthusiastically about the 'new form of philosophical scepticism'\textsuperscript{16} that Wittgenstein has invented, but concedes that 'Wittgenstein never avows, and almost surely would not avow, the label "sceptic"...'. Thus Kripke sees Wittgenstein as setting up a 'real' philosophical problem, and offering a sceptical solution it. But it is well known that the later Wittgenstein explicitly rejects the method of philosophy that offers solutions on the basis of their explanatory power\textsuperscript{18}. So I think we should look for another interpretation.

Fortunately we do not have to look far. There is a sceptical element to Wittgenstein's remarks, and he is accepting that nothing will answer the sceptic. No metaphysical or meta-logical facts determine that I mean plus rather than quus. There are no metaphysical facts that justify language use. This is also an anti-sceptical result, however, for Wittgenstein takes it to show that, since nothing could possibly satisfy the sceptic's desire for justification, the sceptical question

\textsuperscript{15} Crispin Wright is another. See, for example, 'Self-knowledge: the Wittgensteinian Legacy', 1998.

\textsuperscript{16} Kripke, op. cit., p. 60.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. p. 63. See also the discussion on pp. 69 - 70.

\textsuperscript{18} The apparent difficulties with such a position will be addressed in chapter 6.
must have been misguided in the first place. It is the sceptic after all who requires such metaphysical justification, and this is just what Wittgenstein concludes cannot be given:

This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.

It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each one contented us just for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it. What this shows is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which is exhibited in what we call “obeying the rule” and “going against it” in actual cases...

The ‘answer’ that Wittgenstein offers is not a solution to, but a rejection of the sceptical paradox. (A fortiori, he is not offering a sceptical solution). And the ‘misunderstanding’ that Wittgenstein goes on to talk about is not just the mistaken nature of the answers, but also the sceptic’s insistence that some such answer is needed to support meaning. The sceptic began with a misconstrued concept of meaning in the first place, so it should not worry us that nothing answers to that concept. In asking for a justification for a particular application of a word, the sceptic had a particular model in mind. The justification must be in the form of something that is independent of the use I make of a word (indeed, independent of the use that the community I am part of make of it). He wanted something (some object) that was external to the use of a word, which nevertheless gave the

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19 Philosophical Investigations, §201.
meaning of that word. Nothing will fill that role because the meaning of the word (for a large class of cases) simply is its use.

The result is not that there is no fact of the matter about whether I mean plus or quus. I mean plus. I have been trained at school in the practice of adding numbers together and I quite rightly call my acquired skill 'the ability to add.' If you asked me what 73 plus 91 is, I would answer (in the majority of cases), 164. Furthermore, when I learned to add, a new fact became true of me: It became true that I could add. I gained an ability. (I mastered a technique). But does this not miss the sceptic's point? In a way it does, but Wittgenstein is saying that the sceptic does not have a point worth answering. The question of whether I mean plus or quus only arises if we imagine that these functions exist (already, as it were) independently of our application of the plus sign.

The confusion about the demand for a justification can be made clearer with the use of some Wittgensteinian analogies. Imagine you are playing chess, and a sceptical observer demands that you offer a justification for moving your king in such-and-such a way. He is not quieted by an explanation of your strategy within the game. He wants to know what the rule is that you thought you were being guided by (why you moved the King one square and not two). How do you know, he says with a rye smile, that you are interpreting this rule as you have done in the past? Let us assume, he says, that for all the many times you have previously played chess, the board has not been arranged precisely like this, with this configuration of pieces, at this stage (number of moves) into the game. He
insists that at this point in the game, the rule demands that you move the king two squares instead of one. You describe the rule to him carefully, but however precisely you try to define it, he comes up with an interpretation that is inconsistent with the move you have made.

If the sceptic persists with this line of reasoning (and it seems it has no end) you will perhaps become annoyed and at best consider his questions as a distraction from the game. “This is just how chess is played!” you shout. To continue with the retort, “But how do you know?” will now seem so weary that even the sceptic might suspect that there was something wrong with it.

Wittgenstein is suggesting that what is wrong with it is that it demands a kind of justification that is as unnecessary as it is impossible. Moreover, its impossibility demonstrates that it is unnecessary. The sceptic wants a justification that is independent, not only of your decision to move your king in such-and-such a way, but independent of your taking the rules to be such as to legitimise such a move. Nevertheless, he wants the justification to be the thing that guided your decision to move the piece as you did. The supposed decision is not that you moved it to this rather than that legal square, but which squares you took to be legal moves in the first place. But this confuses the matter, for you did not decide that the rule for the king piece is that it can move only one square at a time. You followed that rule blindly. To ask for the justification of that rule following would be to ask for a justification from outside the way your opponent and you take to be the way to play chess. And the way you take chess to be played is not something
independent of the activity you and your community engage in. It makes itself manifest in the way we play chess.

Kripke may have developed Wittgenstein's paradox into a clearer and more precise formulation, but in doing so he lost sight of the nature of Wittgenstein's enquiry. Wittgenstein was not discovering a 'new kind of scepticism', but unearthing the foundations on which we build philosophical theories. He was digging for the hidden questions that had previously caused him to find a particular theory of meaning inevitable. Once those questions are made explicit, they lose their power, for we see that nothing could answer them. This could indeed be characterised as a 'sceptical solution to a sceptical paradox' — or better a sceptical response, for it does not solve the sceptical problem, but rejects it. But if the sceptical questions were not explicitly formulated and considered in the *Tractatus*, the response was:

Scepticism is not irrefutable, but obviously nonsensical, when it tries to raise doubts where no questions can be asked.

For doubt exist only where a question exists, a question only where an answer exists, and an answer only where something can be said.

Now it may be argued that the mere impossibility of answering a question does not obviously make the question nonsensical. Certainly this is a controversial idea to put forward without justification. Scepticism is not *obviously* nonsensical — a

20 Robert Fogelin has compared this scepticism towards philosophical scepticism with the Pyrrhonian aim of freeing oneself from 'philosophical anxiety'. (*Wittgenstein, Second Edition, 1987, pp. 226 – 234*). It is not clear however that Fogelin realises that the implication is that Wittgenstein rejects the sceptical paradox, rather than offering a sceptical solution on the model of Hume's theory of causation (see pp. 159 – 165).

21 *Tractatus* 6.51.
point the later Wittgenstein would have conceded. While his later treatment of scepticism does indeed aim to show it does not make sense, he does not simply attempt to enforce some principle such as the one pronounced in the *Tractatus*. The later Wittgenstein diagnosed each piece of nonsense carefully and individually. But it is clear that in the case of meaning scepticism, little more work need be done than to show that it is unanswerable, for, *pace* Kripke, meaning scepticism is intolerable, if not self-contradictory. If “there is no fact of the matter as to whether I mean plus or quus”, there is no fact of the matter as to whether the sceptic means by this that “there is no fact of the matter as to whether I mean plus or quus”. Meaning scepticism is compatible with its inverse (a point made, for somewhat different reasons, in §201 of the *Investigations*). So if the sceptics demand for justification of meaning cannot be answered, this indeed shows that a justification of this kind is not required, and Wittgenstein has shown that the motivation for a whole line of enquiry, that he himself had once found to be central to philosophy, rests on false foundations.

4.4 The Mythology of Symbolism

The idea that a word corresponds to a meaning, given in advance by the world, is referred to in *Philosophical Grammar* as a ‘mythology of symbolism’. This myth in

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22 "if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here." Kripke's "sceptical solution" to meaning scepticism won't help, as discussed in Chapter 5. Wittgenstein, of course, would never have offered such a theory in order to support meaning.

23 *Philosophical Grammar*, p.
mathematics, for example, suggests that numbers are mind independent\(^\text{24}\) objects to which our use of numerals must correspond. We assume that the number is a pure form of the numeral that is immune to misuse. The problem with this notion of numbers is that it leaves mysterious just how our minds get hold of these objects, prompting the idea that they are 'perceived' by some faculty of intuition. This is precisely the kind of mistaken notion of meaning that Wittgenstein is trying to expose. In §186, having dealt with the feeling that there was something that I must grasp (once and for all) in order to guide all my moves in future, the suggestion is that I require a new 'insight' or 'intuition' at every stage. Wittgenstein responds with 'It would almost be more correct to say, not that a new intuition was needed at every stage, but that a new decision was needed at every stage.'

The point is not, of course, that I can simply decide to use a word or a symbol how I like (though, in a sense, I can). Should I decide to respond with 'five' to the question 'what is 57 + 68?' I would be deciding to use the symbol '+' as (say) the quus function. The point is that the meanings of my words are not independent of the way that I, and other members of my community, decide to use them. (And, to anticipate a further discussion, if there is no regularity in my decisions, we cannot talk about an 'application' at all.) The rule is not an abstract object or Platonic form that one requires a special intuition to grasp. We feel that

\(^{24}\) This includes 'Platonism' in mathematics, the idea that numbers are mind independent objects. But Wittgenstein is also attacking theories, such as certain forms of idealism, which hold that these entities are in fact mental: an idea that he referred to as the 'corresponding mythology of psychology'. As we have already discussed, this move will not solve the (mythological) problems that the mythologies were created to solve.
a rule must be something quite different and independent from the way we use it in particular cases. But the difference in kind between a rule and an instance of following it lies not in some difference in their mode of existence. The difference between rule and rule following lies in the different roles they play in the language games we use them in.

One of the reasons that Wittgenstein thinks we are tempted to look for the mysterious abstract object is that we have the feeling that we grasp the meaning of a sign 'in a flash'. How does Wittgenstein deal with this phenomenon? Is he claiming that there is nothing that I grasp? When we talk about 'grasping' meanings, we must think about the circumstances in which we use such expressions, and that will stop us from sliding back to metaphysical notions of meaning. When do we say, 'I have grasped the meaning of this expression'? In what circumstances is saying this appropriate? And in such circumstances, need there be something that I have got hold of — something that determines how I should use the expression on every occasion in future? Finding no metaphysical concept of meaning that justifies the use we make of a word, we feel uneasy. There must be something that determines unambiguously how I should carry on. We still cannot rid ourselves of the tendency to offer explanations, even when we have accepted that nothing will satisfy this desire to say something more. What have we acted with or against? But the reflections on how we are to interpret a rule show that we cannot drive a wedge between our use of a word and its

25 In a sense, an actual instance of following a rule may indeed become (or partly constitute) a rule when, for example, we treat that instance as a sample in a language game. The rule is: 'do as I do'.
meaning (and this, in retrospect, should be clear from §43). It quiets the feeling of discomfort to look at the situations where we talk about acting in accordance and acting against a rule in actual cases. Talk of acting in accordance with a rule or against a rule only makes sense in the context of a regularity of use. We say, 'that is not how that word is normally used'. (But it would be a great mistake to think that the 'solution' to the sceptical paradox lay in the community26, as if that was where meaning was. After all, could I not follow a rule alone, on a dessert island, say? The problems with the community interpretation will be considered in greater detail in the following chapter).

The idea that we can grasp a rule in a way that reveals its correct application, and the accompanying idea that this is somehow necessary in order to explain language, results in the tendency 'to invent a mythology of symbolism or of psychology'27. The mythology of symbolism was something that Wittgenstein was partly aware of when he wrote the Tractatus, but he failed to see that it had infected his system. He had already realised that the logical constants were not names28. The logical symbol 'not' does not stand for a logical object that one must grasp in order to understand its meaning. He expressed the temptation to make this mistake in Philosophical Grammar in the following way:

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26 Not even Kripke is suggesting that (according to Wittgenstein) meaning consists in agreement within a community. But he does seem to think that Wittgenstein is trying to explain (give an account of) meaning in terms of agreement with other members of a community.

27 Philosophical Grammar, p. 56.

28 Tractatus 4.0312.
It looks as if one could infer from the meaning of negation that \( \sim \neg p \) means \( p \). As if the rules for the negation sign follow from the nature of negation. So that in a certain sense there is first of all negation, and then the rules of grammar.\(^{29}\)

But by the time of writing this he had realised that this kind of mistake applied to meaning in general: we look for the meaning of a word in addition to its use, either as an abstraction from the symbol, or as a mental entity. Both of these are chimeras, suggested to us by a false picture of the way meaning is bestowed upon words. G. E. Moore reports Wittgenstein as saying, that "the mere fact that we have the expression ‘the meaning’ of a word is bound to lead us wrong; we are led to think that rules are responsible to something not a rule, whereas they are only responsible to rules."\(^{30}\)

One could make this point by saying that the mythologies of symbolism and psychology are ways of making a 'category mistake' with respect to meaning\(^{31}\). Having had the various uses of a word explained my means of examples, the philosopher goes on to ask, ‘But what is the meaning of the word?’ The tendency to make this mistake is compounded by the fact that often, no matter how many examples are given, they will never exhaust the concept involved. But then, neither will a definition or a rule.

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29 *Philosophical Grammar*, p. 53.
30 *Wittgenstein’s Lectures*, p. 52 of *Philosophical Occasions*.
31 An expression popularised by Ryle's behaviourist critique in *The Concept Of Mind*. I do not mean to imply that Wittgenstein shared Ryle's philosophical behaviourism. There are similarities between their views, as there are differences.
The theories of meaning that Wittgenstein's remarks are aimed at come about from an over-generalisation of the picture of language that Wittgenstein criticises from section 1 of *Philosophical Investigations*. It is 'the model of object and designation' that he finds in the passage from Augustine: that the way words get meaning is by signifying objects. In the *Tractatus*, the idea that a proposition must have a determinate meaning, which supposedly left no room for scepticism about meaning, brought Wittgenstein to construe the whole of language on the model of 'object and designation'. The only way to give words the determinate meaning he felt they must have was in terms of the naming relation. The logical form of a word corresponds to the nature of the object it stands for. But this produces the mythology of symbolism or psychology: that the meaning of a word is always something in addition to the use of the word.

The model of object and designation supposes that first we have a world populated with various kinds of objects (physical objects, colours, numbers, and so on), and then we attach words to those things. The way we should use each word is then determined by the self-intimating nature of the object that corresponds to it. In rejecting this picture, Wittgenstein is not rejecting the notion of a mind-independent world. He is not rejecting the idea that there really are colours, numbers, or other objects. He is merely rejecting the use they are supposedly put to in philosophical conceptions of meaning. He is rejecting their use in a philosophical explanation of the way we use language. He rejects the

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32 According to the *Tractatus*, the way names can be concatenated is given by the objects with which they are correlated. The internal properties of the objects define the rules for use of the names.
over-generalisation of the idea of defining the meaning of words as a kind of
simple ostensive definition that does not take into account the way the grammar
of a word contributes to setting up the link with the thing named. 'The definition
of the number two, “That is called ‘two’”—pointing to two nuts—is perfectly
exact', but what makes this definition possible is the grammar of numerals. In
order to set up a link between language and the world, we must bring a grammar
(concepts, if you like, that are embedded in our practices) to the world33.

4.5 The Rejection of Conceptual Realism

The mythologies of symbolism or psychology are theories of meaning naturally
held by the conceptual realist34. Conceptual realism maintains that the nature of
reality is independent of our ability to think about it or grasp it. But it also claims
that there can be interesting metaphysical theories or explanations. Traditionally,
metaphysical theorising for the conceptual realist has assumed a distinction
between the way things appear and the way things really are. The apparent
structure of the world is explained in terms of, or reduced to, an underlying real
structure. So the conceptual realist must hold that, although the connection
between our concepts and the true nature of reality is at best contingent, there

33 It is worth emphasising the fact that this does not amount to anti-realism with respect to the objects we
speak about – though it is eliminativist about a certain (metaphysical) notion of meaning.

34 Though the mythologies may be held by the transcendental idealist, too, as is evidenced by the Tractarian
theory of meaning. The difference is that the transcendental idealist tries to describe a metaphysical
mechanism that guarantees the connection between language and the ‘mind independent’ world. One of
the central points of *Philosophical Investigations* can be expressed by saying that this attempt to combine the
realist desire for independent standards of correctness and the idealist desire for complete language–world
correspondence cannot be reconciled.
nonetheless is (hopefully) some way of discovering metaphysical truths by way of analysis of our ordinary concepts.

Now the question arises, on what basis does this analysis proceed? For if reality is independent of our concepts, there is a great deal of room for scepticism about how much of the true nature of reality is in fact revealed to our epistemic point of view. (Indeed the conceptual realist has the problem of explaining how our words and concepts can mean anything if they are divorced from the true nature of things.)

The intuition that saves the conceptual realist’s faith in metaphysics is that, however affected and distorted our view of reality is, it is nevertheless one possible view of reality. In a theory of meaning this intuition is expressed as the claim that our concepts are somehow derived from some aspect of reality. Though the idiosyncrasies of our perceptual systems and mental abilities may confuse and diminish our picture of reality, some of its true nature must provide our thoughts with content. In order to make good this claim, the conceptual realist must provide a theory according to which meaning is derived from an independent reality.

One story that gets told goes something like this. The true nature of reality is given by certain abstract ideas or ‘forms’ that may or may not be graspable by

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35 The more one tries to overcome this scepticism, the more one is driven to some form of transcendental idealism. This, I think, is what motivated the isomorphism between world and language in the Tractatus.

36 I include the Objects of the Tractatus (that is, types of Objects, or logical forms) as possible candidates for these forms. Not that tractarian Objects are identical with what Plato referred to as the ‘forms’. One salient
human minds. It is these forms that embody the true nature of reality, and they themselves are real in the sense of being mind and language independent. Nevertheless, language does afford us some insight into reality, since these abstract forms are the standards to which our concepts must aspire. It is only in virtue of using a word in accordance with such objects that we manage to give our words meaning. (Or to put the point in terms of rule following, the rules themselves are such language independent objects.) The job of the metaphysician is ultimately to discern those concepts that both have application and are independent of any particular point of view — independent, that is, of any particular set of interests or perceptual mechanisms.

But this involves the mythology of symbolism that Wittgenstein goes to such lengths to criticise and reject. Conceptual realism involves the demand for an independent standard of correctness against which we should compare our application of a word. Wittgenstein argues that nothing could fulfil this role, including an abstract, mind-independent object. For how is the comparison supposed to be made? And if the demand cannot possibly be met, that shows that it was a misguided requirement in the first place.

Note that it will not help the conceptual realist to turn to some kind of naturalism about abstract objects. The meaning of our words is not derived solely from the (set of) objects they refer to in the world. We do indeed learn the use of words by being shown samples as a kind of ostensive definition. But such definitions can

\footnote{difference is that Platonic forms can be the subject of discourse, whereas tractarian Objects are beyond meaningful discourse.}
only be useful if the grammar of a word has already been set up; when the rules of
the game to be played with the word has been laid down as a foundation. Even
in the case of a proper name, the meaning is not independent of the use. The
game of naming objects must first be set-up.

The story the conceptual realist tells about meaning may not go exactly as I have
outlined. An alternative account is given by Empiricism. A conceptual form is
imposed on, or derived from, the pre-conceptual 'given' – that which grounds our
lowest level conceptualisations. But this is just one form of the mythology of
psychology. We will see in the next chapter that Wittgenstein's rejection of the
given is a special case of his arguments against metaphysical theories of meaning.
Empiricism is just another way of trying to specify how our concepts are derived
from something independent of those concepts.

The philosophical mistakes about meaning that Wittgenstein criticises are all
attempts to give a justification of a use of a word in terms of something
independent of that use. It becomes clear how this amounts to a critique of
conceptual realism if we put the same point in terms of concepts: Wittgenstein
criticises the attempt to give a justification of our concepts in terms of something
independent of those concepts. We cannot speak of anything without using
concepts, so a justification of those concepts will never be complete. No matter
what kind of metaphysical reduction we perform, we will always have to assume a
grammar that remains unjustified in which to couch that reduction. Conceptual

37 See especially §§28 – 30.
realism assumes that we can speak of objects (or their forms, or some mental representation of them) independently of the concepts that pick those objects out. And this we cannot do.

Conceptual realism comes about from scepticism about whether (human) language is an adequate tool for describing the world. How can the way we choose to use a word at any moment be an adequate measuring rod to place against reality? Surely what we are aspiring to is an independent gauge given by the nature of reality itself. But Wittgenstein argues that nothing corresponds to this independent gauge. We just have the way we use words within the context of a custom or practice. The tendency to search for an independent measure of reality is one that is brought about by unnecessarily searching for a justification of these practices where there is none. We simply use a word in a particular way, and the use itself will determine whether an object, property or fact falls under its application.

Now, given that Wittgenstein is rejecting these philosophical conceptions of meaning, and therewith any plausible form of conceptual realism, does he thereby embrace its converse, conceptual idealism? One thing that we can note in passing is that the transcendental idealism of the *Tractatus* was put forward in part as a solution to meaning scepticism as applied to his early realism: how is the connection between a language independent world and language ensured? He answered that both language and the world share a logical form. Anything

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34 That is, the 'mythology of symbolism' that is inherent in the metaphysics of the *Tractatus.*
thinkable must have a logical (pictorial) form since all thoughts are facts, and thus have a logical form of the objects that constitute them, as well as the states of affairs that they depict. But he later realised that there were an indefinite number of ways of ‘projecting’ the thoughts onto states of affairs in the world. This realisation brought him to reject the mythology of symbolism that formed one part of the realist-idealistic hybrid of the *Tractatus*. Does that mean that what we are left with is still (or even more so) a kind of conceptual idealism? We will answer this question in chapter 6. But we can already note that it throws up the same problem of privacy that conceptual idealism faces. A word has meaning so long as it has a use. We cannot simply look to the world or our private experience and name something, hoping that that object will give us the criterion for applying the name. The name must have a certain use already before it can be used as a name. In other words, only a public concept can be used to refer to anything, so we cannot refer to something that is inherently private, thinking that the object itself will bestow a use on the name we give it. Hence we cannot talk about private objects. But Wittgenstein does not leave the matter there. He deals at length with the intuitions that suggest to us that we have sensations that are logically private. Whether his treatment is successful will be the topic of the next chapter.
WITTGENSTEIN ON PRIVACY

Wittgenstein’s Remarks on Private Language and the Myth of the Given

And hence also ‘obeying a rule’ is a practice. And to think one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule ‘privately’: otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same as obeying it.\(^1\)

Wittgenstein draws this conclusion immediately after his rejection of the sceptical paradox and the corresponding model of meaning that it gives rise to. If instead meaning is use, if it requires a regular practice, then private meaning is not possible. For merely thinking that one is following a rule is not to follow a rule.

But it is not yet clear why a private language is not possible. Kripke thinks that Wittgenstein has argued that meaning (insofar as there is anything called ‘meaning’ left on Kripke’s reading) requires a community. It requires the agreement of other language users. Hence simply thinking one is following a rule is not enough for rule following to be actually taking place. Where there can be no criteria by which other members of the community can check if a word is being applied correctly, there can be no such thing as a language. Kripke thinks that this is about all there is to the “private language argument”.\(^2\) The various comments about privacy that follow are then presumably a defence of

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\(^1\) *Philosophical Investigations* §201.

\(^2\) Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, p. 101: “The solution [to the sceptical paradox] turns on the idea that each person who claims to be following a rule can be checked by others.” See also p. 99.
Wittgenstein’s account of meaning in that they defend it against an obvious counter example: that the language of sensations is inherently private in character. Wittgenstein must defeat this idea if he is to defend his ‘new account of meaning’ in terms of agreement within a community.1

But it is not at all obvious that the statement above follows so easily from the discussion of meaning in the first 200 sections. We have already seen that Kripke’s interpretation of Wittgenstein’s remarks on rule following has missed the mark. And there are further good reasons to doubt the community interpretation of Wittgenstein’s remarks on private language. The most decisive point is this: even if something like the community interpretation were correct, it remains unclear why this in itself should rule out an alternative form of language that is based on private objects; just because public language works in such-and-such a way, why should a private language? Surely the whole point about it being private is that it has a different nature to ordinary language.

I think Wittgenstein’s swift conclusion in section 202 is the product of more thorough analysis. After all, Wittgenstein rearranged his remarks obsessively, and there is little reason to expect them to follow the standard form of argument.2 There is much yet to be explained, both by section 258, which is most often taken to be the definitive statement of “the private language argument”, and by the remarks before and after it. Many of the remarks derive from previous work on

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1 Ibid. p. 73: “...Wittgenstein proposes an alternative rough general picture. (To call it an alternative theory probably goes too far...)” But Kripke also compares Wittgenstein to Berkeley, who claimed to be defending common sense, and yet attacked an idea “strangely prevailing amongst men”.

2 I.e. Premises; Conclusion; Defence against apparent counter-examples.
sense data and private objects. Wittgenstein had been working for a long time against the prevalent 'Myth of the Given'. So I suggest we look for an interpretation that forms a natural continuation with this previous work.

One way to approach Wittgenstein's remarks on private language is suggested by the conclusion of the previous chapter. If Wittgenstein's remarks on meaning amount to a rejection of conceptual realism, then perhaps we can understand his rejection of the given as being motivated by considerations similar to those that lead to conceptual idealism. This is not yet to suggest that Wittgenstein was a conceptual idealist; that question will be raised and examined in detail in the following chapter. But we might consider the remarks on privacy with the working hypothesis that Wittgenstein does indeed share some assumptions and aims with the conceptual idealist, and that he is similarly motivated to reject the dualism of scheme and content. The notion of the private object is just the notion of an ineffable, pre-conceptual object. For something to be private to the individual would mean that it does not fall under the restriction of a regular, specifiable use. But according to Wittgenstein we cannot talk of any class of objects without assuming that a grammar is involved in individuating those objects. And if there is a grammar we can specify it, and this shows that the supposed private object is covered by a public concept after all.

Of course, a great deal more needs to be said to hammer out and make clear this interpretation. So this chapter will proceed as follows. First I will consider the shortcomings of the community interpretation and suggest an alternative. Then I
will try to make sense of the remarks on privacy using the working hypothesis as our guide. I will conclude, by way of preparation for the next chapter, by drawing some distinctions between Wittgenstein's reasoning and that of the conceptual idealist.

5.1 Customs and The Community

We can distinguish two important interpretations of why private use is ruled out on Wittgenstein's account. The 'community interpretation' (to which Kripke subscribes) emphasises the communal nature of language use. Since language is a custom, because it is from the beginning an integral part of a communal form of life, there can be no private language. There are two problems such an interpretation must face. Firstly, this by itself does not seem to rule out the possibility of a private language. Even if it is true that language as we know it is embedded in a community of language users, this does not by itself rule out the possibility of a language that works within a different context. It remains to be shown that the possibility of rule following requires the community. The second problem with this interpretation, suggested by Malcolm Budd\(^5\), is that it is weakened by allowing for the possibility of a 'public' language in isolation from a community. It is not an actual community of speakers that is required, but the possibility of speakers that could, in principle, understand the language user that makes his utterances or thoughts public in the required sense.

An alternative account stresses Wittgenstein's emphasis of the fact that an instance of rule following could not occur in isolation of other applications of the rule, or at least not in isolation of the context of rule following behaviour in general. As Budd points out, Wittgenstein's concept of following a rule as a practice or custom is illustrated, not by a contrast between a single individual in isolation and a community acting in agreement, but by the contrast of a single occasion and a practice spanning a series of occasions.

The reason that the community is so often proffered as the seat of meaning by commentators of Wittgenstein is that the problem is taken to be that nothing grounds my decision to take a rule one way rather than another. Whatever seems right is going to be right. And that means we cannot talk about right here. But, to repeat a point made by McDowell\(^6\), what good will it do us to look to the community? Whatever seems right to the community is going to be right, so we cannot talk about right here either. This paradox only disappears on the second interpretation. A judgement can be considered right when it is in agreement with judgements that are part of a regular practice. That is not to say that the notion of a community is irrelevant. We have learned our notion of rule following in the context of a community. Could I follow a rule just once in my life? We could say so if I acted in the context of a rule-following community.

So what is the connection between my decision to interpret a rule in a certain way, and the communities' sanction of that decision? Well, imagine that I did

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reinterpret the rules of chess, so as to allow a certain move that was considered
illegal by other players of chess (say, that the king can move two squares
whenever the player is in check). The other chess players will insist that I have
got the rules wrong. But suppose I insisted on playing this way, and always played
this way. I find someone who has not previously played, and convince them that
this is a superior way to play. (I train them my way). I play this way regularly. It is
no good to say that there is no justification for this new move. There is no
justification for the old way of playing. Rather, people would say, “I don’t know
what you’re playing, but it’s not chess”. I have invented a new game.

One might say that I have a ‘right’ to play my way, but this is not simply because I
have found someone to play my way with me. I could invent a new way of
playing patience, which only I ever play. I will have still invented a new game. I
might even never play the game I invent, but only consider the new rules in my
imagination. Of course, if someone asks me the rules, I should be able to explain
them. (The response “I knew them a while ago, but now I have forgotten” would
rightly be regarded with suspicion. But it is possible that I am telling the truth.)
But what about the following situation: I cut a deck of cards, and declare, “I won!
I found the 8 of spades.” If, on being asked if I could win again, I say “but the
rules of the next game are not decided yet”, you will not accept that there was any
winning or losing going on at all.
5.2 Wittgenstein on Private Language

Before going on to present what is widely regarded as “the private language argument” in section 258, Wittgenstein continues his discussion of rule following. During this discussion he touches on the interdependence of such concepts as ‘agreement’ and ‘same’ with the concept of a rule:

One might say to the person one was training [to follow a rule]: “Look, I always do the same thing: I.....”

224. The word “agreement” and the word “rule” are related to one another, they are cousins. If I teach anyone the use of the one word, he learns the use of the other with it.

225. The use of the word “rule” and the use of the word “same” are interwoven. (As are the use of “proposition” and the use of “true”).

Thus, if we are to apply a rule there must be some sense in which it can agree with other applications of the rule (made by ourselves or by someone else). There must be some sense in which what we are doing is the same thing. It is this possibility of agreement or disagreement that is essential for an act of rule following. Now, what happens when I try to name a sensation by the act of concentrating on that sensation – as it were, giving a “kind of ostensive definition” of a word by pointing to its referent inwardly. What is the purpose of this ceremony? To impress on myself the connection between the sign and the sensation? But that is only so that “I remember the connection right in the future.” And Wittgenstein goes on:

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7 *Philosophical Investigations*, §§223 - 225.
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'.

Now some commentators have taken this to be a case where verification is required for the act of applying a symbol to a sensation. If this were the case we could reject the argument so long as we reject this kind of Verificationism. But there is no indication here, or in the surrounding text, that what is missing for the private linguist is merely the test of agreement with other cases. Rather, there is no room here for the concept of 'agreement' or 'same' at all.

What aspect of the sensation is going to be used as a criterion of identity? In virtue of what does one say, "this is another instance of S"? Just that it seems to me to be so. "Whatever seems right to me is right", and there is no room for the possibility of disagreement. But if there is no room for disagreement, we cannot talk of agreement either, and thus we cannot talk of 'right', or of the application of a rule.

The proponent of a private language will not accept this so easily, however. What makes Wittgenstein so sure that there is no room for the notion of agreement here? Perhaps I do get my application of the word 'S' wrong sometimes, and I just don't know it. But Wittgenstein is insisting that if that is possible, then we should be able to articulate what it is that we are getting right or wrong. There must be a game of getting it right or wrong set up, and that is precisely what the

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8 Philosophical Investigations, §258.
private linguist has not done. Otherwise what is it that we are supposed to be pointing at?

Consider Wittgenstein's remarks on ostensive definition early on in *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein considers (in section 28) how someone might be taught the meaning of the number two by pointing at two nuts. On the face of it, ostensive definitions look hopelessly inadequate:

> But how can 'two' be defined like that? The person one gives the definition to doesn't know what one wants to call "two"; he will suppose that "two" is the name given to this group of nuts!

And Wittgenstein concedes, “an ostensive definition can be variously interpreted in *every* case.” This is, in fact, just a special application of the 'sceptical paradox' that Kripke has made so much of. We want the 'object' that is the referent of our word to determine the rule for its use, but what we are trying to point to can be variously interpreted, and so it seems we have not provided any guide to the meaning of the word at all. Yet the sentence that precedes the passage quoted runs: 'The definition of the number two, “That is called ‘two’”—pointing to two nuts—*is perfectly exact.*' The answer to the problem of ostensive definition is that the person you are teaching must know or guess that you are referring to a number, and what a number is. That is, he must already understand the *use* of the word. And he will demonstrate that he has correctly understood if he goes on to use the word 'two' correctly. If he does not then we must offer further examples or instructions.

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9 *Philosophical Investigations*, §28. Here I have added the italics.
The point that is relevant to the discussion of private language is that the ostensive definition only makes sense in the context of a use. This is the point that Wittgenstein makes in section 257, immediately preceding the passage widely regarded as "the private language argument":

When one says "He has given a name to his sensation" one forgets that a great deal of stage setting in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense. And when we speak of someone's having given a name to pain, what is presupposed is the existence of the grammar of the word "pain"; it shews the post where the new word is stationed.

So the point could be put this way: you can very well be defining something when you say you are 'pointing inwardly', but you are only doing so insofar as you have a regularity of application to go by. Otherwise your pointing remains hopelessly ambiguous. But if there is some regularity of use that will disambiguate your pointing gesture, then you should be able (at least in principle) to share it with us.

Once we imagine that the private linguist has something before him, we have assumed that he has something that has conceptual shape. The basic idea has much in common with the conceptual idealist's rejection of the given. If it is 'a something' then it can be described. Hence the assumption that a private linguist has something before him, but we cannot say what, is mistaken:

If you say he sees a private picture before him, which he is describing, you have still made an assumption about what he has before him. And that means that you can describe it or do describe it more closely. If you admit that you haven't any notion what kind of thing it might be that he has before him—then what leads you into to saying, in spite of that, that he has something before him?\(^\text{10}\)

\(^{10}\) Philosophical Investigations, §294.
Do these remarks constitute a cogent argument against the possibility of a private language? The private linguist will argue that as an argument, this line of reasoning begs the question against his position— for it is precisely his contention that some concepts are known from a private sample that cannot be publicly articulated. Put in this way, Wittgenstein's demand that the private linguist further describe what he thinks he has before him seems nothing more than a refusal to take his opponent seriously. But I think this unsatisfactory result comes about through misinterpreting the later Wittgenstein's method. There is no "private language argument". What Wittgenstein's collected remarks offer us is a series of approaches to a set of more or less related philosophical theses. Wittgenstein's method is to uncover the intuitions that underlie them. Once these intuitions are laid bare, we can see how ill founded and muddled they are. While any single remark may not prove beyond possible doubt that the private linguist is mistaken, taken together they strip away the façade that there is good reason to believe the story that the private linguist tells. The private linguist is made to retreat to a position that invites us to say: "But isn't that ridiculous? Why should we believe that?" And of course the private linguist (in particular, the younger Wittgenstein) put forward his thesis as part of an explanation of language. But an explanation that turns on something inherently mysterious, it seems to me, is no explanation at all. If the private linguist wants to deny that, so be it, but it leaves his position without the intuitive appeal it once seemed to have. Wittgenstein does not offer a cogent argument against private language, because he does not offer an argument in the traditional sense. His remarks, however, are convincing.
5.3 McDowell on Wittgenstein’s Rejection of the Given

This connection with conceptual idealism (and so far it is only a connection—I am not claiming that Wittgenstein was a conceptual idealist) can be put like this: The possibility of a regularity of use can also be called a public concept. To possess a concept, on this account, would be to be a master of the technique of the application of a word. Wittgenstein’s claim then amounts to this: language can only be used to refer to that which falls under some public concept. Hence we cannot use language to talk about a private object that does not fall under a public concept. It follows that talk of the ‘given’ as a pre-conceptual something is mistaken.

The idea of Wittgenstein’s remarks on private language as a rejection of ‘the Myth of the given’ has been taken up by John McDowell in ‘One Strand in the Private Language Argument’. McDowell’s reasons for so interpreting Wittgenstein seem to stem from a general approval of the project that rejects this “dualism of conceptual scheme and pre-conceptual given”11:

[W]e ought to look with favour on a thesis on these lines: nothing can count as an episode in a stream of consciousness unless it has (already, we might say) a conceptual shape, an articulable experiential content.12

But McDowell concedes that this may not be precisely the way Wittgenstein intended his remarks:

12 Ibid.
I do not mean to suggest that Wittgenstein sees his polemic in precisely these terms, as an application of a general rejection of the dualism. Opposition to the dualism makes good sense of some of what he says. I think it leaves some of what he says unexplained, and some looking positively mistaken.\(^\text{13}\)

But if such an interpretation leaves some of Wittgenstein's remarks unexplained, we have good reason to look for another interpretation. I would like to argue, however, that the problem lies in the way that McDowell conceives of Wittgenstein's rejection of the dualism. Once we have corrected that, we can make good sense of all of Wittgenstein's remark on this issue.

The rejection of the given that McDowell has in mind is the one exemplified by Wilfred Sellers' argument in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. This argument centres on an inconsistency in the notion of the given as it is supposed to play a role in empiricist epistemology. The given is supposed to be pre-conceptual, and as such cannot stand in rational relations to anything. It therefore falls outside of 'the logical space of reasons'. But it must 'impinge' on that space, so that it can act as a *ground* or *justification* for our lowest level conceptualisations. The traditional rejection of the given argues that nothing could play both these roles. Note that this argument leaves open whether there is anything that corresponds to each of these roles individually. It merely argues that nothing could play both roles, and that is what the proponent of the given wants.

McDowell quotes Rorty's attempt to expound a "Wittgensteinian point" by identifying two different forms of knowledge. The first is "the way in which the

pre-linguistic infant knows that it has a pain”, which “is the way in which the
record-changer knows the spindle is empty, the plant the direction of the sun, and
the amoeba the temperature of the water.” This is to be sharply distinguished
from “what a language-user knows when he knows what pain is”. Rorty argues
that “the mistake that Wittgenstein exposed” is “the notion that knowledge in the
first sense—the sort manifested by behavioural discrimination—is the ‘foundation’
(rather than simply one possible causal antecedent) of knowledge in the second
sense”.

While McDowell has serious misgivings about talking about the pre-linguistic
infant as ‘knowing’ that he is in pain, rather than simply ‘feeling’ it, and the
behaviouristic remarks this way of talking gives rise to, he is otherwise in broad
agreement with Rorty’s interpretation of Wittgenstein. McDowell wants to take
the point about knowing one is in pain and transpose it into a point about having
the concept of pain:

Then his point can be put as one about the relation between pre-
conceptually felt pain and episodes of pain that belong in full-fledged
streams of consciousness, conceived as necessarily in conceptual shape.
The fundamental point is the distinction between foundations and
(mere) causal antecedents: non-conceptual pain (in pre-linguistic infants)
is a causal antecedent of the ability to have conceptually structured pain
episodes, not a continuing ingredient in them that grounds the
conceptual structure involved. Put like this, Rorty’s point perfectly fits
the reading of Wittgenstein I am recommending.15

So McDowell finds a story in Wittgenstein that has the form of Sellar’s rejection
of the given. Note that the non-conceptual pain still has the role of a (mere)

causal antecedent to the ability to have conceptual pains. The distinction between the two is that a pain must have conceptual shape if it is to feature in the stream of consciousness. This leaves McDowell in the uncomfortable position of having to defend the claim that pre-linguistic infants and animals do not have pains in the same sense we do. Surely this is not a claim that we should be happy about saddling Wittgenstein with. Furthermore, by his own admission, the interpretation McDowell is advocating leaves some of what Wittgenstein says unexplained. The problem is that in transposing Rorty's point, McDowell conflates two separate Wittgensteinian points.

The point about how we know we are in pain is indeed related to Wittgenstein's remarks on private language, though perhaps not as closely as McDowell proposes. The standard view is that what I mean by the word 'pain' can only really be known to me, for I am referring to what can only be known to me, namely, my pains. We are tempted to express this thought by saying, "I only know what pain is from my own case." The remarks on private language are a direct attack on this view of pain language. Given that this picture is rejected, Wittgenstein must offer some indication of how pain language might be learned.

This is where Rorty's 'Wittgensteinian point' has its source in *Philosophical Investigations*. Against the rejected picture of pain language, Wittgenstein offers the following alternative as one possibility: "words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of sensation and used in their place."\(^{16}\) Thus the verbal

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\(^{16}\) *Philosophical Investigations*, §244.
expression of pain is taught as a replacement of crying behaviour. That is not to say that the word ‘pain’ describes crying, but replaces crying and inherits from it the connection with pain as the public expression of pain.

This ‘connection’ requires careful reflection. It is not that we say ‘I am in pain’ instead of crying out — suppressing the tendency to scream, as it were — or as a new involuntary reaction to pain stimulus. Wittgenstein describes the way pain language is learned. He is suggesting one way that the word pain enters our language games. We could put the point like this: having unconceptualised pains (in pre-linguistic infants) is a causal antecedent of the ability to know one is in pain in the sense of being able to say one is in pain17.

But note that I used the word ‘unconceptualised’ (rather than ‘non-conceptual’) to describe the pains that infants have. They are not conceptualised, that is, by the infant. Yet they are the very same pains that we attribute to linguistically competent adults when they wince and say, “I am in pain!” The knowledge that the infant, or an articulate adult, or anything else for that matter, is in pain requires the public concept of pain18.

I want to use the expression ‘non-conceptual’ in a somewhat more fundamental sense than it is used by McDowell. For him, having a ‘non-conceptual pain’ is

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17 Wittgenstein controversially denies that it makes sense to know that ‘I am in pain’. I simply have pains. (I have no justification for the claim, “I am in pain”). But even if we were to agree with Wittgenstein, the point still stands that having pains is (normally) a causal antecedent of full mastery of the word ‘pain’. Whether it is a necessary condition is quite another point. (Philosophical Investigations §315 seems to suggest this question is unanswerable.)

18 Philosophical Investigations, §384: “You learned the concept ‘pain’ when you learned language.” (Italics supplied.)
having something that has not been conceptualised as part of a stream of consciousness. Only the linguistically competent can, on McDowell’s account, have fully fledged streams of consciousness. The ‘pre-conceptual’ pains of infants act as mere causal antecedents of the things we commonly refer to as pains\textsuperscript{19}. But I want to use the term ‘conceptual’ to refer to anything that has a nature that can be expressed as a public concept. Something is therefore non-conceptual if it \textit{does not admit} of being captured by a public concept\textsuperscript{20}. On the traditional picture of pain-language that Wittgenstein attacks, pains are just such ‘non-conceptual somethings’. But Wittgenstein argues that language can only refer at all insofar as we have a grammar set up for our referring expressions\textsuperscript{21}. Since it makes no sense to talk about an essentially private use of a word, a ‘something’ which makes contact with language must fall under a public concept (use). It follows that \textit{nothing referred to by language is non-conceptual} in the sense I am using the term.

Not only does this way of looking at Wittgenstein’s remarks avoid saddling him with the unworthy view that infants do not have real pains in the sense that we do, but it makes sense of those passages that McDowell finds obscure or in error. The two offending passages that he quotes are to be found in section 304 of \textit{Philosophical Investigations}:

\textsuperscript{19} This may not do McDowell’s account justice. He talks about the ‘pre-conceptual pains’ being ‘a substratum on which the capacity for concept-carried awareness is constructed’. Whatever that means.

\textsuperscript{20} Thus the claim of conceptual idealism is that everything is conceptual, and nothing is non-conceptual. Wittgenstein, I think, would agree with the sentiment, but regard the statement as either merely a ‘grammatical remark’, or otherwise nonsense. But more on that later.

\textsuperscript{21} The word ‘refer’ is being used with the knowledge that there are many different things that we do with word that we are inclined to call ‘referring’.

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“And yet you again and again reach the conclusion that the sensation itself is a nothing.”—Not at all. It is not a something, but not a nothing either! The conclusion was only that a nothing would serve just as well as a something about which nothing could be said. We have only rejected the grammar which tries to force itself on us here.

And section 293:

The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a something … That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of ‘object and designation’ the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant.

Note that Wittgenstein here stresses, as he was fond of stressing, that what he is doing is making a grammatical remark. He has not denied that we have sensations, but “only rejected the grammar which tries to force itself on us”. This point has remained obscure to most commentators on Wittgenstein, but I think a proper understanding of it is essential to a proper understanding of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy in general. It is particularly relevant to understanding the rather odd expression “not a something, but not a nothing either”. But first, let us consider the way in which McDowell objects to this locution.

According to McDowell, given the framework of the rejection of the given that he has outlined (namely the Sellars-Rorty rejection of something that impinges on the space of possible reasons), Wittgenstein should have said something more like the following:
The sensation (the pain, say) is a perfectly good something—an object, if you like, of concept-involving awareness. What is a nothing (and this is simply a nothing, not "not a something, but not a nothing either") is the supposed pre-conceptual this that is supposed to ground our conceptualizations.\textsuperscript{22}

So, according to McDowell, Wittgenstein should have denied something that he did not (the pre-conceptual this). Furthermore, Wittgenstein should have accepted something that he apparently denies, namely the sensation that occurs in 'concept-involving awareness'. McDowell thinks that Wittgenstein is motivated to deny sensations as objects, because of the following thought:

The idea of encountering a particular is in place here only because the experience involves a concept (pain, say, or toothache): the particular has no status except as what is experienced as instantiating the concept. So the idea of encountering a particular in this application lacks a kind of independent robustness that we can credit it with in other applications.\textsuperscript{23}

Given this interpretation of the main force of "the private language argument", McDowell concludes that we should not say that the sensation is not a something, but rather that at best it is a limiting case of the model of object and designation. But this simplifies Wittgenstein's remarks on private language considerably. For a start, what Wittgenstein is objecting to is not the idea that we call our pains 'objects', but that in doing so we should realise that we have not yet said anything revealing about their nature. The danger of calling them objects is that the picture of sensation language that this engenders: namely, the idea that I know what the word 'pain' means from my own acquaintance with my pains. The passage that is

\textsuperscript{22} McDowell, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 283.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 284.
commonly called ‘the private language argument’ (namely, section 258) has the following form: Wittgenstein starts with the assumption that we only know pains from are own case. And Wittgenstein asks what it would be to introduce a term that refers to such private objects into a language. The private linguist thought that he could first point inwardly at his pain, and then derive from the object designated a (private) use for the label that he has supposedly attached to it. No one else will be privy to this use because no one else will be privy to that object. This is the ‘model of object and designation’ that Wittgenstein objects to. He objects that such a method of introducing a term into language would not work. The object that the private linguist thought he was pointing to, which is not a pre-conceptual this, but a ‘this’ that cannot be conceptualised, ends up playing no role in the language-game that results. Thus Wittgenstein claims the sensation as it is conceived in this story is ‘not a something’. It has not yet been given the status of a something in the story told by the private linguist. Only with a language-game already set up can we make sense of attaching a label to a thing. So the first thing to note is that Wittgenstein is not denying that our sensations are ‘objects of concept involving awareness’ (for this expression can, of course, be given a use). He is denying that in thinking of it as a ‘limiting case of object of designation’ we have settled its nature prior to examining how pain language is used. He is denying that the private linguist can help himself to the something prior to this examination.

But even this account of Wittgenstein’s remarks on private language is too simple, for Wittgenstein does not present a single “private language argument”, but a
battery of attacks on a group of related philosophical theses. The common theme is to start from the assumption that 'I only know such-and-such a sensation from my own case', and to show how this would not enable us to talk about the sensation in question at all.

The second passage quoted above that McDowell objects to gives only Wittgenstein's conclusion to section 293. McDowell has neglected the idea that Wittgenstein was considering, which is the idea that "it is only from my own case that I know what the word 'pain' means". McDowell misses the following from the beginning of section 293:

If I say of myself that it only from my own case that I know what the word 'pain' means—must I not say the same of other people too? And how can I generalize the one case so irresponsibly?

Now someone tells me that he knows what pain is only from his own case!—...

This idea suggests that pain language is set up in a way parallel to the following:

Suppose everyone had a box with something it: we call it a "beetle". No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle. Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. But suppose the word "beetle" had a use in these people's languages?—If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a *something* for the box might even be empty.—No, one can 'divide through' by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is.

So again we have Wittgenstein wonder what it would be like if the 'object of designation' model were correct. That model has it that we have our own sample of the thing to be designated, and we know what the word means by examining
that object. But then whatever use we make of such a 'designating' word would not allow us to talk about the very thing that we thought we were supposed to be talking about: "the object drops out as irrelevant". This is not a rejection of the idea that the sensation is a something, but a reductio on the notion of construing the sensation on the model of 'object and designation'.

The first passage quoted above that McDowell objects to (from section 304) is also clearly a reductio on the object of designation model. "The conclusion was only that a nothing would serve just as well as a something about which nothing could be said." Wittgenstein is rejecting the sensation as it is construed as a private object.

But Wittgenstein does not want to deny sensations. The passage continues:

We have only rejected the grammar which tries to force itself on us here.

The paradox disappears only if we make a radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts—which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or anything else you please.

The paradox is that, if we construe the sensation on the model of object and designation, we end up not being able to talk about sensations at all: they fall outside of language. The paradox is dissolved if we do not bring a notion of an object to the understanding of, say, pain, but look at how pain language is actually used. The grammar of the word pain shows us the place that the word 'pain' has in our language.
5.4 Wittgenstein, Idealism and the Limits of Language

But then why does Wittgenstein not say that what the private linguist wants is simply a nothing? The short answer is that the private linguist has not made enough sense to give us anything to deny. If to assert nonsense does not make sense, then its denial will equally lack sense. Although this may seem a rather flippant answer, I believe that, properly understood, this holds the key to understanding many of Wittgenstein’s more perplexing passages.

Wittgenstein repeatedly urged that he “was not trying to deny anything”, and that he was only making “grammatical remarks”. These two ideas are clearly related in Wittgenstein’s mind, as is clear from section 307:

“Are you not really a behaviourist in disguise? Aren’t you at bottom really saying that everything except human behaviour is a fiction?” —If I do speak of a fiction, then it is of a grammatical fiction.

I think it is significant that, after a further comment on “the philosophical problem about mental processes and states and about behaviourism”, which ends with “And naturally we don’t want to deny them [mental processes]”, Wittgenstein makes one of his elliptical comments about “the aim of philosophy”. The connection is this: the aim of philosophy is not about asserting the existence of this, or denying the existence of that. It is simply a matter of getting the grammar of our language clear. Wittgenstein is not in the business of doing ontology. On the contrary, he wants to demonstrate the philosophical practice of ontology is mistaken. All we can do in philosophy is examine the way language works, and this does not provide the philosopher with any special
insight into reality. Both the private linguist who wants to make an inarticulate sound, and the Platonist who wants to ground our language use in a theory of meaning, share a common mistake. They both assume that philosophy is about reaching out beyond the ordinary workings of language (to what is 'really there', as it were). But in so doing they leave the limits of language.

The full answer to this question can only be appreciated with a better understanding of Wittgenstein's philosophy. We are tempted to think (along with the conceptual idealist) that if we have shown that sensations as the private linguist construes them result in a paradox, then we have shown that private objects do no exist—that they are nothings. But according to the later Wittgenstein, this misconstrues the nature of language. Language does not have the complete contact with reality that the conceptual idealist takes it to have. So we cannot say that beyond the limits of language there is 'nothing'. Nor are the things we talk about connected in a contingent manner with language, such that beyond the limits of language there are things that cannot be expressed in our language. There is not, as the conceptual realist would have it, 'something' beyond the limits of language. Both the words 'nothing' and 'something' belong to language, and beyond its limits, we can say nothing. Understanding this thought provides the key to understanding Wittgenstein's remarks on philosophy, and his relationship to idealism. So it is to these matters that I will turn in the next chapter.
WITTGENSTEIN, IDEALISM AND PHILOSOPHY

The Limits of Language in the Later Method

For this is what disputes between Idealist, Solipsists and Realists look like. The one party attack the normal 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.\(^1\)

According to the early Wittgenstein, philosophy comes about through man's 'impulse to run up against the limits of language'. It stems from our natural amazement at life: amazement that the world exists and that we can think and speak. We try to express this amazement in the form of a question; but to do so is to utter nonsense. Amazement is not a question and therefore has no answer. Rather, it is the manifestation of the limit of what makes sense. On the other hand, these limits make manifest the unspeakable truth in idealism: the limits of language are the limits of the world.

A concern with the limits of language remained central to Wittgenstein's thought throughout his work, surviving the various changes from the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical Investigations*. In both of his principle works he makes a conscious effort to sketch the bounds of what makes sense, and to do it from the inside.

\(^1\) *Philosophical Investigations*, §402. The dispute is irresolvable because it is not recognised that it is a grammatical dispute. Instead, they think the nature of the world is at stake.
For example, in the *Tractatus* he says of philosophy that 'It must set limits to what cannot be thought by working outwards through what can be thought.' In *Philosophical Investigations* he states:

The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and the bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language. These bumps make us see the value of the discovery.

There are, of course, important differences in methodology between the two approaches, not least the shift in emphasis from more general considerations to a concern with detail and the particular case. Furthermore, the later work criticises the tractarian conception of meaning, and makes a more concerted effort to reject philosophical theories in general. Does this mean that Wittgenstein left behind the transcendental idealism of the *Tractatus?* In particular, to what extent can the *Philosophical Investigations* be said to present a kind of idealism? Clearly the later work is not solipsistic — indeed, it is motivated to a large extent by an attempt to exorcise the solipsism of the *Tractatus* — but does this involve a rejection (as Hacker seems to think) of idealism in general? It does seem that Wittgenstein rejected the transcendental idealism that supported the metaphysics of the

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2 *Tractatus* 4.114

3 *Philosophical Investigations*, §119. Other examples of the role of philosophy as delineating the limits of language can be found throughout the *Nachlass*. 'The goal of philosophy', according to Wittgenstein, 'is to build a wall where language comes to an end.' (Section 90 of 'The Big Typescript').

4 Wittgenstein refers to the 'transcendental twaddle' in a letter to Engelmann (quoted by Hacker, p.81 of *Insight and Illusion*).

**Tractatus.** In the *Philosophical Investigations* he claims that the concepts involved in this doctrine lacked content:

Thought, language, now appear to us as the unique correlate, picture, of the world. These concepts: proposition, language, thought, world, stand in line one behind the other, each equivalent to each. (But what are these words to be used for now? The language-game in which they are to be applied is missing.)

But despite this apparent rejection of the Tractarian connection between language and the world, one influential interpretation does not see the later Wittgenstein as rejecting transcendental idealism completely. Bernard Williams has suggested that the rejection of transcendental solipsism, with the move from 'I' to 'we' in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, occurs within the transcendental level.

The comparison of Wittgenstein and Kant has developed into something of an industry. Contributions to the debate have been made by Norman Malcolm, Derek Bolton, Jonathan Lear, Thomas Nagel, and Daniel Hutto, to name but a few. Unfortunately, the issue is somewhat confused by the fact that there is no clear agreement on some fundamental questions that underlie the debate. Most importantly, there seems no general agreement on the question of what

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6 *Philosophical Investigations*, §96.
7 Bernard Williams, *op. cit.*
constitutes an idealist doctrine, let alone a Kantian one. Hutto defends Wittgenstein from being “tarred with the brush of idealism” by making a favourable comparison between Wittgenstein’s philosophy and the work of Donald Davidson. Davidson, he claims, is “a self-styled realist”, and if the label of idealism will not stick to him, it will not stick to Wittgenstein. This argument ignores the fact that idealism comes in many different forms, and applies at different levels of analysis. Kant, as we have seen, used his transcendental idealism to attack the ‘dogmatic idealism’ of Berkeley and the ‘sceptical idealism’ of Descartes. He argued that his transcendental idealism implied empirical realism. Kant, too, was a ‘self-styled realist’. Nor is Kant’s idealism restricted to his anti-realist views of time and space. As the discussion of idealism in part one of this thesis makes clear, the term ‘idealism’ need not be restricted to traditional antirealist doctrines. The underlying notion identified there was the idea that the world is limited in some way by our ability to conceive it. This is the notion of idealism used by Nagel13, who characterises both Davidson14 and Wittgenstein as idealist.

A standard objection to the Kantian interpretation of Wittgenstein is that there is no room in his philosophy for the crucial Kantian distinction between the world of appearance and the world as it is in itself. There is no sense in which the later Wittgenstein can be seen as accepting the idea that we can filter out the mind’s contribution to experience and consider it independently. Transcendental inquiry


14 For a discussion of how Davidson can be characterised as a conceptual idealist, see chapter 3.
was for Kant an *a priori* investigation of the application of concepts to objects that ultimately reveals necessary truths about the formal structure imposed by mind. Wittgenstein, of course, had no interest in such structures. Lear replies\(^{15}\) by claiming that a rejection of the transcendental distinction does not mean a rejection of transcendental philosophy. Instead, we might be able to take a transcendental stance towards ordinary activities like language use. But the use of such tactics may stretch the comparison between Wittgenstein and Kant to the point of vacuity. And the problem is compounded by the fact that there is no agreed interpretation of either of their views, or even which aspects of their views are the most essential. The question of whether or not particular aspects are essential to their respective philosophies will only be biased by the attempt to assimilate Wittgenstein's views to Kant's.

There is another reason why we should not paste over the later Wittgenstein's apparent lack of regard for the transcendental distinction. Denying that distinction is precisely what brought Davidson to reject the dualism of conceptual scheme and content (given), and hence to embrace a kind of conceptual idealism.

There is something to be said for comparing Wittgenstein's and Davidson's views in this respect. Wittgenstein's views on the conditions of meaning seem to imply that nothing can make sense which purports to reach beyond the outer bounds of human experience and life. Similarly Davidson's views on truth imply that nothing can make sense that purports to reach beyond the outer bounds of our

\(^{15}\) In *Subject, Thought and Context*, Petit and McDowell (eds.)
language and languages like ours. For Wittgenstein, it is only within a custom or practice that there exists the possibility of agreement and disagreement on the application of a rule, and thus the possibility of getting the application of a rule right or wrong. Since language use is a matter of rule following, we cannot use language to refer to that which we cannot make any judgements about. Wittgenstein would seem to agree with Davidson that we cannot make sense of a radically different conceptual scheme to our own.

On the surface, though, there also seems to be a major point of difference between Wittgenstein and Davidson: in some respects Wittgenstein does seem to be at least encouraging conceptual relativism. Wittgenstein, for instance, is fond of giving 'anthropomorphic' examples in which he confronts us with a different form of life from our own. But the acceptance of different forms of life does not necessarily lead us to conceptual relativism, just as the acceptance of different languages does not lead us there. What would commit us to such relativism is an acceptance of different forms of life that are incommensurable with ours. Bernard Williams has argued that on Wittgenstein's theory of meaning we would not be able to consider such forms of life\footnote{Op. at.}. Far from being a relativist, Wittgenstein presents us with different ways of applying concepts \textit{from our point of view}. We understand them precisely because they are not so alien to us as to be incommensurable with our way of acting.
Of course, comparing Wittgenstein's views with Davidson's can fall prey to the same dangers as the comparison with Kant's views. Ultimately, the comparison would not do justice to either philosopher. It would not be difficult to find important differences in their philosophies. (The fact that Davidson believes one can have a theory of meaning is one salient difference.) The suggestion is, rather, that we replace the vexed question of 'In what sense was Wittgenstein a transcendental idealist?' with the question 'In what sense was Wittgenstein a conceptual idealist?' In any case, this question seems to be more in the spirit of Williams' original article than the subsequent comparisons with Kant. According to Williams, Wittgenstein was concerned to show the limits of sense by 'moving around reflexively inside our view of things and sensing when one began to be near the edge by the increasing incomprehensibility of things regarded from whatever way-out point of view one had moved to'\(^{17}\). The idea is that Wittgenstein is an idealist in subscribing to the following principle: what the world is for us is shown by the fact that some things and not others make sense\(^{18}\).

Further evidence for the claim that Wittgenstein is a conceptual idealist can be found in Wittgenstein's work. We have already seen (in chapter 4) that Wittgenstein rejects a certain strong form of realism (Platonism) and that this rejection can justifiably be regarded as a rejection of conceptual realism. In

\(^{17}\) Williams, op. cit. p. 153.

\(^{18}\) The 'for us' in this principle would seem to make it reasonably innocuous. But Williams is suggesting a world view without peers: 'Under the Idealist interpretation, it is not a question of our recognising that we are one lot in the world among others, and (in principle at least) coming to understand and explain how our language conditions our view of the world, while that for others conditions theirs differently. Rather, what the world is for us is shown by ... the fact some things and not others make sense.'
chapter 5 we made sense of Wittgenstein's rejection of the given along roughly conceptual idealist lines: it is not possible in language to refer to something that is not individuated by a public concept. Our concepts are embedded in our practices, and cannot be thought of as being derived purely from an independent world. In short, Wittgenstein seems to hold a central claim of conceptual idealism that the nature of the objects, properties, and facts to which our concepts correspond is not fixed independently of the nature of the concepts that correspond to them.

That this claim could be attributed to the writer of *Philosophical Investigations* is supported by section 371:

*Essence* is expressed by grammar.

And by 373:

Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar).

As well as *Zettel*, section 55:

Like everything metaphysical the harmony between thought and reality is to be found in the grammar of the language.

All of these quotes suggest that Wittgenstein held the view that the nature of the world we inhabit is determined by our linguistic practices. What is apt to strike one as most odd about attributing such a view to Wittgenstein is that it amounts to a substantial metaphysical thesis, and Wittgenstein infamously rejects the

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19 But for a cautionary remark with respect to this idea, see *Philosophical Investigations*, 372.
validity of all philosophical theses. Indeed, all the claims that Wittgenstein held this or that kind of idealism (or that he held an opposing realism) share one assumption: that despite his insistence to the contrary, Wittgenstein's philosophy can be assimilated to some form of metaphysical doctrine. The common assumption, rarely stated explicitly, is that it is not possible to consistently avoid substantial metaphysical claims when doing philosophy. This view is further encouraged by the fact that Wittgenstein's remarks on philosophy have proved to be the most perplexing of his work, and are often dismissed as incoherent.

I do not think that Wittgenstein can be regarded as an idealist. Although he shares some of the assumptions of the conceptual idealist, he does not draw the metaphysical consequences that would make his philosophy a form of idealism. Not only does he think that drawing such consequences is nonsensical, but he has a conception of language that precisely rules out the (tractarian) idea that the limits of language are the limits of the world. This conception of language also throws light on his otherwise obscure remarks on philosophy, and shows that these remarks are not at all incoherent. In the following section I will examine Wittgenstein's conception of language and its relation to his rejection of philosophical theories. We will then be in a position to finally put to rest the idea that Wittgenstein was some kind of idealist by stating precisely his relation to conceptual idealism.
6.1 Wittgenstein's Remarks on Philosophy

In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein notoriously goes beyond the limits that his conclusion draws, and he explicitly acknowledges this, asking us to reject his premises as nonsense once we have recognised their significance. In *Philosophical Investigations* in contrast, he attacked much of the metaphysical and semantic theory of the earlier work, and made an effort to bring the concepts that are employed — such as 'language' and 'meaning' — down to earth. His remarks on philosophical method, however, seem to have the same kind of paradoxical nature as is manifest in the earlier work. Just as the *Tractatus* offers a theory of what can and cannot be said (both in general and in philosophy), so too *Philosophical Investigations* seems to offer a theory of what can and cannot be said in philosophy. He makes the apparently unsupported claim that one cannot offer theses in philosophy. In what follows, I will discuss those remarks and attempt to make sense of them. I will argue that the inconsistency is more apparent than real. Wittgenstein's views on philosophical method are derived from a certain conception of language and its relation to philosophy, and that this conception does not amount to a 'theory' in the sense that Wittgenstein rules out.

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, a philosophical problem is said to have the form: "I don't know my way about." Conceptual confusion arises when we become entangled in our own language. It is the task of the philosopher to untie the knots and remove the puzzlement that arises “when language is like an engine idling”,

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30 *Philosophical Investigations*, 123.
when it is without genuine content and understanding. Thus philosophy has the roughly negative role of sweeping away misunderstandings. It leaves ordinary language and real understanding as it is, only no longer obscured by confusions.

There are several ways in which confusions can arise, but one error that Wittgenstein repeatedly draws attention to is the tendency to over generalise, and find similarity were there is diversity. For example, when we see a law in the way a word is used, and we try to apply it consistently. The results can be paradoxical, and we are left in philosophical bewilderment. Or for example, the question 'What is time?' gives the impression that a definition is being asked for, but giving one does not provide understanding but creates misunderstanding. In the search for a law that we can apply consistently, we may first say, for example, that "time is the movement of heavenly bodies". But applying this consistently soon leads to paradoxical results. Realising the definition is unsatisfactory we discard it and look around for another. This very process of searching for definitions that will be more satisfactory is what convinces us that there must be some such correct answer.  

There is also the danger of false simplifications and assimilation, or of applying an analogy without regard for how far it will stretch. There are misunderstandings concerning the use of words, for instance, caused by seeing "analogy between the forms of expression in different regions of our language". Thus mistakes are

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21 The Blue and Brown Books, p. 27.
22 Philosophical Investigations, §90.
made by “philosophising mathematicians” who fail to see that there are different uses of the word ‘kind’ when they talk about kinds of numbers or kinds of proof – as if it had the same meaning as in the context “kinds of apples”.

Then there are analogies that create false pictures of the way language might work. For example, seeing that we can refer to an object in conversation by pointing to it, and knowing that we can point to a thing by looking at it, we mistakenly imagine that we can refer to a sensation by a mental act of directing one’s attention to it.

One of the reasons all these confusions get a grip on philosophers is because of a mistaken tendency to apply the methods of science, and a temptation to answer philosophical questions in the way science does. This is what Wittgenstein claims to be behind much of the false simplification and assimilation (a criticism aimed at the *Tractatus* as much as other philosophy). But his criticism of the scientific method goes far deeper than this, and his reaction is a complete rejection of most of what was previously called philosophy: ‘It can never be our job to reduce anything.’ Philosophy, as Wittgenstein prescribes it, is ‘purely descriptive’:

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24 *Philosophical Investigations*, §669.
It was true to say that our considerations could not be scientific ones. It was not of any possible interest to us to find out empirically 'that, contrary to our preconceived ideas, it is possible to think such-and-such'—whatever that may mean. (The conception of thought as a gaseous medium.) And we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets it light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language, and in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: *in spite of an urge to misunderstand them*. The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.\(^\text{36}\)

There are two points I would like to note about this passage. The first is that Wittgenstein considers the practice of offering theories in philosophy as a mistake, brought about by misapplying the method of science. The concepts of 'theory' and 'explanation' are grouped together, along with the notion of advancing something 'hypothetical'. This suggests the following connection between the concepts: scientific method proposes theories by postulating the hidden nature of the world. It is hidden in the sense that it is not observable, and requires the conjecture of hypotheses that must be tested against reality. This method relates to Wittgenstein's characterisation of philosophy in that this proposal and evaluation of theories is done on the basis of their explanatory power. A good theory is not one that seems self-evidently true, for that would be a mere observation. It is evaluated, rather, on the basis of what it explains, and how it explains it. The explanation it affords is thus offered as the justification for accepting the theory as true. This does seem to be the method employed by most philosophers. A philosophical problem is outlined, and a theory is proposed of

\(^{36}\) *Philosophical Investigations*, §109.
the underlying 'philosophical' facts. It is then argued that this theory explains the existence of the facts that constituted the problem, or shows them to be illusory, and thereby offers a solution. This solution is offered as a justification of the theory, and how well it deals with various philosophical problems (and how well it fits with other accepted theories) is the measure by which it is compared with competing theories.27.

The second point is that Wittgenstein sees philosophy as being primarily concerned with language. His primary target in the early sections of *Philosophical Investigations* is the theory of language of the *Tractatus*, and the influence of Russell and Frege contained therein. The central idea that is criticised is that philosophy should produce theories of the world that are offered on the basis of their ability to explain language. He also criticises the Russelian idea, expressed in the *Tractatus* (3.325), that the first task of philosophy is to reform language using a symbolism that more correctly mirrors the logical form of the world:

> Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it.
> For it cannot give it any foundation either.
> It leaves everything as it is. 28

> Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything—Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us. 29

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27 A theory that perfectly fits this description of philosophy is Russell's Theory of Descriptions, which Russell advances on the basis that it solves various puzzles in the philosophy of language and logic. (See his 'On Denoting', 1905).

28 *Philosophical Investigations*, §124.

29 *Philosophical Investigations*, §126.
Wittgenstein's use of the words 'explains' and 'deduces' requires some scrutiny. They are perhaps a little strong or general for his purposes, for was it not Wittgenstein that explained why there could be no private language? Did he not deduce that such a language was not possible? And Wittgenstein elsewhere accepts a form of 'explanation' that is not the one that science employs, but is a way of demonstrating 'connections' between phenomena. It should also be noted that Wittgenstein's use of the word 'theory' is also specialised. Theories in mathematics were considered by him to be part of the game of mathematics, and as such were not considered subject to his criticism. Similarly, "the so-called 'theory of chess' is itself just another game: the demonstration that I can get there in eight moves consists in my actually getting there in the symbolism, hence in doing in signs what, on a chess-board, I do with chessmen." So we might restrict the meaning of the terms 'explanation' and 'deduction' to their uses associated with constructive and predictive theories that attempt to probe beyond phenomena. Certain observations, which might be considered 'philosophical theories' by others, are not considered by Wittgenstein to be 'theories' as he uses the term. The fact that the meaning of a word can (in a large class of cases) be defined as the use we make of it is not presented as a theory that requires some justification in terms of its explanatory power. It is presented as an observation, and if it has a justification, it consists in giving examples, or in presenting the facts that make this particular observation easier to make. Of course, Wittgenstein

30 See, for example, Philosophical Investigations, §122.
then goes on to defend his observation against philosophical theories that contradict it. And he does that by unearthing the peculiarly philosophical intuitions that underlie those theories — intuitions that are not based on the observation of actual language use. Once an observation is made, there is no reason that we cannot adduce other related facts. We can even deduce that certain philosophical notions ("theories") are ruled out by the implications of an observation. For example, given certain observations about the nature of rule following, one can deduce that a private language is impossible. What Wittgenstein claims cannot be deduced is the hidden nature of the world that is supposedly required to support the surface phenomena of linguistic practice. The philosopher gains no special insight into reality with his investigations. He can merely make clearer and plainer that which is already in full view.

So we could summarise Wittgenstein's notion of a theory by pointing to the cases where we postulate something hidden beyond the actual use we make (or could make) of words. Consider, for example, the beetle in a box analogy with respect to sensation language. Theories 'cancel out': they are what could be otherwise given the observable phenomena. This may leave the term 'theory' a little vague — in the sense that it doesn't give a precise definition that covers all cases — but this is in line with Wittgenstein's own remarks on the nature of language and philosophy. Trying to give a more precise definition runs the risk of contradicting Wittgenstein's own methodological principles. Wittgenstein can be said to be teaching the use of the term 'theory' through the examples of the philosophical
notions he attacks. And this is precisely the way he says such concepts can be taught.32

But does Wittgenstein's method really proceed by means of mere description? If so, how does it solve philosophical problems? Reading through the Philosophical Investigations one can see the following general approach being repeated: Wittgenstein takes a question that results in philosophical confusion and considers various answers. Throughout he examines how we actually use the terms involved in the question, and rejects the problematic answers that one is tempted to give. For example, when considering the question, 'What is meaning?' he looks at various answers that suggest that 'meaning' refers to some peculiar process in the mind, or something external that the mind 'grasps'. In making tacit conceptions of meaning clear and explicit we can see clearly how they are mistaken. The conception we are left with when these mistaken ideas are cleared away consists of a series of examples of the way we actually proceed in 'language-games'. Our understanding of these games is not augmented with a new theory of what underlies them. It remains as it did before, but cleared of the obscuring misunderstandings we harboured before our investigation. Thus the work of the philosopher is to bring us back to our ordinary and unproblematic understanding, and one does this by "assembling reminders for a particular purpose."33

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32 See, for example, Philosophical Investigations, §§71 – 72.
33 Philosophical Investigations, §127.
Philosophy then, is supposed to proceed without metaphysical theories, or the explanations these theories offer, and we are told to be content with 'mere description'. This conception of philosophy is not, of course, a mere description of the way philosophy is actually done. It does not characterise what went by the name of philosophy before Wittgenstein, nor does it describe most of what we would recognise as philosophy today. So is Wittgenstein not offering a theory of philosophy, and thereby contradicting his own demands? In particular, is he not giving us a theory of the nature of philosophical problems? The idea that all philosophical problems are nothing but linguistic muddles certainly appears to be a theory of philosophical problems. The apparent contradiction (or at least much of it) can be removed if we carefully examine Wittgenstein's reasons for holding it. For what Wittgenstein has banished is theories of the way language works in terms of the purported hidden nature of reality that supports language. But Wittgenstein makes several claims about language that imply that this kind of support cannot be found. These claims, I think, can be considered to be observations rather than speculations, at least if one considers the area of thought that Wittgenstein was most interested in. I will argue that, at most, Wittgenstein was guilty of over-generalising these ideas in a way that may have prevented him from seeing certain philosophic problems, for example in areas such as ethics and aesthetics.

In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein's primary focus is the kind of theory of language that he himself was previously inclined to give (as discussed in chapter 4). But throughout his later work he held views about language that imply his
further views about the nature of philosophical problems. Thus, these latter views are not merely presented as a thesis. They are part of a continuing commentary on the nature of language, not a theory of the reality that supports language. In the next section I will examine the later Wittgenstein's conception of language, and try to judge if they make his view of philosophy inevitable. In the process we should not only be able to settle the question of whether this philosophical method is consistent or not, but we should also be able to pick up some clues as to Wittgenstein's relation to idealism.34

6.2 The Autonomy of Grammar

"Grammar consists of conventions"35, and these conventions are in a certain sense arbitrary. This is at odds with the conceptions of language preferred by both the conceptual idealist and the conceptual realist. The conceptual realist holds some form of the picture of language that Wittgenstein repeatedly attacks. This picture has it that language has a definite purpose, which is to communicate thoughts about objects. If we construe all of language on 'the model of object and designation', grammar is not arbitrary, but reflects the nature of those objects. The grammar of a word is derived from the nature of the object that the word refers to. Hence, for the conceptual realist, the concepts embedded in our grammar aspire to reflect the independent nature of reality.

34 The debate about Wittgenstein's views on philosophy has been hampered in some cases by a lack of attention to the development of his ideas. Equally, the debate about Wittgenstein's relation to idealism has been marred in some cases by a lack of attention to his texts, and has been conducted instead in very general and somewhat vague terms. In order to avoid making similar mistakes, in the following section I will quote heavily from his texts.

35 Philosophical Grammar, p. 190.
For the conceptual idealist, the connection between language and the world is even stronger. On the conceptual idealist conception of meaning, certain general considerations about the nature of representation or judgement in part determine (necessarily reflect) the nature of the objects, properties and facts that our concepts correspond to. Thus the conceptual idealist proposes that the analysis of those concepts can provide insight into the 'true nature of reality'. Language contains metaphysical truths. To say that grammar is arbitrary is to deny that there is any such link between our concepts and substantial metaphysical truth. This is true, according to Wittgenstein, since language does not have a definite purpose that involves the nature of reality in the relevant respect. Instead, it merely reflects contingent facts about human nature.

Wittgenstein first rejects the conception of language as something transcendentally isomorphic with reality\textsuperscript{36}, and instead wishes to use quite ordinary phenomena as the raw data of philosophical thinking:

\begin{quote}
Language is not defined for us as an arrangement fulfilling a definite purpose. Rather "language" is for me a name for a collection and I understand it as including German, English, and so on, and further various systems of signs which have more or less affinity with these languages.

Language is of interest to me as a phenomenon and not as a means to a particular end.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

Languages, of course, can be invented for a particular purpose, in which case that purpose will be reflected in the language. But language in general does not come

\textsuperscript{36} See Philosophical Investigations, §96, quoted above

\textsuperscript{37} Philosophical Grammar, p. 190. (See also Zettel, §322).
about like this. This is one of the essential points to emerge from comparing language with the playing of a game.

To invent a language could mean to invent an instrument for a particular purpose on the basis of the laws of nature (or consistently with them); but it also has the other sense, analogous to that in which we speak of the invention of a game.

Here I am stating something about the grammar of the word "language" by connecting it with the grammar of the word "invent".

Are the rules of chess arbitrary? Imagine that it turned out that only chess entertained and satisfied people. Then the rules aren't arbitrary if the purpose of the game is to be achieved.

"The rules of a game are arbitrary" means: the concept 'game' is not defined by the effect the game is supposed to have on us.58

Grammar is arbitrary in the sense that the rules of chess are arbitrary. Nothing justifies the rule that one may move the king only one square at a time. That is just the way the game is played. The way a game is played may reflect nothing whatsoever. If this comparison with language holds true, it follows that a certain approach to philosophy, which proposes theories of reality on the basis of their potential to explain linguistic phenomena, is misguided. We cannot look to metaphysics to explain language, since grammar affords no explanation:

Grammar is not accountable to any reality. It is grammatical rules that determine meaning (constitute it) and so they themselves are not answerable to any meaning and to that extent are arbitrary.

There cannot be a question whether these or other rules are the correct ones for the use of "not" (that is, whether they accord with its meaning). For without these rules the word has as yet no meaning; and if we change the rules, it now has another meaning (or none), and in that case we may just as well change the word too.39

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39 Philosophical Grammar, p. 184. The second paragraph also features in Philosophical Investigations as a footnote on page 147.
Wittgenstein believed that even the grammar of the logical constants was arbitrary: rather than reflecting some necessary fact about the world, they reflect contingent facts about human nature. In a footnote to p. 147 of *Philosophical Investigations* he refers to the tendency to 'invent a myth of meaning'\(^40\). We feel as if the fact that three negatives yield a negative again is somehow contained in the single negative. And in a sense it is: that is the convention for use the word 'not'. But we could agree to use the word 'not' differently. For example, such that two negatives yield a negative (as in the intended – and understood – meaning of "I ain't done nothin'"). What makes some rules seem more necessary than others is our form of life. We need only imagine a different way of living and communicating (involving, perhaps, different laws of nature) in order to make the use of some other rules intelligible\(^41\).

This contradicts the conceptual realist intuition that the concept 'not' is independent of how we decide to use it. A Platonist theory of logic, for example, holds that 'not' refers to an abstract mind-independent object that embodies the nature of negation. Wittgenstein's point is not that we cannot consider rules in such an abstract form, but that we need not use one rule rather than another. His point is that there can be no philosophical justification of using one rather than another. The reason we find the choice of one so necessary is because it is bound up with our nature\(^42\). That is how we normally think. Of course, there is a strong

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\(^{40}\) In *Philosophical Grammar* he refers to this mistake as a 'myth of symbolism or psychology' (p. 56). See chapter 4, section 4 of this thesis for a discussion.

\(^{41}\) *Philosophical Investigation*, p. 230.

\(^{42}\) See footnote (a) on p. 147 of *Philosophical Investigations*. 

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philosophical tendency to the conceptual realism that Wittgenstein is rejecting here. This can make Wittgenstein's view seem inconsistent. To the conceptual realist it may seem very much like Wittgenstein is offering an anti-realist theory of concepts. But Wittgenstein is only rejecting the philosophical conception of meaning that the conceptual realist is proposing. This is in perfectly consistent with his view of philosophy. "Philosophizing is: rejecting false arguments." As we saw in chapter 4, the sceptical requirements that the conceptual realists theory of meaning aims to meet are ill conceived. In general, the justification that the conceptual realist wants can never be achieved.

To understand Wittgenstein's reasons for holding this, one must consider the background against which he was writing. In the philosophy of language prevalent at the time, the task set by Russell and Frege, as well as his younger self, was to look for a theory of reality that accounted for certain regularities in language. It was assumed that these regularities must reflect metaphysical necessities. But for the later Wittgenstein, this assumption does not stand up to close scrutiny. This is what Wittgenstein means when he says that language is 'arbitrary':

43 See chapter 4, especially sections 4 and 5.
44 'The Big Typescript, § 87 (p. 165 in Philosophical Occasions).
"The only correlate in language to an intrinsic necessity is an arbitrary rule. It is the only thing which one can milk out of this intrinsic necessity into a proposition."

Why don't I call cookery rules arbitrary, and why am I tempted to call the rules of grammar arbitrary? Because I think of the concept "cookery" as defined by the end of cookery, and I don't think of the concept "language" as defined by the end of language. You cook badly if you are guided in your cooking by the rules other than the right ones; but if you follow other rules than those of chess you are playing another game; and if you follow grammatical rules other than such and such ones, that does not mean you say something wrong, no, you are speaking of something else.45

The conception of language in Wittgenstein's mature thought derives from the simple observation that the rules of grammar could be quite other than they are. They would not thereby by 'wrong'; they would simply be different rules. To assume that the rules of grammar reflect the nature of reality is to assume that there is only one possible grammar, or set of grammars, that corresponds in some way to reality. But this confuses questions of content with questions of form. A grammar is not true or false. The judgements that it allows us to make are:

The rules of grammar are arbitrary in the same sense as the choice of a unit of measurement. But that means no more than that the choice is independent of the length of the objects to be measured and that the choice of one unit is not 'true' and of another 'false' in the way that a statement of length is true or false. Of course that is only a remark on the grammar of the word "unit of length".46

But why say that the rules of grammar are not in general justifiable by reference to reality? Why can we not specify a grammar that is justifiable by reality, which

45 Philosophical Grammar, pp. 184 – 185. (See also Zettel, §320).

46 Philosophical Grammar, pp. 185. (See also Zettel, §320).
therefore reflects the nature of reality? After all, Wittgenstein concedes that certain ‘rules of representation’ are not conventions, since they can be justified:

I do not call the rules of representation conventions if they can be justified by the fact that a representation made in accordance with them will agree with reality. For instance the rule “paint the sky brighter than anything that receives its light from it” is not a convention.47

The answer is that the philosophical project of specifying the reality that justifies these rules of representation cannot be completed in general, for in the end all we can describe is reality as it is conceived by a particular grammar. The reality that we call upon to justify our grammar must be described, and this description is made possible by a certain grammar. But then it too stands in need of justification:

The rules of grammar cannot be justified by showing that their application makes a representation agree with reality. For this justification would itself have to describe what is represented. And if something can be said in the justification and is permitted by its grammar – why shouldn’t it also be permitted by the grammar that I am trying to justify? Why shouldn’t both forms of expression have the same freedom? And how could what the one says restrict what the other can say?48

Wittgenstein’s remarks on philosophy in Philosophical Investigations are not unsupported speculations. They arise from a picture of language that he developed over many years. This picture results, moreover, from a persistent attempt to see and represent language without the obscuring apparatus of a philosophical doctrine. It crucially involves rejecting the dualism of the surface

47 Philosophical Grammar, p. 186.
structure of language and an underlying deep structure that supposedly reflects
the essence of the world. Without this dualism we cannot solve philosophical
problems in the method supposed, for example, by Russell.

Of course, this brief description of Wittgenstein's views on language is not
enough to prove the validity of his controversial views on philosophy. But I think
we have done enough to show that they are not evidently and straightforwardly
self-contradictory. We have seen that Wittgenstein rejection of 'theory' in
philosophy is a rejection of applying the method of science to philosophical
problems. He rejects the idea that we can postulate a hidden nature of the world
that underlies our ordinary use of words on the basis that doing so has
'explanatory' power. This follows in part from his views on language and
grammar, which crucially involve rejecting the distinction between the observable
surface phenomena of language and an underlying hidden structure. A 'deep'
grammar is always offered in philosophy as a kind of justification of our use of
words, but such a justification is never possible. For what is the point in offering
a justification with something that is just in need of a justification itself?
Grammar can never be justified (and does not need be) because it arbitrary.
Grammatical rules are only answerable to more rules, not to the nature of a pre-
conceptualised (pre-grammatical) reality.

None of this is evidently self-contradictory, although it does involve some major
assumptions about the nature of philosophy. I will mention three that strike me
as important. Firstly, in the view that philosophy should not proceed on a model
of science, there is the assumption that philosophy must never advance uncertainly with hypotheses. It is not a matter of assessing the best theory, but of proceeding slowly and certainly. This is not itself a hypothesis – for it is too fundamental to compare it with the alternative – but it is an assumption.

Secondly, Wittgenstein also inherited a certain conception of philosophy from Frege and Russell as being primarily concerned with language. Again this involves some major assumptions, but again they are on the level where one must make assumptions in order to begin at all. Finally, it was Wittgenstein's view that all philosophical problems can be solved by 'untangling the knots' of language.

Where does this optimism come from? On Wittgenstein's view of language and its connection with the world, removing confusions seems to be the only way of solving philosophical problems. But why does he assume that all philosophical problems are soluble? It seems to me that it comes from the conviction, which Wittgenstein developed early in life, that all philosophical problems and really 'pseudo-problems' – albeit pseudo-problems that are often difficult to dissolve. It comes from the principal, expressed explicitly in the *Tractatus*, and implicitly in the treatment of the 'sceptical paradox', that a question without an answer is not a real question at all – that we cannot meaningfully express a question that has no possible answer. This is also a substantial and fundamental assumption in Wittgenstein's method.

I would also reserve judgement on whether Wittgenstein completed the task of revealing the nature of language to be always as he describes it to be. Wittgenstein simply refused to consider whole areas of discourse such as ethics
and aesthetics. So we might put the matter this way: given certain general assumptions about the nature of language, Wittgenstein's views on philosophy follow. We might doubt that Wittgenstein's remarks on philosophy have the general validity that he presented them as having. But even if that were the case, that would not by itself commit Wittgenstein to some metaphysical views, such as the isomorphism between the world and language implied by conceptual idealism, that he himself explicitly denied.

The single element of idealism that survived from the \textit{Tractatus} is this: that, as philosophers, we are confined within a language that cannot be anything but ordinary. There is no way to specify a language that more deeply or accurately reflects the nature of reality, for such a language would just as much be without justification. No justification (such as the given) can be specified without bringing it within ordinary language use, robbing it of its independent status, and thereby its justificatory role.

\textbf{6.3 Wittgenstein and Idealism}

I said the sole remnant of the earlier idealism is a certain concern with the limits of language. It is inherited from the idea that we found in Wittgenstein's 'Transcendental Solipsism' of §5.6 of the \textit{Tractatus}: The limits of my language mean the limits of my world. So does the later Wittgenstein nevertheless hold a kind of idealism? One that is based on the claim that the limits of our world are the limits of our language? This would just be the so-called move from the 'I' to the 'We' that Williams claimed occurred within the transcendental level.
The mistake here is to forget that Wittgenstein has rejected the transcendental scaffolding that made the earlier statement of the limits of language into a form of transcendental idealism. As we have already discussed, Wittgenstein rejected the transcendental isomorphism between language and world. The later Wittgenstein rejects the distinction between the surface structure of language and an underlying structure that more accurately reflects the Way Things Really Are. So while it is true to say that we cannot speak beyond the limits of language, that does not tell us what things there could or could not be. The limits of language are merely the limits of what can be said (not what there is). Finding the limits of language (by running up against them – finding inconsistencies and confusions) has only a therapeutic value. The limit of language in the later work is merely the point where our attempts to philosophise bring us to utter nonsense, where we are tempted to point insignificantly towards the world in an attempt to justify language.

The best way to make this point is to state the difference between Wittgenstein’s philosophical outlook and that of conceptual idealism. Conceptual idealism is an attempt to answer the question ‘How is metaphysics possible?’ In chapter 3, we discussed ways in which the conceptual idealist might argue for metaphysical truths. These methods are ruled out on Wittgenstein’s view of language.

For Morris, a metaphysical result is the establishment of a metaphysical reduction. For this to take place, there must be some (but not too great a) distance between our concepts and the objects they pick out. This allows for the possibility that
two concepts may nevertheless be of the same thing, thus allowing that one might be reduced to the other. But for Wittgenstein, grammatical rules, and the concepts contained within them, are inseparable from the kind of things they apply to. A different concept would just be a concept of a different thing. Recall the point that Wittgenstein makes in *Philosophical Grammar* about there being no "question whether these or other rules are the correct ones for the use of 'not'"\(^{49}\).

More generally, there is no question as to whether these or other rules are correct for a particular meaning, since the way we use a word determines what it means, not the other way round.

Now, to this rather general claim, the metaphysician will no doubt object, and with good reason. It is clear that we sometimes have different concepts for the same thing, and we may discover this fact. The classic case of Hesperus and Phosphorus is undeniable\(^{50}\). Or, to take another well-worn example, the word 'water' as applied by a competent speaker of English before the advent for modern chemistry, has a meaning given by its use. And that use may well have been best described in terms of the distinguishable macro properties of water. The word 'water' was used to name that clear liquid that quenched thirst, filled our lakes and oceans, and so on. When it was discovered by science that such fluids shared some underlying nature or structure that was specifiable in a new scientific vocabulary, the grammatical rules for correctly applying the word 'water' were reformed by the scientific community. A new grammatical rule was added in the


\(^{50}\) See Kripke's treatment of necessary *a posteriori* propositions in *Naming and Necessity*, 1982.
form of the proposition "water = H\textsubscript{2}O". According to Wittgenstein’s maxim, then, that the meaning of a word is given by its use, it would seem that the meaning has changed. At first blush, Wittgenstein’s views on meaning seem to bring him into line with the internalist, and in direct contradiction with the intuitions of the externalist. The former holds that the only facts that are relevant for determining the intensional meaning of a speaker’s utterance are facts about the speaker. The externalist claims that the "meaning" has remained constant through the discovery that "water = H\textsubscript{2}O", and draws the moral that meaning is determined in part by facts external to the speaker. On his account, the discovery that water is H\textsubscript{2}O is not only an empirical discovery, but also the discovery of a necessary proposition \textit{a posteriori}. But note that if the externalist wants to maintain that the meaning has remained constant, but that the use has changed, he owes us an account of what this constant "meaning" is, given that is neither the referent nor the use of the term.

Yet we have to concede to the externalist that there does seem to be some constancy in intentional meaning, and the discussion of Wittgenstein’s views on meaning in the previous two chapters do show some affinities with externalism\textsuperscript{51}. To this we can add that Wittgenstein’s notion of grammar actually makes sense of the idea that the use changes, while the meaning somehow remains constant. For in such a case we do not have a radical change of grammar, but an \textit{anticipated refinement}. A newly discovered empirical proposition (that water molecules consist

\textsuperscript{51} For example, the fact that meaning involves a regularity of use shows at least that it is not simply a matter of what the speaker \textit{thinks} he means (Philosophical Investigations §202). We resolve what someone means by an expression by considering the physical and social context in which the speaker utters it.
of two hydrogen atoms bound to an oxygen atom) is hardened into a grammatical proposition. A symptom becomes a criterion. That hardening may take place almost immediately in the case of scientific discoveries, of course, where the scientific theory (modern chemistry) already prescribes that natural kinds have "essences". That is to say, it is already written into the grammar of natural kind terms that some such refinement of the grammar will take place. Given this process of predetermined refinement, it certainly does make some sense to say that the concept involved has remained the same. The grammar of the word "water", both before and after the refinement, can be described by pointing at some water and saying, "that stuff". This, as Putnam originally pointed out, is how we are inclined to describe and teach our use of natural kind terms. And there is a sense in which someone brought up in an environment identical to ours in every respect, except that the stuff referred to with the term "water" has a different chemical composition, has a different "use" for that term. This is to take the externalists intuitions into account - both that we are using the same concept before and after the discovery, and that the twin earthlings have a different use. It is also true that we defer "correct use" to future scientific discoveries, in particular when there is a well-entrenched conceptual framework already in place (e.g. chemistry) - just as we defer correct use to the community or a group of experts. One could talk about "wide vs. narrow use", where the

52 A point with which Putnam concurs: "For what I have said is that it has long been our intention that a liquid should count as 'water' only if it has the same composition as the paradigm examples of water (or as the majority of them). I claim this was our intention even before we knew the ultimate composition of water." "Why There Isn't a Ready Made World" in Realism and Reason, pp. 220 - 221.

53 "The meaning of 'meaning'", 1975.
former, but not the latter, includes facts about the environment and the linguistic community. Furthermore, describing the use of the term is such a general way, we can make sense of the idea that what we discover when we find out that “water is H₂O” is in part a discovery about the way we have already been using the term “water”. The idea that we can “discover” a grammatical proposition in this sense does explain externalist’s intuitions, and the feeling that we have discovered something necessary.⁵⁴

This raises the issue of how “necessary a posteriori” propositions fit with Wittgenstein’s views, particularly his views on the nature of necessity. According to Wittgenstein, empirical propositions can be said to describe possible states of affairs, but necessary propositions cannot be said to describe necessary states of affairs. Their role is normative rather than descriptive: they function as, or are linked to, “grammatical propositions”.⁵⁵ But what of so-called necessary a posteriori propositions, which are purported to be both necessary, and about the world? As we have seen, grammar is a matter of convention. How can a “proposition” such as “water = H₂O” be both a matter of convention and have empirical content?

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⁵⁴ But I don’t see that we should concede too much to externalist intuitions other than at a “certain level of description”. To get swept up in the enthusiasm of externalism runs the danger of substantive philosophy, and will only get us into controversies (i.e. the internalism/externalism debate) that are not our direct concern. The debate often degenerates into the kind of philosophy that Wittgenstein was so dismissive about, because the theoretical term at issue (“meaning” or “content”) is so ambiguous, and the two sides disambiguate in different ways. This kind of debate can only have importance to the meaning theory builder.

To understand this, we need to consider again Wittgenstein’s view of grammar and the role convention in language. It is true that the claim that grammar is based on convention is central to Wittgenstein’s philosophy, but it must be recalled that this applies to grammar as a whole. In fact, grammar incorporates conceptual frameworks (such as modern chemistry) that make demands on how we decide further grammatical rules.\footnote{Of course, those demands do not \textit{have} to be deferred to. One could resist them in particular cases. To reapply a by now familiar point, making such exceptions to a conceptual framework is not a case of abusing that framework, but of using a different framework.}  If these demands are followed, then the arbitrariness of a grammatical rule becomes partly removed from its direct application\footnote{It is only \textit{partly} removed because the decision to accept the demand of the conceptual framework, that is, to apply that conceptual framework in this case, is, of course, arbitrary.}. An example of the following kind will illustrate the point well. Let us suppose that we agree to use the term “pepple” to designate that thing I currently have in my pocket, and suppose we take “pepple” to, in Kripke’s terminology, “rigidly designate” that item\footnote{Kripke, \textit{Naming and Necessity}.}. So, the pepple might exist in counterfactual situations, and indeed it is possible that the pepple was never in my pocket at all. Nevertheless, it remains true that the pepple is, in fact, in my pocket, and we use that fact to name it, despite the fact that we do not yet know what the pepple is. (We could imagine this naming as part of a game, where the aim is to guess the nature of the pepple). While the pepple remains in my pocket, we have a perfectly adequate handle on how to use our new word. And that is because we already have a grammar in which we can talk about things in my pocket. And despite the quite arbitrary way in which this item was named, we are
now in a position to empirically investigate the nature of peppleness. Should it turn out that my investigation reveals that the pepple is, in fact, a coin, we would proudly declare that, not only is the pepple this coin, but, since identity is a necessary property, we will have discovered that the pepple necessarily is this coin.

So is this not an example of a necessary a posteriori proposition? For Wittgenstein, necessary propositions are grammatical, so on his account it is necessary in so far as it has a normative role in how the terms involved are used. Nevertheless, when we named the pepple, the full use of the word, while already prescribed by our naming ceremony, remained in some ways unknown. Although it has already been arbitrated, it was not known, even by the namer, that this object was a pepple. Thus we can learn, a posteriori, what a pepple is, even though this is a matter of a grammar that is ultimately arbitrary and based on convention. A grammatical a posteriori proposition, we might say, is a proposition that is part convention, part empirical. (If we again imagine the game of guessing the nature of peppleness, we can imagine that the judge in the game gets to peek at the object. In doing so he discovers both an empirical fact and a grammatical rule that can both be expressed with “the pepple is this coin”).

In a similar way, we can see that “water = H₂O” is also partly grammatical. While it was discovered empirically that water has such a structure, the idea that some such structure was there to be found belongs to a certain conceptual framework that constitutes a grammar and embodies rules that are ultimately arbitrary. This allows us to perform reductions that reveal something of the grammar in which
they are applicable, and thus provide a means of conceptual analysis. While this grants a great deal to the externalist, and even hints in the direction of essentialism\(^9\), given Wittgenstein’s full account of the nature of language, externalism cannot offer us truly *metaphysical* reductions. Against this idea, Wittgenstein offers two decisive considerations.

First we have the by now familiar point that offering externalism as a theory that explains language use on the basis of the underlying structure of the world has the overwhelming problems emphasised in *Philosophical Investigations*. Any such theory assumes that reality has a structure that can be discerned prior to our linguistic practices. But discerning structure is a matter of language use, and thus presupposes a grammar. This grammar, if it is to be considered more fundamental, must be justified as such. These justifications will inevitably come to an end and we will just say that these are the sorts of discriminations that we tend to make – this is what we do. We cannot have a theory of language that makes reference to the world considered prior to that which we are trying to give a theory of: the employment of concepts.

There is an obvious counter-objection to this line of thinking that may be called ‘scientism’. The language of science, it will be argued, is not at all arbitrary, since it is designed for a very particular purpose: to discover the true nature of the

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\(^9\) The essentialism it hints at, however, is an innocuous kind on the level of concepts. The quote from Putnam in footnote 52 goes on: "If I am right then given those referential intentions, it was always impossible for a liquid other than H\(_2\)O to be water, even if it took empirical investigation to find it out. But the ‘essence’ of water in *this* sense is the product of our use of the word, the kinds of referential intentions we have: this sort of essence is not ‘built into the world’ in the way required by an essentialist theory of reference itself to get off the ground." (*Realism and Reason*, p. 221).
universe. The grammar it embodies, it will be further argued, is justified by its utility and the predictive power of its theories. This point ignores that even in scientific language games we bring to those games natural and cultural dispositions that could be otherwise. This brings us to the second point, which marks the most salient difference with conceptual idealism. While it is true that we defer correct usage of natural kind terms to the scientific community, we need not use those particular concepts. Wittgenstein, far from holding the view that certain concepts are essential to understanding the universe, argues that no concepts are absolutely essential:

"[If anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize—then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him."

This is also the crucial point to understanding the difference between Wittgenstein's views and Davidson's. The Davidsonian method is to look for the 'large features of reality' in the 'large features of language'. But we have already seen that the later Wittgenstein argued explicitly that the large features of language that he discerned in his earlier work could not be used meaningfully as super-concepts. If concepts such as 'proposition', 'language' and 'thought' have meanings, they must be thoroughly ordinary. In any case, these concepts alone do little more than set the problem of metaphysics. According to Davidson, even

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60 *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 230.
once we have established the possibility of a theory of truth (with which Wittgenstein would not concur), there remains the task of settling the ontological categories. Davidson, for example, argues that a large number of sentences we hold to be true could not be if there were not events, but concedes that a theory of truth would not specify that events exist. Since Wittgenstein holds that our conception of the world is not absolutely necessary, we might well countenance a conceptual scheme in which there was no category corresponding to events. In contrast to conceptual realism however, the question of whether one scheme or another is more correct does not arise for Wittgenstein. They are simply different. They are embedded in different forms of life. So, like the conceptual realist, Wittgenstein does seem to hold that it makes sense to consider (in some general way) that a conceptual scheme may be so different that it would be incommensurable with our own. This will be true if the interests and nature of some creature made its form of life radically different from ours. 'If a lion could talk,' says Wittgenstein ‘we could not understand him’.

6.4 Wittgenstein and Kant

I earlier put aside the question of whether the later Wittgenstein was a ‘Transcendental’ idealist, on the grounds that the question is too ambiguous. The philosophies of Kant and Wittgenstein are too complex, and too subtle, to lend

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62 Perhaps one might argue that we could not countenance a conceptual scheme without events – that such a conceptual scheme would make no sense to us or would necessarily seem incomplete. But who is to say that another conceptual scheme could not be so radically different from our understanding? Perhaps this question cannot be answered from within our conceptual scheme, and so we should neither assert nor deny the possibility.

63 Philosophical Investigations, p. 223.
themselves to any systematic comparison. Those who have argued for the merit in comparing their views have more often provided little in the way of evidence from the corresponding texts. In order to advance the debate, Hans-Johann Glock has distinguished four different ways in which the philosophies of these two thinkers might be compared: questions of actual influence; parallels at the methodological level; substantive similarities in philosophical logic; and substantive similarities in the philosophy of mind. For the most part, this thesis has concerned itself with the first two of these, particularly in chapter 2, where we considered Kant’s influence on Wittgenstein’s early thought. There we found both points of influence and similarities at a very general level of methodology. But when we turn to the later Wittgenstein, this kind of comparison becomes too tenuous to warrant detailed claims, for the connections become too far removed. For the most part, that which links Wittgenstein with Kant are just those aspects of Wittgenstein’s early work that the later Wittgenstein went to so much trouble to refute. Thus we have just as much reason to consider Wittgenstein’s mature thought as a rejection of the Kantian justification of (a restricted) metaphysics.

Perhaps the best level on which to compare these very different philosophical approaches is on the very general level sketched in chapter 3: as approaches to metaphysics. Both avoid the dichotomy of conceptual idealism and conceptual

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64 A view also expressed by Hans-Johann Glock, in one of the more interesting articles on the topic ‘Kant and Wittgenstein: Philosophy, Necessity and Representation’, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 5 (2), 285–305. (See for example Jonathan Lear's paper to *The Aristotelian Society*, The Disappearing "We" – and Barry Stroud's response.)


66 See longer footnote 0.2 in the appendix for a brief discussion on comparing the Transcendental Deduction with the private language argument.
realism by restricting metaphysical claims, though Wittgenstein does so more fervently. Both acknowledge the limits of our conceptual scheme, and accept (at least implicitly) the possibility of other, incommensurable conceptual schemes. Against the conceptual realist, both Wittgenstein and Kant are keen to prescribe strict boundaries on talk about that which is beyond our conceptual scheme.

One salient difference is that, even taken in its most negative sense, Kant’s concept of ‘noumena’ has no real parallel in Wittgenstein’s later thought. And while both accept the possibility of alternative conceptual schemes, there is no sense, however limited, of a ‘thing-in-itself’ in Wittgenstein’s mature thought. We get a grip on considering different points of view by considering different interests and forms of life – not by considering, in however an abstract form, a common reality that differing schemes are applied to.

The most profound link between their philosophical approaches is their shared commitment to restricting metaphysics. But as we saw in chapter 1, Kant’s task was ultimately to save metaphysics by placing it on firm foundations. This aspect of Kant’s thought is precisely that which developed into modern day conceptual idealism. Wittgenstein took the restrictive aspect of Kant’s project to greater extremes – even in the Tractatus – and ended up with philosophical quietism.

The quietism discussed in this chapter is the main point of continuity with the ‘transcendental idealism’ of the Tractatus. The critique of meaning and philosophy

\[^{67}\text{Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 223. In the 'Transcendental Aesthetic', though Kant does not consider other conceptual schemes explicitly, he acknowledges the human-centric nature of our way of}\]
in *Philosophical Investigations* can be related to the quietism of the *Tractatus* in the following way: the later critique shows how we cannot express the transcendental conditions of meaning and the world. While the younger Wittgenstein thought that they made themselves manifest, but cannot be said, the later Wittgenstein shows how the quest to discover them is misguided in the first place. What is beyond language is merely nonsense. This shows that the differences with Kant are more significant than the similarities. Kant wanted to save metaphysics; Wittgenstein set out to destroy it.

Part of the quietism of the *Tractatus* was a rejection of the notion of synthetic *a priori* truths. In section 6, Wittgenstein argues that the only *a priori* truths are analytic. The propositions of mathematics and the fundamental principles of mechanics are analytic in the sense that they say nothing about the world, but show something about the nature of representation. “The logical propositions describe the scaffolding of the world, or rather they present it. They ‘treat’ of nothing.”

Wittgenstein later reconsidered this anti-Kantian aspect of the *Tractatus*. His earlier view was that the elementary propositions are independent of each other. But this presents a problem, since the proposition ‘this object is red all over’ excludes the proposition ‘this object is green’, and Wittgenstein failed to find an

thinking when he concludes that it is “solely from the human standpoint that we can speak of space, of extended things, etc.” (A26 / B42)

Longer footnote 0.1 has some relevance to the issue of comparing Wittgenstein and Kant at this very general level.

69 *Tractatus* 6.124.
analysis of such statements in terms of common elementary propositions. He therefore gave up on the thesis that the elementary propositions are independent, and recognised that statements like 'Nothing can be red and green all over' are logically necessary without being strict tautologies. He contemplated calling such propositions ‘synthetic a priori’. As Glock points out, this amounts to an admission that some propositions seem to anticipate reality without being based on experience of that reality. Neither the Platonist view that these statements are about some reality beyond empirical reality, nor the positivist view that they say nothing, were plausible alternatives for the later Wittgenstein: both the Platonism and the positivism of the Tractatus were rejected.

But neither could Wittgenstein reasonably turn to Kant on this issue. Kant’s theory of the synthetic a priori assumes too much of the theoretical architecture of Kant’s transcendental enquiry. It is worth saying something, therefore, about Wittgenstein’s reassessment of necessary propositions. For given the anti-theoretical stance described above, it is not clear what account of the so-called synthetic a priori Wittgenstein is entitled to give.

The first thing to note is that the later Wittgenstein did reject the notion of synthetic a priori truths. According to Glock, for Wittgenstein necessary

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70 See Glock, p. 299.
72 The Wittgenstein of the Tractatus managed, in an unsettling way, to combine these opposing views. They showed something about a super-empirical reality, but said nothing.
propositions are \textit{a priori}\textsuperscript{73} because they are not \textit{about} anything, and therefore not synthetic in Kant's sense\textsuperscript{74}. As we have already seen, for Wittgenstein necessary propositions are \textit{normative} rather than descriptive. They function as 'grammatical propositions', which are used to express grammatical rules or 'norms of representation'.\textsuperscript{75}

The account of necessary propositions that Glock finds in Wittgenstein then goes as follows. The apparent 'hardness' of necessary propositions is explained by the fact that a grammatical proposition "\textit{antecedes} experience in an innocuous sense."\textsuperscript{76} The statement "Black is darker than white" is not corrigible to experience since the putative statement "This white object is darker than that black object" is a nonsensical combination of signs. Nothing can count as both deserving the attribution of being 'white' and being 'darker than black'. Necessary connections are connections in grammar, and thus, in a broad sense\textsuperscript{77}, conceptual.

Glock goes on to say of Wittgenstein's later work that:

\textsuperscript{73} Given the previous discussion on necessary \textit{a posteriori} propositions, we may want to phrase this a little more carefully than the view Glock attributes to Wittgenstein. It would be better to say that that part of a proposition that constitutes its necessary status is not about anything, since it is grammatical.

\textsuperscript{74} Glock, p. 300. (\textit{Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle}, pp. 67, 77–8; \textit{Lectures}, p.79).


\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{77} Broad, because Wittgenstein's notion of grammar includes not just rules considered in abstraction, but their employment in language games that embody a 'form of life'.

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The bounds of sense are drawn not by synthetic principles a priori, but by linguistic rules which exclude certain moves within a language game... Accordingly, while not all logical necessity is analytic, it is all conceptual, and hence linguistic, that is to say, it is determined by what we treat as a meaningful employment of words.  

This linguistic account is just what we would expect from Wittgenstein given the characterisation of his philosophy provided in this chapter. For Wittgenstein, we cannot give philosophical theories in terms of the hidden structure of the world. As philosophers, we are restricted to making observations about language.

Glock goes on to argue, however, that this view of necessary propositions will not adequately explain the a priori status of some simple 'metaphysical' propositions, such as 'Every event must have a cause', and that this amounts to a lacuna in Wittgenstein's account. He points out that, “on a straightforward interpretation”, Wittgenstein's treatment of the law of causality rests on the claim that the phrase 'uncaused event' is ruled out as nonsensical on grammatical grounds. But that is shown to be false if we consider the following case: image that one morning dinosaur footprints appeared on the ceiling. It is true that we would not, in the absence of any plausible candidate for a cause of this event, simply shrug our shoulders and say “Just one of those things!” But Glock maintains that eventually we would be prepared to give up in our quest for a suitable cause – “for instance because the laws of nature not only fail to provide one, but suggest that none is to be had”. Thus the idea of an 'uncaused event' cannot be ruled out on conceptual grounds.

78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., p. 301.
But Glock has evidently brushed over a distinction between the kind of 'conceptual grounds' that feature in Wittgenstein's thought, and a simple account based on analyticity: that the concept of a cause is implied by the concept of an event. In any case, our suspicions are aroused by Glock's apparent willingness to countenance the idea of an uncaused event. He gives no indication of how the laws of nature might lead us to believe that the dinosaur prints were uncaused, and has smoothed over the fact that accepting such an idea would be met with almost insurmountable conceptual resistance. He has only made clear two unsatisfactory alternatives: either we find the notion of an uncaused event straightforwardly contradictory, or we find it perfectly acceptable. He rejects the former, but if the latter is accepted as true, we seem to be thereby giving up on the \textit{a priori} status of the law of causality. For in the situation where we accept the existence of an uncaused event, we have given up on the \textit{truth} of the statement 'every event must have a cause', let alone it's \textit{a priori} status.

What has gone wrong here? Consider the difficulty we would have accepting the possibility of the dinosaur prints being uncaused. Glock is right to claim that it is not that the phrase 'uncaused event' is straightforwardly nonsensical, but it may be appropriate to object that, "that is not how we \textit{normally} think about events!" I think that Wittgenstein might express this confusion by saying, "I don't know what game we're playing now!"

We can explain both the oddness of the phrase 'uncaused event' and its apparent coherence if we consider this phrase as being a new use of the word 'event'. The
phrase has been taken out of the context of its usual language games, and although this is possible — we can invent new games — it makes us feel uneasy because the rules of this new game have not yet been made clear or decided upon. Ordinarily, the concept of an event is used in the context of classical (or folk) mechanics. It belongs to a family of games that have as their purpose the formulation of explanations. Without further understanding of how a language game that gave up on the law of causality could provide us with explanations, the new use of the verbal sign 'event' remains detached from its previous meaning. The term 'event' has its place in that family of language games that are connected with giving explanations of the world in a particular form. According to Wittgenstein, the sentence 'every event must have a cause' expresses one of the common grammatical rules of these games. Of course we can choose to give up on that rule — the rules of grammar are in a certain sense arbitrary. But they are not arbitrary when one considers them with respect to the nature of the games we play. To use other rules is to play different games.

Glock claims that what is missing from Wittgenstein’s account can be found in Kant. What links the idea of an event with the idea of a cause must be a third concept. In a Kantian spirit, Glock suggests that this third concept is the notion of experience: ‘Events must be caused not because random and chaotic changes do not qualify as events, but because persistently chaotic events are not plausible objects of self-conscious experience’\(^8\). But that will not fill any lacuna in

Wittgenstein's later thought, because it does not fit with his thought at all. The subject matter of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is grammar, not 'self-conscious experience'. Wittgenstein would not have couched his thoughts using such an ill-defined term, which smacks of a super-concept:

We are under the illusion that what is peculiar, profound, essential, in our investigation, resides in its trying to grasp the incomparable essence of language. That is, the order existing between the concepts of proposition, word, proof, truth, experience, and so on. This order is a super-order between—so to speak—super-concepts.81

The third concept that links 'event' and 'cause' for Wittgenstein is not the concept of experience, but the concept of an explanation, or more generally the language games we play when we formulate and consider explanations.

This leaves us one remaining question about the consistency of Wittgenstein's pronouncements on philosophy. For is not the concept of a language game a super-concept? One thing that can be said in favour of the coherence of Wittgenstein's method is that the concept of a language game at least remains, in a broad sense, a linguistic concept. Its employment as a device to solve philosophical problems is in keeping with the heart of Wittgenstein's method: to assemble reminders from observations of language, and to do so in a way that does justice to the richness of linguistic activity. Wittgenstein is not an idealist because he is not offering a theory of reality. He is engaged in the task of forming a coherent

81 *Philosophical Investigations*, §97. Of course, that is not to say that we cannot give the phrase 'self-conscious experience' a relevant use, but Glock leaves this possibility mysterious. It certainly would not be the notion as it was used by Kant when he talks about the 'synthetic unity of apperception' (as in, for example, B407), as is clear from the critical tone of §24: 'The significance of such possibilities of transformation, for example of turning all statements into sentences beginning 'I think' or 'I believe' (and thus, as it were, into descriptions of my inner life) will because clearer in another place (Soripsism.)'
and perspicuous representation of language. Philosophy tells us nothing, but simply reminds us of the kinds of creatures we are and the way we communicate.
PART THREE

QUIETISM

Wovon man nicht spechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.
The previous chapter covered Wittgenstein's reasons for holding a general quietism with respect to all philosophical problems. It might be argued, however, that Wittgenstein still made some substantial assumptions, at least about the nature of language, if not about the nature of philosophy. Wittgenstein worked hard over many years on developing what he considered a perspicuous representation of language. If this representation is correct, then I think his views on philosophy follow. But the very fact that developing this understanding took so much of his time shows the enormity of the task, and therein lies the difficulty. For language is a large and complex phenomenon, and it is difficult to represent it with one metaphor that is not as subtle and ambiguous as language itself. The endless possibilities suggested by the idea of a 'language-game' are evidence of that — a point that Wittgenstein made use of to discourage over-generalising in philosophy\(^1\). So the difficulty in accepting Wittgenstein's views with respect to philosophy come to this: that it is hard to see that language \textit{always} works in a way

\footnote{\textit{Philosophical Investigations}, §24.}
so as to exclude the possibility of drawing substantial philosophical theories from it. It is hard to accept that quietism holds in general.

Despite Wittgenstein's high-handed pronouncements on philosophy, it is evident that he was clearly aware of this problem. He treated each piece of philosophical nonsense individually and thoroughly. Not that he completed this task. Certain areas of discourse were barely covered by his work, most notably ethics and aesthetics. Even if quietism were the only correct approach to philosophy in general, it would be an endless task to show it. But that is no reason to reject quietism, applied in a piecemeal fashion, as a general methodology. The limits of this methodology will be shown by the extent of its success. By way of illustration, I want to demonstrate that quietism is correct for at least one particular area of discourse. And the first step in this direction will be to show that neither conceptual realism nor conceptual idealism can provide satisfying accounts of that area. Such a demonstration would at least illustrate the conflict between conceptual realism and conceptual idealism, and show how quietism can provide a cogent alternative.

I have in mind three related lines of thought that tempt us, as philosophers, to utter nonsense. In the course of this thesis I have touched on, in varying contexts, a number of more or less related themes in the philosophy of mind and metaphysics. In particular we have touched several times upon the nature of subjectivity and its relation to language and objectivity. It is the connection between these lines of thought that I want to stress in the present chapter. If I
am right in thinking that the connection between them is significant, then the philosophical treatment of one should provide insight into the correct treatment of the other two. And this connection can best be made, I believe, by considering these philosophical problems in the context of the debate between conceptual idealism and conceptual realism.

7.1 Philosophy and Subjectivity

The first line of thought is simple, but perplexing. It is the argument, discussed in chapter 1, that has been used to propound a doctrine of idealism. The argument takes the form of an exercise in conceivability. We are asked to imagine a world (or some part of it) that is presented to no subject whatsoever. But one necessarily finds oneself as subject in or of that world. Hence, the argument concludes, a world without a subject is impossible.

We noted in chapter one that it is a mistake to take this argument to prove that minds are a necessary part of the world. When I imagine anything, I, as imagining subject, am not necessarily part of what is imagined. Indeed, it seems that in a certain sense of 'me', it is difficult to see that I could be part of what is imagined. For nothing in my imagination corresponds to me. Of course, I can imagine being one of the characters in the scene that I imagine. Usually (though not necessarily) this will take the form of conjuring up conscious states that bear some similarity to the states I suppose I would be in if I were in the imagined situation. These states will typically be in some way visual in nature (I imagine how thing would appear to me visually) but may include other sense modalities and perhaps
the emotions that the images invoke in me. Although the situation is simulated, if ones imaginative powers are strong enough, the simulation can be extremely vivid. The emotions one evokes in oneself may be very real. However distinct the act of imagining is from the act of perceiving one will always be in some set of mental states that are very real. One does not imagine that one imagines. Likewise, one would like to say something similar about the subject. Though I imagine myself in a foreign place, I do not imagine myself. Every part of what I can imagine I can imagine otherwise. The content of my imaginative act can always be changed. But that it is I who imagines remains constant. Even if I imagine being someone other than M. D., it remains true that I imagine that I am someone other than M. D. Throughout the imaginative act, I am myself.

This last point may form part of the realist’s reply to the idealist\(^2\). If the content of my imaginative act is given by what is imagined, then I form no part of that content. Hence, while I cannot abstract myself from my imagination (since it is I who does the imagining), I can subtract myself. Even if, as Peacocke would have it\(^3\), to imagine a tree is to imagine being in some conscious state that would normally be caused by the presence of a tree, it does not follow that what one is imagining is a tree being perceived. The perceiver is not part of what is imagined.

Nevertheless, even if this point is conceded, the argument for idealism still has some power. It still seems to contain some philosophical truth, even if that truth

\(^2\) As it does for Williams. See his ‘Imagination and the Self’ in *Problems of the Self*.

\(^3\) His views on what it is to imagine something can be summed up with the following General Hypothesis he puts forward: *(H) to imagine something is always at least to imagine, from the inside, being in*
is not the doctrine of material idealism. Part of this ‘truth’ is contained in the
thought that a subject, if not present in my imaginative act, is somehow
presupposed by any imaginative act. The world as it is imagined, perceived or
known, is a world for a subject. The world as it is conceived is the world for a
subject. The concept of world and the concept of subject are interwoven. But
what is this subject that is presupposed? Two answers suggest themselves. But
these two answers, while both are tempting to the point of being self-evident, also
seem mutually exclusive to the modern philosopher.

The first answer has already been suggested by the discussion so far. It is that
whatever the subject that is presupposed by the ‘world’ is, it is not \textit{part} of that
world. Whatever world I imagine, the subject that is necessarily ineliminable from
the act of imagination is never part of what is imagined. The point could be made
in a Humean spirit: whatever part of my imagination or experience I assess, none
of it turns out to be the subject. But Kant thought of the matter differently. It is
not that a thorough phenomenological search comes up empty, but rather that we
know in advance that the subject will not be found \textit{in} experience\footnote{B406 – 407.}. Kant thought
of the subject as the synthetic unity of apperception. It is the ‘I think’ that can
accompany all my thoughts and intuitions. Such a transcendental subject cannot
usefully be described as a substance, for (to put the matter in Kantian terms) the

\textit{some conscious state}. See Christopher Peacocke, ‘Imagination, Experience, and Possibility: A Berkeleyian
View Defended’.
category of substance applies only within experience. But then what is left of this concept of a subject? The sober minded philosopher — especially the conceptual idealist — might argue that it is merely an idea, one that is ripe for elimination. On this view the subject is a construct, corresponding to an idea that has no real referent. Just as the 'I' is no part of the imagination or experience, so it is no part of the world.

The second answer is that, quite clearly and obviously, I am the subject. This is worrying enough for the proponent of the argument for idealism. As we saw in chapter 1, that argument, if it works, proves not idealism but solipsism, for I cannot imagine something that is not imagined or perceived by me. But suppose now that we reject the argument for (material) idealism on the basis outlined above. We granted that a subject is presupposed, but argued that such a subject is merely a presupposition to the idea of imagining anything. It is not part of the world, but an idea that is related to the idea of a world. But am I merely an idea? Does the idea of a subject in the context of the imaginative act not refer to me? It is easy to feel sympathy with Descartes' thought that if anything is certain it is that I exist as a thinking substance. (We really do feel this sympathy).

This brings us to the second line of thought that I would like to discuss. As we noted previously, the argument, rather than taking us neatly to the doctrine of

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5 This simplifies Kant's view somewhat. He claimed in his 'Critique of the First Paralogism of Pure Psychology' that we must necessarily regard ourselves as substance, but concludes that we should 'recognise that this concept signifies a substance only in idea, not in reality.' [A 351]

6 One might argue (as Schopenhauer does) that this 'I' is identical with the thing-in-itself, but this leaves the subject as something inherently mysterious, beyond our ability to make judgements or say anything about it.
idealism as intended by Schopenhauer and Berkley, has driven us to the unhappy position of solipsism. But what kind of solipsism have we arrived at? It is not the obviously nonsensical solipsism that has it that all substance is dependent on my ego. For my ego is, if it exists at all, a substance. A substance is a part of the world, and very much a contingent part of it. I can easily imagine a world without substances. Yet in doing so I do not disappear. The subject that was presupposed in my idea of a world, we must conclude, is not part of the world.

We are immediately reminded of the solipsism of the *Tractatus*, which I labelled 'Transcendental' in chapter 2. By 'transcendental' I mean precisely that which is presupposed by the idea of experience and the world. Wittgenstein himself excluded that which is presupposed from being part of the world, for that which is part of the world is contingent, and could be otherwise (*Tractatus* 5.634). Hence the 'metaphysical subject' is a 'limit — not a part of the world' (5.641).

The problem with this, as we saw in chapter 2, is that it leaves completely mysterious what this metaphysical or transcendental subject is. For Wittgenstein it is part of that which makes itself manifest, but cannot be said. And the subject enjoys this ineffable status because it is presupposed by the notions of language and possibility. Put another way, we cannot give content to the notion of the transcendental subject, since it is that which is presupposed by the idea of

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7 Unless, of course, one tries to use this argument to show that the substance of my ego is not contingent — which is precisely the solipsist's point. I assume for this argument that such a crude form of solipsism is not a tempting alternative.
content. But this just seems to be nonsense. How can we use a concept to which we cannot give content?

We have reached the idea of transcendental solipsism by considering the argument from imagination for idealism. The early Wittgenstein did not put these thoughts in terms of imaginative acts. For him, a possibility was given by representability. The link is easy to make, however, since for Wittgenstein to think (use language) is to picture a state of affairs. We can thus understand Wittgenstein’s reasons for introducing the metaphysical subject in §5.6 by considering the way our current line of thinking has led us to solipsism. I cannot imagine any proposition that is not a proposition in my language. So the limits of my language are the limits of the world (that which can be described in language).

I argued in chapter 2 that Wittgenstein does not argue from the privacy of language and experience to his transcendental solipsism. But it does not follow that Wittgenstein did not hold some view akin to the privacy of language view at the time of the Tractatus. As we noted in chapter 4, he held that we learn to use words by a kind of private examination of the phenomena referred to. (The very view that he later attacked so rigorously in his remarks on private language. See chapter 5.) And even if one does not argue from privacy to solipsism, one could well argue the other way. Whatever the differences between ‘empirical’ and ‘transcendental’ solipsism, it is the essence of solipsism that the subject (in whatever sense the ‘subject’ is understood) has a unique relation to the world. One can describe this uniqueness in terms of the objects that the subject’s
language is supposed to refer to. The subject is taken to have direct contact with those objects in a way that is beyond the descriptive powers of language. Objects can be named but not described. (And since this naming relation is presupposed by language, it cannot be further analysed within language). The link between privacy and the notion of a simple object is this: a simple object can only be named, not described. The object does not fall under any public concept, since it has no structure to distinguish it from any other object. The concept it falls under can only be understood by the user of its name, who is in direct contact with its self-intimating nature.

The third idea that I wish to discuss is the concept of essentially private experience. It is easy to sympathise with the view that the later Wittgenstein goes to so much effort to attack: that only I can know what my experience is like. It is likewise easy to sympathise with the view (though apparently easier for some philosophers than for others) that experience is made up (at least in part) of private, ineffable elements that correspond to the subjective qualitative feel of experience. Our ordinary descriptive language describes what our experience is of, not the experience itself. Even experiential terms, such as ‘dizziness’, do not seem to capture what it is like to feel dizzy in their public use. That knowledge, it would seem, is pre-linguistic, and can only be gained by having the experience. But could there be something that is pre-conceptual? If we can speak of it at all, then surely we can articulate what it is that we are speaking of. And then we have described that which was earlier supposed to be ineffable.
7.2 Subjectivity and the 'Irresolvable Debate'

Like so many philosophical disputes, the problems discussed here concerning the subject and its relation to the world have been characterised by diametrically opposed views. Let us take some of the wide-ranging literature on 'qualia' and 'sense-data'. The referents of these terms (that is to say, which entities are at issue in the first place) are, of course, the subject of much contention. The term 'qualia', as used by some philosophers, need not imply the disputed entities have (or are) private or ineffable properties. This is particularly true if the proponent of qualia holds that they are properties of things (objects) rather than minds. Nevertheless, much of the traditional dispute over qualia or sense data can be considered to be relevant to the issues at hand. For a great deal of the debate about whether qualia exist (and what follows from this) hangs on whether or not qualia are describable in ordinary public language (whether they can be given physical or functional descriptions)\(^8\). To simplify matters I will henceforth use the term 'qualia' to refer to private, ineffable qualities. The question is whether such a concept is coherent enough to have any application.

The debate about the existence of qualia is an example of the form of dispute where one camp asserts the existence of some disputed entity, while the other position denies its existence. In such disputes, it is typical for some overarching doctrine to be at stake. In the case of qualia and the subject, the general philosophical thesis most generally taken to be at issue is physicalism. The anti-

\(^8\) Of course it is open to the anti-physicalist to argue that qualia admit of public descriptions that resist physical or functional reduction, but I don't think anyone does this.
physicalist argues that some entity, such as qualia, 'evidently' exists, or can be shown to exist by simple reasoning, and that its description cannot be reduced to a physical level of discourse. The physicalist has the option of either arguing that the existence of the disputed entity is compatible with physicalism⁹, or (more often the case) that the disputed entity is not coherently defined and should thus be eliminated.

This seems to be the underlying form of most arguments about qualia, even when they are not explicitly put in these terms. By this I mean that this way of putting the matter best reflects the opposing intuitions that prevent the debate from being resolved. Let us take, for example, Jackson’s Knowledge Argument¹⁰. This does not obviously have the usual form of an argument about ineffable qualities or entities, but I think that it is driven by (and driving at) the same intuitions.

Mary is brought up in a completely black-and-white environment, learning all her knowledge from textbooks and a black-and-white television set. She is a most diligent and gifted student, and she finally absorbs all the knowledge that can be taught in this way. She gains, that is, all the propositional knowledge there is to gain. In particular she demonstrates a remarkable grasp of neurophysiology, especially in the area of colour perception. According to Jackson, she thereby gains all the knowledge that the physical sciences afford on these matters. So what happens when she leaves the room and experiences red for the first time?

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⁹ E.g. Shoemaker argues that qualia exist, in that inverted spectrums are a logical possibility, but that they are nevertheless compatible with functionalism. See ‘Functionalism and Qualia’.

¹⁰ Jackson, F., ‘What Mary Didn’t Know’.

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Does she learn something new? The anti-physicalist claims that she obviously does. She learns the *what-it’s-like* to experience red. But, by hypothesis, she already knew all that the physical sciences had to teach. So there are more facts to be known than those covered by the physical sciences, and physicalism is false.

There are two standard responses to this line of argument. Firstly, it has been argued that what Mary gains when she leaves captivity and sees a ripe tomato for the first time is not some piece of knowledge but a recognitional capacity. She gains the ability to recognise (the experience of seeing) red. The second response is to flat refuse to acknowledge that it is clear that Mary would gain any knowledge or even ability by her new experience. Seeing red for the first time, she will instantly recognise it as the experience of perceiving a red object, because it will be just as her studies and research had predicted. We do not know what it is like to have all the physical knowledge, so we are wrong to assume that it would not include the what-it’s-like of experiencing red.

But I do not think that the pro-qualia philosopher need blush at these objections. Neither of them will do much to undermine the intuitions that are fostered by someone who already takes qualia seriously. And by qualia I mean precisely that which is *private* to the individual, for it is privacy that makes the concept of a particular quale resistant to description by the physical sciences. Since there is no (complete) public description of the experience of seeing red, Mary could not have learned what it is like to see red without actually seeing red for herself.
On the other hand, the proponent of qualia is not going to make much headway in converting the opposition to his cause. The physicalist will continue to miss the anti-physicalist point so long as she does not share the same intuitions about private objects. Indeed, her best response can be put like this: either the entity you are talking about can be adequately described and defined, in which case there is no *a priori* reason to suggest that it cannot be incorporated into a completed physics, or your concept is confused, and should be disregarded. Time and again however, this second horn is going to be rejected by the anti-physicalist. For it is exactly his point that there is something that resists complete and adequate description. Something that is beyond the reach of the net that language casts. And if it is beyond the net of language, if there is something that cannot be described, then there cannot be a theory that reduces such phenomena to physical entities. If we cannot specify what is to be reduced or explained, we cannot articulate a theory that reduces or explains it.

Arguments about qualia and subjectivity are not always put in these terms, but I think that this issue underlies a great deal of the debate. If I am right about this then we can view this debate as a subclass of the conceptual realist — conceptual idealist debate. It is no coincidence that the guardians of an irreducible subjectivity (such as Nagel) are also the strongest proponents of conceptual realism

11. The philosophers that argue for the elimination of qualia are not always so forthright in their corresponding support for conceptual idealism

12. Though Davidson is. See his dismissal of qualia in ‘On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme.’
in their arguments is the assumption that if a supposed entity cannot be adequately defined then the concept one is attempting to use is empty. To be a general \textit{a priori} defence of physicalism this response must hold that there could be no entity that is beyond physical description (\textit{a fortiori}, there is no entity beyond all description). To assume a completed physics is possible, and that it would amount to a correct theory of everything, implies that conceptual idealism is correct\textsuperscript{13}. Whether or not the eliminators and 'quiners'\textsuperscript{14} of qualia could be pushed to these strongly conceptual idealist standpoints, they do have a problem in common with the conceptual idealist. They seem to be denying something that really does seem undeniable, even if we cannot say what that undeniable thing is.

I reflect on my experience of looking at a ripe lemon. I notice the unmistakable lemon shape, and recognise its colour immediately as yellow. Not that it is uniform in colour, or even all yellow. At each end there is evidence of an unripe green, and all over it is covered with dimples that are for the most part darker in colour than the general appearance of vibrant yellow. The lemon is illuminated with white light from the window, casting a range of hues. Towards the light it is speckled with white flicks that outline the dimples on its surface. On the upper side the same effect is produced in a more diffuse manner by the light reflected from the cream walls. Underneath and to the right it is shrouded in grey.

\textsuperscript{13} If one assumes that physics can provide a theory of everything, one thereby commits oneself to the idea that everything can be described and brought under the concepts of physics. Whether one is committed to the idea that there can be interesting metaphysical explanations (and thus conceptual idealism) depends on what status one grants to physical explanations. (But assuming completeness is already a metaphysical commitment.)

\textsuperscript{14} A term derived from Dennett's invention of the verb 'to quine', which means to reject some idea on the basis that it is too confused to salvage from it a philosophically respectable concept.
What have I described? My experience of seeing a lemon? Certainly. I have described the way the lemon appears to me. And in doing so I have used concepts with which you are familiar: lemon, yellow, ripeness, light, and so on. But what of the way it appears to me? Have I described that, or merely gestured at it? What of this particular patch of yellow here (just above the point of maximal intensity of the illuminating light)? Well, I could present you with a yellow sample, and tell you under which conditions to view that sample. But I do not want to describe the patch on the lemon, but the patch in my image of the lemon; the way it looks to me alone. How can I know that it looks the same to you, even if you were seated in the same place, looking at the same lemon in the same light?

This line of thought makes it easy to sympathise with the realist’s contention that there is something there that evades description. But where? The only ‘there’ to point at is on the surface of the lemon. And surely we can match that with a colour chart. If there is some other patch, then we should say what it is. For the very fact that we are picking something out shows that we have a concept in mind. We do the following to find the mental patch of yellow: first we find the real patch on the lemon, and then we abstract. (A kind of transcendental reflection on experience after Husserl, perhaps?) We always start with the patch that we can talk about, and then try to absorb the pure form of the experience. As if we could relax our mind and see ‘it’ without thinking – without the interference of conceptualisation. But if there is no thought, how can I know that the experiment has succeeded? How can I pull the non-conceptual experience back into my thoughts and draw conclusions from it? As the conceptual idealist
is fond of reminding us, drawing conclusions is a matter of seeing rational relationships. To affect a judgement, something must already have conceptual form. But the conceptual realist is already crying foul. Surely you cannot mean to deny that there is something indescribable in experience!

This is where I think quietism can best be illustrated. Quietism is a philosophical approach that can arise from the rejection of the kind of philosophical dispute in question. It arises as a response to philosophical disputes that take the form of an opposition of doctrines that can be neither reconciled nor independently resolved in favour of one or the other. As we saw in chapter 3, this is the form of the general debate between the conceptual realist and the conceptual idealist. The conceptual realist insisted that there could be concepts to which we could have no cognitive access, and the conceptual idealist points out that we cannot make sense of a concept that we cannot make sense of. The problem is that nothing can count as an example to resolve the dispute one way or the other without using the very point at issue to interpret the alleged example. There seems no independent way of resolving the issue.

The quietist insight is that where questions cannot be independently resolved, this indicates that the question itself maybe misconstrued. Both arguments for and against qualia seem to be based on sound intuitions. The conceptual realist feels no qualms about talking about something that he cannot describe. After all, it seems so evidently there, part of the fabric of his experience. But the conceptual

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15 That is not to say we cannot make an arbitrary decision one way or the other. But the very fact that it is arbitrary shows that it has no metaphysical justification.
idealist feels just as justified in demanding a more complete articulation of the supposed entity. And this is precisely what the conceptual realist claims cannot be given.

We can only resolve these conflicting intuitions if we give up an assumption that both the conceptual idealist and the conceptual realist share. Both assume that the nature of our concepts reflect the nature of Reality in a metaphysically significant sense. For the conceptual idealist there is a necessary correspondence between concept and object, for the conceptual realist there is a contingent correspondence. But for both what is at stake is the true nature of Reality. And this is what makes our intuitions about qualia seem so inviolable. To deny qualia seems to deny something really there. But to talk of something that has no conceptual shape seems to depart from any coherent conception of reality.

The quietist can release this tension by questioning the concept of reality that is supposed to be at stake. Not that we want to question the ultimate reality of anything. But we can question whether the kind of philosophical considerations in question can provide us with any special insight into reality. The difficulty disappears if we reassess both intuitions with more moderate expectations of what they can show us.

The common assumption shared by conceptual idealism and conceptual realism is that there is some fundamental description of reality that somehow underlies or explains our ordinary conception of reality. There is a way things ‘really are’ in the sense of an ontologically more fundamental level. In questioning this
assumption, the quietist is not being antirealist: he is not in the business of
denying the reality of anything. But quietism denies that we can identify some
way of conceptualising the world that is fundamental in the sense of having some
language independent justification. Ultimately, all conceptual schemes stand
without justification. In order to justify anything, we must already assume some
conceptual scheme, for a justification must have conceptual form.

With the conceptual idealist the quietist agrees that we must respect the bounds
of sense, and not try to point helplessly beyond them. Talk of qualia is nonsense.
If there is some coherent entity that we can refer to at all, we can articulate it.
There must be a grammar for the use of the term that refers to it.

But the quietist also has some points of agreement with the conceptual realist.
While we cannot talk about entities that we do not have coherent concepts for (or
even point to them — pointing, too, requires a concept), this does not mean that
we have the only conceptual scheme available. Our concepts are limited by our
interests and abilities. A creature with other interests and abilities would have
different concepts, and perhaps they would not be accessible to us. If a lion could
speak, we would not understand him\(^\text{16}\). The difficulty is to prevent ourselves
from taking this thought too far and to imagine that we can make sense (even
partly) of some particular concept beyond our grasp, or some particular entity that
we cannot fully conceptualise. And we cannot point to the reality beyond our

\(^{16}\) *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 223.
interests and abilities. We can only talk about what we can talk about, and anything else cannot form part of our explanations or theories.

The conceptual idealist tells us that we have reached the limits of language. But what does that mean? The temptation is to believe that in seeing the limits, we have made some deep philosophical 'discovery'. As if by excluding qualia from the world, we have seen the limits of the world, and thus learnt something of its true nature. But all we have done is found the point at which language breaks down. We have merely uncovered the fact that the term 'qualia' cannot have the use we imagined it to have: that we had a misconceived picture of its use in mind. Consequently, the concept of qualia cannot play the role in our explanations that we may have hoped it could. But we have not denied anything: the concept was not coherent enough to pick out anything to deny. To put the point in Wittgensteinian terms, we have merely rejected the grammar that tries to force itself upon us.

In excluding the term 'qualia' from sensible talk, we feel as if we had come up against a boundary on Reality itself, and thus discovered something of its essence. But reality has no boundaries. It is not a land of possibilities surrounded by impossibilities. (A round square is not an impossible entity. We should rather say that the expression 'round square' has no real use – unless, of course, we give it one. The expression is nonsensical, and there are no entities that correspond to nonsensical expressions). It is simply a mistake to apply the concept of a limit to the world, as if there were some things that fell within the concept, and some
things that were excluded. Reality is not an object. And examining the limits of language tells us nothing about the world. We can only ask, does this expression have real application, or is it useless? And if it is useless, this should merely return us to that which we can talk about.

Is there something that we cannot talk about? The matter is best put this way: something that we cannot talk about is as good as a nothing to us. And we can draw no conclusions from that which we cannot articulate. Something that has no conceptual form cannot enter into rational relations.

So is there nothing that we cannot talk about? The question could be taken to be a question about the use of the word ‘nothing’ and its relation to the concept of (our) language. Whatever the word ‘nothing’ means, it is also a part of our language. We can understand its meaning better by examining the way it is used — in what circumstances it is used. (“There is nothing in this box”; “Nothing can be done here”) I think once we gain a better understanding of this word, we will feel less confident of using it to make grandiose philosophical pronouncements. We return each time to ordinary language.

Now, how does all this relate to the debate about qualia? Recall that the problem arises from conflicting intuitions. The suggestion is that we treat those intuitions with a little more temperance. We have the feeling when contemplating our experience that there is something more than can be expressed. We even feel as if we can point to it inwardly. But the pointing will be meaningless unless we have some concept in mind, and then we have failed to point at something
ineffable. The result is that we cannot talk about that which is beyond language—we cannot even assert or deny its existence. (We are reduced to the inarticulate sound). We are trying to grasp at that which is beyond grasping. So it should not surprise us that we are not satisfied. By the very nature of the task, we cannot succeed. And this fact releases us from the problem without denying anything—we have found nothing to deny. We return to where we started, confined within language, but the tension between the different intuitions has lost its power. For though we must admit that we can only speak and think about that which has conceptual form, in doing so we do not deny anything else.

Of course, we are left with a different kind of tension: the dissatisfaction that something requires more explanation. After all, this desire for explanation is often what motivates us to philosophise in the first place. But I think that once one has seen that a problem has no resolution (and we may need to remind ourselves of this fact) we will find the response that ‘nothing more can be said here’ more satisfying. It does not solve the problem, but brings it to rest.

This, of course, is the method that Wittgenstein used against the philosophical problems of meaning in *Philosophical Investigations*. Recall Wittgenstein’s treatment of meaning scepticism discussed in chapter 4. Once we raise certain philosophical worries about the concept of meaning, we become entangled in irresolvable problems and disputes. The problems can only be dealt with when we question the assumptions that bring them about in the first place. Wittgenstein’s answer to meaning scepticism is that we are looking for
justification where there can be none. The nature of quietism is this: that our explanations must come to an end. There is no justification of our conceptual scheme, for to provide one we would have to point to some facts outside our conceptual scheme. But this we cannot do. Explanations must proceed within our conceptual resources.¹⁷

7.3 Silence and the Subject

The quietist point about the postulation of ineffable qualia was that it is as pointless as it is nonsensical. But so is the denial of qualia. Let us return to the problems of the subject discussed at the beginning of this chapter, and see if the same considerations can help there, too.

First, considerations from imagination brought us both to the conclusion that there is an idea of a subject presupposed by the idea of a world, and that I am that subject. This is problematic since the idea of a subject that is presupposed cannot be part of the world, but I most certainly am. At least, if I am not, I do not know what I am.

Recall the predicament of transcendental solipsism. The transcendental subject is the idea that is presupposed by the idea of content. The idea of language or conceptual scheme always seems to be a language or conceptual scheme for a subject. Correspondingly, the ideas of content and the world presuppose the subject. But what is this subject? It remains inherently mysterious. It is

¹⁷ The relation between qualia and quietism has another aspect: one can see disjunctivist theories of experience as a kind of quietism. The argument to disjunctivism is related to, but separate from, the argument pursued
presupposed by the conceptual scheme, but not included within it. It is the very possibility of language and the world. And this makes it strangely ineffable. Not within language, but presupposed by it.

Like the debate about qualia, this issue can be seen as an instance of the debate between conceptual idealism and conceptual realism. The conceptual idealist, finding that nothing corresponds to the idea of a subject, is quick to exclude it from his ontology. But the conceptual realist objects that to do so is to deny the thing that Descartes found to be so indubitable: the thinking subject. Just because we find ourselves as subjects beyond our own full comprehension, there is no need to deny our own existence!

If we are to re-apply the same method as we did for qualia, we need to first identify some underlying assumption that was misconceived. While Wittgenstein derived his solipsism from considerations of language, we came to it from considerations of imaginability. We dissolved the problems of qualia by questioning our assumptions about the connection between language and the nature of reality. So perhaps we can apply the same scrutiny to the connection between imagination and the nature of reality implied in our reasoning to solipsism and the ineffability of the self. We assumed that if something is inconceivable, it is impossible. And by 'impossible' we meant that it is against the essence of the world itself. But we should have been more cautious. Perhaps it is better to say that if something is inconceivable in a particular conceptual scheme,
it does not correspond to a concept in that conceptual scheme. And if it is beyond any conceptual scheme we can use then it is not a valid concept for us at all. But what we find imaginable depends, like our conceptual scheme, on our interests and abilities. Quietism holds that our conceptual scheme — and what we find to be imaginable — is not justified by the true nature of reality (would such a justification be imaginable?). Such a justification would not be available to us. And if this is so, we should not draw conclusions about the underlying nature of reality from what we find to be imaginable. Imagination does show us something: properly understood, it shows us the limits of our conceptual scheme. And the fact that such considerations end up in contradictions and nonsense when we bring them to bear on the subject shows that our natural inclinations take us beyond sensible explanation. But note that this does not mean that we say that the subject is something beyond explanation. Putting the matter that way pretends to talk about that which cannot be spoken of. It points beyond language to that which we cannot point at. Rather we should say that this ‘concept’, though natural enough, is ultimately incoherent. (And we may quiet our feelings of unease, and bring our thoughts back into sensible discourse, if we examine the way we actually use language in a Wittgensteinian spirit — how is the word ‘I’ actually used? In what contexts, and to achieve what ends? Such an investigation would reveal the limits of the concept of the subject.)

Again we strike the balance. On the one hand we do not speak of the subject as ‘something beyond explanation’. That philosophical line of reasoning is based on the misconception that there is a true conception of reality that underlies and

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justifies our conceptual scheme. We cannot point outside of our conceptual scheme at some particular (the subject) and say 'that cannot be conceptualised'. But neither do we deny anything. We do not deny our intuitions about the subject, but confess that they are not well enough conceived to assert or deny.

Any rendering of the feeling of solipsism — that I have a unique relation to the world — is bound to fail the intuition that inspires it. An intuition is just a feeling. As a feeling *per se* that we can talk about at all, it must, of course, have conceptual form. But that does not mean that there lies behind it some coherent insight into the nature of reality. When we are doing philosophy, we must always return to that which we can talk about. And we remind ourselves that our explanations and justification must come to an end. Beyond those explanations, we deny nothing and assert nothing. Beyond language, there is only nonsense.
Summary and Conclusion

If I say: here we are at the limits of language, then it always seems as if resignation were necessary, whereas on the contrary complete satisfaction comes, since no question remains.

The Big Typescript, § 89.

In chapter 1 I determined that the fundamental view of idealism contained the assumption that reality is limited by our ability to conceive it: there is nothing that is inconceivable. I defined the term ‘formal dependence’ to mean a dependence between a concept and the object, property or fact it picks out, such that there is a formal dependence between any object, property or fact of kind $A$ and the concept $C$ that picks it out as an object of kind $A$. Thus we can define conceptual idealism as a doctrine of formal dependence with a conjunction of the following claims:

(i) There can be interesting metaphysical explanations;

(ii) there is a necessary correspondence between the concepts we use and the nature of the objects, properties and facts picked out by them; such that,

(iii) insofar as a thing can be thought about at all, it necessarily falls under some possible concept.

A metaphysical explanation is one that explains the way things seem (or happen to be conceptualised) on the basis of the way things really are. It is ‘interesting’ so
long as it generates knowledge. Claim (i) is central to the conceptual idealist position, since conceptual idealism is essentially an answer to the Kantian question ‘How is metaphysics possible?’ It is offered as an alternative to the traditional position of conceptual realism, which denies (ii) and consequently (iii). Instead, the conceptual realist holds that our concepts are contingently related to the nature of the things they pick out. Our concepts are considered to be approximations or derivations of the things they correspond to. This process of deriving concepts from the objects they correspond to – or from abstract pure forms of those objects – is what is taken to justify the conceptual realist’s claims to metaphysics. Someone who denies (i) for a particular domain of discourse is said to be a quietist with respect to that domain.

The crucial point of difference between the conceptual idealist and the conceptual realist hangs on whether there could be something that we could not in principle conceptualise. But this debate between the conceptual idealist and the conceptual realist has the form of an irresolvable dispute: any apparent counterexample to the conceptual idealist’s claim only counts as a counterexample in virtue of the point at issue. Like so many philosophical disputes, there seems to be no common ground on which to assess this fundamental difference. The quietist intuition is that this situation indicates that we have reached the limits of language. The appropriate response is to neither assert nor deny the existence of things that we cannot conceptualise. What the conceptual realist is trying to speak of is “not a something but not a nothing either.” Since we can say nothing more here, we should return to the kinds of explanations that we can give.
This thesis set out to define Wittgenstein's relationship to the tradition of conceptual idealism. It explored some *prima facie* reasons for associating Wittgenstein with that tradition. First, he rejects certain philosophical conceptions of meaning that are preferred by the conceptual realist. Second, his remarks on private language amount to a rejection of the 'given' analogous to the conceptual idealist's rejection of the dualism of scheme and content. Third, his philosophy is concerned with the limits of language.

Wittgenstein rejects philosophical theories of meaning. In particular, he rejects the kind of theory he himself was previously inclined to give. The concept of meaning that he attacks is based on the model of 'object and designation'. It assumes that meaning must be something in addition to its use. The conceptual realist finds this concept of meaning inevitable because he wants a 'justification' of the use of a word in the sense that it must both (a) be something (some 'object') that is independent of that use, and (b) provide me with reasons for using it (it must *guide* my use, or determine how I *ought* to use it). But this kind of justification is, according to Wittgenstein, as unnecessary as it is impossible. Nothing can satisfy both (a) and (b). Anything external to the use of a word remains hopelessly ambiguous as a guide to use. We cannot learn the nature of an object simply by examining it unless we already have a concept of that object in mind. Otherwise we could not pick out that object in a way that would enable a regularity of use.
It follows from this that the idea that our lowest level conceptualisations are
grounded in acquaintance with the ‘given’ is mistaken. The idea that we might
use language privately to refer to sensations without conceptual form is based on
the same misguided notion of meaning. Empiricism is false. To the extent that
Kant holds that the given can play some explanatory role in metaphysics,
Wittgenstein’s arguments are also directed against Kant. It is not simply that the
given cannot be known independently of the understanding: a ‘non-conceptual
object’ cannot even be considered. But note that this rejection is a grammatical
rejection. Wittgenstein does not deny anything — he simply shows how certain
combinations of signs are meaningless. He is showing us the limits of language,
and therefore of our explanations.

I argued in chapter 2 that his concern with the limits of language in the *Tractatus*
amounts to a kind of conceptual idealism (albeit combined with certain
conceptual realist tendencies concerning meaning). Wittgenstein remained
concerned throughout his work with the limits of language. But the later
Wittgenstein is not an idealist. Those who hold that he is committed to an idealist
doctrine assume that, contrary to his own insistence, he is committed to some
substantial metaphysical claims. This view is encouraged by the fact that
Wittgenstein’s remarks on philosophy have seemed to many to be an
incomprehensible distraction from his real contribution to that discipline. I have
argued that this is a mistake. Wittgenstein maintained a view of language that
explicitly ruled out the isomorphism between language and the world that the
conceptual idealist is committed to. And far from being an incomprehensible or
self-contradictory anomaly, his remarks on philosophy are central to his thought. Understanding them is essential to understanding his philosophy as a whole.

Wittgenstein argues for general quietism: he claims that the only metaphysical 'explanations' possible are either trivial or unjustifiable. By trivial I mean that they would amount to nothing more than 'grammatical observations'. Once we have a perspicuous representation of language, the need for explanations that go further than the observable surface structure become unnecessary. In any case, they are ultimately impossible: they are an attempt to provide philosophical justification where there can be none. Any justification would have to describe what was being justified, and that presupposes a grammar, which in turn stands in need of justification. A reality that is not conceptualised using some (ultimately unjustified) grammar cannot enter into our justifications. In particular it cannot justify the use, private or otherwise, that we make of certain signs.

I have not attempted to argue conclusively for the truth of Wittgenstein's claims with respect to philosophy. To do so one would have to show that they followed from a representation of language that was both complete and ultimately based upon observation rather than conjecture. This is a task that perhaps even Wittgenstein did not complete. But in the course of this investigation we have seen that, contrary to initial appearances, Wittgenstein's views on philosophy are not obviously self-contradictory. They result from a sustained attempt to develop a perspicuous representation of language. And this representation seems natural and convincing. At most we might object that it is, as yet, incomplete. And
perhaps it is inevitably so: for to get a complete and simple representation would require stepping outside of our language-games altogether. And that is something we cannot do.

So I think we are right to remain suspicious about the generality of the quietist position. It is vulnerable to the charge that it over-generalises its representation of language. It is vulnerable, that is, to possible counter-examples of parts of language that work in a very different way, and it is vulnerable to philosophical theses that are not demonstrably false. Wittgenstein successfully destroyed the 'mythology of symbolism and of psychology', but I do not think I have shown that Wittgenstein has said enough to rule out any form of philosophical thesis. Most importantly, it is not at all clear that all philosophical problems arise from misunderstandings that can be cleared away using description alone. I do think, however, that Wittgenstein demonstrated how a quietist methodology may, in particular cases, "bring philosophy peace".

In the final chapter I tried to demonstrate the power of a quietist methodology when applied to a limited domain. In the course of this thesis I touched upon various problems in the philosophy of the self and subjectivity. These problems are ripe for a quietist treatment, because they are apt to invoke very strong, but contradictory intuitions. Some of these intuitions are the product of rigorous argument and reasoning, but some are fundamental intuitions that are engrained in the very nature of experience itself: the what-it's-like to be conscious. When faced with an irresolvable dispute, the only way to make progress is to look at the
assumptions that underlie it. If these assumptions are unjustified, then the tension of the irresolvable dispute that results from them provides enough reason to consider overthrowing one or more of those assumptions — however natural they seem to the philosophical mind.

The quietist response to the concept of qualia is to suggest that both the assertion of the disputed entity, and therefore its denial, are not significant propositions. The task of philosophy at such an impasse is to accept that no further explanation is available through philosophical investigation. The discovery that 'nothing more can be said here' is one of the most important discoveries in philosophy. In general, any intuition that suggests that there is something beyond our capacity to conceptualise can never be specified, and the only correct response is to offer no theory or explanation at all. The problematic concepts that such intuitions give rise to should not be rejected out of hand, however. They serve an important role in philosophy. They are markers at the bounds of sense.

It is the emphasis placed of these markers that distinguishes the quietist from the conceptual idealist. In his eager dismissal of all things beyond the limits of our conceptual scheme, conceptual idealism actually crosses that boundary. By setting a limit to what there can be (rather than what can be said), the conceptual idealist implicitly denies that there can be anything else. He denies, that is, the claims of the conceptual realist. But if the conceptual realist’s claims are nonsense, so is their negation. The question that is at the core of the dispute — whether there can be things that we cannot conceptualise — can have no answer. For to do so would
be to step outside the limits of our concepts. But if Wittgenstein is right, a question cannot be unanswerable. The apparent question must itself be misconceived. This indicates that neither conceptual idealism nor conceptual realism can adequately articulate the limits of meaning and metaphysics. Our understanding of the connection between language and the world has a limit—precisely because we understand the world using language.

If quietism brings philosophy peace, it does so at a cost. We must overcome the desire to offer explanations. Sometimes we must face the fact that our understanding has come to an end. But if Wittgenstein is right, this will only occur when we come up against the limits of language. And if we recognise that we have reached those limits, we will recognise that there is no longer any explanation required, because there are no questions left to answer. We have exhausted our reasons and reached the point where we cannot assert or deny anything. Beyond the limits of language, there is only nonsense. Where our concepts and explanations come to an end, we should be silent.
0.1 A Concession to Relativism: Human Centred Metaphysics

The 'argument' that Davidson offers against conceptual relativism crucially involved rejecting the pre-conceptual given. Since conceptual idealism is committed to rejecting this too, it would also seem committed to Davidsonian Absolutism. But is there not room for some concession to conceptual relativism that is compatible with conceptual idealism? By investigating such a possibility, we may discover a middle-way between conceptual realism and conceptual idealism. This possibility presents an attractive alternative to the irresolvable debate discussed in section 3.4. But there may be a high price to pay: the very possibility of metaphysical explanation that conceptual idealism and conceptual realism attempt to justify.

The realist insists that Reality as it is 'in itself' (which we will indicate with capitalisation) is quite independent of our conception of it, and the insight of the conceptual idealist can be captured by pointing out that this Reality must remain quite meaningless to us. To talk about reality at all, we must talk about reality as it is conceived in some way. It is essential to reality that it can be conceived, described and made sense of. However, the conceptual idealist may avoid the criticisms aimed at absolutism by arguing the following way: it is possible that we might come across aliens that 'conceptualise the world' in such a different way to us that little or no mutual understanding is possible. That is to say, we can imagine the situation where the detailed study of creatures convinces us that whatever they are doing, they are not talking about the medium sized dry goods that we normally talk about, nor employing any other part of our ontology. What they are doing will remain, for all practical purposes, a matter of speculation. But we can say that if they are employing concepts that are fundamentally distinct from our own, then they must be talking about quite different things to the ones we talk about. No doubt our concepts are determined in part by our abilities and interests, and other creature may not share those abilities and interests. If we were so bold as to say that they 'had a different conceptual scheme to ours' (and we may well want to remain more cautious, but if we did so say), then we would also be forced to admit that they inhabited (i.e. thought about) a 'different world' to us. Since we can say little or nothing about this

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1 In 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme'.

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'different world', it will (quite literally) make no difference to us. The job of the metaphysician is to analyze the concepts we use in order to say some about the world we inhabit. This line of thinking is more inline with Kant's transcendental idealism, if it is perhaps more cautious than he was (at times) about the notion of a noumenal Reality underlying our reality.

The caution is well advised, for down that route lie the bogies of anti-realism and anti-metaphysics. If we are only in cognitive commerce with the world 'as it appears to us', we will be less inclined to celebrate any metaphysical results of conceptual analysis. Metaphysics is supposed to be fundamental in that it reveals the true nature of things, not just the way they are to us. To retain credibility and hold on to claim (i), the conceptual idealist must hold that the world really does contain the things that we tend to pick out: the everyday substances that we talk about (such as human beings, animals, trees, rocks and so on). One may say that these things exist relative to our conceptual scheme, but then in order to be true to conceptual idealism, one will have to insist that there is no more fundamental 'absolute' existence that we can talk about. Conceptual idealism is committed to rejecting a 'view from nowhere', a view uncontaminated by a particular conceptual framework.

Such a cautious balance can be seen in the work of David Wiggins, who argues for a moderate essentialism. He defines conceptualism (or 'conceptualist-realism') as the conjunction of the following claims:

1. "that the possibility of singling out of an object in experience depends upon the possibility of singling it out as a this such;"
2. "that there is no surrogate or reductive level (for instance, the level of description of retinal stimulation or whatever);"
3. "that our cognitive access to reality is always through conceptions that are conceptions of what it is to be this or that sort of thing, these conceptions being a posteriori and at every point corrigible by experience, yet present in advance of the recognition of any particular object as a this such."

Claim (2) serves to exclude the possibility that objects are reducible to mere stimuli of a kind that we do not normally take them to be (and phenomenalism and other kinds of empirical idealism are thereby excluded). Claim (3) is a way of expressing the moderate conceptual idealism under discussion, given its restricted applicability to 'our cognitive access to reality'. Note the explicit

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2 Although the absolute conceptual idealist may choose to put the matter this way: the only way to view the world is (translatable into) the view from nowhere.

3 See chapter 4 of his *Sameness and Substance*.

4 'On Singling out an Object Determinately', in Pettit and McDowell (eds.), *Subject, Thought, and Context*, 169 – 70.
restriction to *a posteriori* concepts that are modifiable in the light of experience. This makes Wiggins' position compatible with certain realist and externalist conceptions of natural kind terms. Claim (1) can be seen as an application of conceptual idealism for *de re* thoughts: the possibility of singling out an object depends on bringing that object under a concept – a 'this such'.

The balance between absolutism and anti-realism that Wiggins is seeking is not easy to spell out. He talks about a 'two-way flow' conception of singling out, acknowledging both the corrigibility of our concepts to experience, and the role these concepts have in deciding what is singled out. (One metaphor that he has used on more than one occasion in that of a fishing net, the size and mesh of which determine not which fish are in the sea, but which may be caught). At one point he puts it this way:

The object is what it is, whether or not it is singled out: but it does not simply individuate itself or, in and of itself, differentiate itself from other things. There are no lines in nature (even though, after the imposition of lines, there are edges for us to find there).

But he admits of the italicised sentence that he has yielded 'to the temptation to try and convey something by issuing the denial of something that is really nonsense.' (And surely the denial of nonsense is just more nonsense). He also urges a cognate criticism of the sentence that follows, which one might suspect of being anti-realist.

The result of this precarious balancing act, if Wiggins does indeed avoid the criticisms that can be levelled at anti-realism on the one hand and absolutism on the other, is a position that is supposed to yield a 'modest metaphysics' of essentialism. Whether or not one admits that the sortal concepts we use are relative to our (human) interests, one can still insist that the objects picked out by them are nevertheless real objects. Perhaps they are real 'relative to the human conceptual scheme', but since we cannot know of any other reality, this qualifier is of little consequence. If one maintains that it is nonsense (for us) to talk about Reality independent of our concepts (the denial of conceptual realism), then the analysis of our sortal concepts will still have the appeal of telling us about the essential nature of our world. The question as to whether there are 'other worlds' that correspond to conceptual schemes incommensurable to ours can be disregarded as idle speculation.

It is worth comparing this moderate conceptual idealism with Kant's defence of a modest metaphysics. At least in the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant argued that nothing could be known about

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5 One might think that it was somewhat unnecessary as a general restriction however, particularly for artefact kinds – unless one takes seriously the possibility that all pencils may turn out to be, say, aliens posing as artefacts, and that this eventuality could cause us to revise our concept 'pencil'.

the thing-in-itself, considered in abstraction from the faculty of judgement. This leaves open the possibility of conceptual relativism, since we cannot know that minds very different from our own might conceive of things very differently. Nevertheless, the analysis of that faculty, and the faculty of intuition, still offered objective knowledge of the nature of reality. While it was in a certain sense relative knowledge, it could be rendered absolute and universal by qualifying it carefully. For example, in the Transcendental Aesthetic we find the following defence of knowledge of the phenomenal world:

As to the intuitions of other thinking beings, we cannot judge whether they are or are not bound by the same conditions which limit our own intuition, and which for us are universally valid. If we join the limitation of a judgement to the concept of a subject, then the judgement will possess unconditioned validity.\(^7\)

This suggests a general formulation of a 'modest' conceptual idealism that avoids the problems of the absolutist kind: that our reality is limited by our concepts. If something is to be considered possible for us, then it must correspond to some concept that we could have. In retrospect, this human centred modesty is compatible with the formulation of conceptualism given by Morris (that is, with claim (B)). But it is worth noting that permitting relativism to a conceptual scheme may endanger the commitment to substantial metaphysical claims. Putnam, for example, draws anti-metaphysical conclusions from just such a combination of positions\(^8\).

Putnam argues against Davidson's absolutism as follows. Imagine a world containing three atomic objects, \(x_1\), \(x_2\) and \(x_3\). How many objects does it contain? The most straightforward answer is 'three', but if you are of mereological bent, you will count 7: \(x_1\), \(x_2\), \(x_3\), \(x_1 + x_2\), \(x_1 + x_3\), \(x_2 + x_3\) and \(x_1 + x_2 + x_3\). Call a language that only admits 3 objects \(CL\) (after Carnap's preferences) and a language that admits mereological sums \(PL\) (after Polish logicians preferences). Imagine that at least one of \(x_1\), \(x_2\) and \(x_3\) is red and at least one is black. If one does not maintain (as the conceptual realist does) that these differing conceptual schemes can be assessed relative to a 'view from nowhere', then the question as to which is correct becomes problematic. It is also not clear how these two languages (with their corresponding conceptual schemes) relate to each other. Putnam argues (against Davidson) that the question as to whether statements in \(PL\) (such as there is an object that is partly red and partly black) correspond in both logical form and meaning to their 'translations' into \(CL\) ('There is an object that is red and an object that is black') is itself relative to a conceptual scheme. He may have a point, since such a question certainly cannot be answered in

\(^7\) A26/B43. The problem with this, it might be argued, is that if we cannot understand the conditions of alternative forms of intuition, we can neither understand the uniqueness of our own, nor the 'unconditioned validity' gained by adding the subject to the judgement. Like the transcendental solipsist of the \textit{Tractatus}, we are trapped within the only form of intuition we have.

either PL or CL, since they cannot even be framed. The ontological commitments of one language can thus not be said to have any more metaphysical weight than the other. The moderate conceptual idealist is thus caught between the opposing alternatives of quietism and absolutism.

I will not argue conclusively for the view that moderate conceptual idealism collapses into quietism here. It suffices for our present purposes to see that it a possibility. Moreover, this possibility shows how someone who held a moderate form of (ii) and (iii) might consequently come to reject (i). The relevance of this point will become clearer when we discuss Wittgenstein's views on philosophy.

0.2 The "Private Language Argument" and the Transcendental Deduction

Some commentators have found similarities between the private language argument and the transcendental deduction. For example, Scruton: "The transcendental deduction has been revived in recent years, most notably by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 – 1951). In the famous 'private language' argument in his *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein argues that there can be no knowledge of experience which does not presuppose reference to a public world." (Scruton, *Kant*, p. 35). But if some of the implications of their conclusions are similar, the premises they start from are most certainly not (see *Philosophical Investigations*, §24). Furthermore, if McDowell's discussion of Wittgenstein's remarks on private language can be seen an attempt to interpret it as Kantian — allowing sensations as "a limiting case of the model of object and designation" — then the discussion in chapter 5 shows some salient differences between the two arguments.

0.3 Quietism and Disjunctivism

I want to pause here to briefly compare the above line of reasoning with another different but related argument. This is a line of reasoning that leads one to a disjunctivist position with respect to sensory experience. The form of argument has something in common with the quietist approach under discussion, but there are also important differences.

It is a common philosophical thought that what we experience is a representation of the world, rather than the world itself. We can see the appeal of this thought by considering the cases of illusion and hallucination. There are certain situations, created by abnormalities of either the environment (in the case of illusion) or one's mental state (in the case of hallucination), where the experience one has is qualitatively indistinguishable from veridical perception, but is nevertheless caused by different conditions. Compare the situation where I am looking at a pink elephant to the case where, unknown to me, some chemical has changed my mental state such that it seems to me as if there were a pink elephant in front of me, when in fact there is not. In the one case my
experience is caused by the presence of a pink elephant, in the other there is no such direct causal connection with a real animal. Assume that the two experiences are otherwise identical. They both have the same vivid qualitative feel. I am apt to behave in identical ways. If the elephant is charging in my direction, I will take evasive measures. I am also apt to form the same beliefs. For example, that I am in immediate danger.

Now, in the case of hallucination, it seems clear that I represent the world to be a certain way, when, in fact, it is not. It is natural to conclude that in this case what we have immediate perceptual access to is a representation of the world, rather than the world itself. What exactly this means, is, of course, a substantial philosophical question. For the sake of the present comparison, let us assume that it means we have immediate acquaintance with something like sense data: mental entities that can represent the world. Now, given that the phenomenology is identical to the case of veridical perception, it seems parsimonious if we postulate that in this case, too, what I have immediate access to is not the world itself, but a representation of the world. The difference is that in the former case, but not the latter, the representation is correct.

This line of reasoning has convinced many of the need to postulate sense data or qualia. Whatever other problems there are with it, there is one point that makes the conclusion seem radically misguided. It just seems false that what I have immediate access to is only a representation of the world. When I veridically perceive an elephant, what I experience is an elephant, not some mental copy of one. To assume otherwise is to assume a disassociation from reality that has struck some philosophers as intolerable. It means, for example, that when we refer to objects in our experience, we are mistaken about the nature of those objects: we are really referring to collections of sense data. But that is not what we find in experience. We find the world.

In some ways this conflict of intuitions is a mirror of the considerations that brought us into tension over ineffable qualia. On the one hand, we have an irresistible line of reasoning to the existence of representational mental entities. On the other, the brute force of a basic intuition. I do not think we need place too much emphasis on the difference between basic intuitions and the result of argument here. In both cases the results of the arguments can be replaced by (similar) brute intuitions, and arguments can be found for the basic intuitions. This is at least hinted at from

9 I shall put aside the question of whether this is a reasonable assumption to make. It may be that the experience of hallucination is never qualitatively identical with veridical perception. That, in part, is an empirical question. But we can at least imagine that the two situations seem the same, and that may be enough to get the argument off the ground.

10 McDowell is one. See for example, 'The Content of Perceptual Experience', Philosophical Quarterly 44, pp. 190–205.
the mirrored structure of the two cases. The issues involved in the two cases are somewhat different, however. I have said nothing in the argument for sense data that would indicate that they are ineffable. Of course, as discussed above, the temptation to assume they are is almost irresistible. But that is a separate issue, and it does not obviously follow from the reasoning presently under consideration.

One way to resolve the conflict that the argument for representational perception gives rise to is to live with a quite different explanation of hallucinations from that of veridical perception. That is, we give up on our desideratum of a unified account. In the one case we have direct perception of the world, in the other we have a misrepresentation of the world. Such a disjunctivist position is quietist in the following respect: it accepts that while we would like a philosophical explanation here, none can be given. It accepts that no philosophical explanation can be given of the fact that hallucinations can have the same qualitative phenomenology as veridical perception. That does not necessarily rule out a scientific explanation. It may be that there is an explanation in terms of common brain states. But it denies that postulating sense data or other representational entities in the case of normal perception can gain us any philosophical insight.

A quietist position might go even further than this, though. It is also possible to deny that the postulation of any representational entities will provide insight into the nature of experience — veridical or otherwise. I don’t wish to argue that here. I have taken this brief digression only in order to indicate some of the similarities and differences between the quietist position on qualia and the disjunctive approach to the philosophy of perception.

Furthermore, any line of reason involves brute intuition, if only in a dependence on the norms of rationality.

Although, given the illusive nature of what we are trying to explain, there seems to be limits on what can be explained in this way — as should be clear from the discussion of ‘ineffable’ qualia. But then we cannot specify what cannot be explained, either.
Bibliography


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