

Wittgenstein's grammar: through thick and thin

Danièle Moyal-Sharrock

Abstract: It may be said that the single track of Wittgenstein's philosophy is the discernment and elucidation of grammar – its nature and its limits. This paper will trace Wittgenstein's evolving notion of grammar from the *Tractatus* to *On Certainty*. It will distinguish between a 'thin grammar' and an increasingly more fact-linked, 'reality-soaked', 'thick grammar'. The 'hinge' certainties of *On Certainty* and the 'patterns of life' of *Last Writings* attest to the fact that one of the leitmotifs in the work of the third Wittgenstein is *the grammaticalization of experience*. This reflects Wittgenstein's realisation that grammar can manifest itself as *a way of acting*. In moves that exceed anything in *Philosophical Investigations*, the third Wittgenstein makes grammar enactive. We shall see that Wittgenstein's hesitant but unrelenting link of grammar to the stream of life in no way infringes on the 'autonomy of grammar'.

I would say that one of the continuous tracks of Wittgenstein's philosophy is the discernment and elucidation of grammar – its nature and its limits. This paper traces Wittgenstein's evolving notion of grammar from the *Tractatus* to *On Certainty*. We can distinguish in Wittgenstein what I will call a 'thin grammar' – a grammar that governs our use of words independently of facts about the world – from a 'thick grammar' – a grammar that is 'reality-soaked'¹ or fact dependent. It seems to me that Wittgenstein's thick grammar grows increasingly thick; so much so that there occurs in 'the third Wittgenstein'² what I call *a grammaticalization of experience*. This is particularly notable in his notion of 'patterns of life' in *Last Writings* and in his concept of 'hinge' certainties in *On Certainty*. This reflects his growing realisation that grammar can be, as it were, anthropo-logical; and that it can manifest itself as *a way of acting*. In moves that exceed anything in *Philosophical Investigations*, the third Wittgenstein makes grammar *enactive*. However, we shall see that his unrelenting, albeit hesitant, connection of grammar to the stream of life in no way infringes on the 'autonomy of grammar'.

Defining grammar

By *grammatical* rule I understand every rule that relates to the use of a language.
(VOW 303)

The limits of what makes sense and what does not; what can be said and what cannot, is a leitmotif of Wittgenstein's philosophy. But what determines those limits? Wittgenstein's astonishing answer, already inscribed in the *Tractatus*, is: grammar. For him, language – any language – is rule-governed (RC 303); that is, governed by rules of grammar. What

¹ I borrow the term 'reality-soaked' from Bernard Harrison, who uses it to speak of a 'reality-soaked language' (1991, 58).

² An expression I coined to denote the post-*Investigations* corpus. See Moyal-Sharrock (2004) (ed.) *The Third Wittgenstein: the post-Investigations works* (Routledge, 2004).

Wittgenstein means by 'grammar' is both similar to and different from what we usually mean by grammar. Ray Monk recounts the following (due to Rush Rhees):

Moore, who attended Wittgenstein's lectures, insisted that "Wittgenstein was using the word 'grammar' in a rather odd sense. ... Thus, he argued, the sentence: 'Three men was working' is incontrovertibly a misuse of grammar, but it is not clear that: 'Different colours cannot be in the same place in a visual field at the same time' commits a similar transgression. If this latter is also called a misuse of grammar, then 'grammar' must mean something different in each case." No, replied Wittgenstein. 'The right expression is "It does not have sense to say ..."' Both kinds of rules were rules in the same sense. 'It is just that some have been the subject of philosophical discussion and some have not.' (1991, 322-23)

And what Monk importantly adds here is that grammatical mistakes made by philosophers are more 'pernicious' than ordinary grammatical mistakes. Wittgenstein, then, merely expands our ordinary understanding of grammar rather than altering it: he does not see grammar as comprised merely of syntactic rules, but of any rule that governs 'the way we are going to talk' (MWL 72): 'By *grammatical* rule I understand every rule that relates to the use of a language' (VOW 303). For him, grammar is 'a preparation for description, just as fixing a unit of length is a preparation for measuring'; so that 'A rod has a length' is as much a preparation for description (e.g. 'This rod is 3 feet long') as the grammatical rule to use 'were' and not 'was' in some cases is a preparation for our intelligible use of language. Wittgenstein is simply more liberal than grammarians as to what he will count as grammar:

Everything that's required for comparing the proposition with the facts belongs to grammar. That is, all the requirements for understanding. (All the requirements for sense.) (BT 38)

Another way of putting this is that grammar consists of the conditions of intelligibility of a language. It is the conventionally-established basis on which we can *make sense*: 'Grammar consists of conventions' (PG 138), keeping in mind that conventions here are not due to a concerted consensus, but to an unconcerted agreement in practice.

Now if grammar includes '[a]ll the requirements for sense', it must then also include rules such as 'There exist people other than myself'. For isn't that a requisite underpinning of sense – a preparation for such descriptions as 'There are twenty of us in this room' or 'Vietnam's population is 96.5 million'? Moreover, following Wittgenstein's criterion for the misuse of grammar in his reply to Moore above ('It does not have sense to say ...'), it has at least as little sense to say 'I can't be sure that anyone exists but me' as to say 'Three men was working'. In fact, people are more likely *not* to understand what you are saying in the first case than in the second. In both cases, they'll understand all the words, but as Monk noted, violations of grammar can be more or less pernicious – so that whereas 'Three men was working' is laughable at worst; 'I can't be sure that anyone exists but me' smacks of the pathological. We'll come back to this.

Grammar, then, is a normatively sanctioned system or method of representation / description; it allows us to use words in order to *intelligibly* represent, describe, express, misrepresent, misdescribe, imagine, pretend, lie about, etc. how things are. I will now briefly

retrace Wittgenstein's drawing of the limits of language in the *Tractatus* as it relates to nonsense and ineffability; for it remains, in this, essentially unchanged and informs what the later Wittgenstein will call grammar.

Drawing the limits of language

In 'On Heidegger on Being and Dread', written in 1929, Wittgenstein writes:

Man feels the urge to run up against the limits of language. Think for example of the astonishment that anything at all exists. This astonishment cannot be expressed in the form of a question, and there is also no answer whatsoever. Anything we might say is *a priori* bound to be nonsense. Nevertheless we do run up against the limits of language. ... This running-up against the limits of language is *ethics*. (WVC 68)

Why is anything we might say in explanation of the astonishment that anything at all exists, nonsense? Why would such an attempt constitute a 'running-up against the limits of language? And how is *that* ethics? In his 'Lecture on Ethics' (written in the same year), Wittgenstein writes:

I see now that these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence. For all I wanted to do with them was just to go beyond the world and that is to say beyond significant language. My whole tendency and, I believe, the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless. Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense. (LE 44)

At this early period of his thought, Wittgenstein viewed as nonsensical any expression that did not 'add to our knowledge'³ – that was not a proposition of natural science (6.53). The nonsensical included ethics and aesthetics (6.421), the mystical (6.522), and his own Tractarian sentences (6.54). None of these have sense – none are bipolar propositions susceptible of truth and falsity – and cannot therefore add to our knowledge. Indeed, even his Tractarian sentences do not *inform*; they *elucidate* (6.54), which is the rightful task of philosophy (4.112). It is *their not adding to knowledge* that makes Tractarian *Sätze* technically nonsensical, devoid of sense.

It is clear then that the *Tractatus* advances a *non-derogatory*, indeed *positive*, understanding of the nonsensical⁴, which it was a mistake on the part of New Wittgensteinians to reject⁵. For, preferring a monochrome, 'austere', reading of nonsense as exclusively gibberish

³ For my present purpose, it is not necessary to mark the distinction made in the *Tractatus* between 'nonsense' and 'senseless', which dissolves in the later Wittgenstein. See, for example, PI 247 and pp. 175, 221 for cases where *sinnlos* is used for reasons which would have, according to the *Tractatus*, required the use of *unsinnig*. But this indiscriminate use of the terms is already present in *Philosophical Grammar* (1931-1934), e.g. PG 129.

⁴ For a full-blown argument, see Moyal-Sharrock (2007a).

⁵ See *The New Wittgenstein*, eds A. Crary & R. Read (London: Routledge, 2000) *passim* in which so-called 'Ineffabilists' (philosophers who, like Peter Hacker, view some nonsense in the *Tractatus* as 'illuminating') are rebuked for 'chickening out', for not being 'resolute' enough to recognise that Wittgenstein viewed all nonsense as 'plain nonsense'; i.e., gibberish.

meant having to view Tractarian sentences as gibberish – a consequence they embraced, with no enduring success. Already the first sentence in the 'Lecture on Ethics' passage shows Wittgenstein alluding to different uses of nonsense ('I see now that these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence'); but he was also later to make this clearer: '... the word 'nonsense' is used to exclude certain things [...] for different reasons' (AWL 64). By the time of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein uses the terms 'nonsense', 'senseless', 'has no sense' indiscriminately to refer to combinations of words that are excluded from the language, 'withdrawn from circulation' (PI 500), and insists that this exclusion may be for different reasons:

To say 'This combination of words makes no sense (*hat keinen Sinn*)' excludes it from the sphere of language and thereby bounds the domain of language. But when one draws a boundary it may be for various kinds of reason. (PI 499)

But the *Tractatus*, I'd have thought, was clear enough in its distinctions of different kinds of nonsense. Unlike nonsense which (1) results from a *violation* of sense, say, when categorial boundaries are misread and allowed to overlap, as in the question: 'Is the good more or less identical than the beautiful?' (4.003) or in '2+2 at 3 o'clock equals 4' (4.1272)), there is nonsense (call it 'important nonsense') that does not make sense either because (2) it is *impossible to put into words* (e.g., the mystical, ethics and aesthetics⁶) or because (3) it *enables* or *regulates* sense (e.g., 'There is only one 1' (4.1272)) or because (4) it *elucidates* sense – and this includes Tractarian remarks. Nonsense that regulates sense is one of the early manifestations of what Wittgenstein will later call 'grammar'.

Moreover, inasmuch as the Tractarian Wittgenstein takes only truth-conditional utterances to be sayable (6.53)⁷, any string of words that does not express a truth-conditional proposition is not, technically-speaking, *sayable*. On that count, all nonsense is *ineffable*. However, as regards important nonsense, whereas (2) the mystical, ethics and aesthetics cannot even be put into words, (3) regulative and (4) elucidatory nonsense, though not *sayable* strictly speaking, can be meaningfully formulated for heuristic purposes. That is, they can be formulated to serve as steps towards a clearer understanding of the conditions of sense or 'limit to thought' (TLP Preface). Tractarian remarks must be passed over in silence – in that they are not hypothetical propositions, but the 'steps' or 'ladder' to intelligibility or perspicuity (6.54). Once used, the ladder must be thrown away (6.54), for these heuristic aids do not belong to the sphere of language but to its delimitation. That is, they belong to what Wittgenstein will later call the *scaffolding of thought* (OC 211). As to elucidatory nonsense, he later makes clear that 'nonsense is produced by trying to express by the use of language what ought to be embodied in the grammar' (MWL 103).

If important nonsense is by definition ineffable, ineffability, too, appears validated. This sheds light on the value for Wittgenstein of 'what we must pass over in silence' (TLP 7); as does this, from Paul Engelmann: 'Wittgenstein passionately believes that all that really

⁶ Ethics, aesthetics and the mystical 'cannot be put into words' (TLP 6.421; 6.522).

⁷ '... what can be said; i.e. propositions of natural science – i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy' (TLP 6.53).

matters in human life is precisely what, in his view, we must be silent about'⁸ (EL 97). But silence here is not deadening: what really matters cannot be said but it isn't imperceptible; it can *show* itself, make itself manifest, to us. And it often does this *through* language: 'the unutterable will be – unutterably – *contained* in what has been uttered' (EL 7), and we can apprehend it. Our apprehension of significance, as non-propositionally conveyed in a work of literature is of that kind – it resembles our grasp of wit. But grammar, too, *shows* itself in our use of language.

The later Wittgenstein will extend the list of the *sayable* to include non-truth-conditional uses of language (e.g., spontaneous utterances, questions, imperatives)⁹, but he will never give up the idea that some things cannot be *said* in the sphere of language – that is, 'in the flow of the language-game'; or the idea that some things cannot be put into words *at all* but can only show themselves *through* words (and, he will add, through deeds)¹⁰. In fact, he will add *certainties* to the list of the ineffable – the grammatical ineffable. Like regulative nonsense, certainties cannot be *said* because they constitute the scaffolding of sense, not its object¹¹. Basic certainties (e.g., 'There exist people other than myself', 'I have a body', 'Human beings need nourishment') are 'removed from the traffic' (OC 210); they cannot meaningfully be said in the flow of the language-game as if they were open for discussion because they are bounds of sense (rules of grammar), not objects of sense.

In fact, the *Tractatus* sets the stage for what Wittgenstein will later call 'grammar': grammar is that which enables or regulates sense (and so is itself nonsensical) and cannot meaningfully be said in the flow of the language-game but only heuristically articulated. What is also incipient in the *Tractatus* is the idea of philosophy as conceptual or grammatical elucidation:

Philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts. ... A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations. [Indeed, this is what he says his Tractarian propositions are: elucidations (6.54)] Philosophy does not result in 'philosophical propositions', but in the clarification of propositions. Without philosophy thoughts are, as it were, cloudy and indistinct: its task is to make them clear and to give them sharp boundaries. (TLP 4.112)

Here again, Wittgenstein will never retract his Tractarian view that conceptual elucidation is the task of philosophy; that: '[t]he philosophical problem is an awareness of disorder in our concepts, and can be solved by ordering them' (BT 309). This emphasis on grammatical elucidation has given Wittgenstein a bad name in mainstream philosophy: it seems as if he reduces everything to language, which would make him a linguistic idealist. Does Wittgenstein think philosophers only play games with words? Language-*games*? What philosophers should be primarily interested with is life, not language. Language is for linguists,

⁸ Note also Wittgenstein's acknowledgment, in a letter to Fricker, that the important part of the *Tractatus* was the silent part: 'My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have *not* written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one.' (EL 143)

⁹ See also PI 23.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the presence of the saying/showing dichotomy as late as *On Certainty*, see Moyal-Sharrock (2007b), 94-97, and *passim*.

¹¹ For further discussion on the ineffability of basic certainty see Moyal-Sharrock (2007b) 65-71; 94-99.

no? No. Grammatical elucidation is important for life because grammar is inextricable from life. Let's see in what way it is inextricable.

Grammar delimits the world

Whenever we say that something *must* be the case we are using a norm of expression.' (AWL 16)

The connection between language and reality has long perplexed philosophers. Is human language the result of our attempts to translate 'nature's own language'? But how can nature have a language? More plausibly, is human language the result of our attempts to facilitate and enhance our relationship with nature, and each other? 'The connection between "language and reality" is made by definitions of words, and these belong to grammar', writes Wittgenstein¹² (PG 97).

There is no such thing in the world, or nature – or however we want to name what Paul Boghossian calls: the 'basic worldly dough' (2006, 35) – as an outline, a system or a concept. The system does not reside in the nature of things (Z 357). Nature is conceptually unmarked; it is we who, with our language, cut paths or inroads of salience and understanding in order to harness the contingent in ways that produce and govern sense for us. For Wittgenstein, this tracing is not metaphysical, but grammatical: 'One thinks that one is tracing the outline of a thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it' (PI 114). Boghossian is right: of course, 'we have no choice but to recognize that there must be some objective, mind-independent facts' (2006, 35); however, as linguistic beings, we come to experience and grapple the world *always already* with language, and there is no getting out of language to compare or measure our outline against bare particulars. At the *conceptual* basis of our confrontation with experience are not bare particulars, but grammar: it is *grammar* that tells us what *kind* of object anything is (PI 373). Wittgenstein's realisation that the demarcation is not empirical but grammatical – that the connection between language and world is a grammatical or logical connection (these are synonymous for the later Wittgenstein¹³) – is, as far as I know, unprecedented in the history of philosophy.

Wittgenstein, however, is no linguistic idealist¹⁴; he does not reduce reality, 'the world' or even 'our world', to language. Though we are responsible for its conceptual outline, the world is not our invention. Is not even the Tractarian Wittgenstein a linguistic idealist? I think not. 'The limits of my language mean the limits of my world' may be read as expressing the view that 'my world' – i.e. my perception of the world – is concept-laden. The later Wittgenstein fleshed this out in his many remarks on how enculturation conditions us to perceive the world through a conceptual frame¹⁵. But what I want to stress here is that our perception being (from

¹² Note that I will be using the terms 'reality', 'nature' and 'the world' interchangeably to refer to unconceptualized or raw reality – what Wittgenstein refers to as the 'reality lying behind the notation' (PI 562); where I mean a conceptualized world or reality, I will speak of 'my world', 'our world' or 'human reality'.

¹³ He saw logical questions as grammatical in that they, too, determine sense.

¹⁴ For further discussion, see Moyal-Sharrock (2016).

¹⁵ For example: 'How can I be taught to recognize these patterns [in the weave of life]? I am shown simple examples, and then complicated ones of both kinds. It is almost the way I learn to distinguish the styles of two composers' (LW II 42-3); 'When he first learns the names of colours -- what is taught him? Well, he learns e.g. to call out "red" on seeing something red. -- But is that the right description; or ought it to have gone: "He learns to

a very early age) concept-laden does not make it *judgment*-laden: though I must possess the concept of 'grief' to see grief on someone's face, judgment need not come into it¹⁶. In most cases, I see emotion in someone's face immediately: no judgment, interpretation or inference is needed; and therefore no so-called 'Theory of mind'¹⁷. Of course, in describing the face as 'sad', I am using a concept, but I am not thereby necessarily making a judgment. That much perception is concept-laden does not make it theory-laden. This is important in that it shows the nonempirical and nonepistemic nature of our *basic* conceptual interactions with our world.

When Peter Hacker writes that the post-Tractarian Wittgenstein sees the harmony between language and reality as no longer orchestrated between language and reality but *within* language – that is, by grammar – and that far from reflecting the logical structure of the world, grammar is 'arbitrary', it owes no homage to reality' (2000, 9-19), he should be wary of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. For Wittgenstein, grammar's demarcations, though not accountable to reality¹⁸, do owe some homage to it. Language (or rather grammar¹⁹) constitutes *our* world in that it conceptually demarcates *the* world; but that demarcation is itself conditioned by the world.

The world's impact on grammar: a 'reality-soaked' grammar

... This fact is fused into the foundations of our language-game. (OC 558)

Certainly, Wittgenstein is clear that grammar is not – in fact, *cannot be* – accountable to reality: 'Grammatical conventions cannot be justified by describing what is represented. Any such description already presupposes the grammatical rules' (PR 67). But he is also clear that reality has to impact our grammar or concepts²⁰: 'The rule we lay down is the one most strongly suggested by the facts of experience' (AWL 84). Though we don't read off our concepts from nature, our concepts are impacted by natural *facts* which are fundamental or salient for us:

call 'red' *what we too* call 'red'?" -- Both descriptions are right. ... What I teach him however must be a *capacity*. So he *can* now bring something red at an order; or arrange objects according to colour' (Z 421); 'As children we learn concepts and what one does with them simultaneously' (LW II 43).

¹⁶ As Wittgenstein makes clear: 'We do not see facial contortions and *make the inference* that he is feeling joy, grief, boredom. We describe a face immediately as sad, radiant, bored, even when we are unable to give any other description of the features. — Grief, one would like to say, is personified in the face. This is essential to what we call 'emotion'. (RPP II, 570)

¹⁷ The mind is often *directly observable*, thus obviating the need for a Theory of Mind to attribute mental states – thoughts, perceptions, desires, intentions, feelings – to others. The notion of the mind as 'something inner', accessible only to oneself, has been seriously undermined by Wittgenstein. For an excellent discussion, see Vaaja (2013).

¹⁸ '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' (PG 184).

¹⁹ Note that though one of Wittgenstein's most persistent philosophical concerns is to make the distinction ever clearer between grammar and the use of language (BT 38), he does not always mark that distinction. Where he is more preoccupied with distinguishing word and world rather than grammar from propositions, he often speaks of language where he means grammar (e.g. 'If I want to tell someone what colour some material is to be, I send him a sample, and obviously this sample belongs to language' (PR 38)); or speaks of them quasi-interchangeably (e.g. 'The calculus is as it were autonomous. — Language must speak for itself' (PG 63)). But the distinction between language and grammar remains a logical distinction: grammatical rules *govern* our use of language; they are not language, but are essential to language; make language possible.

²⁰ These – 'grammar' and 'concepts' – are often used interchangeably by Wittgenstein. A conceptual elucidation is a grammatical elucidation.

'What we have to mention in order to explain the significance, I mean the importance, of a concept, are often extremely general facts of nature: such facts as are hardly ever mentioned because of their great generality' (PI, p. 56). But what is the nature of this correspondence? 'Would it be correct to say our concepts reflect our life?' he asks; to which he replies: 'They stand in the middle of it' (LW II 72). This means that our concepts are immersed in our life, intertwined with it in a dynamic interaction: the fabric of life provides the milieu in which our concepts are formed; in turn, our concepts order the fabric of life. Does this mean that the grammar of our language is *justified* by facts? Wittgenstein asks himself this question again and again, from at least 1930²¹. Here is one late formulation of it:

If we can find a ground [by which Wittgenstein means a 'justification': he uses the German *begründen*] for the structures of concepts among the facts of nature (psychological and physical), then isn't the description of the structure of our concepts really disguised natural science; ought we not in that case to concern ourselves not with grammar, but with what lies at the bottom of grammar in nature?

Indeed the correspondence between our grammar and general (seldom mentioned) facts of nature does concern us. But our interest does not fall back on these *possible* causes. We are not pursuing a natural science ... Nor natural history ... (RPP I, 46; cf. PI p. 230)

This²² makes it clear that when Wittgenstein speaks of the correspondence between concepts and nature, he is talking about the correspondence between the *structures* of concepts – that is, our grammatical rules – our grammar – and facts of nature. Take the concept of pain, some of the 'structures' of that concept can be expressed in grammatical rules such as: 'Human beings are normally susceptible to pain'; 'Tables and chairs don't feel pain'; 'There is psychological as well as physical pain', etc. In these passages, then, Wittgenstein is saying that of course we are interested in the correspondence between our grammar and very general facts of nature, but not in the way natural scientists or historians are interested in this correspondence. That is, we are not interested in any empirical justification or historical account for our having the grammatical rules we do. Let me give an example.

There are cases where a rule of grammar may have its historical root in an empirical discovery; for example, the realization that men have something to do with the reproductive process (it was long thought that women singly procreated²³) may well be at the root of the grammatical rule: 'Every human being has two biological parents'. However, such

²¹ See Malcolm: 'The notes for 1930-1932, edited by Desmond Lee, exhibit at first a striking continuity with the *Tractatus*: language consists of propositions; a proposition is a picture of reality; a proposition must have the same logical multiplicity as the fact which it describes; thought must have the logical form of reality. But new concerns soon appear. What is the relation of the logical grammar of language to reality? The application of grammar to reality is not shown by the grammar; a picture does not contain its own application. "In all language," Wittgenstein says, "there is a bridge between the sign and its application. No one can make this for us; we have to bridge the gap ourselves. No explanation ever saves the jump, because any further explanation will itself need a jump." "Can grammar be justified? Can we say why we use just these rules of grammar and not other ones? Is the logic of our language to be justified on the ground that it fits the nature of reality? No. "Our justification could only take the form of saying 'As reality is so and so, the rules must be such and such.' But this presupposes that I could say 'If reality were otherwise, then the rules of grammar would be otherwise.' But in order to describe a reality in which grammar was otherwise I would have to use the very combinations which grammar forbids. The rules of grammar distinguish sense and nonsense and if I use the forbidden combinations I talk nonsense.' (1980 online).

²² PI Part II (1946-49) is roughly contemporaneous with RPP I (1946-47).

²³ With the help of fertility goddesses.

correspondence or justification is of no interest to philosophers; what philosophers are interested in is what *logically* demarcates sense from nonsense, and that cannot be due to justification: 'The essence of logical possibility is what is laid down in language. What is laid down depends on facts, but is not made true or false by them' (AWL 162). Our grammatical rules are not the result of reasoning or justification. So how are facts connected to grammar?

In contrast to what I will call a '*thin* grammar', whose rules are *not* conditioned by facts (e.g. '2+2=4'; 'A rod has a length'; 'This is (what we call) a table') and are normatively engendered and sanctioned, the rules of '*thick* grammar' (e.g. 'Human beings have bodies, need nourishment, sleep'; 'Human beings can go to the moon') *are* rooted in facts and may be either experientially or normatively engendered and sanctioned. Wittgenstein opposes the terms: 'cause' and 'ground' to distinguish a nonratiocinated rootedness in facts and experience from a justified rootedness. Would it be right to say that my having a body is a bound of sense for me *because* previous experience has taught me so? No, our lifelong experience of having a body may be the 'cause' of it being a bound of sense, but it is not its 'ground' (cf. OC 429; 474). I have not come to the conclusion that I have a body 'by following a particular line of thought' (OC 103). Our *experience* of having a body or of mountains not sprouting up in an hour is not empirical or epistemic; it is either instinctive (as is the case of having a body) or acquired via repeated exposure or conditioning, and so second nature (as is the case with mountains being there immemorially). It may help here to distinguish between 'experiential' (*embedded in* experience) and 'empirical' (*inferred from* experience). Our lifelong experience of ourselves as embodied; our experience of the world as populated by people other than ourselves; our experience of mountains as geological structures that do not sprout up in an hour²⁴ make such experience part of the scaffolding or background of sense for us. These facts are 'fused into the foundations of our language-game' (OC 558) – that is, they are part of our grammar. And where some thick rules of grammar are originally grounded in fact and articulated as news-breaking propositions (e.g. 'Human beings can go to the moon'), it is only with time and repetition, once they have hardened into a rule, that they belong to the scaffolding of thought²⁵.

'The common behaviour of mankind'

While acknowledging the buzzing indeterminacy, spontaneity and irreducibility of human life, Wittgenstein also keeps reminding us of certainties and regularities. Amongst these are our *shared* natural reactions; what he calls 'the common behaviour of mankind' (PI 206): reactions such as crying when in pain or sad; smiling when glad; jumping when startled; gasping or screaming when afraid; reacting to someone's suffering. He calls these instinctive common reactions or action patterns 'prototype[s] of thought' (RPP I, 916). These prototypes or action patterns are the necessary starting points of language: 'it is characteristic of our language that the foundation on which it grows consists in *steady ways of living, regular ways of acting*' (CE 397; my emphasis). Without certain constantly recurring patterns, our concepts would have no

²⁴ '[A child] doesn't learn *at all* that that mountain has existed for a long time: that is, the question whether it is so doesn't arise at all. It swallows this consequence down, so to speak, together with *what* it learns' (OC 143). 237. 'If I say "an hour ago this table didn't exist" I probably meant that it was only made later on. ... If I say "this mountain didn't exist half an hour ago", that is such a strange statement that it is not clear what I mean' (OC 237).

²⁵ For more detailed discussion, see Moyal-Sharrock (2007b).

grip; so that our acquiring concepts, such as pain, requires that we have normal prototypical human reactions: 'If a child looked radiant when it was hurt, and shrieked for no apparent reason, one couldn't teach him to use the word "pain"' (LPP 37).

In his last writings on the philosophy of psychology, Wittgenstein delves deeper into these action patterns as they typically, and often internally, relate to feelings and emotions. He introduces the expressions 'patterns of life' and 'patterns of experience'²⁶ to denote the 'constant repetition' (RPP II, 626), the regular and tell-tale characteristics of our various psychological expressions and behaviours (e.g., those of pain, joy, grief, hope, but also of *simulated* pain, joy, grief, hope etc.) – going as far as to suggest that typical physiognomies and constitutive rhythm and tempo attach to them:

'Grief' describes a pattern which recurs, with different variations, in the weave of our life. If a man's bodily expression of sorrow and of joy alternated, say with the ticking of a clock, here we should not have the characteristic formation of the pattern of sorrow or of the pattern of joy. (PI, p. 174; cf. LW I, 406)

For pretence is a (certain) pattern within the weave of life. It is repeated in an infinite number of variations. (LW I, 862)

Someone smiles and his further reactions fit neither a genuine nor a simulated joy. We might say 'I don't know my way around with him. It is neither the picture (pattern) of genuine nor of pretended joy.' (LW II, 61)

'Patterns of life' refer to recurring – mostly behavioral and facial – expressions characteristic of psychological concepts. There is not only one, or even a handful of 'occasions' that we might call 'grief', but innumerable ones that are interwoven with a thousand other patterns (cf. LW I, 966). And this is so for *all* our psychological concepts, because the 'natural foundation' for the way they are formed 'is the complex nature and the variety of human contingencies' (RPP II, 614). As a result the concepts themselves lack determinacy and have a kind of elasticity; but where most philosophers attempt to tame or reduce the indeterminacy, Wittgenstein wants to capture it: 'I do not want to reduce unsharpness to sharpness; but to capture unsharpness conceptually' (MS 1367, 64). Yet this unsharpness does not mean that our concepts are so elastic as to lack a hard core. Indeed Wittgenstein's depiction of psychological indeterminacy is everywhere bounded not by rules, but by certain *regularities*: an order or pattern emerges from obstinate, though constantly varied, repetition; the evidence has tell-tale *characteristics*, our feelings and behaviours are informed by *typical physiognomies*. Of course, 'there are simple and more complicated cases; and that is important for the concept' (LWI, 967), for it is the simple cases that give the concept its solid centre, its unambiguous core' (RPP II, 614): 'There is an *unmistakable* expression of joy and its opposite' (LW II, 32; original emphasis). The point here is not to eradicate indeterminacy, but to recognize that there are *basic* regularities in the 'hurly burly of human action' (Z 567), and that these are what shape our psychological bedrock or psychological grammar. This, without losing sight of the fact that 'simple language-games [...] are poles of a description, not the ground-floor of a theory' (RPP I, 633). The point is that, though there is an *indefiniteness* or *indeterminacy* essential to the

²⁶ Wittgenstein uses the German word *Muster*, which can be translated both as *model* or *pattern*.

kind of *repetition* in question – for it is a repetition that is embedded in life – there *is* a repetition, a pattern; and our psychological grammar is conditioned by such patterns:

Seeing life as a weave, this pattern (pretence, say) is not always complete and is varied in a multiplicity of ways. But we, in our conceptual world, keep on seeing the same, recurring with variations. That is how our concepts take it. For concepts are not for use on a single occasion. (Z 568)

The grammaticalisation of experience

The 'hinge' certainties of *On Certainty* and the 'patterns of life / experience' of *Last Writings* attest to the fact that one of the leitmotifs in the work of the third Wittgenstein is the *grammaticalisation of experience*. Thick grammar – inasmuch as it is conditioned by our human form of life²⁷ – is a grammaticalisation of experience²⁸; one might say it is *anthropological*: 'The basic concepts are interwoven so closely with what is most fundamental in our way of living that they are therefore unassailable' (LW II, 43-44). Unassailable means impregnable and infallible. So that grammar, though impacted by facts, remains autonomous.

The grammaticalisation of experience did not come easily to Wittgenstein. As early as 1930, he writes: 'I will count any fact whose obtaining is a presupposition of a proposition's making sense as belonging to language' (PR 45)' (by which he means grammar²⁹). And indeed in PI, he had gone as far as to count objects such as samples as belonging to grammar³⁰. However, in his last notes: *Remarks on Colour* and *On Certainty*, we find him hesitant to apply this to contingent facts: 'Here it could now be asked what I really want, to what extent I want to deal with grammar' (RC 309); and what he'd asserted as a 'correspondence between concepts and very general facts of nature' in PI, is now put in the form of a question, albeit a rhetorical one, in *On Certainty*: 'Indeed, doesn't it seem obvious that the possibility of a language-game is conditioned by certain facts?' (OC 617).

Though comfortable with the idea that some contingent facts condition our grammar, Wittgenstein was uneasy with assigning the expression of these contingent facts a grammatical status – indeed, with recognising seemingly empirical propositions to be grammatical rules. So much so that, as late as OC, he even contemplates a compromise: 'Is it that rule and empirical proposition merge into one another?' (OC 309). However, his '[inclination] to believe that not

²⁷ There are also culture-bound, or 'local' thick grammars – conditioned by the different forms of human life. For more on this distinction, see Moyal-Sharrock (2015).

²⁸ To consider the thick rules that are reality-soaked but not strictly speaking *experiential* (e.g. 'Napoleon existed' (cf. OC 185)) as part of the 'grammaticalisation of experience', we would need to either understand the term 'experience' in this phrase in a broad (culture-inclusive) sense, or say that not all of thick grammar is part of Wittgenstein's grammaticalisation of experience. I would opt for the first.

²⁹ See note 20.

³⁰ 'If I want to tell someone what colour some material is to be, I send him a sample, and obviously this sample belongs to language; and equally the memory or image of a colour that I conjure by a word, belongs to language' (PR 38). 'We can put it like this: This sample is an instrument of the language used in ascriptions of colour. In this language-game it is not something that is represented, but is a means of representation. ... And to say "If it did not exist, it could have no name" is to say as much and as little as: if this thing did not exist, we could not use it in our language-game. – What looks as if it *had* to exist, is part of the language. It is a paradigm in our language-game; something with which comparison is made. And this may be an important observation; but it is none the less an observation concerning our language-game – our method of representation' (PI 50). Although Wittgenstein speaks of samples as being part of, or belonging to, 'language', strictly speaking, he means to 'grammar'. See note 20.

everything that has the form of an empirical proposition *is* one' (OC 308) wins the day; in *On Certainty*, he comes to see that the contingent or empirical nature of these propositions is invalidated by their very unassailability or indubitability. In fact, he could have reminded himself of this passage from the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*: 'To accept a proposition as unshakably certain ... means to use it as a grammatical rule' (RFM 170). Be that as it may, we can safely say that in *On Certainty*, he is finally reconciled with the fact that some apparent empirical propositions 'form the foundation of all operating with thoughts (with language)' (OC 401). Wittgenstein has understood that grammar can be 'reality-soaked' without being empirical, but the journey was laborious, confirming that 'Not empiricism and yet realism in philosophy' is indeed 'the hardest thing' (RFM 325).

Our concepts delimit the world; but the world has its impact. Realising the full extent to which – as Cora Diamond puts it: '... grammar is to be seen in how we live' (1989, 20), Wittgenstein expands our conception of the logical. He gives grammar / logic an anthropological twist, and thereby redefines its limits. Logic is seen to be 'reality-soaked', but without falling into the traps abhorred by Frege: it is flawed neither by subjectivity (psychologism) nor fallibility (empiricism). This is crucially important for philosophy; it redefines the limits of sense or possibility.

Redefining the limits of possibility

Wittgenstein's conception of the logical is internally linked to our human form of life and this does not sit well with traditional conceptions of logical necessity. Stanley Cavell points out this apparent shortcoming:

Wittgenstein's view of necessity is ... internal to his view of what philosophy is. His philosophy provides, one might say, an anthropological, or even anthropomorphic, view of necessity: and that can be disappointing; as if it is not really *necessity* which he has given an anthropological view of. As though if the a priori has a history it cannot really be the a priori in question. (1979, 118-9)

On the standard philosophical view, the logical must encompass *all possible worlds*. Most philosophers think, like Bertrand Russell, that 'No logical absurdity results from the hypothesis that the world consists of myself and my thoughts and feelings and sensations, and that everything else is mere fancy' (1912, 10). This, the Tractarian Wittgenstein would have endorsed: 'A thought contains the possibility of the situation of which it is the thought. What is thinkable is possible too' (TLP 3.02). But, on Wittgenstein's anthro-*logical* view of logic (which would include the grammatical rule: 'There exist people other than myself'), logical absurdity *would* result from such hypotheses or thoughts as 'The world consists of myself alone' – unless meant figuratively or embedded in a fictional context. Conceivability can be equal to possibility in fictional worlds, but in our world, possibility is dependent on the conditions of sense anchored in our human form of life. A thought that has lost its human mooring and runs wild on the uncharted tracks of the imagination is not a possibility; it's a thought. It takes anthro-*logical* bounds of sense to enable us to discern the *humanly* possible from the merely imaginable. Of course, these reality-soaked bounds of sense are, by definition, *basic* – but it

only takes something as basic as the grammatical rule: 'There exist people other than myself' to render senseless the alleged possibility that 'The world consists of myself alone'.

Philosophical speculation should not be deemed sufficiently confined by conceivability; it must be constrained by logical parameters specific to our world. Rai Gaita echoes Cavell's denunciation of traditional epistemology and logic as a 'denial of the human' because the concepts informing them are 'essentially unconditioned by the fact that they are concepts deployed by human beings' – and, he adds, echoing Winch this time, that 'we cannot purify our concepts of their embeddedness in human life ... without being left with only a shadow play of the grammar of serious judgment' (1990, xi; xii). Wittgenstein decried this purification of our concepts, or as he put it, the 'crystalline purity of logic' (PI 107). For logic to stop being 'empty', it must '[g]et back to the rough ground!' (ibid.).

When the only constraints on logical necessity are a few logical laws pared of any *human* specification, nothing impedes the so-called 'possibilities' that: 'There may exist no one in the world but myself'; 'The world may be five minutes old' and 'Human beings can switch bodies'³¹. To any ordinary person, these are inanities unless uttered in sci-fi contexts; and philosophers shouldn't be in the business of propagating them as possibilities. Hume is right that '[n]othing is more dangerous to reason than the flights of the imagination, and nothing has been the occasion of more mistakes among philosophers'³² (*Treatise* 1.4.7).

Wittgenstein had a second look at logical necessity and saw that, as Diamond puts it, it has a *human* face (1991, 6, 13). The logical limit of possibility in our form of life has to be an anthropo-*logical* limit. Wittgenstein's extension of logic to incorporate specifically human bounds of sense prevents – or ought to prevent – philosophers from envisaging life-size absurdities as legitimate possibilities.

Grammar as enactive

'How is the word used?' and 'What is the grammar of the word?' I shall take as being the same question.
(AWL 3)

We have seen that grammar can manifest itself in action. All grammar – thin or thick – deploys itself as a technique, a know-how, not a set of principles that we learn and apply rationally: 'To understand a language means to be master of a technique' (PI 199). In mastering different language-games, a child masters the *grammar* of words; their use in the language. Wittgenstein's notion of grammar is not more complicated than this. Rules of grammar are simply expressions of the norms of sense that grow out of, and in tandem with, our natural ways of acting and our socio-cultural practices. Grammar does not generate language; nor does it exist independently of language or action; it is embedded and enacted in what we say and do. The proper use of the word 'pain', for example is manifested in our ways of speaking and acting, and so the child assimilates grammatical rules or norms as it assimilates the language – through

³¹ David Lewis sees 'the mere possibility' that a person might switch bodies as real or serious enough to require refutation (1971, 47).

³² And, I would add, nothing more time-wasting for scientists to engage in experiments to try and (dis)prove philosophers' time-wasting thought experiments: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/next/physics/physicists-confirm-that-were-not-living-in-a-computer-simulation/>.

exposure to, and guidance in, correct usage. That is, children are habituated into standards of correctness of the practice in question, and thereby formed to act and react in particular ways; they are trained to master a technique through the inculcation of a normative attitude. The assimilation of rules – be they linguistic or mathematical – does not have the features of a *learning that*, but of a *learning how* – of a training or a conditioning, a way of acting.

Wittgenstein's account of the emergence, transmission and practice of language is an enactive account. In teaching a child to replace the natural expression of pain with the word 'pain', adults teach the child 'new pain-behaviour' (PI 244). Language is, in such cases, an extension of an underlying action pattern, a more sophisticated way of acting. So that, in investigating our grammar – thick or thin – the philosopher examines and reflects on the practices, forms of life and patterns of life in which it is inextricably embedded. *Pace* its detractors, grammatical or conceptual investigation is not a philosophical method that ignores reality, but a way of elucidating *our* bounds of sense.

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