Philosophia (2009) 37:629–652
DOI 10.1007/s11406-009-9196-2

Philosophical Clarification, Its Possibility and Point

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Received: 6 February 2009 / Revised: 10 February 2009 / Accepted: 16 March 2009 /
Published online: 29 April 2009

Abstract It is possible to pursue philosophy with a clarificatory end in mind. Doing philosophy in this mode neither reduces to simply engaging in therapy or theorizing. This paper defends the possibility of this distinctive kind of philosophical activity and gives an account of its product—non-theoretical insights—in an attempt to show that there exists a third, 'live' option for understanding what philosophy has to offer. It responds to criticisms leveled at elucidatory philosophy by defenders of extreme therapeutic readings and clearly demonstrates that in rejecting the latter one cannot assume Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy was theoretically based by default.

Keywords Wittgenstein · Philosophical clarification · Philosophical elucidation · Therapeutic readings · Resolute readings · Philosophical theorizing

> The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one's eyes). The real foundations of his enquiry do not strike man at all. Unless that fact has at some time struck him.—And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful.
>
> Ludwig Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §129

Introduction: What's at Stake?

It is possible to pursue philosophy with a clarificatory end in mind. Doing philosophy in this mode neither reduces to simply engaging in therapy or in theorizing. Likewise, the products of such labour (if correctly conducted) would not be merely speculative offerings or the dissolution of confused thinking (even where such dissolution is a necessary means to achieving clarity on important topics). This paper seeks to defend the above thoughts, and in the course of so doing, to say something about the point of doing philosophy in this way.

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To forestall a possible misunderstanding, I do not argue that clarification is *all* that philosophy can achieve (my ambitions are not so imperialist). My intention is only to establish that it is something that philosophy *can* achieve. It goes without saying that I would not bother defending this kind of philosophical endeavour if I did not think it important, but I will not attempt to establish its importance in this short essay (other than indirectly); it will suffice for my purposes if I can defend its possibility and get clearer about its point. My central goal is to articulate, understand and defend the existence of this kind of philosophical activity, showing that it neither reduces to therapy nor theory. If successful, this will show that there exists a third, 'live' option for understanding what philosophy has to offer.

The paper is structured into three distinct parts. In the first section "Clearing Away a Misunderstanding", I provide a brief history of recent developments in how to interpret Wittgenstein's philosophy—developments that raise deeper questions about how philosophy might be conducted and to what end. With the second concern in mind, I respond to a serious charge made by some 'New Wittgensteinians' against elucidatory readings of his philosophical mission—a charge which, if upheld, would threaten not only the viability of such interpretations but, by extension, the very possibility of philosophical clarification as a genuine pursuit. To counter this I demonstrate that clarificatory philosophy need not have the sorts of implications its critics imagine it to have and that, for this reason, their complaint fails. The second section "The Nature of Clarificatory Philosophy" proceeds to say something more positive about the point of philosophical clarification, what it involves and the outcomes it promises. The latter are importantly distinguished from additions to our theoretical knowledge of the world.

The section entitled "Afterward: Should all Philosophical Theorizing be Denounced?" is a kind of Afterward. I supply it because, despite the arguments of this paper, I anticipate that many will remain wedded to the idea that *all* positive, articulable philosophical offerings *must* be theoretical offerings. But this thought looks less attractive once it is realized that there is currently no single, well-understood, or agreed upon notion of what qualifies as a philosophical theory. Moreover, on reviewing the slender catalogue of things that philosophical theories might be, it becomes abundantly clear that Wittgenstein sought to provide us with something quite different. If I am right his true legacy is not only to have provided us with existence proofs that philosophical clarification is possible, he serves as an exemplary guide for learning how to do it for ourselves.

Clearing Away a Misunderstanding

It was once widely supposed that Wittgenstein's major contribution to philosophy is to have advanced not one but two 'theories' of language. And it was also widely supposed that the antithetical nature of the content of those theories provides an appropriate means of demarcating what is of real interest in his otherwise eclectic corpus, splitting it into two well-defined periods—the early and the late. This way of understanding Wittgenstein's great accomplishments informed the interpretations of many prominent figures in analytic philosophy for many years (and, in some circles, it still remains influential).[1] It is the textbook way of characterizing his achievements; one that finds articulation in

[1] Kripke (1982) and Carruthers (1989, 1990) provide particularly clear examples of this tendency, but it is widespread.

countless introductions to his work—i.e. those that talk freely and unabashedly of his early truth-conditional 'picture theory' of language which stands opposed to his later 'use-theory' of language.

To their great credit, resolute readers such as Diamond (1989, 1991, 1995, 2004) and Conant (1989, 1991, 1995, 2000, 2004) have shown that this way of interpreting Wittgenstein entirely misses the point. It is not just that such readings are slightly off kilter; they are fundamentally misleading. By casting Wittgenstein as a theorist (and one interested mainly in language) they seriously misrepresent both the originality and importance of his philosophical insights. For these have to do with what he thought philosophy could achieve and how it must achieve it. Understanding the true character of these offerings is not possible as long as we think of him as 'advancing theories'.[2] Put simply (and in a way reminiscent of Wittgenstein), if we stick with such limited interpretations we will miss the most important facts; we will misrepresent and fail to appreciate the real value of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

In this regard, the resolute readers' corrective is of the first importance—it put the question of what Wittgenstein was really up to visibly on the agenda. Nevertheless, one can acknowledge the value of this without thereby endorsing extreme therapeutic readings; i.e. those promoted by some self-anointed New Wittgensteinians (most visibly, Hutchinson and Read).[3] This is because rejection of theoretical readings is consistent with the acceptance of elucidatory readings; those which regard Wittgenstein's target as that of clarifying certain important topics.

There has been an on-going debate between these two camps for several years now. To date my part in the dispute has played out over the course of a series of publications (replies and replies to replies) which have largely focused on worries about the proposed costs and benefits of such readings when it comes to interpreting the *Tractatus* (Hutchinson and Read 2006, Hutto 2006, Hutchinson 2006). Importantly, these exchanges have unearthed the real bone of contention between elucidatory readers and their challengers. It is that the elucidatory readers hold that—throughout his entire career, early and late—Wittgenstein's primary philosophical purpose was to get at and convey substantive philosophical insights. Of course, we

[2] One obvious problem with 'theory-based' readings, that dominate the reception of Wittgenstein's work in the analytic tradition, is that they overly restrict our interests by encouraging us to focus on just two periods of Wittgenstein's work – and then to focus on only selected aspects of the work done in those periods (i.e. those that purportedly relate to the articulation and defense of one or other of these 'theories of language'). This is why Moyal-Sharrock's (2004) work is of such great importance; she emphasises the need to examine the work of the late, late Wittgenstein. When I argued against the need to identify a third Wittgenstein in an earlier paper (Hutto 2004) it was in the spirit of tracing certain constant themes of his thought, while noting changes across his development. That is I was (and am) keen to regard him as a thinker who was always seeking for clarification, and struggling to convey what that task involves. With that criterion in mind the headcount of Wittgensteins should come to just one. My initial thought on this was that if we reject 'theory-based' interpretations of his work there is no interesting basis for making the standard sharp divisions between the 'early' and the 'late' Wittgenstein. But in line with main proposal of this paper (and based on further discussions with Moyal-Sharrock) I now appreciate that we can mark out Wittgenstein offerings at different points in his career by focusing on their specific content without assuming that such offerings are theory-based. As Moyal-Sharrock has stressed to me, this is because the *results* of his elucidations (or attempts at such) differed in different periods. To understand Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy properly and to benefit from the full range of his insights on fundamental topics we need to extend our interests beyond the *Philosophical Investigations* to his last writings. These undoubtedly contain important new developments.

[3] I have raised concerns about the internal coherence of such readings and have argued against them in various other ways in earlier publications (Hutto 2003, 2006, 2007).

need not suppose (indeed we should not) that he was always equally successful in achieving this end at every stage of his work. All that this view entails is that clarifying important philosophical matters was always his central ambition.

This claim breaks faith with those interpretations that regard him as seeking *only* to dissolve illusory problems of philosophical manufacture—problems which are wholly brought into being and fostered by confusions that are in turn sponsored by certain pictures and misguided commitments; commitments that some philosophers find irresistibly gripping. Defenders of elucidatory readings need not deny that many so-called philosophical issues are 'internally related' to the confusions of certain philosophers (to borrow McManus' turn of phrase—see McManus 2006, ch. 10). In such cases what appear to be deep and burning problems concerning important topics crumble to dust, without residue, once the supporting commitments are exposed as wrong-headed. Providing this sort of treatment is complicated and difficult; it is often crucial for achieving philosophical clarity.

This sort of therapeutic work plays an important part in Wittgenstein's methodology. But acknowledging this is consistent with denying that such therapy is (or need be) the end of philosophy. I have argued that Wittgenstein is seeking something *other than* the provision of such cures alone. It is the idea that Wittgenstein was seeking to achieve something positive in his philosophy that extreme therapeutic readers see as unwarranted, sophistic and dangerous. Indeed, they see it as dangerous precisely because it is attractive, and seductively so. With this in mind, defenders of therapeutic readings are happy to admit that elucidatory readings are now not only popular, they constitute the new, 'standard' way of understanding what is distinctive and important about Wittgenstein's philosophy. Naming names, Hutchinson and Read (2008) find such a reading advanced by, for example, Kenny (1984), Hacker (1986), Glock (2001) and Schroeder (2001, 143), see also Hutchinson (2007, 704).[4]

But they also insist that this is a mistake—that if we are to use Wittgenstein's philosophy as a model for our own pursuits then we must follow Baker (2004) in rejecting the idea "that Wittgenstein left room for a positive role for philosophy which stands in contrast to and supplements its predominantly negative or therapeutic task" (26). Extreme therapeutic readers argue that Wittgenstein allowed for no positive philosophical task that is *independent* of the therapeutic task. On this point they disagree with those named above who promote so-called standard versions of elucidatory readings.

But therapeutic readers also advance a stronger claim about the end of philosophy, arguing that clarification is a means to the end of therapy. And, crucially, on this important issue they are at odds even with those, such as Marie McGinn and myself, whom they regard as offering milder versions of elucidatory readings.[5] The

[4] Interestingly, it appears that even a founding father of resolute readings is partial to elucidatory interpretations. For instance, Conant has lately observed that "resolute readers will hold [that there exists] a genuine (if limited) continuity in the conception of the activity pursued in the two books … namely, the aspiration to practice philosophy in such a way that it does not issue in a doctrine or a theory, but rather in the practice of an activity" (2007, 68). As long as activity is read as 'therapeutic' activity, this might seem to be in tune with what is claimed by the New Wittgensteinians. But Conant goes on to note that even though Wittgenstein's conception of philosophical activity received different formulations during his early and late periods, his focus throughout his career was steadfastly on the end of philosophical *clarification*.

[5] Hutchinson remarks, for example, that "Hutto and McGinn could be fruitfully seen to be on the fringes of the elucidatory camp … [For although] they both show more sensitivity to the therapeutic nature of the work … they both, crucially, hold on to the thought that there *must be something more*" (Hutchinson 2007, 704).

disagreement is perfectly clear since those who promote such readings defend the claim that therapy is a means to the end of clarification. As a result extreme therapeutic and mild elucidatory readers offer substantively different accounts of Wittgenstein's ambitions and they promote very different visions of how one ought to understand the point and end of philosophy generally.

In launching recent salvos against elucidatory readings, these critics have focused on Wittgenstein's second masterpiece, claiming that "a reading of *PI*, which holds on to Wittgenstein doing more than practicing therapy ultimately leaves 'Wittgenstein' committed to the very commitments of which he was trying to relieve us (and himself)" (Hutchinson and Read 2008, 149). So, despite the current popularity of elucidatory readings, therapeutic critics insist that such readings are unstable and unsustainable—apparently, they face a fatal dilemma. The rough logic of their argument is as follows: There is simply *no way* of making sense of the end of Wittgenstein's project that does not reduce either to understanding it by extreme therapeutic or by theoretical lights. Thus anyone who agrees that theoretical readings are not credible (as I and many others do), is simply forced to suppose that Wittgenstein's interest was *solely* that of providing a kind of therapy by dissolving philosophical problems.

Allegedly, elucidatory interpretations have two undermining features. First, they implicate Wittgenstein in contradictory philosophical commitments and, second, they face a problem of 'motivation' because (reversing the elucidatory formula) it is claimed that any attempt to elucidate in PI is undertaken *only* in pursuit of the therapeutic goal. Thus it has been claimed (in ironically strong terms) that:

> The therapeutic interpretation is *the only* interpretation that can adequately make sense of Wittgenstein's text as a whole and the metaphilosophical remarks in particular. Furthermore, it is *the only* interpretation that can demonstrate Wittgenstein's continued importance and relevance as a philosopher (Hutchinson 2007, 691, emphases added).

My purpose in this section is to answer the charge against elucidatory readings, showing it to be groundless—and hence the conclusions drawn from it are unreliable. Facing up to this challenge is important, not primarily because it is useful for settling an on-going debate between Wittgensteinians, but because doing so matters crucially to how non-Wittgensteinians understand the potential value and importance of Wittgenstein's philosophical approach. For, they too are inclined to think that the choice boils down to either theory or therapy. The only difference is that they prefer theorizing, so, for them, if it were true that all Wittgenstein has to offer is therapy then they are quite happy to write off his contemporary importance. Putting aside concerns about Wittgenstein scholarship, the real danger of allowing this simple pattern of thought to prevail is that we will overlook an important alternative way of doing philosophy and for a different end than that for which it is generally conducted today.

Famously, in the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes:

> A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of the use of our words—Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding

> which consists in seeing the connexions. Hence the importance of finding and inventing intermediate cases. The concept of a perspicuous representation is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things. (Is this a "Weltanschauung"?) (PI §122)

Although the colour octahedron of *Philosophical Remarks* §1 is the sole example that Wittgenstein gives of a perspicuous presentation (at least by name), its features (and the insights he gained from attending to them) aid us in understanding why he regards the concept of a perspicuous presentation to be of fundamental significance. A perspicuous presentation serves as a kind of revealing depiction—a device, instrument or totem that, in the case of the octahedron, shows transparently the limits of how we might use our colour concepts—at least as things stand for us now. For example, by means of comparisons with other colour concepts it allows us to see that red is a pure colour. This revelation can be easily expressed in words. But Wittgenstein observes, "If I am right in my way of thinking, then 'Red is a pure colour' isn't a proposition, and what it is meant to show is not susceptible to experimental testing" (PR §222). His point is that his remark is not a merely hypothetical or theoretical proposal about the possible use of our concepts. It is the articulation of an insight about the nature of redness and what can be sensibly said of it, as things stand for us.

Picking up on this line of thought, Hacker—a principal defender of the elucidatory reading—construed the constructive aspect of Wittgenstein's philosophical project by observing that Wittgenstein "gives us numerous overviews of the logical grammar of problematic concepts … [such that] the conceptual geology of the *Tractatus* gave way to the conceptual topography of the *Investigations*" (Hacker 2001a, 37). It is with reference to this claim of Hacker's that Hutchinson and Read imagine that the defining characteristic of all elucidatory readings is that they construe Wittgenstein's project as mapping "our language in a somewhat Rylean—non-purpose relative, non-context sensitive manner" (2008, 145, see also 143). This is important because, so characterized, the commitments of clarificatory philosophy are (apparently) self-defeating. The complaint raised against it hinges on the assumption that "The word 'map' is taken in the topographical sense of the cartographer mapping the landscape … it is ***that*** restriction that leads to … unfortunate consequences" (2008, 146, emphasis added).

This is how critics of elucidatory readings diagnose the problem: their fundamental complaint is that "Mapping a terrain and mapping a language [is not] a reliable analogy" (Hutchinson and Read 2008, 146). The comparison is, allegedly, not apt because it rests "upon an assumption that one can take up a position 'outside of language' so as to view language" (Hutchinson and Read 2008, 144). Essentially, if one is to map something, such as terrain, then what is mapped must be a relatively stable entity capable of being representationally depicted. Having highlighted this unfortunate feature of the putatively faulty 'mapping analogy', Hutchinson concludes, generally, that "If clarification is a goal, then it presupposes a particular view of how language *must* be" (2007, 700).

So, by this quick series of steps, it is exposed that to suppose that Wittgenstein sought to 'map' our grammar, elucidatory readers require that "Wittgenstein does have a picture (or a theory) of language" (2007, 701). More specifically, "this reading implies that there is some [relatively static] discrete item, or 'entity' …

'language' or 'the grammar of language'. This is really the root of all problems" (2007, 701). Now if this analysis were right, elucidatory readers really would be no better off than those who claim, more openly, that Wittgenstein was in the business of offering 'theories'. But, if this is true, they are worse off (at least morally) because they systematically confuse others about what Wittgenstein was really up to while paying "lip service to the metaphilosophy" (Hutchinson and Read 2008, 144).

A natural response to this sort of charge is to claim that Hutchinson and Read are simply setting up straw men. But they are quick to acknowledge that "neither doctrinal readers nor elucidatory readers tend to claim that one can view language in such a way … they nevertheless imply such an ability" (Hutchinson and Read 2008, 144). And, of course, it is true that public statements avowing or denying such commitments are beside the point; what matters is whether the position advanced really has these sorts of implications or not (i.e. it is not important what implications their defenders *believe* they have). But, the fact is, elucidatory readings do not embed any such theory about language, as I now intend to show.

That elucidatory readings might *seem* to embed (even if only implicitly) a theory about the static nature of 'language' as a kind of 'reality' which our maps purport to represent is a direct consequence of misunderstanding the sort of work that Hacker's 'mapping analogy' seeks to do. A first step toward seeing this is to bear in mind that the analogy is really only supposed to highlight the fact that perspicuous presentations are meant to be illustrative devices. They are used for the purpose of depicting or highlighting certain features of our everyday conceptual practices; features that (in a sense) are already quite familiar to us, since they are part and parcel of what it is to be competent in such practices. Nevertheless, these features only become 'surveyable by a rearrangement' (PI §92). Just as the weeds of an overgrown garden need to be removed if we are to see its beauty, so too the process of achieving clarification necessarily involves "clearing misunderstandings away" (PI §90). But that does not alter the fact that the reason for engaging in such activity is so that we might better understand certain aspects of the character of our practices and their basis.

The first thing to notice is that, far from being purpose-free (whatever that might mean), attempts to present such features perspicuously are necessarily "relative to certain purposes" (Hutto 2007, 301). It hardly follows that such activity forms part of a grander endeavour to chart the rules for 'the whole of language' (whatever that might mean) or of all conceptual possibilities, once and for all. Understood in the way just described, there is nothing in the 'mapping analogy' that implies that the conceptual or grammatical possibilities being surveyed are static, or relatively so. Nor does it imply that 'language' and 'grammar' are imagined to constitute kinds of entity.

Still, it might be objected (though this is not claimed by Hutchinson and Read) that—"Even if the point of producing perspicuous presentations is not to provide a complete mapping of the whole of grammar, it remains the case that the usefulness of such presentations presupposes that they *in some way* represent or correspond to an external reality". There is a kernel of truth in this; if a map or illustrative device is out of sync with the domain it seeks to depict, for example if it systematically distorts it, then it will be fail to be of much use, except accidentally. Nevertheless, if the point of drawing our attention to this fact is to show that anyone who is

impressed by 'mapping analogy' must be committed to a simple-minded form of realism about 'the rules of grammar', then the objection fails. One can accept the truism that maps must be accurate if they are to be useful without buying into the strong realist proposal that we can distinguish a presentation (e.g. conceptual, linguistic) from its subject matter (e.g. extra-conceptual or extra-linguistic reality) for *philosophically* interesting explanatory purposes.[6]

Such a thought is made problematic by the fact that it is not possible to talk meaningfully of how-things-are in some absolute way that is wholly independent of our practices—and especially not 'the rules of grammar'. Any account of how maps and pictures stand to their subject matter, so as to be useful for particular purposes, has to be more sophisticated than this. It is entirely possible to find the 'mapping analogy' useful for understanding the nature and function of perspicuous presentations while eschewing strong realism about what they depict.

Furthermore, accepting this is entirely consistent with acknowledging that there is a certain degree of freedom in the way that our use of concepts can develop and extend (see Glock 2008). That said, it must also be admitted that such freedom is not absolute or unconstrained. What we find useful in practice (and, hence, where it is sensible to draw conceptual boundaries) and the obtaining of certain facts are importantly related. Shifts in the facts can, as Wittgenstein observed, make certain of our conceptual practices live or die; some may become impossible to sustain or otherwise lose their point while others might suddenly become pertinent or practically necessary. As such, conceptual possibilities must be understood against the backdrop of what we find practical or useful; it is in this way that they (and presentations of them or what underpins them) are tied to or dependent upon worldly facts. But this dependency cannot be understood in terms of some kind of straightforward representational relation—i.e. which could be rendered intelligible, as strong realism suggests, apart from our practices.[7]

> Crucially, it is possible to reveal both the nature of grammatical rules and the importance in our practices without endorsing the simplistic idea that there exists an underlying, pre-given 'external' reality that fixes the bounds of conceptual possibility. One can adopt the kind of 'navigational' account of the use of perspicuous representations … while rejecting crude objectivism about the status of rules of grammar (Hutto 2007, 305–6).[8]

In raising worries about the 'mapping analogy' and the vision of philosophical enterprise that sponsors it, Hutchinson and Read clearly have the wrong sort of map in mind. They imagine that defenders of the clarificatory approach must see the job of philosophy as charting a vast territory, piece by piece; always using maps with a standard format, such as Ordinance Survey maps. Only these might be suitably

[6] Thus Wittgenstein tells us "One ought to ask, not what images are or what happens when one imagines anything, but how the word 'imagination' is used. But that does not mean that I want to talk only about words. For the question of the nature of imagination is as much about the word 'imagination' as my question is" (PI §370).

[7] For a fuller discussion of this point see Hutto 2003, 112-114, 120, ch. 5.

[8] Perhaps it is because I make such claims that Hutchinson acknowledges that "Hutto (2003) has argued for a delimited (one might say, less Rylean form of elucidatory reading" (2007, 698).

combined to provide a coherent overview. But in fact the ambitions of the clarificatory approach can be much more local and tied to the specific needs of particular map users. A better comparison is therefore to regard them as aiming to produce something akin to the London tube map. For what is required are useful navigational tools, guides that can help us find our way about in local terrains, with specific projects in mind. For:

> [like perspicuous presentations, the London Tube map] is not an accurate or complete representation of all aspects of the network nor is it meant to be (e.g. it does not show the distances between stations accurately or to scale). Indeed, its usefulness precludes it being such. What it shows—so successfully and quite literally—are the 'relevant connections' in a single surveyable design. For the purpose of travelling by tube it is both clear and comprehensive (and has become more so over time, with modifications) (Hutto 2007, 301).

As is evident from this comparison, to be useful most maps must be revisable; they must change if features of the environment they depict shift and alter. Nor, if they are to serve their purposes, should they necessarily strive for completeness; the tube map is a successful design precisely because it does not attempt to reveal *every* feature of the rail system in detail or accurately, to comply with some neutral standard. Good maps, like Beck's, do not attempt to depict all of the features in their domain of interest indiscriminately. They neither do so once and for all nor all at once. But this does make them arbitrary; useful maps do not depict *just any* features of a given domain.

It must be remembered that the whole point of drawing the mapping analogy (which is, after all, just that—an analogy) is to highlight the way in which perspicuous presentations *function*. For what makes something a perspicuous presentation is not its "intrinsic features but its function" (Baker 2004, 41). What all such devices have in common is that they provide landmarks, patterns, analogies which enable their users to understand or find their way about a certain space of possibilities—it is *not* that they strive to capture and present features of 'a static external reality' in a purpose-free way.

For precisely this reason there is "no general restriction on what form a perspicuous representation may take" (Baker 2004, 31). Indeed, if they are to do their specialized work such devices could not possibly share a common presentational format; they must be fashioned in a way that is sensitive to particular features of widely variegated practices and the specific needs of their users. It is simply nonsense to imagine that they might be somehow combined so as to gain a bird's eye view of 'grammar'; i.e. to provide a single, unified take on the various language games—i.e. the whole of language—in the sort of way that, in contrast, a complete set of Ordinance Survey maps might be capable of detailing (at some suitable level of abstraction) the whole terrain of the British Isles.

Functioning like maps (of the Tube Map variety), perspicuous presentations are the primary tools for conducting an investigative, probative philosophy that *only* aims to clarify our understanding of specific facets of certain of our practices or what underpins such practices quite generally. Contrary to the claims of extreme therapeutic readers, understood in this way, perspicuous presentations offer just the right set of tools

for a philosophy that eschews any greater 'explanatory' ambitions—or even descriptive ambitions of an all-encompassing, once-and-for-all variety.

Once this is realized there is nothing left to the idea that in invoking the 'mapping analogy' promoters of clarificatory philosophy reveal themselves to be committed (even implicitly) to pursing a project that is predicated on a tacit endorsement of a false picture (or theory) of language (or grammar).

The Nature of Clarificatory Philosophy

If we are to understand the character of clarificatory philosophy we need more than the 'mapping analogy'. It is important to say a bit more about the outcomes that philosophical clarification strives to deliver. Certain ideas expressed in Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*—although these contain little more than incomplete musings—have been identified as the inspirational source of several of the most striking claims in the *Investigations* about the point and product of philosophical activity. For example, the lineage of PI §122 itself can be traced back to this point.[9] Thus Hacker finds its roots in Wittgenstein's reflections about what goes wrong in Frazer's attempt to make sense of the sacrificial rites conducted on the shores of Lake Nemi—and what, by way of contrast, would be required for a proper understanding of such practices.

Frazer regarded these practices as poorly conceived attempts to bring about certain results by inappropriate causal means. He assumed that, although savage, they stemmed from a basic human, proto-scientific attitude to the world; one that happened in this instance to have been grounded in a serious misunderstanding of how the world works. Essentially, if this were the point of the ritual practice in question then we would be right to regard it as a sort of hopeless and superstitiously corrupt attempt at scientific control. But Frazer mischaracterized ritual practices because, driven by a false picture, he completely failed to understand what really motivated them.

Wittgenstein chiefly wished to guard against this type of error. He insisted that we only begin to grasp the point of such ritual practices, if we first note their expressive, symbolic character. It is only if we are able to see how these features are on a continuum with our own tendencies for engaging in relevantly similar sorts of behaviour—e.g. to engage in non-instrumental, ritual activity such as the shaking of hands, kissing foreheads—that we can make such practices properly intelligible. Only in this way can they be appropriately characterized and understood. Without denying the possibility or even the potential value of providing historical or theoretical explanations of the genesis of specific rituals, Wittgenstein stressed that

[9] The clarificatory conception of the end of philosophy became crystallized in the crucial observations of PI §122, those which regard achieving philosophical clarity as taking the form of 'seeing connexions'. This idea is replanted and "transformed from a comment on anthropological hermeneutics into one on philosophical method" (Hacker 2001b, 75). And we see the prominent influence of these musings elsewhere too – for example, it is clear in the emphasis on description alone in contrast to the attempt to provide hypothetical explanations in PI §109. This famous injunction has its roots in the remark: "Here one can only describe" (GB §63 – see also PI §496).

the kind of understanding required for making such practices intelligible to us is of a wholly different sort.[10]

Falling in with tradition, we might call this special kind of understanding hermeneutical; it requires resonating with the spirit of the human activity in question if we are to understand its *point* (see Bouveresse 2008, 9). Given our form of life—as creatures with the same basic kinds of reactions, instincts, abilities, and tendencies—we are able to see this as a *possible* way of carrying on. The claim is not that our capacity to make sense of a practice evocatively in this way means that we fully understand all aspects of it, or that we would be tempted to engage in it ourselves, or that we would necessarily approve of or sympathize with it. There are clear limits to the depth and degree that such a hermeneutical understanding engenders. Superficially, our capacity to recognize that we too have similar and quite general basic tendencies for engaging in ritualistically expressive behaviour ourselves may yield quietus by our "associating the baffling rite with a comparable impulse in us' (Hacker 2001b, 75). But seeing this much of a 'formal' connection can only render alien rites intelligible in the weakest sense—and perhaps, *for certain purposes*, inadequately so. Thus even while recognizing the behaviour in question as being within the scope of the human we might not necessarily find the practice of the other 'reasonable', 'acceptable' or 'tolerable'. This would not preclude being struck by the sense of its being a possibility for 'us' (which is exactly why the latter thought can be unnerving).

Yet if we focus too much on admitted limitations of this kind of hermeneutical understanding we will miss the crucial point—which is that, for *philosophical* purposes (but perhaps not for all purposes), it is the recognition of such connections that reminds us of something of pivotal importance. Moreover, what we gain, if successful, is not a theoretical grasp of the origins, genesis or basis of the practice in question; it is rather that we recognize it as, in some weak sense, a possibility for us.[11] We are brought to understand it by being struck by something important and fundamental about ourselves and our situation. Specifically, by our making comparisons between such practices and our own (using real or imagined examples), provided we do not mischaracterize these, we can be brought to recognize something fundamental about ourselves: i.e. that "This is simply the way human beings live, or act, or react". This is a paradigm of the sort of revelation that philosophical clarification can yield.

It is important to understand the status of such revelations and the kind of philosophical labour required to get at them. Crucially, they are not theoretical or hypothetical pronouncements, although they can be rendered in a propositional form which can make it hard to distinguish them from such. Trying to understand the status of philosophical revelations was a central problem—if not *the* central problem—that Wittgenstein struggled with throughout this career, from beginning to end. Like the everyday certainties that he was later interested to properly characterize in *On Certainty*, these too are best understood not as the conclusions of theorizing but as the

[10] To capture this, Hacker stresses the need to understand that "ritual action is expressive rather than instrumental. Hence puzzling alien rites cannot be made intelligible by an empirical inquiry into their genesis, which might at best explain the false beliefs about the instrumentality of actions, but only by associating them with impulses familiar to us, such as kissing the picture of a loved one or striking an inanimate object in rage" (Hacker 2001b, 77).

[11] Hence "The meaning of this has nothing hypothetical about it, and as a result it does not depend on any historical hypothesis whatsoever" (Bouveresse 2008, 9).

sort of thing that stands fast for us; something that can only be revealed to us and brought properly to our attention by getting free of false, misleading pictures.

To illustrate this we can see what kind of truth is revealed and how we might get at it by considering Wittgenstein's most scrutinized (but for some still wholly mystifying) attempt at philosophical clarification; his 'rule-following considerations'. It is not possible to do justice to Wittgenstein's investigations into that topic in this sort of space (I offer a more extended discussion elsewhere, see Hutto 2003, 142–173). So instead, in order to make my point I will attempt something more doable and offer an extremely compressed rendering of Wright's most recent musings on this topic. My reasons for focusing on his reflections, in sketch, are twofold. First, I largely concur with his analysis; so I take this to be a top-flight summary statement of the kind of revelation that philosophical clarification can provide. Secondly, I disagree with Wright's quietist interpretation of what we gain from such activity, so it is worth underscoring exactly why and where we disagree.

Wright (2008) ably shows why, for what are now well-known reasons, the standard explanatory strategies for making sense of what rule-following involves (i.e. those provided by Platonists and communitarians) must fail to live up to their promises. He also accepts that Wittgenstein's finished view on this matter is that our systematic difficulty in understanding the requirements of rule-following is generated by a misplaced demand for explanations of a certain form. The basic trouble is that philosophers systematically fall into the trap of insisting on using the wrong sort of overly-sophisticated model of what reasoning involves (which Wright labels 'the modus ponens model') and then demanding that it applies even to what, in the basic cases of interest, is really only a competence through which we "follow rules blindly or without reasons" (2008, 140). He summarizes his conclusions as follows:

> To say that in basic cases, we follow rules without reason is to say that our moves are uninformed by—are not the rational output of—any appreciation of *facts about what the rules require*. This is, emphatically, not the claim that it is inappropriate ever to describe someone as, say, knowing the rule(s) for the use of 'red', or as knowing what such a rule requires. Rather it is a caution about how to understand such descriptions—or better: how *not* to understand them … In basic cases there is no such underlying rationalising knowledge enabling the competence. *A fortiori* there is no metaphysical issue about the character of the facts it is knowledge of, with platonism and communitarianism presenting the horns of a dilemma. The knowledge *is* the competence. Or so I take Wittgenstein to be saying.
>
> *That* is why Wittgenstein's own response to his well-argued rejection of platonism is quietist. A non-quietist response would be called for only if platonism had given a bad answer to a good question (2008, 140).

Although brief, this passage epitomizes both the kind of elucidatory work Wittgenstein was engaged in as well as the kinds of insight that philosophical clarification can yield.

The activity required to reveal such truths can be thought of, as Moyal-Sharrock suggests, as the sort of rearrangement we find in Cubism; this is not any kind of theorizing. The point of such activity, as with Cubism, is not to inform "but only to highlight the familiar" (Moyal-Sharrock 2007, 5). This can require going at a given

target from many angles, perhaps over and over again, rearranging things this way and then that—which is certainly evident in Wittgenstein's investigations. But it also involves ridding ourselves of certain obscuring pictures *completely*—just as therapeutic readers insist—for only by so doing are certain questions and problems revealed to be entirely redundant (PI §133, see Conant 2007, 37). The result of such intensive labour, when successful, is that we are brought to understand what is utterly mundane and ordinary (PI §125). This is, in part, possible because we are no longer blinded to such aspects by pictures of our own making (PI §127). Hence, as with the removal of mote in the eye, these features can be brought into proper focus (and perhaps further scrutinized) for the first time.

The enterprise of philosophical clarification is not in any way an easy or straightforward business. And this fits with Wittgenstein's observation that each philosophical topic requires unique treatment, case-by-case. To be sure, this is partly because investigating such topics requires the untying of its own peculiar series of knots and tangles, but it does not follow that undoing these is all that one can achieve in philosophy. For what is sought at the end of such activity is a kind of understanding that takes the form of a revelation. We are brought to recognize what is in some sense already there before our eyes; something that was blocked from sight by our attachment to ill-formed pictures—pictures sponsored by misguided ways of framing the issues (and usually kept in place by misplaced explanatory urges). Together these forces create illicit but seemingly utterly irresistible demands that fix exactly how any philosophical problem *must be* satisfactorily approached and answered. This is why "It often happens that we only become aware of the important *facts* if we suppress the question 'why' and then in the course of our investigation these facts lead us to an answer" (PI §471).[12]

Assuming this is right, it still leaves open the question of why Wright thinks Wittgenstein is a quietist. It remains entirely possible that he was offering us something different, something non-theoretically derived that could be articulated easily enough. Wright makes this perfectly clear in neatly summing up what the rule-following considerations show. Indeed, he takes himself to be reporting, quite unproblematically, what Wittgenstein *says*: "The knowledge *is* the competence". This revelation takes the form of a familiar sort of philosophical equation. It is but one of many such observations that can be found in Wittgenstein's writings—i.e. those that remind us that this or that is essential or fundamental to our form of life (e.g. "An intention is embedded in its situation, in human customs and institutions" (PI §337), 'What am I getting at? At the fact that there are a great variety of criteria for 'personal identity' (PI §404), and so on). The corpus is literally teeming with these kinds of remarks. It is against this backdrop that we should understand statements such as the following:

> Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a 'proto-phenomenon'. That is, where we ought to have said: this language game is played.

[12] Wittgenstein's critique of Frazer applies perfectly well here: the "desire to find a causal explanation for what he is describing has simply made him blind to precisely those features that are … the most significant ones" (Bouveresse 2008, 6).

> The question is not one of explaining a language game by means of our experiences, but of noting a language game (PI §654–655).

In line with this, along with reminders about general facts that make engaging in language games possible, Wittgenstein's later work also contains a multitude of clarifications concerning notable features of particular language games, e.g. comparing the ways we talk about thinking and speaking (see PI §330). These do the same sort of work as the comments on more fundamental topics, only the focus is more modest.

Crucially, what can be shown can also be said. Nothing in the work of the later Wittgenstein suggests otherwise. If so it is possible to articulate philosophical certainties just as we can with more quotidian ones (see Moyal-Sharrock 2007, 10; though, for a more subtle, technical, distinction between saying and speaking, see 42–47). This being the case, what must be rejected is not the idea that Wittgenstein said anything at all (and hence was a quietist) but rather that in saying what he did he was not offering us theoretically-based pronouncements. The status of his speech acts is quite different.

What is on offer is not the outcome of *theorizing* (that would surely be a gross mischaracterization of Wittgenstein's method). By this I don't simply mean to say that it is not the outcome of *systematic* theorizing.[13] The product of such philosophical activity is not a series of claims that have the status of mere hypotheses. This is apt to shock since many philosophers seem to be congenitally incapable of admitting that such beasts as non-theoretical philosophical remarks are possible.[14] For them, any enunciable claim is regarded as at least weakly theoretical or hypothetical if for no other reason than the fact that it must be possible for intelligent critics to contest or deny it. True enough. But this fact alone would not change the status of what is said if what is said is the articulation of a revealed philosophical certainty. By the same token everyday certainties, such as the acknowledgment that 'This is a hand', are not converted to mere empirical hypotheses simply because we can imagine someone, wrong-headedly, trying to defend or challenge such claims by providing or attacking alleged proofs of them.

It is for this reason that "If one tried to advance theses in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them" (PI §128).

[13] That view is widely accepted. It is certainly true that Wittgenstein's approach looks unsystematic. But it will only be considered so if our model of what it is to operate systematically is that of advancing and defending a theory by means of well-oiled argument. Wittgenstein's recovery of elusive insights by giving each topic its own, specialized and complex treatment might look unsystematic if we compare one such treatment to that of another. But that is, of course, consistent with there being method to his approach in dealing with such cases even if he had no one-size-fits all template.

[14] Williamson, for example, seems inclined to think that all philosophical saying reduces to a kind of theorizing. He makes this evident while defending his views about what he believes is required for the resolution of philosophical problems (which he maintains requires straight solutions to be provided through sustained meta-logical graft). He writes: "Some philosophers under the influence of the later Wittgenstein, deny the relevance of formal semantic theories to vague natural languages … This attitude suggests a premature and slightly facile pessimism. No doubt formal semantics has not described any natural language with perfect accuracy; what has not been made plausible is that it provides no deep insights into natural language. In particular, it has not been made plausible that the main semantic effects of vagueness are not susceptible to systematic formal analysis. In any case, for present purposes *the claim* that there can be no systematic theory of vagueness, is *just one more theory of vagueness*, although – unless it is self-refuting – not a systematic one (2007, 37, emphasis mine).

Philosophers are concerned with indubitable certainties; and the fact that some people might object to these or fail to recognize them as such would not alter their status; it only seems to. Ultimately, "such doubt is idle—in the same way that sceptical doubt about our certainty of the existence of the external world is idle".[15]

What is on offer is not some simplistic form of ordinary language philosophy. The aim of philosophical clarification is not just to provide therapy; it seeks to bring to light important facts and features of our everyday practices—facts and features that we are otherwise wont to overlook or misconstrue. Therapy has a critically important role to play in this process but it is not the ultimate end of the exercise. I still stand by my claim that "it would be wrong to infer that therapeutic activity is the legitimate end of philosophy. Philosophy is good for more than freeing us from false pictures and breaking bad habits of thought" (Hutto 2003, 218). The object of this sort of philosophy is not just the demolition of the obscuring pictures but demolishing them in order to get a better understanding of what they obscure. The aim is to achieve a kind of non-explanatory, non-theoretical understanding.

What makes this form of understanding distinctive is that it is not progressive in anything like the usual sense; unlike scientific knowledge we start from what we already know, we do not seek to "know more" (Williamson 2007, 5). Rather the difficulty here is to achieve an understanding—an elucidation—of something that in some sense we *already* know (or better, of something which we would or ought to know if we were not prevented from doing so by operating with misleading pictures). For:

> Something we know when no one asks us, but no longer know when we are supposed to give an account of it, is something we need to *remind* ourselves of. (And it is obviously something which for some reason it is difficult to remind oneself) (PI §89)

This is also, of course, why Wittgenstein says:

> 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.
>
> One might also give the name "philosophy" to what is possible *before* all new discoveries and inventions (PI §126).

The result of a successful philosophical investigation would be recognition of a valuable form of philosophy—one that does not seek to produce new scientific knowledge. What I have sought to establish, taking inspiration from Wittgenstein, is that it is possible that at least some philosophical work—work on fundamental topics—can be conducted with a wholly clarificatory end in mind. If so, it is possible for philosophy to yield *positive* philosophical insights without adding to our stock of scientific or theoretical-based knowledge.

[15] This remark is from Danièle Moyal-Sharrock. It derives from a personal email correspondence we had in discussing these issues during the preparation of this paper.

Afterward: Should all Philosophical Theorizing be Denounced?

Using the rule-following considerations as a kind of existence proof, I hope to have shown in precisely which sense Wittgenstein thought that a distinctive kind of non-theoretical philosophical insight is possible. Indeed, more than that, I hope to have shown why he thought that the achievement of such insight is the only appropriate target when engaged in certain kinds of fundamental philosophical inquiry. What I have not sought to establish is that this precludes the possibility of philosophical theorizing in other areas or on other topics.

How does this square with Wittgenstein's own take on these matters? Some of his remarks suggest that he adopted a much more aggressive attitude toward the very idea of philosophical theories. Most famously, he issues the following injunction: "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" (PI §109).

Although, as this remark makes clear, Wittgenstein set his face against philosophical theorizing, he did not attempt to supply anything like a general argument against any and all forms of it. Rather he dealt with specific occurrences of such attempts at theorizing, weeding out troubled patches of his philosophical garden, section by section; giving special care and treatment to each specific threat. Thus Hagberg (2008) observes, correctly, that:

> [Wittgenstein's work does not constitute] a general polemical attack on metaphysics in any generic sense or on metaphysics *in toto*. It is rather a set of investigations into very particular metaphysical *pictures*, in Wittgenstein's sense, as they would preclude taking complexity seriously, cut short the patience required to comprehend significant particularities and allow drastic oversimplification to masquerade as an 'account' (241–242).

Instead of offering a general cure for all metaphysical theorizing, Wittgenstein proceeds case by case, showing that specific theoretical proposals

> … will turn out, upon examination, to have been motivated by a philosophical anxiety that can be traced to some relatively specific misleading philosophical picture of what knowledge, mind, or reality must be like—on pain of some Bad Consequence. The best anti-metaphysical strategy is then to diagnose and dissolve the underlying misconception, thereby relieving the felt pressure that had made a metaphysical response seem possible because necessary (Brandom 2006, 223).[16]

In stressing this, Brandom (2006) recognizes that Wittgenstein responds to metaphysical offerings "more in a retail than a wholesale spirit" (222). This picks up on one point that I have been at pains to underline in this section. It is that seeking philosophical clarity is at odds with the production of *certain kinds of* philosophical theories—specifically, those that interfere with or obscure our understanding of a particular topic. Although all such 'theories' sharing this feature, as such form a

[16] Brandom goes on to note that this is, at best, a "template for arguing against metaphysical programs, rather than an argument as such" (2006, 223).

class, they must be identified case by case. It is the production of such purportedly 'explanatory theories' that Wittgenstein warns against in PI §109.

Such theories bear a special stamp. They are typically marked out by having the following odd properties: (1) they systematically resist ordinary scientific assessment or empirical refutation; (2) their acceptance is motivated by purely philosophical considerations, deriving from assumed premises and axioms (these can be deeply entrenched and not easily visible); (3) they profess special explanatory powers, i.e. of being the *only* theory that *could conceivably* address a certain type of explanatory concern.

I regard Fodor's (1975, 2008) 'Language of Thought' (or LoT) hypothesis as a prime, modern-day specimen of this sort of product. I discuss its problematic features in greater detail elsewhere and I will not rehearse those arguments and concerns here (Hutto 2007, 2008, ch. 5). My interest is not to provide a full and fair assessment of that 'hypothesis' in this paper but to note its characteristic hallmark that suggests it is not a genuine theory of any variety; i.e. its *perfect* explanatory fit with its explanandum.

As a general rule we ought to be suspicious of any philosophical offering that claims to be an empirical hypothesis but is incapable of empirical testing. But we should be even more deeply suspicious if that offering looks to have been specially crafted, in fact *tailor-made*, to meet certain philosophical needs and demands. In such cases it is important to attend to the genesis of such so-called 'philosophical theories' when it is claimed that their principal (empirical) virtue is that *nothing else* could imaginably do the explanatory work marked out for the theory in question. For it is not that such a 'hypothesis' would turn out to be contingently true (by being an inference to the best explanation); rather its truth is apparently guaranteed—in advance—since it is the *only* imaginable explanation that can do the required work; i.e. only an explanation that had such and such features could possibly satisfy our particular explanatory needs. Here, just as when dealing with snake oil salesmen, it is always a good idea to get independent assurances that the needs which are putatively being satisfied have not themselves been specially manufactured by those offering the cures or explanations. The only difference is that, unlike snake oil salesmen, the creators of a philosophical theory of this variety need not be intellectually dishonest, only confused or trapped in the 'grip of a picture' which imposes demands on what form or shape a successful explanation *must* take.

There is (I think) ample evidence that Wittgenstein was himself—at least at one time in his career—in the grip of exactly this sort of picture and succumbed to just such tendencies (see Hutto 2003, 2006, ch. 3, esp. 97–98). Moreover, it is precisely his recognition of this failing that prompted his warning: "In philosophy we do not draw conclusions. 'But it must be like this!' is not a philosophical proposition. Philosophy only states what everyone admits" (PI §599).

To be sure, Wittgenstein rejected so-called philosophical theories of this sort. But offerings of this type are not the only candidates for being philosophical theories. Perhaps, as a class, such things are simply perversely malformed, bad attempts at philosophical theorizing. What else might a philosophical theory be? In these post-Quinean times it is not uncommon for philosophers to claim to be advancing philosophical theories which take the form of straightforward 'empirical' hypotheses. If this is really what philosophers are doing when advancing their 'theories' they would be—in a very straightforward sense—'doing natural science'. But if so, it prompts the

question: what makes such theorizing *philosophical per se*? Surely, to qualify as possible a *philosophical* theory requires something stronger than simply being a straightforward empirical hypothesis that happens to be advanced by a philosopher.[17]

A more plausible idea is that philosophical theories are distinctive because they are precisely *not* straightforwardly empirical hypotheses. It is often supposed that genuine philosophical theories are distinguished by their conceptual subject matter. This idea is much to the fore in Jackson (1998) but is powerfully undermined by Williamson (2007) who, echoing the observations of the section entitled "Introduction: What's at Stake?", argues that "philosophical truths are not generally truths *about* words or concepts" (48). Or, more precisely, the reasons why investigating such topics might force us to attend sensibly to the use of words or concepts is because of the way the former are related to their metalinguistic and metaconceptual subject matters, which are the true topics of interest.

If so it does not appear that philosophy has a unique type of subject matter that sets it apart. In this light a more promising thought is that there is something special about the way in which philosophical proposals are evaluated and tested. Philosophers are not empirical scientists (indeed some don't leave their armchairs). They do not run ordinary experiments, they run thought experiments. Of course, scientists also engage in thought experimentation, but what makes philosophical work allegedly special is the kind of evidence that is employed to evaluate such theories. The standard assumption, endorsed implicitly by many working analytic philosophers, is that our intuitions can and must be called upon to adjudicate and decide the appropriate fate of various philosophical theories.

Again, in defending the idea that philosophy is a kind of conceptual analysis, Jackson (1998) prominently propounds this sort of view about the role of intuitions—holding that they can be relied upon to settle disputes concerning divergent philosophical theories about important topics (e.g. the nature of mental causation, consciousness, etc.). He claims that this involves making "appeal to what seems most obvious and central [about the concept in question], as revealed by our intuitions about possible cases" (1998, 31). In a previous publication I raised a series of worries about this sort of approach (see Hutto 2003, 2006, ch. 6). Here I will mention just one, a serious, glaring and—I think—potentially devastating problem with this proposed methodology. It is this: In order to do their required work it must be the case that the intuitions called upon are securely, independently and impartially grounded (and can be identified as such). The trouble is that if nothing can be found to play the role of justifying or making true specific intuitive judgments then it seems hopeless to call on intuitions to adjudicate important matters in philosophy in the way proposed. This problem and its importance have not gone unnoticed, even by those friendly to understanding philosophy as primarily in the business of providing scientific knowledge. As Williamson observes:

> 'Intuition' plays a major role in contemporary analytic philosophy's self understanding. Yet there is no agreed or even popular account of how intuition works, no accepted explanation of the hoped-for correlation between our having an intuition that P and its being true that P. Since analytic philosophy

[17] If this is all there is to being a philosophical theory then the immediate (and legitimate) worry would be that without the appropriate training in theory-building philosophers would probably just be doing science badly.

> prides itself on its rigor, this blank space in its foundations looks like a methodological scandal. Why should intuitions have any authority over the philosophical domain? (2007, 215).

Without an answer to this worry, it is little more than pretence to claim that an appeal to intuition provides evidence for philosophical theorizing that is on a par with the sort of evidence used in other branches of science.[18]

It is little wonder that Williamson urgently seeks to address the fact that "the current philosophical mainstream has failed to articulate an adequate philosophical methodology" (2007, 4). For he, like me, is driven to correct philosophy's current self-narrative because he believes that "If philosophy misconceives what it is doing, it is likely to do worse" (2007, ix, see also 22). In taking a stand against what he calls 'philosophical exceptionalism', he hopes to demonstrate that "Although there are real methodological differences between philosophy and the other sciences, as actually practiced today, they are less deep than often supposed" (2007, 3).

He offers us a different way to understand philosophical theorizing. In doing so, he openly eschews what he calls 'crude empiricism' and 'crude rationalism' (positions which roughly map onto the two visions of what a philosophical theory might be, as described above). He stresses that "philosophy is in no deep sense a linguistic or conceptual inquiry, any more than physics is. But it does not follow that experiment is an appropriate primary method for philosophy" (2007, 21). Crucially, in making his case that philosophy is one of the sciences Williamson refuses to endorse "the philistine emphasis on a few natural sciences" (2007, 4). Without denying the need to be informed about experimental results in some areas of philosophy, he denies that philosophical work essentially depends upon such empirical data. As such, his "opposition to philosophical exceptionalism is far from involving the idea that philosophers should model themselves on physicists or biologists" (2007, 6). Rather, by Williamson's lights, philosophy's way of working should be understood as more akin to the way 'theories' are developed and proved in other, more deductive sciences, such as mathematics. For a pivotal idea of Williamson's is that "mathematics is a science if anything is" (2007, 4).[19]

In defending this line Williamson attempts to show that we can make sense of philosophical thought experiments by understanding them as valid arguments about counterfactual possibilities—and that we can use our imaginative capacities to assess the relevant modal possibilities, just as we would make such assessments about everyday topics in other mundane contexts (allegedly without calling on intuitions for special support). I am not convinced that this proposal works—especially the final step, but it constitutes one of the best and most robust attempts to make sense of what philosophical theorizing might be—certainly, it is not an overtly crude or obviously false vision of what such an activity involves.

Let us suppose for the sake of argument that Williamson's approach will pay off and that at least some branches of philosophy can provide us with new, *bona fide* theory-based knowledge. What follows? Not that philosophy is unexceptional. To

[18] There is interesting work underway to examine this very problem. For example, the Arché centre at St. Andrews is currently running an AHRC funded project on Philosophical Methodology (2008-2012), led by Jessica Brown and Herman Cappelen. Still, it is not yet obvious what the outcome will be.

[19] For a similar diagnosis, with direct reference to Wittgenstein, see Brandom 2006, 210.

make that claim stick, in an unqualified form, it would have to be shown that all philosophical activity is identical to theoretical activity *as such*. But, even if we accept Williamson's claims it may still be the case that philosophy is exceptionally unscientific in *at least some* important cases—i.e. that it is exceptional in *at least some* of its important endeavours. This verdict is especially warranted if the endeavours in question turn out to be ones that relate to some main areas and preoccupations of philosophical inquiry.

The list of topics calling for philosophical clarification (of the kind described in the previous section) include, of course, those that Wittgenstein famously dealt with in his later writings—e.g. our understanding of the nature of language, psychological states, expressive attitudes, rule-following, and so on. Yet even today—especially today-other philosophical topics demand similar treatment. Attachment to certain attractive metaphors and models of 'the mind' and its primary relation to 'the world' systematically interfere with and impede a proper philosophical understanding of the nature of perception, information, representation, phenomenal experience, reasons, intentional action and the self. Even some die-hard philosophical naturalists are willing to concede this much, though they tend to fall in with the idea that if one does not offer a theory then the only other option is to provide therapy, as this quotation from Papineau makes evident:

> Wittgenstein thought that all philosophy should be therapy. In his view, philosophical problems arise because we allow superficial features to seduce us into confusion … philosophical therapy will free us from muddled thinking. I reject this conception of philosophy almost entirely. I hold that, on the contrary, nearly all important philosophical problems are occasioned by real tensions in our overall theories of the world; and that their resolution therefore calls for substantial theoretical advances, rather than mere conceptual tidying.
>
> Still, when it comes to the particular topic of consciousness I think Wittgenstein was right (2002, 3–4).

Consciousness and the other topics I mention are not trivial sideshows. They mark out substantial areas of concern that cry out for philosophical clarification.[20]

Thus even if Williamson's assessment should prove correct, even if *some* legitimate forms of philosophical theorizing exist it would not follow that there is no room in philosophy for purely clarificatory projects. Seeking for clarity without the attendant aim of generating new knowledge is not *only a possible* philosophical ambition, when dealing with many sorts of central philosophical concerns, it may be the *only legitimate* one.

[20] Indeed, Williamson, himself, is not adverse to philosophical clarification by means of the eradication of false or misleading pictures. For example, he writes: "appeals in epistemology to a metaphysical conception of analyticity tend to rely on a *picture* of analytic truths as imposing no genuine constraint on the world, in order to explain the supposed fact that knowing them poses no serious cognitive challenge. If that account could be made good, it would provide a useful sense for 'insubstantial,' which would refer to the pictured property, epistemological not in its nature but in its explanatory power. Substantial truths would be the ones that lacked this property. But the account cannot be made good. The metaphysical picture cannot be filled out so as to have the required explanatory power in epistemology. Thus 'substantial' and 'insubstantial' are not provided with useful senses. The negation of a picture is not itself a picture" (2007, 54).

In reaching this conclusion it is useful to consider Brandom's modest proposal about what philosophical theorizing amounts to and how it might relate to the kind of understanding that Wittgenstein is after. Brandom's views on this topic are articulated as part of his attempt (in his John Locke lectures) to show how the traditional analytic project of understanding the semantic relations that hold between different vocabularies can be usefully and viably extended in important ways.[21] His proposed technique is to capture, in an appropriate meta-vocabulary, "what one must *do* in order to *use* various vocabularies and so to count as *saying* or *thinking* various kinds of things" (2006, 3). The result would be a description of what it is necessary for someone to do in order to make competent use of a certain vocabulary for a certain purpose. Thus he tells us that:

> It is worth seeing how and to what extent different target vocabularies can be elaborated from various base vocabularies—including and perhaps especially, with pragmatic detours through the specifications of practices-or-abilities necessary to deploy those vocabularies—because that is a way of *coming practically to know our way around* those vocabularies, our discursive practices, and the subject matters they make it possible for us to talk and think about (2006, 226, emphasis added).

Brandom regards this product as a kind of philosophical theory. Specifically, he tells us that "What corresponds in this semantic-analytic project to the postulation of unobservables in empirical scientific theorizing *is the employment in the algorithmic construction also of some further vocabulary, whose use is not governed by antecedent norms* but is determined instead by stipulated inferential connections to both the base and target vocabulary" (2006, 214, emphasis added).[22] Let us again, for the sake of argument, consider that this might constitute a legitimate candidate for being a philosophical theory. Still, as Brandom himself notes, even if this sort of algebraic understanding should be available in some domains, that "does not entail this sort of understanding being available in every case, even in principle" (2006, 215). In noting this he adopts a more tolerant, ecumenical and pluralistic attitude towards the possibility of a variety of philosophical ends and means—an attitude of precisely the kind I have been at pains to promote.

> Even under the broad heading of trying to understand discursive practice, there is a more basic sort of hermeneutical understanding, whose implicit, practical, everyday species and whose explicit, theoretical, sophisticated species must *both* be studied and exercised by philosophers (2006, 216, see also 211, p. 213, emphasis added).

What can we conclude from these brief reflections about philosophical theorizing? I think it is that *even if* it should turn out that there might be viable forms of philosophical theorizing this would not show that the kind of knowledge and

[21] Brandom's own version of analytic pragmatism gets its inspiration from Sellars and takes seriously the important, indeed seemingly fatal, challenges raised by Wittgenstein for traditional approaches in analytic philosophy.

[22] The 'theories' Brandom describes do not, however, appear to be explanatory in any clear sense – i.e. they do not advance hypotheses but only descriptively chart features underlying certain kinds of talk. If so the theory/description contrast looks in danger of collapse.

understanding that such 'theories' might provide precludes the possibility of gaining non-theoretical insights of the kind that philosophical clarification seeks to engender. As far as I can see no argument has yet been advanced to show that philosophical clarification is impossible or that to attempt it is really only an attempt at a weak or lazy form of philosophical theorizing (though I think this is often tacitly assumed).

A Positive End to Philosophy

Hutchinson suspects that "the desire to see Wittgenstein as an analytic (maybe the analytic) philosopher—though a subject-transforming and engagingly or maddeningly eccentric one—drives the elucidatory (and doctrinal) interpretation" (2007, 710). I want to stress that showing that Wittgenstein really belongs in the canon of analytic philosophy, after all, is surely not my motivation. Indeed, attempting this would be an odd move for at least two reasons.

We live in interesting times. Mainstream analytic philosophy, which has been the dominant approach to the subject in the English-speaking world, is purported not only to be in crisis but in its death throes. It has been openly regarded by some as a "degenerating research programme, motivated by suspect methodological aspirations" (Brandom 2006, 202). Some think that, at best, if it can be patched up, it might be kept alive in a diminished form with the aid of grafts and extensions from other more healthy philosophical approaches, such as pragmatism. According to other reports its situation is much more serious; it never was at all (Preston 2007). If that assessment proves true then the Anglophone way of doing philosophy neither has nor ever had a unifying basis. As such, the very idea of analytic philosophy would turn out to be a sophisticated illusion promoted and sustained by hope for its promised result—i.e. a systematic, rigorous and reliable way of achieving new philosophical knowledge on a par with that of other modern sciences.

Anyone who takes either of those concerns seriously, as I do, will have little motive for wanting to show that Wittgenstein was part of the analytic school (as opposed to, say, one of its principal opponents). That would be reason enough to distinguish Wittgenstein's project from that of the analytics. In my case, there is an even more obvious and fundamental reason for doing so. My attempt to establish that philosophical clarification is necessary and sufficient for dealing with certain fundamental philosophical inquiries clearly breaks faith with analytic philosophy's self-conception. For the great majority of its practitioners believe (even if they don't explicitly argue) that all worthwhile philosophical activity is *entirely* within the fold of science. All good philosophical work aims explicitly at the production and maximization of knowledge. This is the default view, at least for many. It is tied to the thought that "philosophy essentially involves the production of theories or views" (Preston 2007, 61).[23]

[23] It is easy to speculate that this way of thinking gains support from a more pervasive acceptance of scientism – one that has a venerable origin, having prevailed ever since Newton's work was "taken as a paradigm not only in the developing sciences, but even in what we would now call the humanities … [This occurred because] to take Newton's work as a paradigm for *science* was *ipso facto* to take it as a paradigm for *knowledge* as such" (Preston 2007, 136-7, see also Brandom 2006, 209).

What makes Wittgenstein's conception of the end of philosophy importantly different is precisely the fact that it cannot be understood as a kind of theory-building aimed at the production of new knowledge. However, I have laboured to show that rejection of the idea that philosophical activity really just is, or reduces to, a form of 'theorizing' does not entail the acceptance of the idea that such activity is thereby only or purely therapeutic. There are other forms of philosophical activity than offering theories or providing therapy, and other reasons for pursuing philosophical projects than those. A philosophy with only clarificatory ambitions is not only possible but valuable.

Finally, I wholeheartedly agree that "If Wittgenstein scholarship is to be anything other than something of interest to historians of our subject, Wittgenstein must be seen to have relevance to current debates within that subject" (Hutchinson 2007, 692).[24] But it strikes me that understanding and defending a version of philosophical activity with primarily clarificatory ambitions, and unequivocally showing its worth, is the best chance of securing that vibrant future for philosophy done in the spirit of Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein's work is my inspiration for wanting to engage in philosophy that seeks only for clarification when dealing with certain important topics. I find this approach running throughout the length and breadth of his writings. Indeed, I think that his single most important, and lasting, contribution to our subject was to show us how to pursue philosophical investigations with this end in sight.

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[24] I confess to finding Hutchinson's remark more than a little ironic given the reception that therapeutic readings get from the analytic mainstream. When it comes to assessing the value of Wittgenstein's contribution to philosophy, the attitude seems to be roughly this: 'If all Wittgenstein's philosophy has to offer is therapy with a negative goal, so much the worse for Wittgenstein's philosophy. And from this we can deduce, should Wittgenstein be right about what philosophy has to offer in general, i.e. if all philosophy has to offer is therapy with a negative goal, then so much the worse for philosophy. Thank God he was wrong. Back to theorizing'.

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