CHAPTER III

WHAT CAN BE SHOWN?

Introduction

In the preceding chapter we discussed the contents of what can be said in the *Tractatus*. If the *Tractatus* is a book on merely what can be said then there is no problem. But Wittgenstein tries to say something about what cannot be said also. Like Kant, Wittgenstein demarcated what can be said (phenomenon) from what cannot be said (noumenon). His truth-functional language is designed in such a way that all the elements of the world (facts) can be expressed clearly in that language. But what does not belong to this world of phenomena cannot be expressed through this language. In order to examine his views on what cannot be said, it is necessary to have a brief survey of the doctrines of essentialism. The Wittgenstein of *Tractatus* is an essentialist in the first place. His metaphysics is rooted in essentialism. Every metaphysician is an essentialist of one kind or the other. In general, it is viewed that ‘essentialism’ is a doctrine which accepts that everything possesses its own essence. ‘Essence’ is defined as the meaning of a given thing, that which is in itself, in contradistinction from all other things and in contrast to the states of a thing changing under the influence of various circumstances. The concept of ‘essence’ is of great importance for any philosophical system to draw a distinction between system from the standpoint of how the relationship between ‘essence’ and ‘being’ is viewed. Essentialists maintain that an object’s properties can be classified into two
categories; namely, essential and accidental. The essential property of thing is that in the absence of which the thing ceases to be what it is. For instance, ‘P’ is essential to ‘X’, for ‘X’ to be what it is, it must possess ‘P’ as its essence. To exemplify, rationality is the essence of human beings. To be a human being, one must possess rationality as an essential element. As a matter of fact, Wittgenstein’s objects constitute the essence of the world (reality). Similarly, names constitute the essence of language.

As regards, essentialism, there are three important philosophical positions. They are as follows. These doctrines highlight how universals and particulars are related to each other.

1. In the metaphysical doctrine of Plato, the Forms are the essences, which have an independent existence. The physical objects are mere carbon copies of those Forms. Thus Forms as essences are universals, while the objects which are mere carbon copies of those Forms are particulars.

2. It is a position holding that something can have an essential property in virtue of a definition, or as described in a certain way.

3. Some objects, no matter however described, have essences. In other words, they have essentially or necessarily, certain properties without which they could not exist or be the things they are.

According to the first view, universals and particulars are related to each other as copy is related to the original. All particulars are the copies and the universals are the originals. The second view suggests that the universals are related to the particulars of perceptual experience as the name ‘X’ is related to the individual
known by that name. The universals of thoughts are mere names, which are used to denote or point out the various individual objects that exist in the physical environment. The third view highlights that universals are merely descriptions of relations found among particulars. The particulars of various kinds bear certain definite relation qualitative or quantitative to each other, and the description of these relations are their corresponding universals. Corresponding to these three views of the relation between universals and particulars, there are three views concerning their reality. The copy view of the relation between the universal and the particular implies that universals are real and the particulars are mere appearances of them. The ‘name’ view of the relation between the two implies that the particulars alone are real, while the universals being nothing more than convenient signs or symbols used to indicate groups of particulars and, consequently, nothing more than ‘appearance’. The descriptive view of the relation between universals and particulars holds that both are real. Particulars are real as existent qualities, while universals are real as organization of particulars. The ‘copy’ theory assumes an external relation between particulars and universal with an emphasis upon the reality of the universals and the illusory nature of the particulars. The ‘name’ theory holds that the relation between particulars and universals is external. The particulars are real while universals are functions but convenient symbols because of their unity. The descriptive theory insists upon an internal relation between particulars and universals, each being involved in the other and thereby the reality of both is emphasized. The first theory is historically known as realism; and the second as nominalism. The third view is popularly known as the doctrine of the concrete
universal. A brief survey of essentialism helps us in understanding whether Wittgenstein subscribed to any one of the above mentioned forms of essentialism. It appears that the doctrine of essentialism somehow dominates Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. Let us examine this.

**A Brief Survey of Essentialism**

The concept of ‘essentialism’ has been discussed since the early Greek times. A systematic study of essence was done by Plato. He has no explicit theory of concepts. His theory therefore is implicit and it has to be derived from the way in which he employs the particular concept like ‘good’, ‘truth’, ‘beauty’, etc. According to Plato, to have the concept of a ‘circle’ is to have intuited the circle and to be able to use this knowledge in naming, defining, instancing and judging about the circles. To put it in the words of Plato, “Concepts therefore are entities-subsistent or mental but skills such as being able to name and identifying objects, recognize and discriminate among them, to say what counts as objects of certain kind, and to define and make true statements about objects.”

A necessary condition of these activities is the prior grasp of the realm of forms. Thus Plato considers forms to be essential archetypes of things. Forms have eternal existence, for he believed that the Forms are to be understood only through mind and not by senses. Form is related to a thing in three ways. First of all, the Form is the cause of the essence of a thing. Secondly, a thing may be said to

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‘participate’ in a form, and thirdly, a thing may be said to imitate or copy a Form. Since for Plato, Form is a mental conception it can be achieved either through recollection or through dialectic, or through the power of desire. He held that before the soul was united with the body it was acquainted with the Forms. Perception of objects reminds the soul of the respective essences, which it knew already. This is the knowledge of the Forms through recollection. The knowledge of Forms through dialectic is the power of abstracting the essence of things. Thus the Forms and the essences of things have properties which are sets of necessary and sufficient properties. These sets determine the necessary criteria of one’s concepts.

Aristotle, like Plato, claims that there is an essence of things. He says that “we know a thing better when we say what it is when we know the colour, size, posture with us.” The mind separates all the qualities of a thing and thinks upon what a thing really is, that is, upon its essential nature. Aristotle calls this essential nature of a thing as substance. Hence, substance according to him means “that which is not asserted of a subject but of which everything else is asserted.”

Substance is that which is basic upon which everything else must rest. For example, when it is spoken of a ‘small chair’, here ‘chair’ is understood in its essence, that is, in what makes it to be a chair, before that particular chair is understood as small. Here the essence or substance of chair has its own existence separate from its qualities. It is possible to know the essence of the thing. ‘Chairness’ is distinguishable from other particular qualities, like ‘small’ or ‘big’. This

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151 Ibid.
essence or substance is independent of the particular qualities. As it is possible to identify a small chair and big chair to be chair, so “there is something ‘beneath’ (substance) all the qualities.”\textsuperscript{152}

Aristotle calls this as essence or substance or universal. Plato identified this universal or essence with the Form, but Aristotle is of the view that this essence or substance is a combination of matter and form. For him, in nature, there is no form without matter and no matter without form.

John Locke, the pioneer of the classical empiricist tradition, has got a different notion about essentialism. He too accepts the concept of essence, out his doctrine of essentialism is different from those of Plato and Aristotle. Lock distinguishes between the concepts and non-existent idea of substance. This resulted in a contrast between real essence and normal essence. In the ordinary use of the word ‘essence’ relates to a sort and supposes a species. According to Lock, “essence may be taken for being of anything, whereby it is what it is.”\textsuperscript{153} In general a real essence is unknown when we speak of this essence of a particular thing without giving them any name. The evident of things have names into sort or species, only have certain abstract ideas. The word essence imports in its familiar use. A figure is including a space between three lines in the real as well as the nominal essence of a triangle, being not only the abstract idea to which the general name of annexed by the very essential or being a thing itself. According to Locke, all ideas of particular substance such as ‘dog’ or ‘cat’ are of sorts of things. “These sorts (kinds or species) have

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
essence by virtue of which they are a sort and in virtue of which each of its members is of that sort.”

These sorts, according to Locke, are not knowable internal constituents, which are the characteristic of real essence. These sorts are abstract ideas, which are fabrications of the mind. Hence, essence depends on the individual, but not on nature. This is the characteristic of nominal essence. To explain it further, to be a man or of the same species man and have a right to the name man, but what has a conformity to the abstract idea the name man stands for, nor anything be a man or have a right to the species man but what has the essence of that species, it follows that the abstract ideas for which thee name stands for and the essence of the species is one and the same. From whence it is easy to observe that the essence of the sorts of things and, consequently, the sorting of the things in the workmanship of the understanding that abstracts and makes that general ideas.

Regarding the ontological status of the essences as to whether they are real, Locke vacillates between denying and affirming reality to essences. In some places, he says, things and persons have internal constituents or essences. In some other places, he says, that there are no real essences. But, Locke does not accept the logical nature of real essences as prerequisites of classification. For him, real essences are not a necessary condition for sorting. If it were the case, then the classification of

things would be impossible. Hence for Locke sorting depends upon abstract ideas or nominal essences.

But, since we are in need of general words, thought we know not the real essence of things all we can do is to collect such a number of simple ideas as, by examination, we find to be united together in things existing, and thereof to make one complex idea. Which, though it is not the real essence of any substance that exists, is yet the specific essence to which our name belongs, and is convertible with it; which may at least try truth of these nominal essences?\(^{156}\)

Locke rejects the notion of the real essence and substitutes it with nominal essences. In fact, "Locke’s rejection of traditionally accepted necessary condition along with its substitution of nominal essences as abstract general ideas …is the first articulate challenge in the history of philosophy to the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition that real essences determine and govern the conceptual life."\(^{157}\)

Therefore, for Locke sorting out things or objects involves nominal essence and not real ones. An abstraction from the multiple possibilities of collections of simple ideas serves as nominal essence. Further he holds that, "The nominal essence of ‘gold’ is that complex idea the word ‘gold’ stands for, let it be for instance a body yellow, of a certain weight, malleable, fusible and fixed."\(^{158}\) Here sorting of ‘gold’ involves these attributes as criteria, but none of them is essential. Since there are no real essences

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\(^{156}\) Ibid., p. 268.


and only nominal essences, there can be many different nominal essences of gold based on many different sets of criteria for the use of the word ‘gold’. This may give rise to multiples of nominal essences. For one the simple ideas may be a, b & c and for another it may be a & c and for another it may be c & d. Here Locke chooses the view that different nominal essence reflect different abstract ideas or concepts. This may result in having a same word ‘gold’ but with a different idea of gold each governed by a definite closed set of criteria embedded in the nominal essence. This implies there are as many different concepts of gold as there are nominal essences of it, each of them closed. This compels Locke to multiply concepts (abstracts ideas) to cover multiple sets of criteria (nominal essences.)

According to Berkeley, having a concept is being able to employ a particular idea as a sample of similar ideas. For example, there are particular triangles and particular ideas of those particular triangles and there is a general idea of triangles, which is a particular idea of triangles that is given a representative status as a sign of all triangles. Hence, according to Berkeley, there are no abstract triangles. For him, abstraction is possible for things that can exist separately from each other even though they invariably go together. It is not difficult to conceive but logically impossible.

For example, a triangle is defined to be a plain surface comprehended by three right lines, by which I answer, that in the definition it is not said that whether the surface be great or small, black or white, nor whether the sides are long or short, equal or unequal, nor with what angles they are inclined to each other; in all
which there may be great variety, and consequently there is no one 
settled idea which limits the signification of the word triangle. It is 
one thing for to keep a name constantly to the same definition, and 
another to make it stand everywhere for the same idea; the one is 
necessary, the other useless and impracticable.\textsuperscript{159}

In this way, each idea is particular for Berkeley. To put it in his words, “It can become general by being made to represent or stand for all other particular ideas of the same sort.”\textsuperscript{160} For example, the idea of a line is a general idea that is, employed as an example of all lines. The word ‘line’ is not a name to an abstract general idea, but a general word being employed in a general way.

Suppose a geometrician is demonstrating the method of cutting a 
line in two equal parts. He draws, for instance, a black line of an 
inch in length: this, which in itself is a particular line, is 
nevertheless with regard to its signification general, since, as it is 
there used, it represents all particular lines whatsoever; so that 
what is demonstrated of it is demonstrated of all lines, or in other 
words, of a line in general.\textsuperscript{161}

A particular line becomes general being made a sign, the name ‘line’ is taken as 
particular; by being a sign is made general. According to him, general ideas are 
ictions and contrivances of the mind. If anyone should perform his own thoughts


\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., p. 58.

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
and there an idea corresponds with the description he made. Ideas do not exist without the mind. Things are the copies or resemblances.

Against the views of Berkeley, Hume accepts the notion of abstract ideas. For him, “The abstract idea of a man represents men of all sizes and all qualities.”\textsuperscript{162} This abstract idea can not be conceived by exhausting all possible sizes and qualities or by representing no particular one at all. The former implies an infinite capacity of mind, which is possible. The later suggests that quantity and quality differ and are distinct from their particular degrees of quantity and quality, which they are not. The mind can’t form any notion of quantity or quality without forming a precise notion of degree of each. Therefore, for Hume every idea of an object is particular but Hume also says that “some ideas are particular in the nature, but general in the representation.”\textsuperscript{163} It is observed that the some particulars, for example ‘table’ resemble each other in certain observable ways. This general employment of a word that names a particular to its resembling particular is called ‘custom’ by Hume. Thus for example, the concept of man is an ability to create particular images when the corresponding word is uttered. Thus concepts are ability to conceive or to have conception and not simply conceptions.

In opposition to nominalist thesis, Kant holds that it is the distinction between one object and the other that is important, but not their names. The names must not blur these distinctions nor evoke distinction when there is one. For Kant, “every concept must be thought as a representation which is contained in infinite

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., p. 50.
number of different possible representations which are no concepts, as such, can be thought as containing an infinite number of representations within itself.”\textsuperscript{164}

Thus for Kant, knowledge is a whole in which representations are compared and connected. This whole constitutes a three- fold synthesis of knowledge, namely, “the apprehension of representations as modification of mind in intuition, the reproduction in imagination and their recognition in a concept.”\textsuperscript{165}

According to Kant, one has a schema, not images of the concept of the triangle. What is universal to all triangles is only a schema but not images. He holds that, “The concept ‘dog’ signifies a rule according to which my imagination can delineate that figure of a four-footed animal in a general manner, without limitation to any single determinate figure or any possible image that I can represent in concrete actually presents.”\textsuperscript{166}

The purpose of this survey is to show how the various doctrines of essentialism are explained. There is no unique sense in which essentialism is explained. Although Wittgenstein was in favour of essentialism in his Tractatus he did not support any one particular form of essentialism. His main objective in the Tractatus is to show that language has its own essence. However, in his Philosophical Investigations, he repudiated the essentialist doctrine, namely, that the objects share certain common essences in order to be grouped under a particular class or a set. He substituted the notion of ‘family resemblance’ for the notion of ‘essence’. What is

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
most significant here is that early Wittgenstein was an essentialist. Essentialism, strictly speaking, belongs to the realm of what can only be shown. Even in his picture theory of meaning, Wittgenstein tries to hold the view that a proposition is a picture. To be a true picture of what it represents or pictures, a proposition must share the same logical form of the fact in question. How does he explain the notion of ‘logical form’? According to Wittgenstein, one can say that a given proposition shares the same logical form of a fact in question provided that it accurately represents the elements of the fact. The elements of a proposition and the elements of a fact correspond with each other.

Interestingly, like the doctrine of essentialism, the doctrine of anti-essentialism (family resemblance) belongs to the realm of what can be shown. Let us examine this in detail. There are two possible ways of approaching Wittgenstein’s work. The first way is to bifurcate or divide his earlier work into what can be said and what can be shown. The other way is that the early phase of Wittgenstein’s work is chiefly restricted to what can be said although one finds evidences of what can be shown. The later Wittgenstein is chiefly engaged in what can be shown through language games and forms of life.

**Family Resemblance**

Later Wittgenstein attacked the doctrine of essentialism. According to him, essences do not represent anything. For instance, when one says that all the cows are brought under the class ‘cow’ because they share what is essential to all cows, namely, ‘cow-ness’, one is not really sure whether this essential nature of cow signifies having four
legs or two horns or a particular physique of the animal or colour and so on. In order to make his point clear Wittgenstein takes recourse to the nature of games. There are several games like card games, board games, indoor games, outdoor games, and Olympic games. When one looks for a common feature that is essentially runs through all these games one does not find anything in common. Then he talks about language games. What is a language game? He answers this question in the following manner:

Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common to all that we call language. I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same words for all,--- but that they are related to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship or these relationships, that we call them all language.\[167\]

The above illustration of Wittgenstein serves dual purpose. First of all, it lays stress on the view that the use of language is primarily an activity. Secondly, it leads us to the view that this activity is performed in a variety of ways resulting in the various language games representing the various forms of life. The grammar of every language game is derived from the form of life that it represents. Further, holds Wittgenstein:

You will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don’t think, but look.\textsuperscript{168}

One can show family resemblance among the objects or entities belonging to various classes of phenomena when they exhibit criss-cross relationships among them. There is another interesting illustration from Wittgenstein in this regard. Let us say A, B, C, and D are the children of X and Y. What is that essential feature that runs through all the four which makes them the children of X and Y? Wittgenstein explains this in the following way:

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\begin{array}{cccc}
A & B & C & D \\
B & C & D & E \\
C & D & E & F \\
D & E & F & A \\
\end{array}
\]

From the above diagram we can infer that that no two children have anything in common. It may be the case that A and B share something in common (height), C and D (colour), A and C (baldness), A and D (mannerisms) and so on. Thus we find criss-cross relationships. This is what makes them belonging to a family. Wittgenstein characterises these similarities as ‘family resemblances’ (PI #67). As Stroll puts it: “No mysterious hidden essence lies behind these array of idioms.”\textsuperscript{169}

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., Sec. 66.
The point that Wittgenstein tries to drive home here is to show that the relations among the members of a family are exhibited and as philosophers we simply describe them. Wittgenstein’s new philosophy reminds a reflective person of this fact. Now let us move to another aspect of what can be shown, namely, scepticism.

**Is Philosophical Scepticism Tenable?**

It is generally viewed that philosophers are generally do not take things for granted. They are generally portrayed as persons who ask questions where questions need not be asked. Such a feeling is justified to some extent. One well-known philosopher who justified this characterization is Descartes. Descartes is well-known for his ‘method of doubt’ by which every fact commonly accepted to be true is brought under scrutiny. We generally take the existence of material objects for granted. But Descartes argues that all our experiences may not be caused by these objects but may be the delusions caused by a great deceiver. Hence we cannot be sure of the independent existence of material objects. Descartes goes on doubting till he arrives at something that cannot be doubted without self-contradiction the fact that I exist as a thinking being. This form of scepticism, propounded by Descartes, in which one temporarily suspends one’s beliefs to examine their real strength is called methodological scepticism. But the scepticism propounded by David Hume is a more rigorous one. Hume questioned the principle of causality which forms the basis for many of our ordinary beliefs and also that of science. He argues that causal connections are not necessary connections for they are contingent and arise out of a human need to impose regularity on the phenomena of our experience. We could know the existence of permanent substance. Hume maintains that we are acquainted
with impressions, the vivid experience that impinges on our senses and ideas i.e., the faint and less vivid copies of these impressions. We do not know the existence of any material object that supports qualities and remains permanent amidst all changes. We cannot, again, be sure of the existence of a permanent soul that is the seat of our conscious states. Since time immemorial, thinkers have been trying to answer the sceptics and provide a solid foundation for our knowledge that is unquestionable. Of these attempts, the polemics of Moore against the sceptics is noteworthy. We will now go to see how Moore tries to silence the sceptics.

Moore argued that the Sceptic’s contention that we are not certain of most of our ordinary beliefs can be refuted. He wanted to established the truth of our commonsense beliefs in his papers, “A Defence of Commonsense”; and “Proof of the External World”. Examples of commonsense beliefs which he claims to know with certainty to be true are: ‘There exists at present a living human body, which is my body’. This body has either been in close contact with or not far from the surface of the earth, since it was born. There also have existed many things from which my body has been at various distance.’ The earth has existed for many years before my body was born. I am a human being and I have, at different times since my body was born, had many different experiences, of each of many different kinds. There have lived, on the surface of the earth, not only human beings but also many different species of plants and animals.’

Moore characterized the type of philosophy that insists on the truth of the various propositions listed above as a ‘commonsense view of the world’. He holds the view that not only does he himself upholds such a view, but that all other
philosophers, in fact, also uphold such a view, even though philosophers would deny that they do so. Moore maintains that the commonsense view of the world rests upon the acceptance of a universally shared set of know truth, whatever some philosophers may to the contrary and despite the fact the they would wish to reject such a view. To deny the truth of these propositions is the height of absurdity, according to Moore.

Moore also points out that we know many of the truths enunciated above only indirectly, i.e., on the basis of evidence of one sort or another. If, for instance, I do know that the earth existed for many years before I was born, I certainly only know this because I have known other things in the past which were evidence for it. But I certainly do not know what the evidence was. Moore feels that we are all in the strange position that we do know many things, with regard to which we know further that we must have had evidence for them, and yet we do not know how we know them.

To the above arguments Wittgenstein responded in the following way in his very important work *On Certainty*. Wittgenstein always looked at every philosophical problem from a new angle. The debate between Moore and sceptic is also examined by Wittgenstein in its new light. He involves in a three-cornered argument with Moore and the sceptic, particularly Descartes. G.H. von Wright feels that Wittgenstein’s views expressed in his *On Certainty* possess a thematic unity which makes them almost unique in Wittgenstein’s whole literary output. Wittgenstein basically argued that both Moore and the sceptic misunderstood the nature of doubt, knowledge and certainty in several ways. On the one hand, the
sceptic did not realise the importance of the conditions under which alone is doubt possible. He failed to realise that doubting presupposes grounds that cannot be doubted. On the other hand, Moore too was mistaken when he said that the propositions enunciated by him are known to be true with certainty. The truisms Moore enumerates play such a special role in our language, thought, reasoning and inquiries that it is an error to say we know them in the ordinary sense of this term. Their status is so fundamental that they provide the ground and framework for determining the certainty or uncertainty, the truth or falsity for other propositions. They themselves, however, are without grounds and are incapable of being justified or supported by evidence.

**Analysis of Doubt**

Having refuted the approaches of both Moore and the sceptic, although Wittgenstein does not deny the tenor of Moore’s arguments against scepticism, he attempts to look at the whole issue from a different perspective altogether. He is not happy with Moore’s refutation of scepticism. In the process, he does not try to establish the truth of various propositions being questioned by the sceptic. Wittgenstein’s argument is not devoted to show the falsehood of the sceptic’s conclusion, but to bring out the meaninglessness of the sceptic’s procedure. This is shown in his analysis of doubt and the elucidation of conditions required for the very possibility of doubting, if it is to be a meaningful activity. Let us see what he has to any say in this matter.
Wittgenstein argues that doubt is not possible without proper ground. At one place, Descartes argues that we may be being deceived by a malicious demon and hence cannot be sure of the independent existence of things around us. For Wittgenstein, this is a mere *ad hoc* ground produced to continue doubting. But such a ground is as good as not having a ground, because mere imaginary grounds for doubting something should not be taken as a ground at all. Again, doubt must amount to something more than the verbal utterance of doubt. If someone doubts the existence of material objects, his doubt does not make any difference in practice. A person who says, ‘I do not believe in the existence of material objects, and another who says ‘I do believe in the existence of material objects’ will act similarly if placed in a particular set of circumstances. Both brush their teeth every morning, both have lunch in the afternoon, both gossip in the evening and go to bed in the night. But Wittgenstein believes that doubting is not just putting a question mark after a sentence; it must show itself in our way of life. If it does not, then our doubt is meaningless.

There is no possibility of doubt outside the context of a language-game. A language-game is a practice that involves agreement or disagreement of foundational beliefs that gives meanings to the words that are being used. In order to express the doubt that ‘P’ one must understand what is meant by saying that ‘P’. Cartesian doubt in a way destroys itself for it calls into question everything. But Wittgenstein says that, if one is not certain of any fact he cannot be certain of the meaning of his words either. If someone were to say, ‘I don’t know if this is a hand’, Wittgenstein would ask him whether he knows what the word ‘hand’ means. If he
knows it, then his doubt cancels itself. The fact that a certain word means something is an empirical fact and Descartes, to be consistent in his methodology must go so far as to doubt the meanings of words. Then Descartes will not even able to express the idea that ‘the evil genius is deceiving me totally, for he can’t be sure what the word ‘deceive’ means. To put it in a nutshell, the fact that we can communicate to each other in a particular language shows that we take many things for granted in our day-to-day-life.

As already stated earlier, all our doubts find their existence in specific language-games. For a person to express doubts about a particular subject-matter and ask profitable questions in its domain, he must be equipped with the basics of the language-game concerned. Wittgenstein gives the example of an over-precocious student who delights in interrupting the teacher with questions at every juncture. Imagine that a teacher is teaching history. He begins with the statement “India attained independence on fifteenth of August 1947”. Mahatma Gandhi was the father of the Indian freedom movement. At this point let us say the teacher is interrupted and has to listen to a cascade of questions from the sceptical student like: ‘Can you be sure about what you say? Have you seen Gandhi?’ if the teacher becomes irritated his impatience is justified. The pupil’s doubt is hollow. He has not learnt how to ask questions. He has not learnt the game sufficiently well to express doubts about it. Universal doubt, thus, is impossible in even in principle.

It is that case that the game of doubting presupposes certainty. Genuine doubt takes place against a background of belief that is undoubted. This background provides the unquestioned rules, beliefs and standards by which to resolve
particular doubts as these arise at particular junctions of experience. The grounds for doubt are kept fixed and undoubted in order to state what is in doubt and to proceed with appropriate steps to try to remove the doubt. As Wittgenstein puts it: "Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; --- but the end is not certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e., it is not a kind of seeing on our part; it is our acting, which lies at the bottom of the language-game."\(^{170}\)

The Cartesian sceptic may reinforce his point by saying that we often hold on to beliefs which we may realize later to be mistaken. Descartes gives this argument to suggest that the data of experience given to our senses may be false, for we have often been misled by our senses, say in the case of mirage or any other optical illusion. Since we can be mistaken about our well known beliefs, it is justified if we question all the items of our knowledge. In this context Wittgenstein makes a sharp distinction between a mistaken belief and other forms of false beliefs. We must not confuse the two, as is done by the sceptic. For instance, I am consulting an authoritative work on the subject and I may find that I was mistaken. However, if someone were to imagine that he had been living for a long time somewhere other than where he had in fact been living during that time, then it will be considered not a mistake but a case of mental disturbance. Similarly, if someone said that he is not sure whether he has a body or not we will not say that it a mistake, we will interpret it as a sign of madness. Mistakes can be corrected by reference to accepted rules of settling issues involving matters of fact. But in the case of fundamental doubts, say doubt in the existence of material objects, we will be paralysed and not know what

to do Wittgenstein says: “If someone supposed that all our calculations were uncertain and that we could rely on none of them (justifying himself by saying that mistakes are always possible) perhaps we would say that he was crazy.”

The difference between a mistake and a mental disorder is that there can be valid reasons for a mistake committed in the recognition of the fact, whereas in the case of mental disorder there can only be cause which are strictly pathological. Secondly a mistake is a false judgement; an expression of madness is no judgement.

**Analysis of Claims to Knowledge**

In continuation with our examination of Wittgenstein’s response to Cartesian scepticism with specific reference to the conditions under which the activity of doubting makes sense, we will analyse what he has to say about Moore’s refutation of the sceptic’s position. Moore, as we had seen before, enunciates a number of propositions which he claims to know with certainty to be true. An example of such a proposition is ‘I know this is my hand’. Wittgenstein will now argue Moore is mistaken in the use of the expression ‘I Know’ in connection with the propositions he lists out. Wittgenstein feels that it is a misleading usages and Moore has not sufficiently studied the language games in which it makes sense.

One legitimate use of the statement, ‘I know that S’ where S is a proposition one claims to know is that one has special qualifications which enable him to state the matter confidently. A dermatologist can say, ‘I know this is not a case of

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171 Ibid., Sec. 217.
leprosy’. Here the force of ‘I know’ is only to suggest that one is competent enough to judge the issue. But with respect to the commonsense propositions, Moore says, ‘I knew all along that you were so and so.’ Such a statement is like saying ‘Good Morning’ in the middle of a discussion.

Wittgenstein provides us with a number of other reasons for the inefficacy of knowledge claims with respect to Moore-type propositions. One is that the information that if I know that this is a hand is worth importing, that casts doubt on its truth. Again, I know that ‘this is my hand’ makes sense only if I can say, meaningfully, I do not know whether this is my hand’. But we do not ever mistake the location of our hand, hence the latter statement results in absurdity. A typical use of ‘I know’ is the case in which one is sure that he can justify his proposition. In other words, one can accept the claims of a person who says ‘I know....’ because he can give compelling grounds to show that the proposition is true. According to Wittgenstein:

One says ‘I know ‘when one is ready to give compelling grounds. ‘I know ‘relates to a possibility of demonstrating the truth....But if what he believes is of such a kind that the ground that he can give are no surer that his assertion, then cannot say that he knows what he believes.172

However, the propositions of Moore cannot be justified by adducing reasons for holding them. Moore is aware of this fact as we have seen in our characterization

172 Ibid, Sec. 432.
of his views. He admits that we are in the awkward position of knowing many facts without being able to specify how we know them. But Wittgenstein will say that this is tantamount to admitting that Moore does not know then. Proceeding further, Wittgenstein writes: “I should like to say: Moore does not know what he asserts he knows, but it stands fast for him, as also for me: regarding it as absolutely solid is part of our method of doubt and inquiry.”\(^{173}\) There are certain foundational beliefs and our sociology of knowledge primarily rests on those foundational beliefs. As regards the training in language and absorption of communal life Wittgenstein writes as follows in his *Brown Books*: “The child learns this language from the grown-ups by being trained to its use. I am using the word ‘trained’ in a way strictly analogous to that in which we talk of an animal being trained to do certain things. It is done by means of an example, reward, punishment, and suchlike.”\(^{174}\)

**What is a World Picture?**

This is one of the most significant aspects in Wittgenstein’s later work. The concept of a ‘world picture’ is important in understanding the full import of Wittgenstein’s polemic against the skeptic and Moore. Although we do not have any definite clue as regards this concept in his *On Certainty*, yet the indirect references made by Wittgenstein help us in understanding this concept. Again every attempt to explain this concept falls in the realm of what can be shown. According to Milton Munitz,\(^{175}\) there is a gradual increase in a holistic understanding of knowledge in

\(^{173}\) Ibid., Sec. 151.


Wittgenstein’s philosophy. In the *Tractatus*, there is a stress on the role of logically independent elementary propositions, each of which depicts some particular possible state of affairs. In his later writings especially in the *Blue Book* and the *Philosophical Investigations*, one finds Wittgenstein’s emphasis on role of language-games as making clear the use and therefore the meaning of specific expressions in it. In his *On Certainty* without ignoring the significance of the notion of a language-game, Wittgenstein broadens the scope of his analysis by bringing out the importance of the concept of ‘world picture’ which gives meaning to our various language-games and serves as an encompassing conceptual framework for the ‘moves’ we make in the language-game.

How does Wittgenstein conceive a world picture? A world picture is the common ground which we must with other people in order to understand their actions and words and to come to an understanding with them in our judgments. It must not be construed as a holistic view of the world formed as a result of deliberate inquiry. We can grasp its meaning best by means of the metaphors which Wittgenstein uses. He compares a world picture to an axis. See the following remark of Wittgenstein regarding the world picture:

> I do not explicitly learn the propositions that sand fast for me. I can discover them subsequently like the axis around which a body rotates. This axis is not fixed in the sense that anything holds it fast, but the movement around it determines its immobility.\(^\text{176}\)

Further, Wittgenstein in order to substantiate his view as regards the function of a world picture he compares it with a ‘hinge’. It is viewed as a hinge of our thought and action. He writes that “the questions that we raise and our doubts depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt as it were like hinges on which they turn.”\textsuperscript{177}

The propositions concerning a world picture acquire a status of an axiom. Therefore, they can neither be proved nor disproved. In other words, they are truisms. The impossibility of questioning certain things is not a practical difficulty. We must not think we can’t investigate everything and therefore we are forced to rest content with assumption. Wittgenstein remarks that if I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay fixed. Similarly, it belongs to the logic of our investigations that certain things are not doubted.

Does this mean the world picture provides the ground or foundations for other propositions and beliefs? Yes, but the metaphor of foundations must not be misinterpreted. A world picture does not form the foundation of our beliefs in the way in which a setoff axiom forms the foundation of a logical system. In an axiomatic system, the axioms are deliberate assumptions, but the propositions constituting the world picture are not so, for they represent our social practices and customs. It is acquired in the course of living in the world and interacting with various things in the world, including human beings. The inputs for acquiring a world picture are both linguistic and non linguistic. To quote Wittgenstein in this context:

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., Sec. 341.
As children we learn facts: e.g., that every human being has a brain, and we take them on trust. I believe that there is an island, Australia, of such and such a shape, and so on; I believe that I had great-grandparents that the people who gave themselves out as my parents really were my parents, etc. This beliefs may have never been expressed, even the thought that it was so, never thought.\textsuperscript{178}

The propositions expressing a world picture are not deliberate intellectual constructions. They are interwoven with our day-to-day practices. A world-picture is ground in a form of life. Von Wright in his comments on \textit{On Certainty}, argues that the fragments of a world picture underlying the uses of language are not originally and strictly propositions at all. A child learns to fetch a book, to sit in a chair, and so on. He is not taught that these things exist. Similarly, we do not ‘know’ that we have a body after a process of inquiry. Everything we do shows this. For example, one complains of headache or pain in his leg, one avoids collision with other bodies. One does not put one’s hand in the fire, one goes to a doctor for checking up one’s eyes and so on. Similarly we do not ‘know’ that there are material objects. We sit in chairs, write with our pens, travel in a bus and so on. Wittgenstein summarizes this by saying: “Giving grounds, however justifying evidence, comes to an end; - but the end is not certain propositions striking us immediately as true. i.e., it is not a kind of seeing in our part, it is our acting, which lies at the bottom of the language-game.”\textsuperscript{179}

As mentioned earlier, the components of a world-picture are not propositions. At the same time by saying that the presuppositions. Which Moore claims to know with

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., Sec. 159.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., Sec. 204.
certainty such as, ‘There are material objects’, ‘I know this is my hand’ ‘I have a body which is my body’ express a world-picture. How do we resolve this inconsistency?

In order to resolve this problem, we must distinguish the proposition that constitute the framework of a world picture and empirical propositions. Munitz\textsuperscript{180} brings out the contrast in an interesting manner. Superficially, the statements “the earth existed for many years before I was born” and ‘there are live volcanoes in some of Jupiter’s moons’ may bias signed to the same broad category of ‘empirical propositions’. Or the statements, ‘there are material objects in the world’, and there are lions in Africa’ may also be thought to belong to the same category of empirical propositions. But it is not the case. Statements like ‘there are live volcanoes on some of Jupiter’s moons’ may be tested by the methods on astronomical science to see whether they are in agreement with reality. But a statement like ‘there are material objects’ is not tested against reality’ to see whether it is true or false. To substantiate his position Wittgenstein writes that “there are for example, historical investigations and investigations into the shape and also the age of the earth, but not into whether the earth has existed for the last hundred years.”\textsuperscript{181} A world picture, unlike an empirical proposition is neither true nor false. Disputes about truth are possible within the framework of reference. It is the world picture that provides the norms, criteria and rules for testing other propositions, for determining whether they are in agreement with reality. As remarked by Wittgenstein, “if the true is what is

\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., Sec. 301.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., Sec. 184.
grounded, then the ground is not true, or yet false.”

What Wittgenstein advocates is that a world picture is shared by community of human beings which provides the ideas of linguistic and non-linguistic interactions among themselves. Now a question may arise. Does everyone have the same world-picture? Do people in all countries, at all times throughout history have the same world-picture? Moore is firmly of the opinion that the propositions of commonsense that have been enumerated by him are accepted by all, even though philosophers may hold inconsistent with them. But Wittgenstein thinkers that different in world picture are possible. Differences among world pictures are not simple, like differences between logically contradictory or contrary propositions or like the differences between two scientific hypotheses to account for the same phenomenon. Such differences occur within a commonly accepted system or framework of reference, such as the usual rules if logic and the standard methods of science, can be resolved by appealing to these adjudicating standards.

Further, it may be noted that the differences among world pictures involving entire framework rather than isolated propositions, in which the very standards if adjudication are in debate, is of a much more complicated kind. Here appeal to reasons, ‘facts’, etc. will not help since the very foundations of settling the debate are not shared. At this juncture we must understand the distinction between ‘explanation’ and ‘description’ to clarify the radical difference between a world picture and empirical propositions. Explanation involves giving justification to one’s

182 Ibid., Sec. 205.
claims by appealing to reasons. But, the process of justification, of giving reasons must itself come to an end at some point. One may justify one’s belief in a particular proposition, say that New Delhi airport is the one in which the average number of planes taking off is highest in South Asia. ‘How do you know that?’ asks someone. We show him the Guinness book of world records. But if the same person persists and asks, ‘How do you know that what this book says is true?’ One can only defend himself by saying that information published in standard books is usually reliable. Hence, when justification does come to an end, all one can do is to give descriptions, and say, ‘this is how it is done’, this is what I accept’, ‘these are the standards to be used.’ All our saying in terms of explanations comes to an end, the only outlet for our belief in a particular statement can only be shown.

Suppose there is a change in one’s attitude towards a world picture, how does one explain this phenomenon? Say an atheist and a theist meet and the theist convinces the atheist about the existence of God. Wittgenstein would say that this is possible, but it is not because of the reasons alone that the theist has won the argument. The clash between these pictures has been resolved amongst themselves not by mere justification but by what Wittgenstein calls ‘persuasion’. Wittgenstein gives another example: “I can imagine a man who had grown up in quite special circumstances and been taught that the earth came into being fifty years ago and therefore believed this. We might instruct him: the earth has long since existed….. etc. we should be trying to give him our picture of the world.”

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183 Ibid., Sec. 262.
This would happen through a kind of persuasion. In facts, a change of world picture in some respects is not an easy matter. When an atheist thinks that his position is wrong and becomes a theist, it is not just because of his discussions with the theist. Again, it is not just the case that now the atheist who used to say earlier, ‘I do not believe in the existence of God’ says ‘I believe in the existence of God’. The atheist would have changed his outlook towards ordinary things and events in the world. If he earlier cursed his bad luck when and if he met with an accident, he may now think that it has been ordained by God. A change in a world picture is equivalent to change in a form of life.

The originality of any philosopher is that he throws new light on old problems and sees difficulties where one would see none. Wittgenstein is no exception. Whatever may be the problem he touches, he forces us to think deeply about it. In *On Certainty* we have seen how he reacts to the sceptics and to Moore’s solution to scepticism. His discussion on this topic makes us consider epistemological issues concerning knowledge and doubt in a new light. The crucial point made by Wittgenstein is that cognitive acts like doubting, giving reasons, justifying, arguing etc. Already presuppose a bulk of knowledge that is taken for granted: a world-picture. The propositions constituting a world picture are not deliberate assumptions; they are explications of our form of life which can be made conscious. It is a mistake to claim that we know such propositions to be true with certainty for they are beyond truth and falsity. They provide the framework and the standards by means of which we can test the truth or falsity of empirical
propositions. According to von Wright, the idea of bipolarity which runs through the *Tractatus* can also be found in *On Certainty* although in a different form. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein drew a clear line between ‘what can be said’ and ‘what cannot be said’ but only shown. In his *On Certainty* he makes a distinction between what is grounded and the ground itself. His comparison of a world picture to the hinges on which a door turns is very apt. If the door is to turn, hinges must stay put. If inquiry is to proceed, then the very framework of inquiry cannot be brought under the domain of the inquiry itself. In a way, how our foundational beliefs operate in our day-to-day world cannot be put in language, but can only be shown through customs and practices of individuals living society. At this juncture, It will also be interesting to compare the views of W.V. Quine on the analytic-synthetic distinction with some ideas expressed by Wittgenstein in *On Certainty*. The main point behind Quine’s essay, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” is that the analytic-synthetic distinction cannot be successfully made. Quine compared our total knowledge at any time to a sphere whose inner core consists of propositions that are relatively less open to revision (the so called analytic propositions) and the surface to the empirical propositions which are constantly bombarded by our experiences and which are more likely to be revised. But even the inner core of propositions can be affected. For example some believe that the law of the excluded middle may have to be revised in the light of facts revealed by quantum mechanics, for atoms exhibit both wave and particle natures. Regarding the different between ordinary empirical

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184 Von Wright, G.H. *Wittgenstein*, p. 178.
propositions and the propositions constituting the world picture, Wittgenstein says that there is no permanent dividing line between the two. He maintains that: “The same proposition may get treated at one time as something to test by experience, at another as a rule of testing.”\textsuperscript{185} The analogy of river-bed is the best one to explain Wittgenstein’s position. The base on which the river flows is the channel or ground for the flow of water. Part of the flowing materials may get fossilized. On the other hand, part of the base may get eroded and start flowing. Here the world picture is the river-bed of thoughts and the empirical propositions are like the flowing water. For example, at one time the theory of evolution was rivalled by an empirical hypothesis in biological circles. Now it is accepted as a paradigm for explaining biological facts by most of the scientists. One point of concern can be found in what Wittgenstein had to say about the clash of world pictures. We have seen that such a fundamental difference of opinion cannot be settled by appealing to higher standards for the very standards of adjudication are being questioned. At this point one can convince the other not by justification but by persuasion. But that does not mean that the one who was converted in the process to adopt a different world picture was wrong. We cannot apply the terms ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, ‘true or ‘false’ to a world picture.

Now the question arises: Is this a form of relativism? It does appear so. Relativism may not directly imply scepticism, but it can breed scepticism. It would seem that Wittgenstein, having refuted Descartes’ methodological scepticism, has given scope to more extreme form scepticism. However, it cannot be denied that On

Certainty is an important contribution to philosophy, particularly to the various problems in epistemology. Wittgenstein has once said that he did not want to free people from the burden of thinking by doing the thinking for them. He would like to stimulate others to think on the issue and solve the questions by themselves. He has, no doubt, achieved it in the above work.

Meaning as Use

One of the most significant contributions made by later Wittgenstein to the theory of meaning is to dissolve the notion of meaning. He did not replace it with any other theory. In this context Wittgenstein writes that “the influence of language on philosophy has, I believe, been profound and almost unrecognized. If we are not to be misled by this influence, it is necessary to become conscious of it...”186 The history of philosophy is a witness that philosophers have generally been conscious of the role of language in their inquiries. Some of them even deduced philosophical ideas by considering the way language functions. In Book X of Plato’s Republic, we find him saying, “Whenever a number of individuals have a common name, we assume them to have also a corresponding idea or form”. (source of the quotation and page number). Here Plato moves from a fact in language to an ontological conclusion. When we use common nouns like ‘cow’ to apply to a wide range of individuals, there is a common feature of all these individuals, ‘cowness’. Thus all these individuals, Plato argues, possess that common idea of form, ‘cowness’, and these ideas of forms have an existence independent of the particular individuals.

Aristotle, in his Metaphysics, starts from fact that we do not use verbs except in connection with subjects. We do not say ‘sits’ or ‘walks’, for it would make no sense to say so. We only say, ‘Ram sits’ or ‘Sita walks’ and so on. From this he concludes that substances are ontologically more fundamental than actions. Locke, in his An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, recognises that language is the distinctive feature of humans and discusses the relationship of language to ideas in detail.

However, it was only in the beginning of the twentieth-century that careful attention was paid to the use of language as the medium of communication of thought, and to the various conditions and resources that language makes available for such communication. In this connection, special concern is shown for the problem of meaning. What are the ways of achieving or insuring the presence of meaning in our use of language? Are there certain conditions for meaningfulness that have to be met? What ways are available for making explicit and clear the meanings and uses of various linguistic expressions? Given the frequent failure, difficulty or inadequacy in achieving a clear use of language, what are the standards and techniques for achieving clarification? The attempt to answer questions such as these is a marked characteristic of contemporary philosophy, especially in the case of analytic philosophers.

But Wittgenstein’s views were vastly different from those of the logical positivists regarding the nature of philosophy. We begin with a distinction that is central to his thought: ‘what can be said’ comprises of the propositions of science. The propositions of science are truths about the world. On the other hand,
Wittgenstein argues that ‘philosophy does not result in philosophical propositions’ but rather in the clarification of propositions. Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity. We have sufficiently covered these issues in our earlier chapters.

The logical positivists said that propositions in science and the clarification of these propositions is all that matters to us. ‘What can be said’ alone is important. But Wittgenstein passionately holds that all that really matters in human life is precisely what, in his view, ‘can’t be said but only be shown’. This is the period of transition. This will take us to Wittgenstein’s views on language in his later work *Philosophical Investigations*. In this work Wittgenstein mainly targeted his earlier position which was, by and large, put forward by Frege and Russell. It is mainly the referential theory that dominated the scene. In fact, Wittgenstein’s picture theory is a sub set of referential model.

As an alternative to the picture theory Wittgenstein conceives meaning as use. According to this view, the meaning of a word lies in its use in language. One basic complaint Wittgenstein has against the philosophers in general is that in their quest for unity and simplicity, philosophers become obsessed by particular pictures or paradigms about things in general. They have not spared language in their quest for a theory to account for its various features. Philosophers like Russell, the logical positivists and, in fact, Wittgenstein himself, in his earlier phase, thought that the primary function of language was cognitive, i.e., to describe the world. What results from this is a theory of descriptions, a theory of the real structure of language, a theory that holds that some uses of language are important but others are not fruitful and do not matter, a theory which assimilates the countless uses of language
to just one use, namely, description. What cannot be described (said) through this process remains largely nonsensical. But to say that language has one basic function is a mistake for it has countless uses. Language can be used to give orders, obey orders, make up a story, tell a joke, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying and so on. Wittgenstein gives the name ‘language –games’ to these activities to show their manifold nature and also the fact that ‘the speaking of language is part of an activity or of a ‘form of life’.

When we move from language to individual words, we find this same tendency to assimilate various uses of a word to one use, that of meaning. A word is conceived as a name for an object. Proper nouns that name specific objects are the paradigm cases of words. We have shown earlier in our criticism of a simple theory of reference, how this idea confuses the meaning of a name with its bearer. Again ostensive definitions of common nouns may suggest the view that the meaning of a word is what it refers to. A teacher points to a cow and utters ‘cow’ in the presence of a child. The child understands that the meaning of the word ‘cow’ is the object standing before him. But Wittgenstein argues that the child may understand his teacher in a variety of ways. He may take the colour of the cow as the meaning of ‘cow’. He may think that the horns of the cow is being referred as ‘cow’. Again, what is the guarantee that he may take his teacher to be describing something? He may think that the teacher is ordering him to go somewhere. The only way to escape an oversimplified picture about the function of language and the meaning of words is to look at the actual use of words to see what goes on. Wittgenstein argues that “one
cannot guess how a word functions. One has to look at its use and learn from that.”

We must remember how we looked into the word ‘game’ and its various examples. The functions of words are as diverse as that of tools in a toolbox. When we look into the actual uses of words, we will be prevented from assimilating all of them into one category. Wittgenstein, at one stage identifies meaning with use, although cautiously. His remark on use is very significant. He claims; “For a large class of cases—thought not for all—in which we employ the word meaning it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.”

Wittgenstein’s suggestion that the meaning of words must be seen in the context of a specific language-game in which it is being employed is something novel. When philosophers speculate about the function of language or the meaning of words, they do not look into specific contexts but consider only features that are of interest to them. That is why Wittgenstein comments: “.... philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday.” According to Wittgenstein, ordinary language can perform the job perfectly. We do not need any improvement over it. In this context, to quote Wittgenstein: “It is wrong to say that is philosophy we consider an ideal language as opposed to our ordinary one. For this makes it appear as though we thought we could improve on ordinary language. But ordinary

188 Ibid., Sec. 43.
189 Ibid., Sec. 38.
language is all right.” The expression ‘theory of meaning’ suggests that the essay is on language.

The question ‘Why does language matter to philosophy?’ is an important question. Theories about language enter the most memorable philosophy in order to be applied to central philosophical issues. A philosopher’s theory of meaning can be understood and appreciated fully only in connection with the philosophical problems he is trying to solve (or dissolve). A ‘pure’ theory of meaning in linguistics would be applied to the whole domain of language including all kinds of sentences like assertions, commands, questions, interjections, and so on. Again for a theory of meaning to be comprehensive, it must be applied to commonsense, science, and philosophy, literature in the form of poetry, prose, and fiction and so on. Thus a philosophical theory of meaning is different from a theory of meaning in linguistics proper. As aptly remarked by Wittgenstein the sense of an expression is revealed in a given context. In other words, an expression shows its sense which we have to grasp. Just as meaning of an expression is exhibited, following rule can also be exhibited. Let us analyse Wittgenstein’s views on rule-following.

**Rule-following**

One of the most central issues that Wittgenstein discusses in his later work is the notion of rule-following. The discussions on following a rule, obeying an instruction (such as completing a given series) and understanding the meaning of a word are

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interwoven in the *Investigations*. Wittgenstein shows that language is not a rule-governed activity, but, on the contrary, rules, instructions and definitions are all equally important when we (in general or as individuals) speak or calculate as we do, since any rule (like any definition) will only work if it is understood correctly. In the case of games like chess, we refer explicitly to rules in deciding what should be done and what should not be. Wittgenstein is of the opinion that there is a striking resemblance between the structure of language and the structure of the world (reality). This isomorphism between the structure of language and the structure of the world, felt Wittgenstein, can be vindicated by introducing a ‘logically perfect language’ (ideal language), which is totally governed by a single, unique, rigid system of calculus that does not allow any loose-play. Such a calculus acts in accordance with the fixed rules of truth functional logic. Accordingly, the ‘picture theory of meaning’ (denotative theory of meaning) advanced by Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus* suggests that to understand the meaning of any expression one has to adequate mastery of the rules that govern its use. The true transition in Wittgenstein’s line of thinking towards the workings of language and it underlying logical structure is obvious in his well acclaimed posthumous publication *Philosophical Investigations*.

Wittgenstein advocated in *Tractatus* towards the ‘logic of language’ is normally attributed by the following reasons. Firstly, It is the view that language has a unique discoverable function, namely, ‘logical clarification of thought’ which can be expressed by means of structure revealing analysis of language and the world; and such analysis has a single underlying logic, Wittgenstein puts forward in his
*Investigations* that there is no one ‘logic of language’, but there are many ‘logics of language’ that govern our linguistic practices. The ‘logic of language’ has no unique essence but has a collection of innumerable practices. Secondly, the belief that there can be a systematically worked out philosophical theory that can solve the philosophical riddles which arise out of our misunderstanding of the workings of language is misleading. Wittgenstein felt that instead of formulating a systematic theory to solve the problems of philosophy we must aim to ‘dissolve these problems by clearing away the misconceptions about language.

Of course, both *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations* share the claims that the problems of philosophy arise out of our misunderstandings of the language at its functional level. The important issue worth consideration in Wittgenstein’s treatment of the notion of rule following is:

> to learn to follow a rule is to become the master of a technique—a technique i.e., a part of a social practice, institution or custom. I know how to do something when I do it the way it’s done, but the way it’s done amount to noting more than the way in which those people who are members of the institution do it.\(^{191}\)

Whether understanding a language is a rule-governed activity or not is Wittgenstein’s main concern. His analysis of the nature of understanding explains this process. According to him, understanding is not a mental process as otherwise thought to be. To understand something means to master a technique. To master a technique means an ability to perform certain actions. The explanation given in

Tractatus regarding understanding language reveals that language as an activity abides by certain fixed rules which determine the meanings of various expressions. A person is said to have understood the meaning of an expression provided he has mastered the rules that govern the structure of language. But in Investigations Wittgenstein’s aim is to show that “language is not a rule governed activity, but the rules that determine the meanings.”\textsuperscript{192} of various expressions in language have a single, unique, rigid calculus that controls the rules. According to him, the proclivity of most of the philosophers is to look for generality, whether such rationality has any rational basis. This description of rule-following is often referred to as Platonism. For Plato the ‘Forms’ represent fixed, infallible structure that guide our actions in the world of phenomena. These ‘Forms’ (ideal structures) exist independent of us. Similarly, the rules (use-rules) that govern the structure of language have a unique essence and are independent of us. This analogy allows philosophers to freely use the term ‘Platonism’ as a label for rigid rule-following activity. The rules that govern the structure of language have a unique essence and are independent of us. Against this view, which is generally characterized as Platonism, Wittgenstein argues that language has many logics. These logics are identified with ‘language-games’.\textsuperscript{193} and those use-rules are open for public accessibility. This argument put forward by Wittgenstein in order to show the absurdity of Platonism assumes the form of reduction. According to this argument,

\textsuperscript{192} In Philosophical Investigations Wittgenstein identifies ‘meaning’ with ‘use’. Many a time they were used as synonyms in his later works.

\textsuperscript{193} A ‘language-game’ is a ‘form of life’ that involves a practice of agreement on certain basic or foundation belief that give meanings to the usage of various expressions in our linguistic practices.
the supposed distinction between ‘obeying a rule’ and ‘disobeying a rule’ which is the base for Platonism is ill-founded.

Wittgenstein proceeds with the uniformity of rules followed in logic and mathematics that determines the value structures of various propositions in advance so that one can always verify whether one is following a rule correctly or not. This inexorable nature of logic and mathematics lies in their rigid, uniform system of rules. Thus Platonism can be best compared with rails laid down in advance to infinity. In this context Wittgenstein writes that “whence comes the idea that the beginning of a series is a visible section of rails invisibly laid to infinity? Well, we might imagine rails instead of rules. And infinitely long rails correspond to the unlimited application of a rule. All these steps are really already taken means, one does not have any choice. The rule, once stamped with a particular meaning, traces the lines along which it is to be followed through the whole space. But, if something of this sort really were the case, how would it help?”

From this what Wittgenstein was trying to derive is not that rules do not guide us to correctness; rather the general misinterpretation of the rules in terms of a fixed rail track laid in advance to infinity reduces a rule-follower to the level of a machine or an automata. “Wittgenstein images that have introduces myths and pictures: The restrictive power of a rule is far more essential, built-in feature of all that we perceive and perform, than any sets of rails stretching-out to infinity.” If this model is employed in language, Wittgenstein argues, then the very purpose of

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language as a medium of communication is defeated. The language consists of diversity of rules that govern the use of various expressions. “If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also in judgments.”

Wittgenstein attempts to show the absurdity of Platonism in the following way. There are rules laid down in advance like a ‘rail track’. A rule-follower may think that he is following a rule. Wittgenstein contests that there is a connection between a rule-follower and the rule followed by him. A rule follower may have a flash of understanding with regard to the meaning of an expression. He may attribute it to the rule that he follows. Wittgenstein asks: If a rule-follower has an ordinary flash of understanding when he was not following a rule, then does he attribute this to the rules that he follows otherwise? Wittgenstein calls this a paradox in which “no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was if everything can be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.”

Thus, the question of ‘obeying a rule’ or ‘disobeying a rule’ does not arise. If everything is determined by a rule then the rule does not have any significance. Every action in accordance with the rule is an interpretation. But we ought to restrict the term ‘interpretation’ to the substitution of the one expression of the rule for another. Another feature that Wittgenstein notices in Platonism is that to obey a rule

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197 Ibid., Sec. 201.
is to have a sense of being guided by a rule. The rule dictates terms to the rule-follower. Thus, a rule follower is prevented from contributing anything to what counts as following a rule. Wittgenstein holds that the notion of rule-following is the belief that one is being guided by a rule and it does not really guarantee that the rule is being followed. When a person is applying a rule correctly or not but he might think that he is following a rule. In this context, to make a distinction between ‘obeying a rule’ and ‘not obeying a rule’ is illogical. One’s ‘obeying a rule’ is a practice. And to think one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule at all. It is not possible to obey a rule ‘privately’. The observer is always at an advantage to make an observation whether one is obeying a rule or not for rule-following is a not a private affair.

Proceeding further, Wittgenstein attacks the view that rule-following is an inner mental activity. Some philosophers are of the option that something really occurs in the rule-follower’s mind when he is following a rule and provides him an infallible guidance. What is this something? Something’ is that which attaches a rule-follower to the fixed rails like rules laid down in advance to the infinity. What does it signify? Wittgenstein puts it in a following manner.

It is as if we could grasp the whole use of the word in a flash: Like what e.g.,? - Can’t the use- in a certain sense- be grasped in a flash? And in what sense can it not? The point is that it is as if we could ‘grasp’ it in a flash in yet another and much more direct sense than that- But have you a model for this? No. It is just this expression suggests itself to us as the result of the crossing of different
pictures. You have no model of this superlative fact, but you are
seduced into using s super-expression. (It might be called a
philosophical superlative.)\(^{198}\)

Wittgenstein does not deny the fact that we grasp the whole use of the word
(meaning of the word) in a flash. A person grasps the use of a word that gives the
meaning cannot have any mental mode. There is no uniform rule that governs entire
language. Following a rule is to adopt a common practice that is guided by
agreement in judgments in a community of language users. Agreement in
judgments is called a ‘custom’.

Rule-following is a collective activity, according to Wittgenstein, based on
certain accepted linguistic practices of a community of language users. The concept
of understanding language is the concept of an acquired skill. For Wittgenstein,
language is an instrument of measurement of our customs. Further Wittgenstein
illustrates it through the example of a ‘signpost’. A ‘signpost’ is providing directions
to the public. Similarly in language, “A rule stands there like a signpost.”\(^{199}\) There is
a causal relationship between a sign and my actions. My response to the sign must
conform to a customary way of responding to the sign: “A person goes by a signpost
only in so far as there exists a regular use of signposts, a custom.”\(^{200}\)

\(^{198}\) Ibid., Secs. 191-2.
\(^{199}\) Ibid., Sec. 85.
\(^{200}\) Ibid., Sec. 198.
It amounts to saying that “The application of the concept of following a rule presupposes a custom.” According to Wittgenstein, the terms ‘custom’, ‘institution’, ‘use’, ‘picture’ are used as synonyms.

In Wittgenstein analysis, ‘custom’ is the key notion of rule-following. A custom is something regular, repeated and established. There is no extrinsic or objective factor present in rule-following, Wittgenstein feels “Giving... grounds..... come to an end.... The end... is our acting which lies at the bottom of the language-game.” Language is necessarily built on a pre-linguistic system. To follow a rule is to follow it unreflectively. Wittgenstein remarks that “when I obey a rule, I do not choose. I obey the rule blindly.” The metaphor of acting blindly suggests that the person in acting wholly without a guide. It would be a miracle for someone acting blindly to continue the series correctly. The metaphor of acting blindly is, to my mind, an inelegant way of pointing to the fact that when we follow a rule as opposed to interpreting a rule. When we follow a rule there is a temptation to suppose that we are simply tracing out necessary structure already giving in the rule. For example 2, 4, 6, 8,----- In this case at every step there is a decision making. This is the reason why at times we commit errors in computation.

Wittgenstein advances that following a rule is a skill or an ability to use certain expressions and it is achieved by the language-users. The reaction of rule-following is that if the use-rules of language are based on the agreement of certain

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customs of the community of language-users. Without any objective constraints, then it says what we call ‘truth’ or ‘falsity’ is also grounded in such practices. Truth becomes a matter of agreement in judgments. Wittgenstein notices this objection and replies that. “So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?- It is what human beings say in that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. This is not an agreement in opinion but in the form of life.”

Wittgenstein describes a form of life is an underlying consensus of linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour, assumptions, traditions, practices, customs, natural propensities are shared by the individuals. All these are presupposed in language is a part of an activity. These practices are shared by the members of a community.

The rule-following method employed in exact sciences like logic and mathematics, cannot be extended to the matters related to human practices and customs. Wittgenstein tried to develop a kind of ‘logically perfect language’ that can mirror the reality as it is. Thus, the analysis provided by Wittgenstein in later writings as regards the notion of rule-following is self-stultifying. No one can reduce language to a mysterious rule following activity, but “the mystery here is all in Wittgenstein’s imagination.”

The rules of language are located in the customs or agreements or practices that are observed by a community of language-users. Then why should there be rules at all? Our linguistic practices are based on the customs of a community. In this context, obey or disobeying a rule does not arise.

204 Ibid., Sec. 241.
Likewise, meaning as use is central to *Investigations*. In that Wittgenstein suggested that language has an autonomous status. The rules exist independent of us. Wittgenstein believes that the use of an expression in language need not necessarily reveals its meaning. For example, if a person wants to know the use of a hammer as a tool, one can give him a long list of its uses. But none of these uses gives us the meaning of the word ‘hammer’. Thus ‘use’ and ‘meaning’ are two different things. To him the meaning of the words change according to the context, i.e., the way there reveals its function.

In fact, Wittgenstein rules out the possibility of a putative language speaker following the rules of his own language on the ground that there are no criteria for him to check whether he is following a certain rule correctly. “How does the community tell us whether it is following a rule? Wittgenstein answers: it cannot tell.” 206

Following a rule is analogous to obeying an order. Further he says when a man understands a rule he shows this in his performance. “When they are grasped and accepted as rules, and the experience of grasp and acceptance is an insightful act not reducible to anything in the way of performance.” 207

Following a rule is simply doing one thing or other out of a long list of such performances. Thus a performance is one that can be shown. Wittgenstein’s question: how does private language argument emerge? According to him, “to obey a rule’ is a practice. And to think one is obey a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is

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not possible to obey a rule ‘privately’, otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it.”\textsuperscript{208} If following a rule always involves an act of interpretation. Wittgenstein says that “there is a way of obeying a rule which is not an interpretation that which is exhibited in what we call ‘obey a rule’ and ‘going against it’ in actual cases.”\textsuperscript{209}

Wittgenstein does not conceive that language is essentially private. If language is private to oneself than another person cannot understand it. Wittgenstein rejects the possibility of such private language since it involves obeying a rule privately. Because, there is no distinction between obeying a rule and thinking that one is obeying a rule. This misunderstanding takes place in private language. One’s ability to speak and understand language is nothing but mastering a technique.

The above discussion on the various issues clearly indicates that like earlier Wittgenstein, the later Wittgenstein also maintained the distinction between saying and showing. However, the later Wittgenstein was more interested in the social role of language and its implications for day-today life of the individuals. In the next chapter we would take up mystical experiences as another form of showing.


\textsuperscript{209} Ibid., Sec. 201.