

Wittgenstein

Meaning and Judgement

Michael Luntley



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for Dee

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Preface

The will is an attitude of the subject to the world. (NB p. 87)

Grammar is perspectival. This is the key to Wittgenstein's theory of intentionality and the central claim to this book. The main work consists in saying what it means, not least in defending the idea that Wittgenstein had a theory of intentionality. It often seems that Wittgenstein has an anti-philosophy. I think that is wrong. Indeed, I think he has profound insights that illuminate and can be illuminated by contemporary work on intentionality. The Wittgenstein presented herein is no quietist. The point of the claim that grammar is perspectival is that the conditions for the possibility of intentionality consist not in a body of theoretical knowledge, but in perceptual knowledge. The conditions for the possibility of intentionality are that we see things aright.

For this claim to make sense, we require not a quietist description of ordinary language use, we need a clarification of the metaphysics of grammar. This turns out to be a metaphysics in which we, as subjects, play a fundamental role. The grammar of language is not a structure that we inhabit, it is a structure that, in part, we sustain and amend in our ongoing activities of judgement. That is why this book is about the conditions for the possibility of judgement. The subject, construed as a self-as-will, has an ineliminable role in the account of grammar.

The reading I offer of Wittgenstein is then a reading with substantive metaphysical import. Two of the most central points concern the conception of the subject's place in the world. I argue in chapter 5 that the private language argument is an argument about retrieving our mindedness as part of the world. It is an argument that both acknowledges that there is such a thing as how things are for me and places how things are for me as part of

how things are. The perspective of the subject is real and part of the world. Second, the account of how we are in the world has us primarily engaged in the world, not engaged with others. In chapter 4 I argue that the concept of practice that Wittgenstein employs is a non-social concept.

Wittgenstein has had an enormous influence across the humanities and social sciences. Much of this has been ill-conceived, for it has been informed, for the main part, by the idea that Wittgenstein's onslaught on the Cartesian conception of the mind as private is directed towards the advocacy of a social conception of practice, mind and meaning. That is wrong. On the account of practice that I offer, Wittgenstein still provides insights that matter across academia and beyond, but they will be different. I note some of the opportunities for such impacts, but most of that work will have to wait for another occasion.

The argument that I provide about the conditions for the possibility of judgement is an extraction from Wittgenstein's texts. The extraction has been long, but fun and has been aided by the many colleagues and students at Warwick who have contributed to the game of reading Wittgenstein. Being with others is not constitutive of practice, but it surely helps. It scaffolds one's understanding when, as at Warwick, one reads Wittgenstein in the company of a commonality of understanding and seriousness in approaching Wittgenstein and a general expertise in the philosophy of thought and language. I cannot now identify all the points of contact, but I know that Naomi Eilan, Christoph Hoerl, Peter Poellner, Johannes Roessler and Tim Thornton have enabled my engagement with Wittgenstein in countless ways. Especial thanks also to my graduate class on Wittgenstein in autumn 2002 as I approached final drafting of some of this material.

During April 2002 I was a visiting scholar at the Wittgenstein Archives in Bergen, Norway. While there I delivered four classes at the Institute of Philosophy that drew upon material that now appears in chapters 4–6. I owe a very special debt of gratitude to Alois Pichler, Harald Johannessen, Ole Martin Skilleas, Simo Saatela, Knut Vennesslan and Gerhard Gelbmann for their warm hospitality and hard questions during my stay in Bergen. Material from my paper, 'Patterns, Particularism and Seeing the Similarity', *Philosophical Papers*, 2002, pp. 251–71 reappears in parts of chapter 3 and I am grateful to the editor, Andrew Gleeson, for permission to re-use that material.

There is so much that has to be seen and felt about practice in order to understand Wittgenstein aright. It is not a simple matter of academic scholarship getting Wittgenstein into view, let alone the world. The shape of practice and of our attitude to things is revealed in what we do. I cannot begin to estimate what I have learnt about these things from Dee, my teacher in practice.

Abbreviations

References to the *Philosophical Investigations* are given by paragraph alone, except those to part two which are given by page reference and letter to indicate paragraph. I have used the familiar pagination prior to the compressed version on the new revised 3rd edition 2001. For other Wittgensteinian texts I have used the following abbreviations:

MS References to unpublished manuscripts follow the von Wright catalogue: G. H. von Wright, *Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1982, pp. 32ff.

NB + page number, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, ed. G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1961.

TLP + proposition number, *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, trans. by D. F. Pears and B. McGuinness, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961.

RFM + section number, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, ed. G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees and G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 3rd edn, 1978.

RPP II + section number, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. II, ed. G. H. von Wright and H. Nyman, trans. G. G. Luck, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980.

CV + page number, *Culture and Value: A Selection from the Posthumous Remains*, rev. 2nd edn with English translation, Oxford : Blackwell, 1998.

Z + section number, *Zettel*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1967.

CHAPTER ONE

Wittgenstein's Master Argument

1.1 Introduction

The existence of intentionality is a remarkable fact. It involves the idea of a subject having a point of view. This is not, *prima facie*, just another fact about how things are in the world. We might try to catalogue all the contingencies of the world, the different species of plant and animal, the physical forces that move mountains and the chemistry of our impact on the environment. The fact that we have a point of view and represent how things are in our thought and talk does not, however, appear to be just another item in the catalogue. It has the appearance of being a radically different sort of fact, a fact of which we have little idea how it could be so. How things are in the world – how volcanoes erupt, how industry pollutes, how birds migrate – with these sorts of things we have some idea of how and why they are so. When it comes to how it is that our thought and talk represents reality, we know that this is the case, but that it is the case is, at first sight, something of a mystery. *Aboutness* does not look natural. It might be ubiquitous, for us at least, but the aboutness of our thought and talk is not, unlike the colour of our hair, a straightforward natural fact.

Wittgenstein's central preoccupation was with the question of the conditions for the possibility of intentionality. I prefer to put the matter in terms of the conditions for the possibility of judgement. The reason for this concerns the role that the self as agent plays in Wittgenstein's argument of the conditions for the possibility of intentionality. I shall claim that Wittgenstein's central insight is that intentionality can only be made sense of from within a conception of a self with an attitude to the world, an attitude which is that of a will – an agent. The subject with intentionality is fundamentally an agent.

The notion of agency is required not because the subject of thought acts in and on the world, but because the subject of thought actively configures the attitude of their being a thinker. This involves a wilful organization of systems of representation. Too often systems of representation are thought of as structures (formal, social etc.) which we thinkers inhabit. The view that Wittgenstein presses throughout his work is the opposite of this. The role of the subject is fundamentally that of a judge, putting representations together to make best sense of our ongoing confrontation with things. This confrontation is our basic attitude to things, but it is an attitude that is managed and wilful. It is wilful not just in the sense that things impede our behaviour – that is true of animals and does not capture the real point of the concept of will. The world impedes our behaviour and this is something to which we take an attitude. Being an agent is having the capacity to alter perceptual inputs at will; it is the capacity to organize our engagements with things in order to get what we want. That is the rational attitude, it's an attitude of will.¹

In this opening chapter I want to lay out the foundations for this claim against the backdrop of the problematic for what I shall call 'Wittgenstein's master argument'. The argument has two phases, a negative phase and a positive phase. The former is familiar in the literature on Wittgenstein's work, especially on his later writings. What I call the positive phase is not usually acknowledged. It is the positive phase that introduces the role of the self-as-will.

I shall introduce the master argument by putting it in the context of three standard options on the question how intentionality is possible. These options are attempts at what I shall call 'animatory theories of meaning'. The negative phase of Wittgenstein's master argument is the rejection of animatory theories of meaning, but it is important to start with some appreciation of why such accounts of meaning can look tempting. At this point I keep references to Wittgenstein and the secondary literature to a minimum, for I want to concentrate on an outline analytical framework for thinking about intentionality. The framework provides a general orientation to much of the literature on Wittgenstein on meaning. It also provides a first account of where my reading of Wittgenstein is located with respect to the usual interpretations.

1.2 Animating Signs

The idea of an animatory theory of meaning is a leitmotif throughout modern philosophy. The idea is motivated by the following thought: signs, considered qua inscriptions or as the sounds that articulate them, do not bear meaning.

Signs, qua signs, are inert. In order to carry meaning they need to be animated.² The task of an animatory theory of meaning is to give an account of what brings signs to life. The need for an animatory theory of meaning reflects what I call bipartism about meaning. This is the view that an account of meaning has two components – an account of representations (inert signs) plus, e.g. the rules of use that animate them. Consider the following arrangement:

(1) ¶ŸŠžž ™® ®‡Š

If I ask if you see what I mean with (1) you will, of course, be lost for an answer. The signs mean nothing to you. They are raw ink marks. In order for these signs to come alive, in the way that the signs that make up the sentence you are now reading unproblematically possess meaning, it seems plausible to insist that there are two things about these signs that you need to know. You need to know what the signs stand for and you need to know how they should be used. When you know these you know the semantic power of the sign. There are two ingredients to semantic power: the signs' *representational power* and their *inferential power*. It is a question of considerable importance which, if either, of these powers is more primitive. Should we understand the representational power of a sign in terms of its inferential power, the inferential power in terms of the representational power, or are the two ideas mutually dependent? I ignore these questions for the moment. I shall return to them shortly. For now, let us assume that you need to know both the representational and inferential power of the sign.³

It is not enough to know what each sign individually stands for, you need also to know how the signs can be used, how they fit together to frame judgements that can be true or false. Knowing how the signs can be used is a matter of knowing their grammar – the systematic patterns of use that reveal the inferential connections between judgements formed with signs. Forming a judgement with an arrangement of signs is, in so far as it forms something that is either true or false, forming something that stands in inferential relations to other judgements. It does not seem to make sense to suppose that an arrangement of signs could express a judgement that was true or false and yet there was no conception available of how the truth or falsity of the judgement bore upon other judgements. For example, if you judge that

a is F

it must follow that

something is *F*.

More substantially, if I judge that object *a* is red, then it is at least partly constitutive of the idea that the judgement is a candidate for truth and falsity that its possession of a truth-value bears upon the truth-value of other judgements that can be framed with the name '*a*' and with the predicate '*... is red*'. For example, if it is true that

a is red

and it is true that

b is red

then, other things being equal, it must be true that *a* and *b* look similar with respect to the way that they fill out visual space. If they do not look similar and we know that *b* is red, that is *prima facie* reason to conclude that the judgement that *a* is red is false. Judgements do not stand alone in their possession of truth-values. Whether or not a judgement is true or false bears systematically on the truth-value of other judgements. To know the truth-conditions of a judgement is to know, *inter alia*, how its having a particular truth-value affects the distribution of truth-values over the range of potential judgements formed with common components.⁴ The way that judgements bear upon one another exploits the way they are composed of common components and the patterns of use governing the components. It is these patterns of use that I am calling grammar. Where there is judgement there must be grammar.

How this notion of grammar is marked in ordinary language depends on the contingencies of the sign systems we have developed. What is not contingent is that there must be grammar. It is important not to confuse the fundamental idea of grammar with ordinary language grammar. Suppose I said that

' $\text{¶}\text{§}\text{z}$ ' stands for Othello

that,

' $\text{®}\text{‡}\text{s}$ ' stands for Desdemona

and that,

' $\text{™}\text{®}$ ' stands for the two-place relation ___ loves

This still does not fix the judgement expressed at (1) until we know, for example, which direction we are to read the signs. This is a superficial point

about grammar, it concerns the way that ordinary language grammar marks the connections between one judgement and another. It does not much matter whether our sign systems are read from left to right, or from right to left, or indeed whether they are read in a single linear sequence at all. There is, in principle, no reason why signs could not be read in different directions on alternate days. It would not affect the ability of a sign system to carry meaning if we did this. There is, however, a more fundamental notion of grammar.

The claim that

'TMⓂ' stands for the two-place relation ___ loves

already invokes a notion of grammar, for the thing that 'TMⓂ' stands for is not an ordinary object. The thing picked out is something with a structure to it, a structure defined by the ordering of the two places that the relation binds. The idea that we can understand the sign string at (1) by being told the things that the various signs stand for already invokes a notion of grammar. It might seem that giving an account of the things the signs stand for would, in showing what (1) meant, reveal that the representational power of signs was primitive. Perhaps then, so the thought might go, the sign string at (1) is a simple string of names. The idea that the string as a whole is a string of names only looks plausible, however, because one of the signs stands for something structured. The supposition that all signs are names and that their semantic power can be accounted for solely in terms of their representational power only looks plausible by admitting an ontology of things that include items with organized 'gaps' in them, gaps that can be filled by ordered sequences of objects. It is, then, misleading to suppose that all signs can be treated as names as if their semantic power were exhausted by their representational power to stand for objects, for that requires a heterogeneous category of objects. In particular it includes the need to admit a category of objects with intrinsic structure to them. This structure binds ordinary objects together.⁵

This suggests that whether or not we take inferential power as the primitive idea, an account of intentionality that dealt only with the representational power of signs would be inadequate. The meaning of '___ loves' is not really explained by citing its representational power to stand for the relation ___ loves, for that claim presupposes a grasp of grammatical rules concerning the ordering of the places and the kind of entities that can fill those places. It is only by admitting a heterogeneous conception of objects into our ontology that we can make sense of the idea that representational power is primitive. But the heterogeneity of the conception of objects renders vacuous the defining claim of the idea that representational power is primitive, namely that judgements are formed by strings of names which do no

more than stand for their respective objects. That claim is only plausible if the range of things admitted as objects includes items, like relations, that have grammar built into them. But once that is admitted, it is plain that the concept of an object has been detached from its ordinary significance. Indeed, it becomes unclear that there is a real content left to the claim that all signs are names whose semantic power is exhausted by their representational power to stand for objects. There is a deep notion of grammar that we exploit when we say that ‘TM®’ stands for the two-place relation ‘___loves ..?’ It is the notion of grammar implicit in our understanding that, on being told this, we know what sorts of things can fill the gaps in the two-place relation and that it matters in which order they fill the gaps.

I shall return to consider the relationship between representational power and inferential power later. The above considerations suggest that a theory that dealt only with the former power would be inadequate, but this gives us no reason to assume that inferential power should therefore be taken as primitive. It means, so far, only that we need to find a place both for the notion of the sign's representational power and its inferential power. Now, the inferential power of a sign is the grammar that governs its patterns of use. The predicate ‘... is red’ has a pattern of use that governs its use in inferences that connect judgements involving it with judgements employing other predicates. It is in virtue of this grammar that the connections between

a is red

and,

a is coloured

and,

a is not green

obtain. ‘Grammar’ here means the standard ways of using the expression that govern its contribution to determining the truth-value of judgements in which it figures. These patterns constitute our notion of correct use. There is a normativity built into the notion of grammar. If a subject judges that *a* is red then, *ceteris paribus*, they ought not also to judge that it is green, although they ought to judge that it is coloured. There is not an option about whether or not someone follows these normative patterns. One cannot credibly wake up one morning and decide, ‘Today I am going to use “... is red” in a totally different way, a way that no one has ever used before and that is unrelated to

any previous uses of this expression or any other.' That sort of thing is not possible. It is, of course, possible to decide to use '... is red' as everyone else uses '... is green'. But the deceptive use of an expression trades on patterns of use that are not questioned. The sense in which it seems true to say that there is no option about whether or not you follow the normative patterns of grammar, is the sense that there is no option but that you acknowledge that there are constraints on your use of signs. You have to use them according to patterns that exist independently of your will. You are not and cannot be utterly free in the way in which you use signs. You might, of course, confound other language users by substituting one pattern for another, but what does not seem possible is that you use a sign meaningfully but without any pattern at all. To accept this is to accept a minimal realism about grammar. One of the things that is distinctive of my reading of Wittgenstein is my account of his realism about grammar and how he manages to be a realist without slipping into Platonism. Wittgenstein is often treated as an anti-realist about grammar in his later writings. I shall argue that his interest in grammar runs throughout his work and, with respect to his realism, there is no significant change in his position. What changes is his account of the metaphysics that supports the realism.

To use a sign meaningfully is to use it in a way that it makes a contribution to the determination of the truth-conditions for the judgements in which it figures. The supposition that you could use a sign meaningfully without there being any grammar to its employment amounts to the supposition that the sign could contribute to the truth-conditions of a judgement, and thereby to the judgement's possession of a truth-value, without its contribution revealing any systematic connection between what it would be for the judgement to possess a truth-value and what it would be for other judgements to be true or false. But that then is the supposition that judgements can stand alone in their possession of truth-values, contrary to our earlier argument.

It is extraordinarily difficult to see what this supposition could amount to. You might think, perhaps, that our inability to make sense of the idea of a judgement standing alone in its possession of truth-value is a function of something peculiar to the way we grasp concepts, something peculiar to the human way of understanding meaning. Perhaps other creatures, or perhaps God, could grasp the meaning of a judgement that stood alone? But this hypothesis is purely speculative, for without a positive account of how it could be the case that a judgement could be true or false without there being any conception of how its being so bears upon the truth/falsity of other judgements, we have no grip on what this hypothesis means. It is an empty gesture that provides no reason to suppose that the idea gestured at makes sense.

An animatory theory of meaning is a theory that shows how signs come alive. Signs come alive by having both representational and inferential power. We have already seen that there is a *prima facie* case for not taking representational power as primitive or, at least, insisting that whatever goes into an account of the representational power of a sign it delivers an account of the sign's inferential power. If this is right, an animatory theory of meaning must have some account of the source of grammar. It will have something to say about the ground of the patterns that constrain our use of signs.

Historically, animatory theories have tried to locate the source of grammar in three different locations: Platonic heaven, the individual speaker's mind and the speaker's community. The first and third of these locations seem particularly appropriate as candidates for the source of grammar. This is because the notion of grammar is the notion of patterns of use that constrain our employment of signs, so, instinctively, an animatory theory of meaning will provide something independent of individual speakers that can, as it were, police their sign use. Platonic heaven and the community's behaviour look, to many people, to be appropriate candidates. In contrast, the second source of grammar – the individual speaker's mind – looks persuasive if we concentrate more on the representational power of signs. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the previous considerations, we know that any account of the sign's representational power must be capable of delivering from that basis an account of the sign's inferential power. And so, although the temptation to find the source of grammar in the individual speaker's mind might arise from the apparent appropriateness of this source as an account of the representational power of signs, it is a condition of adequacy on such accounts that they deliver an account of grammar.

None of these locations of the source of grammar is, however, credible. The first and second are generally held to be particularly inane suggestions about the source of grammar. The third still has supporters and, even, supporters who think that Wittgenstein's contribution to a philosophical theory of meaning was to show how and why it is the only possible source of grammar. Nevertheless, all of the three sources for grammar face immediate and obvious problems. It will be helpful to get a preliminary account of what is problematic with the three putative sources of grammar which I will refer to as the Platonist, Cartesian and community sources of grammar. I do this not because I think that there is a better alternative for an account of the source of grammar, but because I think that one of the most important lessons that we can take from Wittgenstein is the rejection of the very idea of an animatory theory of meaning. If we take the existence of signs and their patterns as the starting point of our enquiry, it looks compulsory to give an account of that