# Later Wittgenstein's Anti-Philosophical Therapy

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**Abstract**
The object of this essay is to discuss Ludwig Wittgenstein's remarks in *Philosophical Investigations* and elsewhere in the posthumously published writings concerning the role of therapy in relation to philosophy. Wittgenstein's reflections seem to suggest that there is a kind of philosophy or mode of investigation targeting the philosophical grammar of language uses that gratuitously give rise to philosophical problems, and produce in many thinkers philosophical anxieties for which the proper therapy is intended to offer relief. Two possible objectives of later Wittgensteinian therapy are proposed, for subjective *psychological* versus objective *semantic* symptoms of ailments that a therapy might address for the sake of relieving philosophical anxieties. The psychological in its most plausible form is rejected, leaving only the semantic. Semantic therapy in the sense defined and developed is more general and long-lasting, and more in the spirit of Wittgenstein's project on a variety of levels. A semantic approach treats language rather than the thinking, language-using subject as the patient needing therapy, and directs its attention to the treatment of problems in language and the conceptual framework a language game use expresses in its philosophical grammar, rather than to soothing unhappy or socially ill-adjusted individual psychologies.

## 1. Therapy for Philosophy

Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* §133 suggests to many readers that he regards philosophy in the later period as a kind of therapy for conceptual confusions. We engage in philosophy in the sense of investigating the philosophical grammar of key terms that appear in the formulation of putative philosophical problems, and in the process, therapeutic in itself, we see that these words either have a harmless meaning or no meaning at all. They have no meaning at all if they are abstracted from the practical context in which they could be used as tokens in a pragmatically grounded language game. If they are not abstracted from a genuine language game, then they must be part of a genuine language game, in which case they will only have philosophically harmless and therefore philosophically uninteresting ordinary language game meanings practically and in a

doi:10.1017/S0031819114000011 © The Royal Institute of Philosophy, 2014
First published online 11 March 2014


https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819114000011 Published online by Cambridge University Press

sense extra-semantically grounded as they must finally be, in a form of life. Wittgenstein writes:

> §133 It is not our aim to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of our words in unheard-of ways.
>
> For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear.
>
> The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.—The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is not longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question.—Instead, we now demonstrate a method, by examples; and the series of examples can be broken off.—Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem.
>
> There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies.[1]

The passage is equivocal with respect to the claim that Wittgenstein considers philosophical thinking when investigating the philosophical grammar of problematic terminologies to be therapeutic. Or that philosophers in particular among all other walks of life are in need of a therapy for the kind of mental ailment that must befall them whenever they try to clarify and advance their philosophical ideas. A closer examination of the passage nevertheless reveals that Wittgenstein explicitly only compares the *multiplicity* of philosophical methods to the *multiplicity* of different therapies. He says only, as though applying his family resemblance category to the two cases, that they are 'like' one another in this respect.[2]

Elsewhere, however, especially in the posthumous *Big Typescript* and the editorially collected *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (*Culture and Value*), Wittgenstein more directly hints at the identification of a treatment to relieve thought of its putative philosophical preoccupations as once again vaguely 'like' an illness. It is conceivable that this would be intended in something like the way Wittgenstein's fellow Viennese contemporary Sigmund Freud proposes in the case of

[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd Edition, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1989) (all references to Wittgenstein's text in the notes below are abbreviated as PI, to avoid confusion with the eponymous journal).

[2] See Garth Hallett, *A Companion to Wittgesntein's Philosophical Investigations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 9–11; 233; 335–336. For detailed notes on the meaning of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* §133.



https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819114000011 Published online by Cambridge University Press

psychopathologies. Wittgenstein maintains that philosophical reflection as such is itself or is a sign or symptom of an intellectual conceptual syndrome that requires a general therapy to free thinkers from engaging in philosophy of any sort and at any level whatsoever. It accomplishes nothing from the standpoint of Wittgenstein's ambitions, if, for example, all nominalists overnight were to become realists, at the same time that all realists became nominalists. The point is to overcome philosophical oppositions, which in a sense is to transcend philosophy as it has come to be practiced. Thus, Wittgenstein writes:

> As I do philosophy, its entire task is to shape expression in such a way that certain disquietudes disappear.[3]
>
> The philosopher is someone who has to cure in himself many diseases of the understanding, before he can arrive at the notions of common sense.[4]

Later in *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein adds:

> 254. …What we 'are tempted to say' in such a case is, of course, not philosophy; but it is its raw material. Thus, for example, what a mathematician is inclined to say about the objectivity and reality of mathematical facts, is not a philosophy of mathematics, but something for mathematical *treatment*.
>
> 255. The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness.

To make this case properly, Wittgenstein must argue in *Philosophical Investigations* that language functions only as a language game with rules determined by the game's pragmatic point and purpose against a background of cultural expectations that have taken shape over time as part of a form of life. Wittgenstein says in several places, as we have now seen, that one way of doing or working with the subject matter of philosophy is *like* a therapy or treatment for an illness.

What we do not know from such a literary description alone is how or in what exact sense philosophy in an approved mode for Wittgenstein is supposed to be like therapy. We are given no clear

[3] Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript: TS213*, edited and translated by C.G. Luckhardt and M.A.E. Aue (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2005), 421 (marginal manuscript page reference).

[4] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value (Vermischte Bemerkungen)*, revised edition, edited by G.H. von Wright, with the assistance of Heikki Nyman, translated by Peter Winch (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 50.



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sense of what positive comparison Wittgenstein has in mind for philosophy and therapy, and just how far the similarity is supposed to extend and exactly where it is supposed to end. If the textual evidence supports the proposition that the later Wittgenstein had partly developed an anti-philosophical therapeutic investigation of philosophical grammars in order to relieve philosophy of its conventional concerns, as under some more exact interpretation it would surely appear to do, then the question inevitably arises as to what kind of philosophical object, a person or something else, psychological or semantic, with the syndrome or ailment of philosophical confusion Wittgenstein would diagnose as in need of therapy.

In other words: Who is sick? Is it the individual people tormented by nagging but actually meaningless philosophical problems? Are they the patients requiring therapy? Or is their confused philosophical thinking and all its associated anxiety phenomenologically speaking merely a symptom of a deeper underlying malady in thinking that can only be reformed by investigating the philosophical grammars of problematic terms and phrases used in advancing philosophical analyses, distinctions, problems, questions, solutions, and the like, reflecting the maleable, corrigible conceptual framework of an influential linguistic sub-community who want to think and speak correctly, and deliberately or inadvertently sometimes set an example for larger parts of society to follow as a cultural trend. What Wittgenstein might consider as requiring treatment or therapy, the patient, so to speak, to be cured, need not be a person of individual psychology, an individual consciousness. It could be something more objective, yet still encultured, such as the language in which putative philosophical problems are formulated. It sounds extreme to say that we are then speaking of emotional or related psychological problems of the sort that clinical therapeutic psychology already tries to treat in afflicted individuals who have experienced a literal freezing of the capacity for normal functioning as human beings by virtue of having devoted their lives to the pursuit of philosophical inquiry. We are referring instead to the abuses of rule-governed language game philosophical grammars resulting in what must be the meaningless formulation of philosophical concepts, definitions, distinctions, propositions, and especially arguments modeled on the proof structures of mathematics and verification criteria in the natural sciences.[5]

[5] See Charles Crittenden, 'Wittgenstein on Philosophical Therapy and Understanding', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 1970, **10**: 20–43. Roy Brand, 'Philosophical Therapy: Wittgenstein and Freud', *International Studies in Philosophy*, 2000, **32**: 1–22. Christopher Gefwert, *Wittgenstein*



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## 2. Psychological Dysfunction or Delusion as the Target of Later Wittgensteinian Therapy

If the problem is understood to be some sort of literal psychological dysfunction, then we can refer in the same context to later Wittgensteinian therapy more specifically as a remedy from whatever philosophical questioning disrupts what would otherwise be a more normal healthier life course. It is the ideal, attainable in practice or not, whereby we can stop doing philosophy.[6]

What exactly does this mean, and exactly what kind of relief are we expecting from the sort of therapies Wittgenstein mentions? We distinguish two broad categories of therapy, each supporting a different interpretation of what Wittgenstein might have intended in these key passages. The categories of therapeutic objects are the *psychological* and the *semantic*. One way to bring out the difference between the two is to observe that if a therapy offers psychological relief from philosophical problems, the problems might nevertheless continue unabated and unresolved, while producing no psychological distress or inhibiting any normal course of human activity. We can take a stupefying drug that blunts our interest in or capacity for entertaining philosophical problems. That, presumably, is not among the multiplicity of therapies Wittgenstein wants to consider. The difference between psychological and semantic directed later Wittgensteinian therapy can be applied even if we consider that any semantic theory must somehow be based on or otherwise related to psychological factors, or in any case to the fact of thinking and content of certain thoughts of psychological subjects. It is thinker's thoughts and their expression in language that have meaning, and so the theory

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*on Thought, Language and Philosophy: From Theory to Therapy* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2003). Garry Hagberg, 'On Philosophy as Therapy: Wittgenstein, Cavell, and Autobiographical Writing' (Symposium: Wittgenstein and Literary Aesthetics), *Philosophy and Literature*, 2003, **27**: 196–210. Phil Hutchinson, 'What's the Point of Elucidation?', *Metaphilosophy*, 2007, **38**: 691–713. Matthew Crippen, 'The Totalitarianism of Therapeutic Philosophy: Reading Wittgenstein Through Critical Theory', *Essays in Philosophy*, 2007, **8**: 1–24. Rom Harré, 'Grammatical Therapy and the Third Wittgenstein', *Metaphilosophy*, 2008, **39**: 484–491.

[6] Wittgenstein confided to M. O'C. Drury: 'You know I said I can stop doing philosophy when I like. That is a lie! I *can't*'. M. O'C Drury in 'Conversations With Wittgenstein', *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, edited by Rush Rhees (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1984), 219, note 7.



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of meaning presupposes psychological occurrences, even if it does not yield any part of its own explanatory territory to the logically contingent scientific discoveries of an empirical descriptive psychology.

Whereas, if later Wittgensteinian therapy from philosophical problems is understood to be semantic, then the therapy must involve something more objective than merely quieting subjective anxieties in this or that particular philosopher's psyche. It must have something to do instead with what kinds of language use are rule-governed activities, and which are eliminable dross. As it is, we do not suppose that any alphabetical or lexical combination available from the resources of a given language are guaranteed to be meaningful in the sense of playing a role in a genuine language game. There must be identifiable rules to be determined by a language game's point and purpose, against a pragmatic cultural background that Wittgenstein describes as a form of life, and that he models in simplified form to make particular philosophical observations about how meaning is ascribed to many different uses of language, all of which have a specific job to do and work to help language users accomplish. Why, then, should we suppose that putative philosophical discourse has a role in any genuine pragmatically grounded and rule-governed language game? If philosophy as a genuine language game is understood as something like other games intended merely for amusement, if that is philosophy's point and purpose, then the point and purpose philosophy has taken itself to have would immediately evaporate, and it would be impossible to find serious enthusiastic philosophy language games players for whom the stakes were nothing more elevated than an otherwise pointless pastime.

That is, arguably, on a credible interpretation, precisely the place to which Wittgenstein wants to bring the reader, to see that philosophy is a waste of time. When we see that this is so, we can gradually free ourselves from the spell of philosophical disquietude. There is a path of recovery to normal thinking that each person troubled by philosophical questions can undertake individually, in order to truly appreciate that the philosophical terminologies used to formulate philosophical problems cannot be part of any genuine language game, and therefore cannot be meaningful in the only consideration-worthy pragmatic sense of the word.[7]

[7] Hans-Johann Glock, '*Philosophical Investigations* Section 128: Theses in Philosophy and Undogmatic Procedure', in Robert Arrington and Glock (eds), *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: Text and Context* (London: Routledge, 1991), 69–88. Judith Genova, *Wittgenstein: A Way of Seeing* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995), especially pages xiii–xvii; 1–6.



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Later Wittgensteinian therapy might then be directed at rooting out usages that are pragmatically unsupported by the rules of any genuine language game serving any point or purpose, and that consequently do not play a role in any genuine language game. If such usages are eliminated in the observance of philosophical grammar, then they do not remain to trip up other philosophical thinkers who may suppose that the extravagant terminologies especially of any systematic philosophy must have meaning in legitimate applications. If Wittgenstein sometimes uses conventional philosophy as part of a broader range of anti-philosophical therapies, it is only in the spirit of a grand *reductio ad absurdum*, as in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. The dramatic justification is contained in the fact that using philosophy to defeat philosophy is necessarily also self-defeating.[8]

If Wittgenstein's anti-philosophical therapy succeeds, then there is no need, as has sometimes been proposed, to distinguish between psychological *delusion* as the dysfunctional factor in philosophical reasoning versus veridical understanding of a philosophical problem situation, philosophically preferable pictures to their opposite less preferable alternatives. There should be no motivation to defend a preferred philosophy's meta-philosophical picture as presenting advantages over leading alternatives. If Wittgenstein's anti-philosophical therapy succeeds, then philosophy as a theoretical discipline rather than clarificatory dissolution of belief in the meaningfulness and answerability of putative distinctively philosophical problems effectively comes to an end. Although it does so only in the way that a disease is incrementally brought under control, tissue by tissue and organ by organ, but ultimately just as thoroughly as it was meant to do for very different reasons, more suddenly, theatrically, definitively, and all at once, in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.[9]

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J. Jeremy Winnewski, 'Five Forms of Philosophical Therapy', *Philosophy Today*, 2003, **47**: 53–79. Bob Plant, 'The End(s) of Philosophy: Rhetoric, Therapy and Wittgenstein's Pyrrhonism', *Philosophical Investigations*, 2004, **27**: 222–257.

[8] I discuss these topics at greater length in Dale Jacquette, *Wittgenstein's Thought in Transition* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1998), 134–159.

[9] See Jacquette, 'Wittgenstein as Trans-Analytic-Continental Philosopher', *Postanalytic and Metacontinental: Crossing Philosophical Divides*, edited by James Williams, Jack Reynolds, James Chase, and Edwin Mares (London: Continuum Books, 2010), 157–172. Also my review of Alice Crary (ed.) *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life: Essays in*



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## 3. Dilemma of All and Some Psychologically Dysfunctional Philosophers

The dilemma for the psychological interpretation of the condition from which the later Wittgenstein's therapy is supposed to offer relief is that either all philosophers or only some are psychologically disadvantaged in the way the interpretation is sometimes superimposed.

If it is only some philosophers that are philosophically deluded, psychologically speaking, finding the problem in their states of mind rather than in language or the presumed conceptual scheme of thinkers actively engaged in philosophical reflections, then we are no further advanced than in the conventional oppositional antagonisms of philosophical positions, concepts and counter-concepts, distinctions and counter-distinctions, arguments and counter-arguments, and counter-counter-arguments, interpretations and counter-interpretations. We try in that case to get on the winning side of any philosophical conflict, wherever the best arguments seem to point, and we back those with all our might and main, reserving some of our energy for polemics against the opposite opinions and their supporting proofs.

That is an effective and some would say noble strategy for the conduct of philosophical study, but it is not at all what Wittgenstein has in mind. He wants philosophical questioning and philosophical problems, philosophical concepts, distinctions, arguments, interpretations, and their complements, to disappear altogether, as something not needed in the pragmatic economy by which human beings direct their lives in playing genuine legitimate language games.

Should it be true, on the contrary, that all philosophers suffer from the psychological syndrome of being philosophically deluded, then the thesis begins to lose interest along with its sacrifice of logical significance. If some philosophers are philosophically deluded and hence in need of therapy by the philosophically undeluded, then that is nothing more than putting in different words the perennial opposition of different philosophical ideas, ideologies and methodologies. The undeluded are then those with whom we also philosophically agree, and the deluded those with whom we and the other anointed undeluded disagree. If all philosophers are deluded and there is no refuge from delusion within philosophy, then there is nothing more interesting to say, except that philosophy should just

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*Honor of Cora Diamond, Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (electronic format), http://ndpr.nd.edu/ review.cfm?id = 11863; 2007.12.05.



https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819114000011 Published online by Cambridge University Press

come to an end. That is significantly not at all how Wittgenstein proceeds in *Philosophical Investigations*. What he proposes there instead is that the therapy require the incremental meticulous examination of putatively meaningful philosophical language in order to uncover its specific abuses of pragmatically justified philosophical grammar. The methods, counterexample, comparison of usages and exposing usages to criticism as to their exact conceivable meaning, finding contradictions and other features supportive of philosophical confusions, are themselves philosophical, even if they are a means to an end that must ultimately swallow their own tails or fall on their own swords.

If all philosophers are deluded, then philosophy itself must come under other custodianship. If only some philosophers are deluded and they can help others to become undeluded, then we are only talking about the same old dialectical oppositions that have raged in Western philosophy ever since its inception, but that Wittgenstein seems in some passages to maintain he wants to overcome. The philosophically deluded can only be distinguished from the philosophically undeluded by thinkers with an omniscient perspective as to where philosophical truth is finally to be found. This, however, is precisely the perspective to which conventional philosophy aspires anyway with no resolutions historically in the directions that the discipline has taken or foreseen on the horizon for its future. It is impossible to see how progress can be made here that does not simply perpetuate conventional philosophical exchange, rather than putting it all gently to sleep.

It is in fact exactly the continuation of this attitude toward the conduct of philosophy, dividing the deluded from the undeluded on the grounds of being able to distinguish true from false philosophy, from which the later Wittgenstein intellectually recoils and for which he seems to believe a therapy is required. Wittgenstein cannot possibly accept any philosophical or anti-philosophical therapy that involves carrying forward the traditional program of philosophy from which therapeutic relief is sought. That situation in philosophy is no advance over what in traditional terminology is often a rhetorical and polemical standoff situation in the progress conventional philosophy tries to make through dialogue, criticism, counter-criticism, and dialectic. Consider the interminable debates between realism and nominalism, consequentialism and deontology, and any philosophical opposition of sufficiently respectable pedigree. This is surely an important part of the reason why in our tradition we honor Socrates as the founding figure of whatever it is that philosophy may have tried to accomplish in the continuous tradition stemming from the ancient Greeks.



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My alternative suggestion is that Wittgenstein may well occasionally reveal and in other places merely hint at an anti-philosophical therapy directed against some of the endless profitless spirals of argument within traditional philosophy. I balance these considerations with an interpretation according to which later Wittgensteinian therapy has nothing whatsoever to do with a concept of philosophical delusion as a psychological illness or symptom of illness requiring philosophical grammatical therapy. I propose a semantic solution that goes beyond how this or that philosopher feels about this or that putative philosophical problem. If there is anti-philosophical therapy in the later Wittgenstein, I think for this reason that it can have nothing to do with conceptual, cognitive, or thetic delusion of any kind, and especially not with any specific philosophical delusion of a specific deluded philosopher. Wittgenstein's anti-philosophical therapy may nevertheless be directed at what all philosophical anxieties have in common. This is unsurprisingly the language in which the anxiety provoking problems, questions, answers, propositions, distinctions, concepts, and the like, are expressed.

If Wittgenstein's anti-philosophical therapy succeeds, then, rather than having engineered a clarificatory dissolution of belief in the meaningfulness and unanswerability of putative philosophical problems, philosophy as a theoretical discipline comes to an end in a different way. It is only after the process has proceeded through all the details of all the potentially problematic philosophical terms by which putative philosophical problems are expressed, and the lessons learned along the way are transmitted into the culture through language in the lessons taught children when they are old enough to undersand. In the *Tractatus*, philosophical confusions are eliminated by the later discredited three pillars of logical atomism, picture theory of meaning, and general form of proposition. In *Philosophical Investigations* it is alerting thinkers to how philosophical problems needlessly arise when language goes on holiday away from its pragmatic meaning conditions. We cure ourselves of conceptual illnesses that take the form of supposedly meaningful philosophical problems and their associated intellectual anxieties and disquietudes, when we come to recognize through the therapeutic process of searching out the relevant philosophical grammars that detached from pragmatic rule-governed language games the key terms of philosophical discourse are lacking in meaning or at best wrongly used in philosophical discourse.[10]

[10] Here I have in mind especially Eugen Fischer, *Philosophical Delusion and its Therapy: Outline of a Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2011),



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## 4. Psychological versus Semantic Interpretations

The psychology of philosophical anxiety is important as a symptom of more deeply underlying conditions. The question is to what object the later Wittgensteinian therapy can best be understood as being directed. To the symptoms themselves, psychological but nonetheless remarkable phenomenologically as they are, Wittgenstein would seem to have higher ambitions than merely to cure himself and as many others as he can plausibly reach of philosophcial anxieties at the individual psychological level.

Future generations can be spared falling into the same damaging conceptual confusions only if language is targeted as the diseased limb in need of therapy from its meaningless, pragmatically unsupported word forms that bewitch intelligence, that encourage pictures that afterward determine the direction of certain of our thoughts in otherwise insupportable ways. It is only if language itself is semantically purged especially of its purported philosophical terminologies that are not tokens in any rule-governed genuine language game as part of and grounded semantically albeit extra-linguistically in any form of life. The semantic as contrasted with the psychological interpretation of later Wittgensteinian therapy goes to the cause of philosophical anxiety, with or without its contingently accompanying psychological ephemera.

The heart of the problem, as one imagines Wittgenstein also recognizes, is philosophical language. It was excluded in the *Tractatus* by logical atomism, the picture theory of meaning, and especially by the general form of proposition. Post-*Tractatus*, Wittgenstein is no less committed to rooting out philosophy by way of its abuses of the pragmatic meaning conditions of all the kinds of non- or extra-philosophical genuine rule-governed language games. If Wittgenstein is concerned primarily with relieving individual psychologies of anxieties occasioned by reflection on philosophical problems, rather than with curing language of and innoculating it against abusive philosophical misapplications, then the only way to obtain long-term therapeutic relief is to deal directly with language and the conceptual

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especially pages 256–257. See page 257: 'Unwarranted but distressing or otherwise disabling emotions are constitutive of emotional problems…In other words, Wittgenstein's chief goal is the therapeutic aim of solving emotional problems.' Fischer represents the psychological interpretation of the later Wittgenstein's concept of philosophical therapy to which I am generally opposed.



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framework that a language purports to express. If language can be cured therapeutically of the philosophy that has infiltrated its pragmatically justified and well-adjusted language games, as the semantic interpretation of later Wittgensteinian therapy recommends, then associated psychological epiphenomena ought to disappear on their own when language and its culturally enforced guidelines no longer encourage wasteful, meaningless and, indeed, psychologically anxiety provoking philosophical investigations.

Philosophy, however unconventionally conceived, does not generally concern itself with soothing individual distraught psyches, however consoling certain of its teachings and writings readers under the right circumstances may sometimes find them to be. Such an agenda would reduce philosophy to psychology, or the practice of philosophy anyway to the practice of psychology. This may be an attractive model for some philosophers to adopt, but it does not seem like Wittgenstein's purpose. He elsewhere argues the inadequacy of naked intentionality as determining reference and the objectives of actions including naming and reading. His attention throughout is focused on the conditions for meaningfully engaging in the wide range of pragmatically supported genuine language games. With these he attempts to uncover all that the philosophical grammars of these genuine language game applications imply, what they permit and forbid philosophically grammatically, and what they allow and disallow as meaningful on ultimately pragmatic grounds.

If you can know that you are in pain, then it must be conceivable for you to doubt that you are in pain. The nature of pain is nevertheless such as to make it inconceivable to doubt that you are in pain, doubting whether you are in pain not being quite the same thing. Therefore, it is not possible to know that you are in pain. Nor is the fact that you are in pain something of which you consequently have privileged epistemic access that other persons can only infer by analogy when they experience your behavior secondhand. Unlike yourself, they can also doubt that you are in pain, so they can know it. Ironically, you are the one person who cannot know that you are in pain, just as surely as you cannot doubt that you are in pain. It is a consequence of the knowing-doubting polarity quarried by investigation from the philosophical grammar of uncontroversial examples, and then applied as an established generalization also to the concept of pain. Which might be regarded in a critical light as an extravagant conceptual leap.

Wittgenstein can only hope to clean up and police a small corner of interesting or influential philosophical misapplications of language in



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transacting the putative exchanges of conventional philosophy in an exemplary way. Others may be inspired by the example to emulate and collectively carry forward the purging of language of philosophy supporting terminologies and distinctions beyond what is available to pragmatically grounded genuine language games. An evolved intellectual culture that does not extend meaning to philosophical discourse as only pretending to be tokens in a genuine rule-governed language game, but holds the pragmatic line to the exclusion of putative philosophical language, would relieve philosophical anxiety and incidentally its psychological symptoms. It is only at this deeper semantic level that one imagines Wittgenstein being satisfied to practice any type of anti-philosophical therapy, leaving the supervenient psychological distress to be alleviated thereby as each distinct source of philosophical anxiety is eliminated from language and the corresponding conceptual framework up the supervenience tree. We might say, on the later Wittgenstein's behalf, that the psychological consequences are an inessential after-thought, important as they are symptomatically from a diagnostic standpoint of the more fundamental troubles hidden beneath the surface, to be investigated in the philosophical grammar of thought and language.

Thus, on general terms, for these reasons, it appears preferable to interpret the later Wittgenstein's model of therapeutic analysis of the philosophical grammar of the language in which phlosophical concepts, distinctions, propositions, and arguments are expressed, as semantic rather than superficially individually and subjectively, if not privately, psychological, according to the distinction described. Wittgenstein's therapy is directed toward language in the first and final instance, where the problem resides. It is only in reflection in the passing moments of human consciousness that the accompanying qualia of pleasure or displeasure, anxiety or freedom from anxiety, are to be found, and philosophy has no special techniques for dealing with dysfunctionally pulsating neurophysiologies. The differences in therapies that Wittgenstein describes are in any event not differences between the circumstances or biological constitution of different psychological subjects suffering from psychological anxieties of any kind, which might be philosophical in any given case or repressed infant sexuality, or God knows what. The differences that concern Wittgenstein are rather those higher order semantic considerations between different genuine language games from which certain terms may have been extracted for presumably unintentional philosophical abuse and misapplication. That Wittgenstein is targeting language itself with his therapy in this way on the proposed interpretation, rather than the psychological lives of individual language users,



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is clear from the way he takes specimens of language use and so to speak lays them out on the philosophical grammar dissecting table for a draconian therapy on behalf of language and thought more generally, profiting from the purging of its potential philosophical misapplications, through an uncompromising pragmatic account of the meaning conditions for propositions and related constructions for all different kinds of distinctive genuine language games.

## 5. Wittgenstein's Exclusion of Philosophical Language Games

For Wittgenstein, multiplicities of therapies are provided to relieve the mind of philosophical anxieties through the patient case-by-case investigation of the philosophical grammar of language that has gone on holiday and gotten us all into avoidable philosophical trouble. The effort to provide a perspicuous representation of the rules of pragmatically justified language games, if any, in which the troublesome terminology appears, is supposed to reveal as it reminds us that problematic philosophical discourse does not earn its keep alongside pragmatically indispensable language games. Where explication requires that we understand the pragmatically grounded point and purpose of a language game rule for using the terminology under appropriate circumstances to accomplish a useful or playful goal. Where language games are understood as practical pursuits with a practical point and purpose grounded in a form of life.

That job description specifically excludes philosophy, which we don't really seem to need for anything in a healthy, happy or anyway normal human life. At least not when shopping for five red apples or working on a building site with pillars, slabs and beams. If we only consider the philosophical grammar of any term usages in a language game as grounded in a practical form of life in Wittgenstein's later (anti-) philosophy, and if we assume that there is no form of life that includes philosophy or the practice of philosophy, then philosophy as a meaningful language game is eliminated. These are significant assumptions for the feasibility of the model that Wittgenstein does not explicitly consider or show any sign of awareness of in the later writings. The interpretation nevertheless exerts a powerfully compulsive attraction.

There are unavoidable issues entailed by this understanding of Wittgenstein's model of anti-philosophical therapy in the later writings. For example: Why should Wittgenstein question the fact and try



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to oppose the semantic legitimacy of the extant practice of philosophy that in one sense has evolved as naturally as language games used in grocery shopping and the building trades? That one must always distinguish good from bad philosophy is not a revolutionary observation. Wittgenstein in the end does so himself. This is yet again the problem in alternative language of distinguishing correctly and without philosophical prejudice cognitively deluded from undeluded thinking in philosophy. Criticizing the kind of philosophy he finds other thinkers engaged in, while supposing in the meantime that he is entitled to engage in what he calls philosophical investigations of philosophical grammar, brings Wittgenstein dangerously close to the edge of hypocrisy. The final aim of the inquiry, he further says, is therapeutic, with the specific aim of enabling thought to disengage itself from doing philosophy and concerning itself with philosophical problems altogether. As collateral support for the interpretation, we might reference M. O'C Drury, in his 'Conversations With Wittgenstein', who quotes Wittgenstein reportedly as remarking: 'A bad philosopher is like a slum landlord. It is my job to put him out of business'.[11]

Wittgenstein opens the lid on the toolbox of language to show us all the different kinds and categories. He tours the cabin of a locomotive with a panel hosting different kinds of handles, levers and controls. He lists many of the things we can do with language, all the language games we can play with it. These applications go far beyond what the *Tractatus* had allowed, with its unflinching restriction to the logically contingent description of possible *Tatsachen* or states of affairs, with tautology and contradiction along for the ride. Wittgenstein nevertheless has no tools and no levers for doing philosophy or engaging in any philosophical language game. The reason Wittgenstein does not include asking or answering a philosophical question, formulating a philosophical theory, or the like, in his list of examples of things we can do with language, is that Wittgenstein in the later period is now in the grip of another picture of how meaning works in thought and language, different from the picture that he admits held him captive when he was engaged in the *Tractatus* anti-philosophy, but a powerful and thought-confining picture nonetheless.

What Wittgenstein maintains in *Philosophical Investigations* §115 is nevertheless worth more discerning reflection. He says, not that the *Tractatus* picture was subjectively psychologically engrained in his

[11] M. O'C Drury in 'Conversations With Wittgenstein', *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, edited by Rush Rhees (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 117.



https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819114000011 Published online by Cambridge University Press

thought, where it may have spawned an individual cognitive failure of the sort that might otherwise be envisioned. Rather, Wittgenstein says that: 'A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in *our language* [*in unserer Sprache*] and *language* seemed to repeat it to us inexorably' (emphases in English translation added). If this vital clue is pursued, then it strongly suggests that it is not a *psychological* problem for individual philosophically troubled thinkers that Wittgenstein confronts with his special sense of therapy in *Philosophical Investigations*, but rather something *semantic*, something reflecting in thought and language a *cognitive*, *intellectual*, or *philosophical*, even *doxastic* or *epistemic*, as he describes it also metaphorically in §109, 'bewitchment of our intelligence by means of our *language* [*unserer Sprache*]' (emphasis added). Here Wittgenstein says explicitly that the problem exists in language, implying, as far as the metaphor goes, that it is language itself that is the patient that needs appropriate treatment, therapy and a cure. The illness has superficial symptoms in our psychology, presenting themselves as cognitive failures, obsession with seemingly unanswerable questions, and other sorts of dysfunctional behavior. The illness itself is conceptual, and can only be found and remedied outside individual psychology in language.

Language and its encrustations of uses and misunderstandings as we find them in pragmatically justified language games is not the individual suffering psyché, the philosopher potentially in need of therapy. It is objective rather than subjective, and Wittgenstein always treats it as such, downplaying the idiosyncracies of particular psychologies at every opportunity. Could it be, therefore, that for the later Wittgenstein the suffering patient in need of therapy is not any individual thinker, philosopher by profession or otherwise, but language itself? If it is language that needs to be cured of philosophy by the right-thinking, right-practicing philosopher, the semantic rather than psychological that stands in need of later Wittgensteinian therapy in the investigation of philosophical grammars, then sensations, perceptions and emotions of individual psychological subjects do not enter in or play any but the most accidental and epiphenomenal role for Wittgenstein. They are excluded once again as in the *Tractatus* by ingenious application of the general form of proposition and a devastating semantic-ontic interpretation of Ockham's razor.[12]

[12] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, edited by C.K. Ogden (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1922), 3.328; 5.47321.



https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819114000011 Published online by Cambridge University Press

## 6. Semantic Source of Philosophical Problems as the Target of Later Wittgensteinian Therapy

If the philosopher is cured psychologically, the problems in language outside the philosopher's mind will remain. If language is cured of philosophy, however, of meaningless philosophical terminology that is not part of any genuine language game, then the philosopher who has thoroughly completed the only proper work of philosophy will have no basis for raising additional philosophical problems, but will only oversee the disappearance of philosophy problem by problem. Philosophy will then put itself forever to bed and to sleep.[13]

What must we do objectively to cure language of its gratuitous philosophical problems? Philosophical meaning is complex. Better to find a way of getting rid of it than to open up that can of worms. Or so it might appear, and did perhaps appear to Wittgenstein, in both the early and later philosophy, in which are developed different grounds for setting philosophy aside. The disease is serious, and we may need to amputate. But the disease resides in language insofar as it is reflected in rule-governed language use linked to genuine language games. Besides, we must then somehow use philosophy in order to explain philosophical meaning, whereas there is no universal philosophical method, but, as Wittgenstein reminds us, a multiplicity of such methods, as there are of therapies.

The fox guards the henhouse, when the philosophical meaning of putative propositions belonging to other philosophical systems is judged from the standpoint of any particular philosophical system. Such a privileged system itself must remain philosophically unjustified in its role explicating philosophical meaning for all philosophy despite the endemic bias implied by the application of its own philosophical commitments. Worse, from Wittgenstein's perspective, such a therapeutic interpretation of meta-anti-philosophy is no cure, but only a continuation and further nurturing and encouraging of the underlying intellectual disease and its symptoms. It is doing more conventional philosophy rather than less, and rather than watching it fade away. There is consequently either an infinitely ascending semantic spiral or an ineliminable philosophical bias built

[13] I have been most encouraged in this reading of the later Wittgenstein by P.M.S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion: Themes in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), especially pages 146–214. Also Newton Garver, *This Complicated Form of Life: Essays on Wittgenstein* (Chicago: Open Court, 1994), especially pages 149–268.



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into the possibility of there being a philosophically explicable sense of philosophical meaning.

## 7. Meta-Philosophical Ascent in Conventional Philosophy and the Later Wittgenstein

If we try to avoid the impasses of philosophy by ascending to the higher plane of meta-philosophy, we will only find the kinds of philosophical disputes at ground level duplicated among competing conflicting metaphilosophies. Better, as already suggesed, to get rid of philosophical meaning altogether, if we can. If indeed we can, then we will have accomplished something momentous and history-making in the evolution of human thought. Wittgenstein in both the early and the later period aims at nothing less. The *Tractatus* develops one method for leaving philosophy behind as a historic relic in the wake of what Wittgenstein has to say about meaning. *Philosophical Investigations* offers another method with essentially the same end in view.

Is it true that there can be no philosophical language games because the uses of language in what passes for philosophy are not extra-semantically grounded in practical activities that could constitute part of a form of life? Manifestly, people do choose to live what they describe as a life devoted to philosophy. Others have their occasional philosophical moments. Philosophy, whatever self-indulgences it enjoys, has a long and distinguished history of positively influencing and sometimes originating certain of the arts and sciences. These in turn are supposed by Wittgenstein to be part of a common form of life shared in complicatedly interconnected sociolinguistic ways by philosophers and civilians alike, an interpermeation of practices among the two categories of subcultures that should not be overlooked as relevant to Wittgenstein's disallowal of a philosophical language game or philosophical form of life. There are encultured rules and expectations for participating in philosophy just as there are in other language games, where the practices also develop and evolve.

There are other respects in which Wittgensteinian family resemblances among Wittgensteinian language games prevent any clear cut distinction between the pragmatically-grounded legitimate rule-governed language games purposefully applied in the natural sciences, and the supposedly pragmatically-ungrounded illegitimate unruly putative language games of philosophical discourse. If philosophy plays any part in making science and other practical activities more self-conscious of their methods leading to improvements in



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their theoretical accuracy and practical application, is that not enough of a point and purpose to justify considering that there are practically grounded philosophical language games?

One answer a Wittgensteinian might propose is that we can always misuse our tools, however good the tools are in and of themselves. Pounding on a screwdriver to make it serve as a chisel is an example. Philosophy might be construed as nothing but a misuse of the tools meant for other purposes, taken from the tool boxes of practically-grounded language games and sent on holiday from the workplace to create the kind of conceptual mischief that is symptomatic of a specific type of philosophical intellectual disease. If so, then, once again, the whole business is sure to be rotten top to bottom. If I understand what some critics have proposed, the idea is to find in the later Wittgenstein a way to improve philosophy by means of a philosophical therapy that would free us from false pictures in the progressive course of doing better but still conventional philosophy. It might be thought to do so either by leaving us without and therefore unreliant on any pictures, if such a thing were possible, as I for one would be quick to deny, or with superior objectively considered true pictures or pictures improved according to our needs and recommendations in other ways.

If only these were available to us without engaging in the messy business of critical philosophical dialogue and dialectic. How can the complete misuse of tools result in positive pragmatic results, as seems to have been the case with respect to at least some chapters in the history of philosophy, and undoubtedly in contemporary philosophical research? For example, in the tightening of standards for rigorous mathematical proof or seeking best justification in the explanations of the natural sciences? Matters about which Wittgenstein deeply cares. Surely the better course for Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* would then have been to recognize that along with such language games as, Giving orders, and obeying them—, Singing catches—, Translating from one language into another—, Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying' (PI§23), he might have included also, Asking a philosophical question—, Defining a philosophical concept—, Trying to draw a philosophical distinction—, Offering and defending a philosophical argument—, Answering a philosophical question—.

Then there would also need to be a pragmatic standard for meaningfulness and relative success in philosophical language game playing as in extra-philosophical (normal) language game playing. Wittgenstein could have taken this route, but he did not, and it is interesting to reflect on why he did not.



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## 8. Stopping Philosophy Dead in its Tracks… Eventually

We stop philosophy when everyone permanently stops trying to do philosophy. We stop trying to do philosophy, in turn, when we bring key philosophical concept terms back from holiday, as Wittgenstein advises, and consider them exclusively with respect to the pragmatic point and purpose rule-governed work they are expected to perform within a language game that is an integral part of the larger non-linguistic practical activities of a community of language users that instantiate a form of life.

We exclude the special terms of philosophical discourse from having any legitimate functional role in any legitimate language game. We do so one by one, examining their philosophical grammar, and thereby depriving received philosophical discourse of meaning on the only explanation of the conditions of meaningfulness that the later Wittgenstein countenances in practical purposes as they have arisen historically in the natural history of a form of life. When this task is accomplished there can be no surviving philosophical language games making meaningful use of a distinctively philosophical terminology, and we should no longer have any rational grounds for engaging in meaningless philosophical reflection for which there is no genuine rule-governed philosophical language game pragmatically rooted in any actual form of life. Of course, Wittgenstein is perfectly correct that if we stop doing philosophy then there will be no philosophical language game, but the same could be said if were to stop shopping for apples or working at construction sites.

Wittgenstein confesses in his later period that in the *Tractatus* a picture of how language had to work held him in its grip. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein remains firmly in the grip of an even more compelling picture. It is the big picture, so to speak. That is the model in which the propositions of philosophy generally, not merely those of bad philosophy, but of philosophy by its very nature, are ultimately meaningless. What remains throughout in Wittgenstein's journey from the *Tractatus* to the later posthumous writings, is the commitment in some sense to a view of the possibilities of thought, according to which philosophical discourse is ultimately excluded as meaningless, for which the only remaining question is that of showing how and why this should be so. The *Tractatus* proposes one way of eliminating philosophy as meaningless, and the *Philosophical Investigations* another.

Wittgenstein, in my opinion, does not achieve the goal determined by the big picture in either the early or later (anti-) philosophy. That



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such an ideal might be diagnosed as having a grip on Wittgenstein's thinking is ironic, perhaps, in the popular sense, given what Wittgenstein himself says about the need for therapy to relieve thought of philosophical questioning, so as conspicuously to persist even in the face of contrary evidence. Wittgenstein explicitly professes his occasionally being surprised at the extent to which his thinking has fitted itself into one or another of these molds from around the edges of which he can barely peek to appreciate a contrary perspective. In denying that philosophical discourse constitutes a genuine language game, Wittgenstein makes no effort to consider the possibility that there are established philosophical language uses and that these have arisen as naturally in human practices as language game rules for buying apples at the grocers and moving building supplies to a building site, or that there may after all be some point or purpose to philosophical inquiry that would justify its claim to be ranked a genuine language game among others of very different pragmatic significance.

Human beings have not had philosophy brought down to them from the gods or extraterrestrials. Rather, for a good chunk of their culturally advanced history they have worked in close interaction with mathematicians and natural scientists in common linguistic and explanatory contexts in order to develop their philosophies. Wittgenstein, symptomatically, from a certain diagnostic kit, denies that philosophical discourse exists as a rule-governed language game at the same time that he engages in philosophical investigation and lays down rules for meaning and philosophical grammars that are supposed to exclude philosophical discourse. Moreover, Wittgenstein does not follow his own method where putative philosophical discourse is concerned. He does not patiently consider the philosophical grammar of language as it is used by historical and contemporary philosophers, or as it might be studied by professional linguists and grammarians. His actual project is somewhat different, despite what he officially says about it. It is a unique method of his own, and from Wittgenstein, naturally, we should expect nothing less.

As in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein, still in the grip of his big picture in *Philosophical Investigations*, expects to do away with philosophy by showing that it does not measure up to the requirements of meaningful expression. He concentrates instead on the meaning conditions for extra-philosophical language, and when he thinks he understands it, he takes satisfaction in the apparent fact that putative philosophical language has been excluded as meaningless. All that Wittgenstein has shown, however, is that, if philosophical discourse is meaningful, then it has different meaning conditions than those he has associated



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with extra-philosophical discourse. But so do lots of tools in the language game tokens tool kit that he inventories along with the handles in the locomotive cabin. In the grand plurality of language games with all the different tools and levers and respective philosophical grammars, why should there not be philosophical as well as extra-philosophical (normal) language games?

To ignore and say nothing credible to explain away the apparent existence of philosophical language games in a philosophical form of life, a form of life engaged in by few, but arguably a putative linguistic community, nonetheless, when they are right before him, is arguably a characteristic symptom of Wittgenstein's being in the grip of another of the kinds of pictures that Wittgenstein mentions in seeing things more clearly after rejecting his previous *Tractatus* goggles. Such a diagnosis, we should occasionally remind ourselves, itself follows if at all only according to a certain meta-anti-philosophical picture, a picture whose exact strength of grip on the free run of our own philosophical imagination and perhaps even on our emotional state in trying to do philosophy has yet to be determined.[14]

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[14] A version of this essay was presented as an invited contribution at the World Congress of Philosophy (FISP), Special Round Table Session on Wittgenstein: Therapy or Post-Therapy?, British Wittgenstein Society, Athens, Greece, 4–10 August 2013, under the title, 'Wittgenstein's Therapeutic Anti-Philosophy'. I am grateful to participants at the session for valuable informed discussion.



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