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WITTGENSTEIN, RELATIVISM, AND REASON

by

GILBERT EVERETT FULMER

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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INTRODUCTION

This is an essentially conservative thesis. It attempts to discredit a certain line of argument used by some contemporary philosophers to show that the task of philosophy is more limited than has been generally thought.

This line of argument is a form of epistemological relativism, believed by its proponents to be a consequence of the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. It consists of a loose cluster of themes taken by these men to have been conclusively established by his analysis of the nature of language. I call these claims Wittgensteinian Fideism, a term suggested by Kai Nielsen.¹ His point in adopting this term can be seen in the definition of "fideism" in Webster's Third New International Dictionary²: "exclusive or basic reliance upon faith alone, accompanied by a consequent disparagement of reason and utilized especially in the pursuit of philosophical or religious truth." Thus, Fideism in the present sense is a position which denies the capacity of reason to evaluate or criticize modes of discourse; such modes of discourse are, according to the Fideists, to be accepted at face value—on faith, as it were. Throughout, the terms "Fideism," and "relativism" will be used to refer to this philosophical position. These terms, moreover, are used pejoratively; for I believe that this position embodies an important conceptual error.

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Since it is an error, it is not surprising that the same philosophers sometimes adopt this theme, and at other times do not. So when I refer to "the Fideists" I am speaking of those who advance the arguments I am attacking, but I do not mean to imply that they always argue in this vein. Without exception, the philosophers I attack as Fideists have done valuable philosophical work; my sole purpose is to focus attention on a particular confusion.

The characteristics of Wittgensteinian Fideism are set forth in Chapter I; its main theme is that language is subdivided into countless disparate and discrete universes of discourse. I shall try to show that this way of looking at language is mistaken and philosophically profitless; and I shall also try to show that this thesis, in its Fideistic form, is not supported by the philosophy of Wittgenstein, which I believe to be of the greatest importance. I shall try, that is, to show that the most plausible interpretation of Wittgenstein's remarks does not commit him to Fideistic conclusions. However, Wittgenstein's work, incomplete as it is, exhibits many tensions between themes which were not wholly resolved in his mind; there is some support in certain passages for Fideism.*

It will be noted that I use the terms "conceptual scheme," "linguistic practice," "mode of discourse," and "universe of discourse" pretty much interchangeably, and that I make no attempt to distinguish

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*I was brought to see the necessity of this concession in a discussion with Professor Gilbert Ryle.
them. In this I follow the practice of the Fideists, who devote little effort to clarifying these notions, despite the great reliance they place upon them. Moreover, I do not consider it worthwhile to distinguish these various terms, for I believe that none is of any great philosophical importance, at least in the form used by the Fideists.

My argument throughout will be constructed to show that it is possible to demonstrate logically many things which the Fideists do not believe can be demonstrated. In particular, I argue that logical analysis can sometimes reveal incoherences in linguistic practices which the Fideists believe to be wholly in order. But it should not be supposed that I intend to deny the complex and multifarious proper uses of language; this is not, I hope, an exercise in philosophical parochialism. I only intend to claim that a whole class of philosophical questions is open, against the Fideists' insistence that they are closed. The structure of my thesis is as follows.

In Chapter I, I present, without criticism, some representative Fideistic arguments on several subjects. In Chapter II, I show that this conceptual error has not gone unremarked; I cite the work of several authors who have criticized one or another aspect of it. In Chapters III and IV, I treat two of the major supporting arguments of Fideism: first, the claim that any ongoing linguistic practice is of necessity logically coherent; and second, the notion that radically different concepts of rationality are possible. Also, I
try to show by examination of passages from Wittgenstein's writings that his work does not entail these theses. Finally, in Chapter V, I discuss the central idea that there are numerous logically isolated universes of discourse, and I try to show that this position is untenable.
FOOTNOTES


CHAPTER I

THE PUTATIVE FIDEISTS

In this chapter I shall discuss passages in the writings of several philosophers which exhibit the position I call "Wittgensteinian Fideism," or relativism. I shall not at this time criticize them in any detail, nor try to classify them or show their relation to one another. My purpose at this point is to cite examples of this position, and try to show the nature of the arguments which are offered to support it.

I

The first philosopher I shall discuss is Peter Winch, who has made some very strong claims about the immunity of various realms of discourse from outside criticism. In his paper "Understanding a Primitive Society,"¹ he has argued that the practice of witchcraft and magic among the African Azande cannot legitimately be dismissed as irrational, because the criteria of rationality are internal to these practices. That is, what is to count as rational, and of course therefore what is to count as irrational, is determined by the logic of the practices in question. To attack these practices because they do not conform to the criteria which we employ would be to commit a logical blunder.
For, Winch claims, any language must have a concept of rationality; but all languages need not have the same concept of rationality. Some such concept is necessary, because it must make a difference what is said; without such a concept, there would be no possibility of contradiction, or of conflict between words and actions, or between different accounts of the same event. So even if a language has no word for the concepts of rationality, contradiction, incompatibility, etc., there must be such rules implicit in it which govern its use. However, the anthropologist examining an alien society must keep in mind that the norms of rationality applied there may not be the same as those employed in his own; and so the particular inferences which are justified, and ruled out, in that language may be very different from what he is accustomed to.

So the task of an anthropologist describing another society is to make its rules, practices, and behavior intelligible to the members of his own society. He must, therefore, bring their concept of intelligibility into an intelligible relationship to the norms of intelligibility of his own society. And to do this he must, of course, first gain a participant's understanding of the social practices of the object society.

Winch criticizes many anthropologists for failing to give due consideration to these differences in the norms of rationality. In particular he attacks the conclusions of Sir Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, as reported in the latter's *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic*
among the Azande.⁴ Evans-Pritchard had described the Zande practices, and attacked them as irrational; he had said that although the Zande practices and beliefs are coherent and fully integrated into their social life, these beliefs are nevertheless false and irrational because they do not represent objective reality. This criticism is itself incoherent, says Winch, because the concept of conformity to objective reality is itself grounded in our scientific practices. What Evans-Pritchard is doing is applying the criteria of the European scientist to practices where these criteria are irrelevant; it is the Zande criteria of reality which must be applied in understanding Zande behavior. "What is real and what is unreal shows itself in the sense that language has,"³ and the Zande witchcraft practices have their own sense because they are consistently applied. Therefore it cannot be that their practices fail to come to grips with what is real, as Evans-Pritchard charges: the reality of their magical practices is shown by the use to which they are put in people's lives.

Winch points out that there is an important difference between Zande magic and the magic that might be practiced by a member of our own culture; the two are entirely different in their relation to the social life in which they occur.

Concepts of witchcraft and magic in our culture, at least since the advent of Christianity, have been parasitic on, and a perversion of other orthodox concepts, both religious and, increasingly, scientific.
To take an obvious example, you could not understand what was involved in conducting a Black Mass, unless you were familiar with the conduct of a proper Mass and, therefore, with the whole complex of religious ideas from which the Mass draws its sense. Neither would you understand the relation between these without taking account of the fact that the Black practices are rejected as irrational (in the sense proper to religion) in the system of beliefs on which these practices are thus parasitic.

That is to say, these practices of witchcraft and magic in our own culture are not independently intelligible, but can only have sense in a context of previous ideas. The notions of black magic cannot be discussed without a comprehension of the Christian concepts of which black magic is a parody; in Winch's words black magic has an "essential reference" to these prior concepts. Therefore these notions can be shown to be irrational: they involve the denial of the very concepts which are necessary for their own intelligibility. It is as if a patient were to tell his psychiatrist that he doubted his father's existence because he hated him so much!

By contrast, the Azande accept witchcraft and magic as ordinary parts of their daily existence; they are met with constantly, and occasion no surprise. This witchcraft has no essential reference to any other, more fundamental concepts. Winch quotes Evans-Pritchard to the effect that the Azande use explanations in terms of witchcraft to explain "why events are harmful to man and not how they happen." And, says Evans-Pritchard, "...their
mystical notions are eminently coherent, being interrelated by a
network of logical ties, and are so ordered that they never too
crudely contradict sensory experience. ... To dramatize his
philosophical point, Winch paraphrases this claim to represent a
Zande trying to explain European scientific concepts to his fellows.

... their scientific notions are eminently co-
herent, being interrelated by a network of
logical ties, and are so ordered that they never
too crudely contradict mystical experience but,
instead, experience seems to justify them. The
European is immersed in a sea of scientific
notions, and if he speaks about the Zande poison
oracle he must speak in a scientific idiom.

Evans-Pritchard, says Winch, is not content with elucidating the
differences in the two concepts of reality involved; he wants to go
further and say: our concept of reality is the correct one; the
Azande are mistaken. But the difficulty, thinks Winch, is to see
what "correct" and "mistaken" can mean in this context. For, says
Winch, concepts like reality andcorrectness are inextricably inter-
twined with one another, and with the whole mode of life and dis-
course in which they appear; and there can be no context-independent
criterion of what is real or correct.

Winch applies this idea to some specific examples of Evans-
Pritchard's. He had shown that the Azande believe that witches
suffer from an inherited organic condition which is passed down along
gender lines: all the sons of a male witch are also witches; and all
the daughters of a female witch are witches. They are believed to have in their bodies a "witchcraft substance" which may be found by a post-mortem examination. Since the Zande clan is a group related to one another through the male line of descent, it would seem apparent that either all members of a clan are witches, or none is. Yet the Azande do not believe this. It might appear that this is sufficient ground for charging the Azande with irrational behavior. But Winch disagrees; for what is involved in rationality and rational behavior is a matter to be judged according to criteria which depend on their relation to the social context for their intelligibility. And it is only to us, not to the Azande, that these "obvious" conclusions follow. We charge the Azande with failing to take account of the logical necessity of the case; but the inference is only necessary to one who accepts the logic of our own (scientifically oriented) culture. And of course it is the universal validity of that logic which is the very point in question. Thus, says Winch, the argument against the Azande is circular; it is valid only if it is accepted as valid. Winch believes that any such attempt to criticize social or linguistic practices from outside involves the conceptual error of applying irrelevant criteria.

Evans-Pritchard explains the Zande failure to notice the contradiction by the fact that they "have no theoretical interest in the subject."9 That is, they do not find occasion to draw deductive inferences about other members of the same clan as an identified
witch. And Winch argues that this lack of interest in "theoretical" questions is perfectly justifiable, because "Zande notions of witchcraft do not constitute a theoretical system in terms of which Azande try to gain a quasi-scientific understanding of the world."\textsuperscript{10}

The crux of Winch's claim is that different concepts of rationality are possible. He argues that we must take account of this possibility when trying to explain the behavior of a member of an alien culture. "If our concept of rationality is a different one from his, then it makes no sense to say that anything either does or does not appear rational to him in our sense."\textsuperscript{11} And

...we start from the position that standards of rationality in different societies do not always coincide; from the possibility, therefore, that the standards of rationality current in $S$ are different from our own. So we cannot assume that it will make sense to speak of members of $S$ as discovering something which we have also discovered; such discovery presupposes initial conceptual agreement.\textsuperscript{12}

Having taken so strong a line against the possibility of evaluating the practices of other societies, Winch needs to offer an alternative approach for anthropological practice. If it is not possible intelligibly to criticize or appraise the social forms, what can be accomplished by the student of comparative cultures? Winch's answer to this question is that we can only try to understand their concepts of intelligibility. This means that we must come to understand not only the rules they follow, but the point of
those rules. The most important thing we have to learn from the study of other cultures is this possibility of different ways of making sense of human life, and of interpreting the purpose of human actions. The path to wisdom in the study of alien cultures is through certain fundamental concepts, which he calls "limiting concepts." "Their significance here is that they are inescapably involved in the life of all known human societies in a way which gives us a clue where to look, if we are puzzled about the point of an alien system of institutions."\textsuperscript{13} Such fundamental factors as birth, copulation, and death are so central that ". . . the very notion of human life is limited by these conceptions."\textsuperscript{14} For example, the possibility and the nature of ethical concepts is bound up with the notion of a human life as ending in death. Again, sex is a limiting concept because "The life of a man is a man's life and the life of a woman is a woman's life: the masculinity or the femininity are not just components in the life, they are its mode."\textsuperscript{15} We must begin from these points, not by seeing other cultures in terms of our own.

II

Another characteristic of the putative Fideists is their belief that criticism cannot cut across the boundaries of modes of discourse, because the criteria of truth, rationality, etc. are grounded in those modes themselves. Thus it is not only linguistically
distinct cultures which enjoy immunity from valid challenge; linguistic areas such as science, religion, ethics, etc. are also privileged in this way; statements in any one cannot be evaluated by reference to the criteria of any other.

G. E. Hughes adopts this position in his review of C. B. Martin's *Religious Belief*. Martin claims that religious statements at their rock bottom are not in order; that is, he believes, there are inconsistencies and incoherences built into the very central concepts which cannot be expunged, but only concealed or ignored. Hughes does not agree; he believes that these statements are in perfectly good order at their rock bottom. That is not to say, of course, that no mistakes are ever made in religious language. But, such mistakes are no more necessary or central to the language than in other areas such as material-object language, which Martin claims is conceptually impeccable. Children are taught the language of religious belief with evasion and obscurity present from the beginning, charges Martin; and these cannot be eliminated as the child learns the concepts more fully. Hughes claims that similar evasion and obscurity is often present in other fields, for instance that of moral responsibility; and that adults can learn to operate as well with religious language as with these others.

Hughes' central attack is on Martin's logical method of showing that religious language is conceptually confused. He asks,
But what are our criterial here for conceptual confusion? I should guess that it is possible to show any category of statements or expressions to be conceptually confused if one is allowed to insist that they must conform to the logic of some other category or categories of statements or expressions if they are to be said to make sense. It seems to me that many of Martin's arguments depend on such an insistence in the case of religious statements. 17

Hughes proposes what he calls an "alternative programme" for meta-theology.

. . . .it consists in allowing the actual use of religious terms and statements to determine their logic, rather than trying to force an alien logic upon them. If we adopt this basis, we can then regard arguments which show how religious statements generate contradictions when they are construed on the model of other types of statements, not as demonstrating that they are conceptually confused, but as showing by contrast some of the peculiarities of their own logic. 18

The validity of this "alternative programme" is the point at issue, so it will be well to consider its implications. Hughes is arguing—or at least claiming, since the contention is not very fully developed—that each mode of discourse has its own "logic," which governs the propriety of statements made within it. Thus statements in the language of religion are logical or illogical, rational or irrational, true or false, according to the criteria of logic, rationality, and truth which operate within religious language. Even if it were demonstrated conclusively that some such
statement violated the canons of rationality of some other mode of discourse, this would be of no consequence, and would in no way count against it.

If the meaning of a word is given by its use, and if that word is in fact used, goes the argument, then surely it must have meaning. And if standards of coherence, rules of inference, criteria of truth, are employed in a linguistic practice, surely their employment must in some sense be correct, since they do in fact function. Therefore the most that one can do from outside such a self-sufficient mode of discourse is map its structure so as to show just what the rules may be that govern it. To criticize it, or attack it as invalid, would be to misconstrue the nature of linguistic practices.

Hughes says

. . . the actual usage of religious terms within religious language is taken as normative for the logical type and the kind of meaning they have. . . . religious language is a long-established fait accompli, and something which does a job which, as far as I have been able to discover, no other segment of language can do.19

Of course, he agrees, religious statements must have some coherent order for this to be the case; but he thinks it can be shown that they do. And this, he argues, is all that is required. Any fundamental attack on the intelligibility of religious discourse must necessarily be based on criteria outside that discourse; and thus it
must be ipso facto irrelevant.

III

Norman Malcolm has advanced a view of Christian belief similar to Hughes' in some respects. Malcolm argues that philosophers distort the logic of religious discourse when they discuss the question whether God exists. For, says Malcolm, the logically fundamental religious belief is not the belief that God exists; it is rather belief in God. In fact, the belief that God exists is altogether problematic; Malcolm inquires what difference it would make whether one held that belief or not? It does not seem that this belief could enter into any form of life, Malcolm thinks, unless it is coupled with a belief in God. It would not even be possible, within the Judaeo-Christian tradition, to believe that God exists without also believing in Him. For within that tradition God is real and central to men's lives: belief in Him involves trust and faith, awe and fear. Malcolm asks, "Would a belief that He exists, if it were completely non-affective, really be a belief that He exists?"  

And it is central to the concept of God within this tradition that there be this logical connection between the two beliefs. A belief in God's existence simpliciter, independent of any attitude toward Him or the fact of His existence, would be of no interest. It would not reflect the religious situation, and hence would fail
to be, truly, about God at all.

This is why philosophers have met with such scant success in formulating arguments to prove the existence of God. Malcolm says, "Arguing for the existence of God... appears to be an activity in which people make up the rules as they go along... there is no agreed-on right or wrong in this kind of reasoning."\(^{22}\) That is to say, the belief that God exists is one that we cannot get a grip on, so to speak, unless it is placed in the context of the religious belief in God.

Likewise, says Malcolm, evidence is not relevant to the belief that God exists: the Old Testament does not offer evidence for that belief, but rather assumes belief in the God of the Jews. In fact, we do not know what would count as evidence that God exists, nor would we know what to do with it if we had any. There is no question of verification or falsification of such a belief. It is true that some of the beliefs involved in the religious belief in God are, in some sense, expectations about the world; but such a belief is held "... in such a way that no fact of experience could falsify it."\(^{23}\) So what might be called the factual belief, the belief that God exists, is not a profitable object of philosophical analysis, according to Malcolm.

Here again we see the "fideistic" or "relativistic" claim that in at least some cases the locutions of a form of discourse are immune to criticism. Malcolm is claiming that nothing would count
as a refutation of the Christian belief in God, and that to be
precise, this belief is not to be understood in terms of its cogni-
tive content at all. Thus we ought to address our analysis, if any,
to the meaning of the belief in God, and ignore the apparently
factual claim that something exists. Neither reason nor empirical
evidence can serve as the foundation of criticism since the language
of Christianity quite clearly does involve the belief in God. To
raise the distinct question whether in actuality God does or does
not exist is to misunderstand the logic of religious discourse.

IV

We see this same theme developed in the work of D. Z.
Phillips. Many contemporary philosophers, charges Phillips, have
mistaken the role of religious propositions. They have raised the
general question whether any claim to have experienced God con-
stitutes evidence for God's existence. Now, it is true that doubt
about the validity of particular religious experiences is common
enough; the Bible contains many. But these philosophers are asking
for a justification in general of the possibility of religious ex-
perience, when it would be more correct to inquire as to the
validity of particular claims to have experienced God.

The criteria of validity in particular cases involve such
things as the doctrine of the Church, and the role the experience
plays in the person's life; but these things are criteria within
religious language. It makes no sense to ask for a general justification of the criteria themselves; they can only be applied as a part of religious discourse. Phillip says, "My difficulty is in finding any meaning in this philosophical request for a general justification." He compares such philosophers with the ancients who supposed that the world must rest on Atlas' shoulders: they continue to seek justifications beyond the stage where it makes sense to do so. What must be realized is that religious statements have meaning within a particular form of life, and not outside it; it is appropriate to analyze the role they play in this form of life, but it is not possible to criticize the form of life as a whole. In this, thinks Phillips, religious statements are like any others.

Some philosophers take God to be an individual, of whom it may properly be asked whether he is or is not real. But this is to mistake the nature of the role of God in the language of religious belief; Phillips asks ironically, do these men think God has a biography? In treating God as an individual among other individuals—even though a unique one—they are distorting the depth grammar of religious discourse by imposing on it the depth grammar of physical objects.

What is happening here is that these philosophers are abstracting religious concepts from the human phenomena which underlie them, and thus changing their meaning. There is no neutral ground on which to stand to evaluate religious beliefs, or any others; for
their significance lies in the linguistic context where they are used. Phillips quotes with approval Winch's remark in *The Idea of a Social Science*, "...in discussing language philosophically we are in fact discussing what counts as belonging to the world. Our idea of what belongs to the realm of reality is given for us in the language that we use." Thus there is no way in which we can inquire into the question whether criteria of reality are valid or not; for to do so would be merely to impose the criteria of one mode of discourse on another.

V

A common theme of what we have been calling "Fideism" or "relativism" is the claim that locutions within any particular realm of discourse are immune from criticism from other such realms. This is the burden of Winch's argument against Evans-Pritchard's discussion of Zande witchcraft, and likewise of the various apologists for religion whom we have discussed. W. D. Hudson has taken perhaps a still stronger line on this question.  

Hudson here is replying to an earlier article by Kai Nielsen, which I shall discuss in some detail in the next chapter. Nielsen had argued that religious language is more problematic than, say, material-object language or arithmetic because it gives rise to first-order puzzlement—i.e., within the language, and not just
second-order puzzlement—i.e., about the language. Thus there is little problem in the day-to-day use of speech about material objects, or arithmetical calculations, even though there is considerable theoretical disagreement about the correct analyses of these modes of discourse. But in religious language, says Nielsen, the puzzlement occurs not only among philosophers and theologians, who reflect professionally on the analysis of the language, but also among the everyday users of religious language, namely the devout believers. Nielsen concludes that this distinction shows that religious language is in logical disarray in ways which these other modes of course are not; in fact, thinks Nielsen, large segments of the language of religion are untenable and ought to be abandoned.

To this Hudson responds that Nielsen has confused the nature of first- and second-order language. It is true enough, he agrees, that there have long been skeptics even among those brought up to religious belief, and

...doubts about the coherence, intelligibility, rationality, of religious language occur to many more people, and at far lower levels of educational attainment, than do doubts about the evidence for material object statements or the foundations of mathematics.50

But the distinction between first- and second-order language remains valid: these doubters and scoffers, however limited their education, are engaging nonetheless in second-order commentary about religious language; they are not, at this point, involved in the first-order
activity of using language, as Nielsen believed. So there is no force in Nielsen's argument that religious language is in more disarray than the other forms of speech. Religious language, like the others, functions correctly when it is simply used; only when it is subject to a higher-order analysis does it appear unsatisfactory. But, argues Hudson, this is true of all modes of linguistic discourse, even the best-established and least problematic, as witness the examples of material-object language and arithmetic. So he concludes that Nielsen has failed to make his case against religious discourse.

I have said that this is a very strong form of the Fideistic claim, and it will now be clear why this is so. Hudson is saying here that whenever anyone reflects about the validity of a mode of discourse, or considers its problems, he is ipso facto engaging in second-order discourse; he is, that is to say, making comments about it, not speaking within it. And when this claim is coupled with the further thesis that such second-order reflections cannot impugn the integrity of the discourse, it is very hard to see how there could ever be any criticism of any mode of discourse whatever. For whoever raises doubts about the coherence, rationality, etc. of any mode of discourse by that very act disqualifies his questions from relevance.

Hudson says,

Doubts, the most naive as well as the most sophisticated,
about the coherence, intelligibility, rationality, of God-talk are second-order doubts. Their logic, that is to say, is different from that of doubts within God-talk. The latter presuppose acceptance of the concept of God; but it is just such acceptance which second-order (philosophical) doubts question.\textsuperscript{31}

So it is impossible to challenge the coherence of religious discourse without placing oneself--logically--outside that discourse. And Hudson believes that this refutes Nielsen's argument that the existence of doubters within the framework of religious discourse casts doubt on the viability of that discourse.

Hudson goes in more detail into the question of different conceptual schemes in his book, \textit{Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Bearing of His Philosophy upon Religious Belief}.\textsuperscript{32} Here he argues that it makes no sense to attempt to evaluate the claims of religious discourse, for that would involve criticizing them from an absolutely neutral standpoint. That is, it would require that we stand outside all conceptual schemes whatever. And this is plainly impossible. He says,

\ldots we must say of religion in general, and theism in particular, what Wittgenstein said with wider reference. 'Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a proto-phenomenon.' \ldots like any other conceptual scheme, a religion is based logically upon presupposition, and is bounded logically by frontiers; the former must be accepted, and the latter respected, if the game is to be played or the form of life
taken up. In the case of theism, we must decide whether or not to deal in questions and answers which have to do with God. This decision is logically like deciding whether or not to do science, think morally, or take up some branch of mathematics. It is the decision to give, or not give, a certain frame to experience. 33

Here again we see the claim that whatever religionists choose to say is, so to speak, logically their own affair. For anyone to challenge them would be to deny their presuppositions, which would of course be merely to oppose them with his own presuppositions. And naturally no argument can show one set of consistent premises more valid than any other. So Hudson concludes,

We have neither justified nor discredited theism in any ultimate sense. The difficulty is to conceive of what would be involved in doing so... it would seem that it is an illusion to think that philosophy can do more than reveal its presupposition and draw its logical frontiers. That presupposition is God and those frontiers mark off talk about God from other kinds of talk. 34

Hudson admits that this does not wholly solve the problem: theists certainly do want to say that talk of God is more objectively valid than talk of say, Santa Claus. But we do not quite understand what "objectivity" means in this context; it clearly is not empirical testability, yet there seems to be some sense in using it. So the question is not entirely resolved; but Hudson believes that any adequate account must accept the permeability of the boundaries between different conceptual schemes.
VI

Another who has been charged with Wittgensteinian Fideism is Alasdair MacIntyre. In various places he has argued that religious beliefs have a status fundamentally different from that of ordinary, everyday beliefs about the world; and that this peculiar status renders them invulnerable to at least some forms of philosophical attack.35-36 For example, he rejects the demand for a logically demonstrative proof of the existence of God; such a proof is impossible, he says, because a logical deduction only explicates what is already contained in the premises; it cannot add anything new.37 Thus, a valid logical argument which concluded that God exists would necessarily have to be based on premises which contained the necessity of God's existence; and of course no such premises would be acceptable to the unbeliever or atheist. So the only logical arguments which would serve the purpose are those which cannot be used; one must believe before one can be compelled to believe.

An example of such a bootless proof, according to MacIntyre, is Aquinas' cosmological argument, "...the Cosmological argument is a valid, deductive proof, but only to those who will accept its way of talking—that is who will accept what is already implicitly a theistic way of talking."38 This "theistic way of talking" is the very use of the terms "necessary" and "contingent" being, which are
central to the argument. For to use the concept of contingent being in Aquinas' sense is to state a question that can be answered only in terms of a necessary being, namely God. So the argument can not be persuasive to those who are unprepared to accept its conclusions. It does have a function, however, of clarifying the logic of religious belief; this is the function of religious argument in general. MacIntyre's position here is Fideistic; he insists on a logically unbridgeable gap between religious and non-religious language.

...in religion there is no standpoint beyond both belief and unbelief, beyond all different types of belief, no neutral standpoint from which we can judge between Christianity and its alternatives. ...39

So, according to MacIntyre, there is no possible transition between religious language and non-religious language. Within the religious framework "God exists" does not need to be asserted; outside it, the sentence has no clear meaning. So religious assertions are not reducible to non-religious ones. "Every field is defined by reference to certain ultimate criteria. That they are ultimate precludes going beyond them."40 Justification is only possible by appeal to the defining authority of the given religion, and this is worthless unless one accepts the authority.

It is true that some of the beliefs of the Christian religion are, in part, factual; but, says MacIntyre, this does not mean that
the ordinary sorts of evidence are to be used in evaluating them.

What I want to suggest is that everything of importance to religious faith is outside the reach of historical investigation. That, for instance, in asking whether the Resurrection happened we are not in fact asking a question which future historical investigation might settle is apparent if we consider how any evidence that might be discovered would be assessed. . . . the essence of the New Testament claim, as we have seen, is that certain past events can be part of a religious belief, that is that they can be believed in on authority.  

That is, it is the essence of the Christian faith that the New Testament is the ground of the belief that certain events occurred as described therein; no new historical evidence which might turn up could be accepted as counting against the accuracy of the Gospel story. It is important, I think, to note that MacIntyre here does not mean only the specifically religious statements, for example "Jesus was the Christ." He also intends to include the less theory-laden statements like "Jesus of Nazareth was crucified." For he insists that there is factual content involved in many religious beliefs, though there is more besides. To believe in the Resurrection is to believe more than just that Jesus arose from the dead; but it is to believe at least that.

This is why MacIntyre's claim is, in our sense, "Fideistic": he is saying that acceptance of the New Testament as a criterion of the accuracy of statements about historical events is logically
fundamental for the Christian, and hence unassailable. It has the same logical status as the premise of a deductive argument: no argument from any other deductive system can count against it. The question of the truth of the statements about Jesus' life and teaching reported by the Bible was, so to speak, decided when the believer became a Christian. At this point these statements are no longer open to question, because the Bible is the logically fundamental authority. Historical evidence, however strong it might appear, is simply to be dismissed if it conflicts with the Biblical accounts. There is room for some disagreement, perhaps, in interpreting the Scriptures; but their essential validity is secure from any attack.

This, then, is Wittgensteinian Fideism. It involves a cluster of theses about the nature of language, which might be stated thus:

1. There are many distinct conceptual schemes; e.g., science, religion, and morality.

2. There are, within any given scheme, rules of inference, criteria of rationality, etc.; and these are peculiar to that scheme. I.e., they are contained wholly within it.

3. Therefore each scheme is conceptually isolated; i.e., none can be used to evaluate any others.

4. One is free to choose in which schemes to participate, and which not.

5. One can move at will from one conceptual scheme to another, e.g., from that of religion to that of science and back.
In the following chapters I shall discuss the validity of this conceptual relativism.
FOOTNOTES


4 Ibid., p. 310.

5 Ibid., p. 310.

6 Ibid., p. 311.

7 Ibid., p. 312.

8 Ibid., p. 313.


11 Ibid., p. 316.

12 Ibid., p. 317.
13. Ibid., p. 322.


15. Ibid., p. 322.


17. Ibid., p. 214.

18. Ibid., p. 214.


22. Ibid., p. 108.


25. Ibid., p. 316.

26. Ibid., p. 322.


31. Ibid., p. 270.


33. Ibid., p. 67.

34. Ibid., pp. 67-68.


37 Difficulty, p. 79.

38 Ibid., p. 82.

39 Ibid., p. 108.


41 Ibid., pp. 206-207.
CHAPTER II

CRITICISMS OF FIDEISM

I

Kai Nielsen has attacked some prominent followers of Wittgenstein as "Wittgensteinian Fideists," claiming that they make belief self-justifying. According to Nielsen, these philosophers provide no way of limiting their apotheosis of ordinary usage; he thinks that if their method is adopted, anything goes; all rational criticism becomes impossible. Hence his rejection of some of the more far-reaching of these positions. "...much as I admire Wittgenstein, it seems to me that the fideistic conclusions drawn by these philosophers from his thought are often absurd." I shall adopt the term "Fideism" in Nielsen's sense; but I shall not limit myself in the use of the term to those philosophers whom Nielsen discusses; and I shall discuss attacks on Fideism by other philosophers though none, to my knowledge, has used this term.

Nielsen accepts some of the points made by Wittgenstein and his followers; he believes that to understand linguistic behavior it is necessary to be able to operate with concepts in the same way as those who are speaking. But he thinks that does not commit him to accepting the practices as valid. He says,
If a man has no experience of religion, has never learned God-talk where the 'engine isn't idling,' he will not have a deep understanding of religion. But having such an understanding of religion is perfectly compatible with asserting . . . that the concept of God is 'nothing but a creation of our own confused thought' growing out of our need to escape 'from the anxiety and wearisomeness of life.'

For example, claims Nielsen, the "first-order language" of religion is in conceptual disarray; that is, it is shot through with confusion and irrationality; and a philosopher can show this by rational argument. To do this he must have a participant's understanding of the operation of its concepts: he must know how to make it work. But he need not accept it, either wholly or in part; and his rejection may come as a result of critical examination.

Nielsen cites a complex of "dark sayings" which tend to give rise to this form of Fideism. All are attributed to Wittgenstein, or else taken to be explications of his thought by those who advance them. Nielsen, however, is careful to point out that Wittgenstein might not have been willing to accept them in this form, or to draw the same conclusions from them as do his admirers.

1. The forms of language are the forms of life.
2. What is given are the forms of life.
3. Ordinary language is all right as it is.
4. A philosopher's task is not to evaluate or
criticize language or the forms of life, but to describe them where necessary and to the extent necessary to break philosophical perplexity concerning their operation.

5. The different modes of discourse which are distinctive forms of life all have a logic of their own.

6. Forms of life taken as a whole are not amenable to criticism; each mode of discourse is in order as it is, for each has its own criteria and each sets its own norms of intelligibility, reality, and rationality.

7. These general, dispute-engendering concepts, i.e., intelligibility, reality, and rationality are systematically ambiguous; their exact meaning can only be determined in the context of a determinate way of life.

8. There is no Archimedean point in terms of which a philosopher (or for that matter anyone else) can relevantly criticize whole modes of discourse or, what comes to the same thing, ways of life, for each mode of discourse has its own specific criteria of rationality/irrationality, intelligibility/unintelligibility, and reality/unreality.4

Together these claims constitute the point of view which Nielsen calls Wittgensteinian Fideism. It is quite possible that no single philosopher would assent to all of them as stated here, but there is a common thread running through them; we have seen in the last chapter some examples of this position as it is applied to specific philosophical examples, including of course the religious questions in which Nielsen is primarily interested.
It is important for Nielsen's argument that it is the first-order speech of religion that is confused. It is not merely that philosophers and theologians are uncertain of the correct analysis of this language; it is not only the second-order language about which doubt arises. Second-order questions are problematic in many areas, even where there are no difficulties with the first-order language. "Meta-mathematics may be in a shambles, but not arithmetic or algebra." But religious language is, Nielsen thinks, in a far worse state. The day-to-day religious language of the ordinary believer is confused. More and more educated people in our society are coming to find that they simply cannot operate with the concepts of traditional Christian religion successfully, much though they may wish to do so. Such people find the most basic assertions about God, souls, and the after-life to be fundamentally incoherent and incomprehensible.

It is central to the position here characterized, following Nielsen, as Wittgensteinian Fideism that no criticism is possible against a whole realm of discourse. For, the argument goes, the criteria of truth, rationality, and intelligibility of assertions, beliefs, and actions within any such realm of discourse are internal. That is, what is to count as true, rational, and intelligible in any such realm is determined by the rules of that particular mode of discourse; any attack on these rules from outside must perforce employ other criteria, and these are irrelevant.
The burden of Nielsen’s thesis is to deny this irrelevance.

'Reality' may be systematically ambiguous, but what constitutes evidence, or tests for the truth or reliability of specific claims, is not completely idiosyncratic to the context or activity we are talking about. Activities are not that insulated.6

It is possible, Nielsen claims, for the criteria within a practice to be conceptually confused, and for that confusion to be exposed by reference to other criteria. For discourses are less distinct than the Fideists would have us believe. Some of the terms and concepts involved in religious utterances are also used in every-day discourse. "These terms cut across activities; they are at home in religious and non-religious contexts."7 And it can be seen that these familiar concepts are employed in religious discourse in an unfamiliar way: "God is a person, but we can't identify Him; God acts in the world but has no body...What could it possibly mean to speak of 'action' or 'a person' here?"8 It is such questions, Nielsen believes, that lead some believers who are accustomed to the practice to doubt its logical coherence. That is, they come to feel that such questions cannot be answered, and that religious discourse is therefore unviable.

Nielsen thus denies that "forms of life" as such are beyond criticism; he gives several examples of cases where, he believes, it makes sense to say that a particular form of life is illogical or irrational. Among these are magic and belief in fairies in European
civilization; primogeniture; the Chinese practice of footbinding; and the magical practices of the African Azande. In all these cases it at least makes sense to say that an ongoing practice is irrational, even though that judgment might be false. The Fideist, on the other hand, is committed to saying that such a judgment would be "either senseless or metaphorical." But there are two problems with Nielsen's argument, which I believe seriously weaken his case against Fideism. First, the argument suffers from the fact that the examples he cites are hardly the sort of thing which Wittgenstein and the Fideists mean by "forms of life." Nielsen remarks that it makes sense to say "primogeniture had a definite rationale"; but the rationale was not something contained within the practice of primogeniture. It was based, rather, on the whole complex social structure in which primogeniture was found. It was essential to preserve the feudal system, in which social status and role were determined by land holdings. Moreover, the military duties of the land-holders required that the size of the fiefs be substantial. Under these circumstances, the rationale behind primogeniture is perfectly intelligible: if every estate were divided among all the children at each generation, soon the number of the holdings would be so great, and their size so reduced, that the feudal system would break down. So primogeniture was not itself a whole way of life, with its own criteria of rationality and intelligibility. Rather, it was a practice which was itself
defended by reference to such criteria.

If Nielsen were to choose a relevant example in this area, it should be feudalism itself: this would be the sort of practice which the Fideists have in mind, and it would be far more difficult for Nielsen to make his case against such a form of life. If he were to argue that feudalism results in injustice, its defender will retort that there is justice when each does his duty and receives his deserts according to his station in life. Here the important terms of the discussion, like "justice," are all defined within the practice being discussed; it is this sort of case which gives the strongest support to Wittgensteinian Fideism. Nielsen's criticism of primogeniture amounts to an attack on a straw man.

There is, however, a more serious confusion in Nielsen's paper. This is his failure to distinguish between factual and conceptual reasons for abandoning beliefs and practices. What he requires to make his case are examples in which ongoing forms of life have been discovered to be incoherent, and therefore abandoned. But the examples he offers are merely ones where factual beliefs have changed. He speaks of the former European belief in fairies: "Once magic and belief in fairies were ongoing practices in our stream of life. By now, by people working from the inside, the entire practice, the entire 'form of life,' has come to be rejected as incoherent." But it is not at all clear that belief in fairies was rejected as logically incoherent; it would seem more plausible to
say that it was rejected because it was discovered to be false. There is no insurmountable conceptual problem with the criteria for the existence of fairies: there was no confusion as to just what would count as a fairy; the problem was simply whether or not any were to be found. Belief in fairies, like belief in unicorns, was abandoned when it became apparent that there were none. It is true that the relation between the concepts of falsity and incoherence is close and complex; but the two must not be conflated. Nielsen's failure to distinguish them, I believe, largely vitiates his argument: for he has failed to provide the sort of example he needs.

Nevertheless, Nielsen has drawn attention to some important problems which are implicit in much of contemporary philosophy. He makes a convincing case that absurdity can sometimes result from misunderstanding Wittgenstein's work.

II

Nielsen is careful to point out that he is not attributing "Fideistic" views to Wittgenstein himself; it is possible, he says, that Wittgenstein would have accepted none of the objectionable theses or their consequences. Ernest Gellner, however, attacks the whole philosophical position inspired by Wittgenstein; he believes that what we call Fideism is an inescapable consequence of Wittgenstein's position, and that it shows the absurdity of that position. He ascribes to Winch and others the view that
the cognitive, intellectual, and other practices ('types of discourse') of a society can be validated, and can only be validated, by their place in a society and its culture (a 'form of life').

But

This view is absurd, and very little elementary reflection can show it to be such... This view faces a simple dilemma: either all cultures and subcultures, with all the practices embedded in them, are valid, or only some of them are.

Take the first alternative. It leads to a complete and indiscriminate relativism: it will make witchcraft, in its context, as good as medicine, trial by oracle as good as trial by evidence, and so on. Whether or not such a view is acceptable emotionally, it is not acceptable logically. The modern world, and most others for that matter, simply does not contain neat isolable cultural units, inside each of which the internal norms could be sovereign.

The other alternative is to be selective, to say that some practices are valid and some are not. But it comes into headlong conflict with another essential principle of the philosophy of complacency. If there is to be selection, and if the selection is not to be random and arbitrary, there must be principles of selection. These must then sit in judgment on the various practices, whether or not they are parts of 'forms of life.' But at the very heart of the complacent philosophy was the view that the actual employment and context of expressions...is sovereign, and that to judge it in terms of extraneous and independent criteria is the cardinal sin.

Gellner argues the same charge in his book, Thought and Change.

Either language is a law unto itself (because there
can be no other), or it is not; and if not, the
criteria by which it is to be judged--however
rarely--must be formulated and defended; and they
cannot themselves be extracted from the actual
working of language. (But such independent
criteria have been excluded. . .) Alternatively,
we must accept a total relativism: each language
is a law unto itself. (They must also be con-
ceived as self-sufficient and never other-directed
morally, so to speak--all this in blatant contra-
diction to the real global situation.)
Wittgensteinianism cannot evade or deal with this
fork.

Peter Winch, The Idea of a Social Science,
(London 1958) has correctly extracted this
apotheosis of 'forms of life' from Wittgenstein
and bravely and openly embraced the implications
of the latter alternative.15

. . .it used to be the case that 'philosophers'
were thinkers who, bothered by some general con-
viction, either undermined and replaced it, or
tried to provide it with better foundations.
Today, one often encounters a new genre, which
holds all belief-systems to be valid or, what
amounts to the same, beyond the reach of philo-
sophical criticism (and when is fundamental
criticism not 'philosophy'? The exclusion of
'philosophical' criticism is a thinly camouflaged
banning of any criticism.)16

So affronted is Gellner by Wittgenstein's philosophy that
he has virtually made a career of attacking it whenever possible;
for example, Words and Things,17 "Reflections on Linguistic
Philosophy,"18 and "Nature and Society in Social Anthropology."19

(Unfortunately Gellner's polemical zeal sometimes over-
powers his intellectual scruples. In "The Entry of the Philosophers,"20
he constructs an imaginary dialogue between Peter Winch and Alasdair
MacIntyre, both confessed admirers of Wittgenstein. Says Gellner

The debate is fascinating (the dramatization and most of the italics in what follows are mine but the quotations come from Winch's "Understanding a Primitive Society" in American Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. I, and MacIntyre's "Is Understanding Religion Compatible with Believing?" in Faith and the Philosophers, p. 348).\textsuperscript{21}

The debate is on the subject of the importance of cattle to the African Azande; then Gellner triumphantly cites Evans-Pritchard's statement that the Azande have no cattle, and could have none because of the prevalence in their region of trypanosomiasis.\textsuperscript{22} Gellner crows, "There has been nothing as piquant in philosophy since that episode with Hegel and the planets."\textsuperscript{23} It appears indeed that Gellner has demonstrated the ignorance of the Wittgensteinians.

Now, when Gellner says "most of the italics are mine," one naturally supposes that he is responsible for italicizing, for emphasis, the words used by Winch and MacIntyre; indeed, it can only have been his intention that one suppose just this. Thus it comes as no surprise to note that the word "cattle" is italicized in each of its nine appearances in the dialogue.

But examination of the papers from which Gellner claims to have quoted shows that the word "cattle" does not appear in them! In saying that the italics were his own, Gellner meant that he had supplied the words, as well as their italicization! The remarks attributed to Winch, for example, are a tolerably accurate
paraphrase--except that they concern not the cattle, but the crops of the Azande. Winch never mentions cattle, nor suggests that the Azande have any. Gellner systematically substituted the word "cattle" for the word "crops" throughout the imaginary discussion, and then taunted Winch and MacIntyre about their ignorance of the facts. Gellner would have done better to rely on argument rather than stooping to such intellectually shoddy tactics.)

III

Nielsen and Gellner have rejected the position which Nielsen calls Fideism because they question its philosophical validity. John Hick, in his paper, "Skeptics and Believers," 24 has rejected it for slightly different reasons. Hick's argument is that whatever the fundamental validity of what he calls "linguistic autonomy" might be, it will not do the job for the Christian. It cannot be an acceptable philosophical account of religion, precisely because it is so isolated. On the view of the "autonomists," Hick says, "believing in God" does not refer to the existence of God at all, but just establishes the fact that a person has a use for that concept in his language: he thanks God, is released from anxiety at the thought of God, etc. But he does not necessarily advance the proposition "God exists," so he cannot be asked for a justification of his belief.
Questions of this kind are ruled out as having no place within authentic religious language. The believer talks to God, not about him; or if he does talk about him... this is a liturgical act and not an exercise in metaphysical discourse. There are no connections of logical implication between the realms of religious and philosophical discourse. 

But this autonomist account is inadequate for the Christian believer, says Hick; for Christian religious discourse must have ontological and metaphysical significance. Christians believe that God is a kind of ultimate fact, to which rational considerations are relevant: evil counts against the existence of God, and the impact of Christ on humanity counts for it. From the autonomist viewpoint it is neither logically appropriate nor logically inappropriate to engage in the language-game of religion. But this will not satisfy the needs of the Christian religion.

If it is not to the point to criticize talk about God on the ground that God does not exist, neither is it to the point to commend it on the ground that God does exist and that what is being said about him is true.

So the Fideism of the Wittgensteinians does not meet the needs of faith; more is required to satisfy the Christian than an immunity from attack that is based on impotence.
The position here called Fideism is not a school of philosophy in which philosophers claim membership; rather it is a cluster of arguments which attempt to show that philosophical analysis is impossible in many areas where it has traditionally been attempted. So it is not surprising that occasionally the same philosopher will propound both Fideistic and anti-Fideistic claims. In the previous chapter some views of D. Z. Phillips were cited as examples of Fideism; but he has also confessed to having spoken rather too freely about religious belief as an isolated language-game.27

For, he says, if religious language is taken to be so distinct, this may be just a "quasi-justification for what would otherwise be recognized as nonsense."28

Also, if religion is so isolated it is hard to understand why people take it so seriously. For, on the religious understanding of God, it is a terrible thing not to believe in the existence of God. "The force of religious belief depends, in part, on what is outside religion. . . ."29 And ". . .religious beliefs cannot be understood at all unless their relation to other modes of life is taken into account."30 If this were not so, there would be no difference between real worship and sham worship; but there is a very great difference.
So ordinary, day-to-day facts are closely interwoven with religious belief; they cannot be airily dismissed as some have supposed. For example, religious belief must deal in some way with the fact of pain; to claim that suffering is unreal is not to take it seriously. "When what is said by religious believers does violate the facts or distort our apprehension of situations, no appeal to the fact that what is said is said in the name of religion can justify or excuse the violation and distortion."

Thus, any immunity from attack which religious belief gains as a result of the notion of discrete language-games will be bought at a high price. Religion may be trivialized as a result until it is little more than an engrossing hobby, which one may engage in or reject at will. Phillips argues that it is important to analyze carefully the concepts involved to see just how isolated religious language really is from other linguistic practices.

I have given several examples in which various thinkers have taken note of, and criticized, the cluster of arguments that constitute the epistemological relativism under consideration here. But I believe that none of these fully shows the weakness of that position. In the ensuing chapters I shall try to undermine some of the major arguments which have been taken to support the position, and also to show the extent of the problems which follow if it is accepted.
FOOTNOTES


2Ibid., p. 191.

3Ibid., p. 192.


5Ibid., p. 196.

6Ibid., p. 208.

7Ibid., p. 205.

8Ibid., p. 205.

9Ibid., p. 206.

10Ibid., p. 206.

11Ibid., p. 206.

13. Ibid., p. 347.


16. Ibid., p. 186n.


25 Ibid., pp. 237-238.

26 Ibid., p. 239.


28 Ibid., p. 27.

29 Ibid., p. 39.

30 Ibid., p. 39.

31 Ibid., p. 40.
CHAPTER III

THE ORDINARY LANGUAGE ARGUMENT

Introduction

Many followers of Wittgenstein have supposed that his work has established the general validity of the claim that ordinary language is always all right as it is. They believe, that is to say, that the very fact that such a practice is ongoing shows that it is all right, that it is free of fundamental errors or confusions. For example, they hold, religious language is substantially in order simply because it is a well-established practice, widely engaged in by a large number of people over a long period of time. D. Z. Phillips is one who has frequently made this claim.

The criteria of what can sensibly be said of God are to be found within the religious tradition. . . They are given by religious discourse itself. Philosophy can claim justifiably to show what is meaningful in religion only if it is prepared to examine religious concepts in the context from which they derive their meaning.

It follows from this position that the role of philosophical criticism is limited in certain important ways. Philosophers have often thought to expose religious language, or certain parts of it, as meaningless--as wholly without sense. But if, as Phillips claims,
the concepts of religion derive their meaning from their own context, then the philosophers can hope for no such wholesale refutations. For the very fact that religious language is used, and has been used for a long time, demonstrates that its concepts do have meaning. At most the philosopher can tidy up minor misunderstandings around the edges of religious language. There is no possibility of fundamental criticism which gets at the very heart of religious language.

Of course, the same claim is made for other areas of discourse besides religion. Peter Winch, as we have seen, has claimed that primitive beliefs in magic enjoy a similar immunity from criticism.

It is my purpose in this chapter to attack this claim. I hope to show that the mere fact that a practice is ongoing does not prove it free of errors, confusions, contradictions, etc. Any or all of these may be found in a linguistic practice; the only way of learning whether they are present is by close examination and analysis. There is not, as the Wittgensteinian Fideists have claimed, an a priori guarantee that none can exist. Rather, I shall try to show coherence of a linguistic practice is not an all-or-nothing question: incoherences may be present without bringing the mode of discourse to a screeching halt, and so it may not be inferred that there are none in a continuing practice.
I shall approach this task by first examining some arguments offered by those who believe that ongoing linguistic practices cannot appropriately be criticized. I hope to establish that their arguments are misconceived, and that they have misinterpreted the important thrusts of Wittgenstein's work. Second, I shall examine some of the passages in Wittgenstein's published works which have been taken to show that linguistic practices are immune from fundamental criticism, and offer alternative interpretations which avoid this unfortunate conclusion. Finally, I shall consider some hypothetical examples which illustrate the nature of some of the possible infelicities which may occur in ordinary, ongoing modes of discourse.

One philosopher who has felt deeply the problem of linguistic self-sufficiency is Helen Hervey. Miss Hervey believes that Wittgenstein's theory of meaning as use commits him to the view that ordinary language is beyond the power of philosophy to modify; and yet, she notes, Wittgenstein by no means always heeded his own renunciation of linguistic reform. "...the Philosophical Investigations is devoted to the attempt to show just where, in Wittgenstein's opinion, ordinary ways of speaking are likely to give rise to mistaken conceptions. ..." That is, believes Miss Hervey, Wittgenstein did attempt reform and criticism of ordinary language despite his repeated disavowals. Typically, she says, Wittgenstein
adopted a behaviorist, anti-dualist approach; and yet, "... dualism lurks in the background of ordinary language."4 One of his major concerns is the sort of problem that arises when language is "idling".5 But, asks Hervey, "...if words can be used wrongly, or misused, then can it be maintained... that even sentence, even the vaguest sentence, is in perfect order?"6

Indeed it does seem often that Wittgenstein denies that he intends any reform of ordinary language. In PI, 124 he says, "Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it... It leaves everything as it is." And yet it is indeed true that one of his major concerns was to clear up confusions of language, not all of which result from philosophers' misuse of words. The former strain, claiming that philosophy cannot "interfere," is the basis for the conviction that Wittgenstein ruled out any criticism of ongoing practices. But as Miss Hervey notes, the latter strain, the necessity for removing confusion which actually arises, is also important.

It is my claim that in these passages Wittgenstein does not endorse every thing which is said or could be said in ordinary language. Rather, he is repudiating the view that ordinary language needs to be replaced across the board, as inadequate for its purposes. He is denying that what is required is some general reform which would substitute an artificial, or formal, or systematic language for our customary speech. Certainly Wittgenstein tried to
clear up mistakes, confusions, incoherences, and outright contradictions that sometime arise in ordinary speech. His point in these disputed passages was that no wholesale replacement of ordinary language with something else could accomplish this purpose.

James D. Carney has taken roughly this position; he says Wittgenstein "...devotes much, I think most, of his time showing where aspects of ordinary language have misled people and have thus given rise to conceptual confusion."7 The vagueness of our ordinary language arises not from any imperfection of our language, says Carney, but rather from the indeterminate number and complexity of human purposes. Since we are such very complicated and unpredictable sorts of beings, no conceptual structure could be developed in advance that would be guaranteed to serve all our possible needs. And so "...giving words strict rules is unnecessary, for our sentences in their ordinary context make sense without such rules."8 An ideal language would be beside the point, and that is all Wittgenstein meant.

Miss Hervey, however, remains unpersuaded. In a reply to Carney's reply, she repeats her claim that there is a fundamental incoherence in Wittgenstein's thought.9 For if ordinary language is often or even occasionally wrong or misleading, then the technique of seeking philosophical enlightenment in it is "at least open to question."10 And in any case, she says, when we study ordinary language philosophically, we are doing more than just describing it.
"We are criticizing, suggesting, innovating, and I consider that Wittgenstein was often in fact engaged in such activities." 11

The latter point, of course, is my own thesis: Wittgenstein certainly did criticize, innovate, and suggest changes in some ways of speaking which are customary. It is obvious from reading Wittgenstein's work that, if he ever meant to reject the possibility of changing ordinary language, he did not always heed his own advice. But I deny Miss Hervey's claim that there is an incoherence; later in this chapter I shall try to show how some of these passages can be construed in the manner I have suggested—i.e., that they do not constitute any general endorsement of every part of every ongoing linguistic practice.

I believe Miss Hervey fails to distinguish between overall adequacy, and adequacy for a specific purpose. Her point is that language is not rendered generally inadequate just because there is always vagueness and the possibility of confusion. Vagueness may cause problems in some cases, and then it can be dealt with specifically. My point is that, though ordinary language is adequate in general, there can always be these specific problems which require attention. Vagueness, ambiguity, incoherence, and contradiction may be occasionally found within this generally adequate ordinary language. Borderline cases continually arise; and as soon as new concepts are defined to take care of the borderline cases, new cases will be found which are on the borderlines of the new concepts. Our
language functions despite all this.

We are concerned here more with confusion than with vagueness. More, that is to say, with questions about the general operation of concepts than about the boundaries between adjacent ones. And here, too, our language generally functions well; problems can usually be dealt with specifically when they arise. Wittgenstein's method is to examine carefully the ways in which we speak in order to cast light on concepts. The goal of this examination is to clarify the function of particular concepts, not to eliminate all confusion from the language. It is true that there can be no general insurance against future problems; but it is possible and useful to clarify specific confusions and incoherences.

Such confusions can and do arise within ordinary language, as well as from the philosophical attempt to understand. It is not required for ordinary purposes that language always run without a hitch; it is enough that--most of the time--it runs. When it breaks down, and we do not "know our way about,"\textsuperscript{12} then it is the philosopher's job to find the problem and correct it. When Wittgenstein said that ordinary language is all right as it is, his point is this: its occasional failures do not vitiate its usefulness, either for ordinary purposes or for philosophy. There is no need to seek a \textit{general} justification for language, or \textit{a general} replacement of ordinary by constructed language. Ordinary language is, in general, sufficient for its purposes; but this does not mean
that nothing can ever go wrong within it.

I - 2

Many philosophers who have been impressed with Wittgenstein's later work have failed to recognize the importance of this distinction between the specific and the general. Wittgenstein did much to inspire the shift in emphasis from formal artificial languages to the study of natural languages; perhaps his followers were so caught up in the need to defend ordinary language that they felt they must defend every specific remark in it, not merely its general adequacy. One who appeared to do this is Alice Ambrose. Miss Ambrose argues that ordinary language is not, in any philosophically important sense, inadequate to do its job. True, there are some jobs it cannot do; but that is not a valid criticism, so long as it does its own. Arithmetic cannot do some of the jobs of higher mathematics, but it is not for that reason an inadequate arithmetic: it is altogether sufficient for the everyday purposes to which it is put, namely counting sheep, balancing checkbooks, etc. Its incompleteness is not like that of a deck of cards from which some are missing; it is more like playing a different game, for example one in which the jokers are not used. Again, a road map may show no details of surrounding mountains, and so be useless to a mountain climber; but it may be a perfectly good road map nonetheless. In mathematics a notation is sometimes found inadequate for
some purposes, and a new one is introduced. But "There was no
... inadequacy before the need was felt which prompted introducing
a more useful notation. A symbolism cannot be inadequate so long
as it does the work it was designed to do." 15

Now, this is all perfectly unobjectionable so long as it is
taken in the way in which, I suppose, it was meant. Miss Ambrose
is quite correct in defending ordinary language against those who
would replace it, wholesale, by something else. Nothing would be
accomplished by this even if it could be done. But there is a
danger here, arising from the fact that nothing is said to dis-
tinguish the defense of the general adequacy of ordinary language
from the defense of each specific part of it. In showing that there
is no use trying to replace ordinary language by something else,
perhaps a constructed language, Ambrose might be taken to hold that
there is never anything wrong with any part of ordinary language.
Her analogy with arithmetic might seem to suggest that it is never
in order for a philosopher to suggest emendations to ordinary
language—-that ordinary language accomplishes all its purposes, and
so can never be properly criticized. But the purposes of arith-
metic are determined by the nature of arithmetic, and it is usually
not difficult to tell what is arithmetic and what is not. On the
other hand, as Wittgenstein has shown, the uses of language are very
multifarious. Language does not have just one purpose, or even a
determinate number of distinct purposes. New purposes arise, and
sometimes the language is not adequate to accomplish them without revision; for the ways in which language can fail are as multi-
farious as the ways in which it can succeed. Ordinary language con-
stantly changes; and philosophical analysis is one of the reasons for change, because philosophers are on the alert for problems.

When Wittgenstein says ordinary language is all right as it is, he does not mean that nothing ever goes wrong with it. He means that when problems arise the solution is to seek particular corrections. His point is that whatever changes are made, it will still be ordinary—not formal—language that serves our ends.

So Miss Ambrose is correct in saying that ordinary language neither requires nor is capable of systematic additions that will make it complete. But the fact that no systematic correction is possible does not mean that no correction of any sort is possible.

I - 3

A more satisfactory account of "linguistic self-sufficiency" has been given by J. F. M. Hunter. What Wittgenstein meant to claim, says Hunter, was that language stands alone, requiring no theoretical, general justification or explanation. Linguistic be-

behavior precedes the rules we attribute to it; a person may use a
word correctly (in fact we typically do) without having in mind any sort of explicit rule.
But Hunter draws the distinction between self-sufficiency and perfection.

It is important to understand . . . that Wittgenstein is not saying that everything that anyone says is always perfectly intelligible, and that there is never a need for explanation or interpretation . . . but only that we do not always, or even typically, need explanations of what people say, nor interpret their remarks to ourselves as they say them, and we do not generally learn to use a word by learning a rule for its use, nor know a rule concerning the use of words which we use perfectly competently. The normal thing is for what we say to be understood: when this fails we explain, interpret, define . . .

Language does not rest on a theoretical justification, nor is any general justification of it possible. Explanation and justification occur within language, and they deal with particular cases.

It is failure to recognize this, I believe, that has led many philosophers to suppose that no criticism of an ongoing linguistic practice can ever be valid. It is possible to emphasize the importance of ordinary language, and yet remain critical of its occasional shortcomings.

II

In the previous section I discussed some mistaken interpretations of Wittgenstein's view of ordinary language. Now I will examine some of the passages which are taken to support this erroneous interpretation; I shall try to show that it is not necessary, or even
plausible, to construe Wittgenstein as saying that everything
which is said in ordinary language is all right as it is. Thus I
hope to show that criticism of existing linguistic practices can-
not be ruled out a priori.

Wittgenstein says,

On the one hand it is clear that every sentence in
our language 'is in order as it is.' That is to
say, we are not striving after an ideal, as if our
ordinary vague sentences had not yet got a quite
unexceptionable sense, and a perfect language
awaited construction by us. --On the other hand it
seems clear that where there is sense there must
be perfect order. --So there must be perfect order
in the vaguest sentence.19

It is easy to see how some might think this an endorsement of every
sentence that occurs in ordinary language. But let us look more
closely at the context: Wittgenstein here is rejecting his earlier
view that there is an "utterly simple" structure of thought.20 In
response to his earlier argument he now stresses that every sentence
must have a "quite unexceptionable sense." This means, I take it,
that there is nothing wrong with its sense; its sense is not de-
cicient in some way because of a failure to achieve perfection. For
"we are not striving after an ideal." A sentence does not take its
sense from logic, seen as the "a priori order of the world."21 This
notion of logic as a picture of the world is in fact the target which
this whole section of the Investigations aims to destroy.
What Wittgenstein is contrasting here is not correctly and incorrectly used sentences in ordinary language; rather, it is ordinary language and ideal language. That this is the point is clear from a comparison with a passage in the Blue Book.

It is wrong to say that in 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 language is all right. Whenever we make up 'ideal languages' it is not in order to replace our ordinary language by them; but just to remove some trouble caused in someone's mind by thinking that he has got hold of the exact use of a common word. 22

Wittgenstein here is warning of the temptation to suppose that language must be "utterly simple," and "of the purest crystal," and without "empirical cloudiness or uncertainty." 23

This temptation is very strong, but it must be avoided, for when we believe that we must find that order, must find the ideal, in our actual language, we become dissatisfied with what are ordinarily called 'propositions,' 'words,' 'signs.' 24

What we must do is to

... see that we must stick to the subjects of our every-day thinking, and not go astray and imagine that we have to describe extreme subtleties. ... 25

We must see that "... the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not a result of investigation: it was a requirement." 26 "We see that
what we call 'sentence' and 'language' has not the formal unity that I imagined, but is the family of structures more or less related to one another."²⁷

All this, I think, shows that Wittgenstein was not speaking at all of the possibility of misuse of ordinary language. The argument is wholly addressed to ridding ourselves of a mistaken picture of language and logic. Its thrust is to urge us not to advance theories,²⁸ but rather to ask ourselves, "...is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home."²⁹ If Wittgenstein had intended to deny the possibility of mistakes, misuses, or confusions in functioning practices he would surely have said more on the subject than a single ambiguous sentence.

The same argument is further advanced in Philosophical Investigations 124, another passage often cited in support of the claim that ordinary language is immune from criticism.

Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is. It also leaves mathematics as it is, and no mathematical discovery can advance it. A 'leading problem of mathematical logic' is for us a problem of mathematics like any other.³⁰

This means, I take it, that philosophy cannot interfere with the use of ordinary language in general; philosophy cannot replace the
language which is used by another, more suited to the problems of philosophy—nor can it support ordinary language, either. No wholesale replacement of the language which is used is possible, and no justification of it is necessary. Wittgenstein is arguing here that philosophy must give up its delusions of grandeur, its ambition to offer theories which will explain the general use of language; for language is the primary phenomenon, and the best the philosopher can do is study it closely. "What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use."  

But this does not mean at all that philosophy does nothing.

The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language. These bumps make us see the value of the discovery.  

In order to get clear about the meanings of the words we use we must look closely at the ways in which we use them; we must discover what went wrong when we are "entangled in our own rules."  

The point is that such problems . . . are, of course, not empirical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: in despite of an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.
When he says that philosophy cannot "interfere" with the actual use of language, then, he is not supposing that the philosopher has nothing to say. Rather, what the philosopher has to say is not at all what many have thought. What the philosopher has to offer is a close examination of the "workings of our language," and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings."

Another passage in the *Investigations* which has often been taken to mean that ordinary language is immune to criticism is PI 654: "Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a 'proto-phenomenon.' That is, where we ought to have said: this language-game is played." But again the context does not support that interpretation, for Wittgenstein here is not talking about all language-games whatsoever, but of a particular one: psychological expressions. He is trying here to break the hold of another tempting picture, namely the notion that such expressions are depictions of inner states of affairs. We are tempted to suppose that when someone says, "I mean to do so-and-so" this means, "There is a particular process going on in my mind, namely the process of intending to do so-and-so." In order to show that this is wrong, Wittgenstein here offers several examples. "What is the natural expression of an intention?—Look at a cat when it stalks a bird; or a beast when it wants to escape." The concept of intention is grounded in certain sorts of behavior in certain contexts; when we look at the cat we do not ask ourselves what
processes are occurring in its head. Even if we were interested in feline brain physiology no information about the cat's head would give us a better understanding of its intention to spring at the bird. The intention-behavior is itself the "proto-phenomenon." That is, it does not require, and is not susceptible of, explanation in terms of some other phenomenon. "The question is not one of explaining a language-game by means of our experiences, but of noting a language-game." 37

"We say a dog is afraid his master will beat him; but not, he is afraid his master will beat him tomorrow? Why not?" 38 The reason we do not say this is that a dog, having no language, is incapable of behavior which would express fear of being beaten tomorrow. What is basic to the concept is the expression, not any feeling in the dog's head. And if one is forced to guess the meaning of a hostile glance seen out of context, the main thing one guesses is just the context—not anything about the inner states of those involved. 39

The whole context shows that Wittgenstein is attacking a particular view of mental words—a view which seeks to explain them in terms of descriptions of inner processes or states. He shows that no such descriptions could play the necessary roles in our language; and so, in this particular case, what we should say is, "This language-game is played." He does not say, and there is no hint that he means, that we can never say any more about any ongoing
language-game; he is making a particular point, and some have mistakenly taken him to be making a general one. Again, if it were his purpose to claim that linguistic practices are immune from criticism he would have done more than merely offer this one remark in passing.

The thesis that the ordinary workings of language are flawless is obviously correlated with the view that all philosophical problems are created by philosophers themselves and their "metaphysical use of words." That is, some have believed that Wittgenstein meant that problems only arise when philosophers or others use words in technical senses foreign to their native language-games; if they had only left ordinary language to its own devices all would have been well. But this is not Wittgenstein's view; it is true that philosophers have frequently been guilty of this, and have paid the price in confusion; but use of words in odd ways is not limited to philosophers; philosophical problems can arise anywhere.

The problems arising through a misinterpretation of our forms of language have the character of depth. They are deep disquietudes; their roots are as deep in us as the forms of our language and their significance is as great as the importance of our language.40

So confusions are not always the results of bad philosophy, of metaphysical flights of fancy. Our language is shot through with potential problems; there is a built-in danger of misusing language
in the ways that produce philosophical problems. If ordinary speech in everyday life were beyond the reach of philosophical criticism, what would be the source of these "deep disquietudes?" There would be no misinterpretation of language to give rise to problems in the first place. The philosopher's job is like that of the policeman: it involves both prevention and correction of linguistic confusion.

In this section I have tried to rebut the claim that Wittgenstein repudiated all attempts to change language in any way. Instead, I have argued, the passages which have been so interpreted were really addressed to other problems entirely. So far as Wittgenstein is concerned, it is often appropriate and necessary to suggest remedies for specific confusions of language.

III

In the previous sections I hope I have shown that those who claim ongoing linguistic practices cannot rationally be criticized have not proved their case. There is, therefore, no theoretical reason why we should not examine such practices for conflicts, confusions, and incoherences; there is no a priori guarantee that linguistic practices will be free of them. Now I propose to examine some actual examples of practices which do or could exhibit such incoherences; thus I hope to cast light on the sorts of problems which philosophers might profitably seek to correct.
Peter Winch has claimed strongly that the practices of witchcraft and magic among the West African Azande is in perfect order. However false, irrational, and contradictory it may seem to us, says Winch, it is in order because it operates according to the Zande criteria of truth, rationality, and coherence; since it does in fact operate perfectly well, any criticism we Western, scientifically-oriented observers may make is irrelevant. For evaluating Zande practices, argues Winch, the only relevant criteria are the criteria employed by the Azande; to impose our criteria or rationality, coherence, etc. on them is to make a conceptual error. This is because the meaning of the terms and concepts of the Azande is determined, as it must be, by their use of them. Since they continue to use them in these ways, this use is justified.

First I must emphasize that I have so far done little more than note the fact, conclusively established by Evans-Pritchard, that the Azande do in fact conduct their affairs to their own satisfaction in this way and are at a loss when forced to abandon the practice. . . .

Obviously this is the same claim with which we have been dealing throughout this chapter—the claim that an ongoing, functioning linguistic practice is self-justifying, and cannot sensibly be criticized by criteria other than its own.

I have several comments to make about this claim of Winch's. First, it is important that he seriously misrepresents the situation
among the Azande; according to his own primary source, Sir Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard—the noted anthropologist who reported the results of his extensive sojourns among the Azande—the Zande practices do not function quite so well as Winch imagines.\footnote{43}

Winch bases his argument on the fact that the Azande do not choose to abandon their beliefs in witchcraft and magic, even when challenged by outsiders. They seem to find this method of life entirely satisfactory, and dismiss alternatives as lightly as we might dismiss a West African who tried to convert us to their beliefs. But—and this is the crucial point—there\footnote{44} are problems with the Zande practices. A major theme of Evans-Pritchard's book is the effort to explain just how it is that the Azande come to terms with these logical difficulties. In brief, they simply do not inquire into the problems, they ignore the inconsistencies, they "have no theoretical interest in the subject."

For example, the Azande believe that every human death is the result of witchcraft or magic, they have no concept of death as resulting from natural causes.\footnote{45} Witchcraft is practiced only by those who are hereditary witches; these have within their abdominal cavities a strange stuff called "witchcraft substance." Witches are regarded as wicked, and their evil is much feared; no Zande ever confesses to being a witch. Aside from post-mortem examination of a person's body, the only method of identifying witches is by use of the so-called "poison oracle" (involving feeding poison to fowl and
observing their behavior) which governs most major decisions of Zande life.

Since no Zande will willingly admit that a relative is a witch, when a kinsman dies he concludes that the death is necessarily the result of witchcraft. Zande tradition requires that reparation be made, by monetary compensation paid by the witch or his clan, or by killing the witch directly or by magic. At the time of Evans-Pritchard's observations the Azande were under British rule, and murder was prohibited; so magical killing was considered the most honorable form of vengeance.46

But, as I have said, the Azande never admit to being witches, or to having a witch in the family. So a Zande dies, and his clan practices magic to take the life of the witch who killed him (as identified by the poison oracle); but when the latter dies (as eventually he must—the Azande seem in no hurry about these things) his friends and clan suppose that his death was in turn due to wicked witchcraft by person or persons unknown. They then ask the oracle to identify the witch guilty of their kinsman's death, and attempt magical vengeance in their turn, and so on.

Now, it is clear that the same death is being regarded in very different ways by different Azande: when A dies his clansmen attempt the magical assassination of B, who supposedly killed him by witchcraft; but of course B's family regard him as an innocent victim of the witchcraft of C. This fact is concealed from public view.
because the Azande do not reveal the identity of the witch who killed their kinsman. Thus the conflicting views do not come to light.

The conflict is not entirely hidden, however, because the prince of the district must be notified of all magical vengeance taken on witches, and of the mystical information concerning every death. Thus the prince must know that the death of any one of his subjects is simultaneously regarded by his relations as the result of some other's witchcraft, and by another clan as the outcome of their magical vengeance for the death of their relative. Evans-Pritchard reports,

Princes must be aware of the contradiction because they know the outcome of every death in their province. When I asked Prince Gangura how he accepted the death of a man both as the action of vengeance-magic and of witchcraft he smiled and admitted that all was not well with the present-day system.

So it turns out on closer inspection that Zande practices are subject to just the sort of problems we might expect; those who possess all the information recognize exactly the conflicts which we recognize. The Azande, then, do not, as Winch claims, have such different criteria that there can be no communication. All that can be said is that their failure to deal rationally with their concept of witchcraft does not lead to immediate problems, and that it has been retained. (After all, that is easily understandable if witches are not real.) There is nothing here to support Winch's claim that
what is irrational for us is rational for the Azande.

Another problem concerns the Zande belief about inheritance of witchcraft-substance. The Azande believe that all witches and only witches have witchcraft-substance in their bodies. Moreover, all the same-gender descendents of witches are also witches; thus all the sons, grandsons, etc. of a male witch are witches, and all the daughters, granddaughters, etc. of a female witch are also witches. Now it appears obvious that either all members of a clan have witchcraft substance in their bodies, or none do. And so if it is found when the body of one clan member is examined after death, it would follow that all living members of the same clan are witches. But the Azande do not draw this conclusion; and they do not consider that the coherence of their system is compromised when no witchcraft substance is found in the body of the son of a male witch. Moreover, says Winch, the Azande are perfectly justified in not drawing this conclusion, for it is only to us sophisticated philosophers that this conclusion logically follows. It does not follow for the Azande because logical inference is rooted in linguistic practices, and the Zande practices do not involve this particular inference.

But again Winch misrepresents the Zande situation. It is true that the Azande are not "incommode" by the argument; that is, they do not see it as sufficient to make them abandon their beliefs about the nature of witchcraft; their practice continues. But it is not true that it is somehow outside their conceptual purview. They are
perfectly capable of comprehending its significance, and of employing it themselves when it suits their purposes. Evans-Pritchard says that sometimes a Zande who is accused of witchcraft will cite in his defense the fact that the bodies of members of his clan have been examined after death, and have been found free of witchcraft substance. Therefore, the defense runs, I must not be a witch. This argument may be offered even though there have been other members of the clan who have been conclusively convicted of witchcraft.48

It is not that, as Winch claims, the Azande reason in some manner fundamentally different from our way; it is rather that they sometimes choose not to reason at all on this subject.

(In his defense of the Azande, Winch seems a bit confused as to his purposes. He defends their right not to be logical, if they wish, regarding their mystical beliefs. But this is not the same as showing that they are being logical, in a manner different from our logic. It is the latter which Winch requires to support his argument that criteria of rationality are grounded in each linguistic practice and uncriticizable from outside it.)

And yet the Zande practice continues withal. It contains incoherences that lead to mistakes of fact, such as expecting witchcraft substance where none is to be found; and it contains others that lead to outright contradictions, such as believing that a death occurs for two mutually exclusive reasons. Some Azande recognize these problems some of the time; some concede that there are
conflicts which they do not know how to resolve. But their mystical mode of discourse continues to function more or less successfully, most of the time. Obviously it is possible, then, for an ongoing linguistic practice to be in partial disorder; so we cannot infer a priori that all such practices are wholly coherent.

III - 2.

Let us now consider the question from a slightly different angle, by looking at changes within a particular language, and a more familiar one. In Europe in the Middle Ages the belief that the earth is flat was perfectly respectable; scholars were aware that some of the ancients had believed in a round earth, for various reasons, and doubtless some shared that belief. But most men, even educated men, were content to rely on the "obvious" evidence of the senses that the earth is approximately flat. And in that day and age this mistake was harmless: no one was able to circumnavigate the globe, and probably no one much cared to.

It is true, there was some evidence to the contrary at hand; observant sailors always knew that the mast of an approaching ship appeared over the horizon before its hull; but the implication was not considered. And of course travelers were aware of the change in elevation of the stars as they traveled north or south; this knowledge was even used as a method of primitive navigation. But it was not generally remarked that this would be inexplicable if the surface
of the earth were flat.

Now, it is not that these men's conceptual powers were unequal to the task of understanding the shape of the earth. Their language was perfectly capable of expressing the difference between a plate-shaped object and one shaped like a ball. They were not fools, nor was their language so very much less developed than our own.

The point is that the incoherence of their belief was not drawn to their attention by circumstances; it made no difference that most men had false beliefs about the shape of the planet; because no one had any occasion to do anything about it. The mistake was not so much a logical as a sociological one; it was easy to overlook the reasons for believing that the earth is spherical because nothing in the milieu brought them into prominence. Even the fact, if known, that Eratosthenes of Alexandria had calculated the diameter of the earth fairly accurately, using impeccable geometrical and astronomical methods, was not sufficient to break the hold of the "obvious" flatness of the earth.

In these circumstances, I want to say, it was not irrational to believe the earth flat; it was rather a failure to engage the ratiocinative process at all. The reasons against believing the earth flat were not recognized; reasons for that belief seemed unnecessary; and the incoherence did not come to the surface.
By contrast, for an educated man of today to believe the earth flat would be wholly irrational. The question cannot be burked; it is in the ambience in a world of intercontinental passenger airplane flights. And one who is aware of the facts cannot rationally deny their consequences: the earth is, roughly, spherical. The earth has no edge, and that fact is incompatible with its being flat. The reasons for believing that the earth is round are good ones, and overwhelmingly so.

They are not reasons of a new and unique character (at least some are not). They are not reasons which would have been incomprehensible to a medieval man; if he could have had them before them he could have drawn the same conclusions as we do. And in fact he did, as we have seen, have some of them before him. His belief was not irrational, but--and this is the point--it was not correct, either. The belief in the flatness of the earth led to no unfortunate consequences at that time; but that is not enough to make it a true belief. The incompatibility of this belief with the indisputable facts was exposed when astronomical observation became more sophisticated and systematic; and more dramatically when Magellan sailed around the world. The old belief had to be abandoned.

The significance of all this for the present argument is this: the conceptual connections between facts, evidence, beliefs, reasons, etc. are many and various. It simply will not do to say, as Winch does, that criteria lie wholly within a particular linguistic
practice; and that therefore no criticism based on other criteria is relevant. The medievals failed to recognize that certain facts were evidence for the roundness of the earth, but that does not mean that those facts were any the less conclusive evidence—either for the medievals or for us. Nor does the failure of the Azande take seriously that incoherences in their beliefs about magic mean that they are not real incoherences.

To illustrate the latter point, let us consider a hypothetical case in which the Zande witchcraft beliefs face problems similar to those which confronted the flat-earth theory. As we have seen, the Azande have no theoretical interest in the problems inherent in their witchcraft beliefs; but circumstances might arise which would focus attention on those problems—circumstances in which interest in them would be practical, not merely theoretical. Suppose that crop failure became so common as to seriously endanger the Azande’s very existence; this would in all likelihood be attributed to an increase in malicious witchcraft. So protecting themselves against witchcraft might become so important that the Azande would have to adopt new methods; they might be forced to try to expel all witches from their midst, instead of combatting each individual case of witchcraft as it comes up. What would they do? They could not apply their present beliefs about the inheritance of witchcraft substance.

The impossibility does not lie in the formal contradiction
which might be written down by a logician; it has nothing to do with the scandalous $P \land \neg P$. It is an altogether practical impossibility.\textsuperscript{51}

For suppose that the Azande decided to banish from their country all witches; whom would they banish? When the body of $X$ is examined after his death, witchcraft substance is found. When the body of $Y$, $X$'s paternal uncle was examined, no witchcraft substance was present. So on the evidence of $Y$, $X$ cannot be a witch; but there was witchcraft substance in his body. And on the evidence of $X$, $Y$ must be a witch; yet none was found in him. In the happier days when the Azande could afford to wait until a witch caused trouble before dealing with him, this kind of contradiction was shrugged off, according to Evans-Pritchard. But now more effective methods are required if the Azande are to survive; and what can they do? They have what they formerly regarded as absolutely conclusive proof that all the relatives through the male line of $X$ are witches, and equally conclusive proof that none of them can be a witch. And there is no way that the Azande can both banish and not banish the same man. The previously unnoticed incoherence has been brought to the surface; whatever rationalization the Azande might concoct to explain away the breakdown of the practice, the conflict cannot be resolved. Action is required, and with their present beliefs they cannot tell what to do.

Now, it might be said that I am distorting the Azande conceptual structure by speaking of "conclusive proof," and "logical
incoherence" at all. But this objection would miss the point. It is true that the Azande do not have the concept of evidence, and conclusive proof, in just the same way as we do. But they certainly draw conclusions, make inferences, and reason about the world around them. They know what it is for something to be a good reason, or a poor reason, or no reason at all. And in their present scheme they have what they believe are the best of reasons for thinking that these people are witches, at the same time they have equally good reasons for exonerating them. This kind of contradiction is not something derived from the philosophy of science; it is an entirely everyday matter.

A second possible objection is that the Azande could find some way of getting around the problem without resolving the contradiction. For example, they might arbitrarily adopt the rule that the first instance is the only one to be considered, and any future conflicting evidence will be disregarded. This is wrong for two reasons. In the first place, this is still a revision of their original conceptual scheme: the decision to ignore all future evidence was neither explicit nor implicit in their practices concerning witchcraft. It was formerly believed that when a witch was discovered his whole clan was *ipso facto* implicated; and since the presence of witchcraft substance was taken to be a necessary and sufficient condition of a person's being a witch, it followed that it would be present in all the other members of his clan. The
possibility of conflicts between the witchcraft-substance criterion and the beliefs about inheritance was not provided for. We do not provide for the possibility that two people who know arithmetic will do the same problem and repeatedly get different answers; if this happened, and the mistake could not be found, our concept of arithmetic would be different. Likewise, if the Azande adopted the custom of ignoring all cases after the first they would also be changing their previous concept. So even if they did this, it would support my argument that their concepts required modification.

Second, it is frivolous to suppose that the Azande will adopt any such ad hoc convention. They believe that the identification of witches is of utmost importance to their welfare; they are using every means at their disposal to learn who the witches are, and exile them; this is the whole point of what they are doing. And so they cannot afford to simply ignore the conflicting evidence; to dismiss it would not be taking the question seriously. Doctors sometimes find conflicting evidence as to whether a tumor is malignant; but they do not ignore it; on the contrary, they try to find out which is correct, because they need desperately to know. It is fundamental to the concept of evidence that it is not ignored when the question at issue is important. Any such stipulation would again be a modification of the previously satisfactory beliefs.

Notice that this argument is not predicated on any assumption that witches do not exist, or that the Azande are confused or mis-
taken in their beliefs that their lives are affected by witches. For suppose that witches do exist, in just the form that the Azande believe: the Azande are incapable of dealing with the situation. If the belief about inheritance of witchhood is true, then the evidence of the witchcraft substance cannot be retained. Or, if witchcraft substance is taken to be the fundamental proof, then the belief about the pattern of inheritance must be revised or abandoned. If witches are a real danger, then the Azande must develop a better method of dealing with them.

Of course, I do not suppose that the problems which are attributed to witches by the Azande are in fact caused by witchcraft. On the contrary, I even suggest that one important reason why the incoherence in Azande belief has not yet led to difficulties is precisely that witches are not a real threat, and therefore effective means of dealing with them are not required. But the significant thing is that the beliefs are incoherent, as practiced and expounded by the Azande, whether witches are real or not.

Ironically, Winch's own defense of the Azande practice seems to involve the assumption that witches are not real. As I noted earlier in this chapter, Winch defends the right of the Azande not to be rational in this area, saying that they simply do not follow the implications of their beliefs to their logical conclusion. But defending the Azande in this way suggests that Winch does not believe that the Azande are right about witches at all. In effect Winch is
saying, "The Azande practice is perfectly in order because they can get away with it; and of course we know they will continue to get away with it, for witches are imaginary." A failure to be rational needs no defense, if it leads to no problems. And if it does lead to problems, no defense is possible. If Winch believed that there was a real possibility that the Azande might be seriously threatened by witchcraft, their failure to deal rationally with it would loom larger in his mind.

The conclusion, I believe, is inescapable: a social or linguistic practice can exist even though it contains incoherences, so long as those incoherences do not lead to serious and immediate practical problems. Therefore it cannot be said that in this sense ordinary language is always in order as it is.

So where does this bring us? I hope I have said enough to demonstrate that certain avenues remain open to the philosopher. Those I call the Wittgensteinian Fideists have claimed that, since "ordinary language is all right as it is," it is never proper to criticize an ongoing linguistic practice. I have tried to show first, that their arguments in this direction are confused; second, that the passages in Wittgenstein's work purporting to prove their case can at least as plausibly be otherwise construed; and finally that confusions and incoherences do in actual fact occur in ongoing linguistic practices. It is no part of my purpose to claim that these are always present, or that philosophers who claim to have
discerned them are always correct; I only wish to show that analysis is permissible and indeed required.
FOOTNOTES


3. Ibid., p. 350.

4. Ibid., p. 346.

5. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, New York: MacMillan, 1958. Paragraph 132. (Unless otherwise noted, all citations to Wittgenstein's works refer to the numbered paragraphs into which they are divided. Page references, where necessary, will be so labelled.)


8. Ibid., p. 170.


10. Ibid., p. 172.
11. Ibid., p. 175.


15. Ibid., pp. 175-176.


20. Ibid., 97.

21. Ibid., 97.

23. Ibid., 97.

24. Ibid., 105.

25. Ibid., 106.

26. Ibid., 107.

27. Ibid., 108.

28. Ibid., 109.

29. Ibid., 116.

30. Ibid., 124.

31. Ibid., 116.

32. Ibid., 119.

33. Ibid., 125.

34. Ibid., 109.

35. Ibid., 654.

36. Ibid., 647.

38 Ibid., 650.

39 Ibid., 652.

40 Ibid., 111.


42 Ibid., p. 311.


44 Ibid., p. 25.


47 Ibid., p. 28.

48 Ibid., pp. 123-124; p. 126.
49 cf. Zettel, 352: "It is a fact of experience that human beings alter their concepts, exchange them for others when they learn new facts; when in this way what was formerly important to them becomes unimportant, and vice versa."

50 cf. Remarks, II, 83: "It is--I should like to say--for practical, not for theoretical purposes, that the disorder is avoided."

51 cf., Remarks, I, 10: "Cut down all these trees!--But don't you understand what 'all' means? (He had left one standing.) How did he learn what 'all' means? Presumably by practice."
CHAPTER IV

OTHER MODES OF REASONING

Introduction

In the previous chapter I examined one alleged consequence of the notion that meaning is given by use, namely the belief that any ongoing linguistic practice must be in order exactly as it is. In this chapter I shall discuss another misinterpretation of this very important insight of Wittgenstein's. It is widely agreed nowadays that the meaning of concepts is closely interwoven with the practices that surround their application; and so it is often thought that reasoning, inferring, counting, calculating, etc. are relative to the ways in which they are used. Therefore, the argument runs, the particular ways in which we reason, infer, count, and calculate are not the only possible ways; some other society, for example, could easily have different—i.e., fundamentally different—ways of doing these things, so long as their other practices were also correspondingly different from ours. That is, they could count according to a different sequence, and do arithmetical calculations based on that sequence; and their methods would be just as valid ways of counting and calculating as ours.

As we have seen, this conviction has been expressed by Winch,
among others; he argues that the Azande are perfectly within their logical rights when they draw different conclusions than we do.¹

We say that their beliefs about witchcraft-substance are incoherent, because those beliefs may entail that all members of a clan be witches, and simultaneously entail that they all not be witches. But when we say this we are applying our own criteria of rationality, says Winch; and the only criteria which are relevant to evaluating the Azande are their criteria of rationality. Since the Zande criteria do not result in their drawing the same conclusions, they must be different from ours; but, thinks Winch, they are equally valid.

I wish to dispute this claim; I do not agree that it is intelligible to speak of radically different modes of reasoning from our own, or radically different patterns of calculating, etc. But I do not deny that the concepts of reasoning, counting, calculating, etc. have intimate logical interconnections among themselves and with other concepts and activities. On the contrary, I believe that these interconnections are of the first importance if we are to understand rightly what role all these concepts actually play. And, finally, I submit that it is these very interconnections among our concepts which render senseless the supposition that it is possible to reason in fundamentally different ways.

Perhaps I can best make the point of this chapter if I enter
a disclaimer at the beginning, to make clear just what I am not claiming. It is the purpose of this chapter to refute the assertion that some people do or could reason in fundamentally different ways than we do. But I surely do not deny that people in various times and places have had very different thoughts, beliefs, and reasons; what I deny is that they differ from us radically, in a sense that I shall try to make clear.

In the Muslim world the customs of marriage are very different from those in Christendom; a man may have four wives, and divorce them rather easily, etc. Likewise, in feudal times, when a vassal was ordered to go to war by his liege lord, that was a good reason for him to go; it was his duty. G. E. M. Anscombe, in *Intention* gives the example of a doomed Nazi who elects to spend his last hour killing Jews. In each of these cases we might say, in one sense, that we do not understand why these people act as they do, for their reasons would not persuade us to act that way.

But in another sense we can understand quite readily; without being a Muslim, or a vassal, or a Nazi, we can understand that it is appropriate behavior for them. It is not moral for a Nazi to kill Jews; but it is consistent and, in that sense, comprehensible. It is not irrational for a Nazi to spend his last hour killing Jews; if there is irrationality involved, it is in being a Nazi in the first place. The argument about the appropriateness of the action must be shifted up one level; for, given that a person is a Nazi, then killing
Jews is indicated.

In another connection, Wittgenstein asks whether a man brings up his children because he has found it pays.³ Of course not, in the usual case; yet we can easily imagine someone doing so. If there were a market for well-educated slaves, we could understand a man's rearing children for this reason; his actions would be revolting and reprehensible, but not, in this sense, incomprehensible. But suppose we were able to show him, by carefully marshalled facts and figures, that his operation could not make a profit; that costs were so high, and prices so low, that he could not in the long run come out ahead. And suppose he did not dispute our figures, but continued to say that he would rear children for profit. He agrees with all we have to say about the profit and loss situation; he admits that he cannot make money; yet he does not accept this as a reason for abandoning the operation. This would be a radical departure from our ways of reasoning; if a person cannot be brought to see that the impossibility of making a profit counts decisively against engaging in an activity for the purpose of making a profit, then we cannot understand him. It is no use in this case to say that he is "reasoning differently"; we should not say that he is reasoning at all.

This is the type of divergence I intend to deny; I will try to show that it is not possible that someone could reason in ways which we could not learn to understand, given enough information. If someone is reasoning, then we can follow his reasoning, or can come
to follow it; if we cannot, then we have no right to call it "reasoning."

In order to show all this I shall first examine arguments offered by a number of philosophers who believe that this relativism is a consequence of Wittgenstein's philosophy; I hope to be able to demonstrate that, for the reasons I have suggested, they fail to give any sense to the supposed possibility of alternate modes of reasoning. Then I shall look in some detail at some passages in Wittgenstein's own work which have been taken to have these relativistic implications, and I shall try to show where these commentators have gone wrong by elucidating what I believe to be Wittgenstein's actual account of inference and logical necessity. (Many of these arguments and examples will involve elementary mathematical or arithmetical operations, because it is here that we feel the strongest compulsion to draw particular conclusions, and so these areas provide the clearest kind of cases.)

It may not always be entirely clear at a given point whether I am arguing for what I believe to be the correct position, or explicating Wittgenstein's arguments. But this is of small importance, for I am convinced that, correctly interpreted, Wittgenstein's remarks on these subjects provide the most satisfactory account it is possible to give of what is called logical necessity.
One of the strongest claims made for alternative modes of inference has been offered by Douglas Gasking. Gasking's main point is that our methods of calculation are interwoven with the ways in which they are applied, so that a change in the calculation could be imagined if it occurred together with the appropriate modification of the application. (Gasking acknowledges a "very great debt" to the lectures of Wisdom and Wittgenstein.) His point is well taken, as far as he follows it up; unfortunately, his view of these activities is not yet broad enough.

Gasking says, "...I shall maintain that we could use any mathematical rules we liked, and still get on perfectly well in the business of life." He tries to show this by a series of detailed examples, of which I shall examine only one; I believe, however, that similar arguments would serve to dispose of the others as well. He says that it would be possible to multiply according to a "queer" multiplication table in which $6 \times 4 = 12$; and in general the results are given by the formula (as we would say)

$$(a + 2)(b + 2)/4$$

For example, argues Gasking, a building might use this table in determining how many one-yard-square tiles would be required to cover a floor; he would measure, says Gasking, in the following
manner,

He measures the sides of the room with a yardstick as follows: He lays his yardstick along the longer side, with the '0' mark of the yardstick in the corner, and the other end of the stick, marked '36 inches', some distance along the stick (sic). As he does this, he counts 'one'. He then pivots the yardstick on the 36 inches mark, and swings it round through two right angles, till it is once more lying along the side of the room—this time with the '36 inches' mark nearer to the corner from which he started, and the '0' mark further along the side. As he does this, he counts 'two'. But now the direction of the stick has been reversed, and it is the convention for measuring that lengths should always be measured in the same direction. So he pivots the stick about its middle and swings it round so that the '36' mark is now where the '0' mark was, and vice versa. As he does this, he counts 'three'. He then swings the stick round through two right angles, pivoting on the '36' mark, counting 'four'. He then reverses its direction, as before, counting 'five'. He swings it over again, counting 'six'. It now lies with its end in the corner, so he writes down the length of the side as 'six yards'. (If we had measured it in our way, we should have written its length down as four yards.) He then measures the shorter side in the same way, and finds the length (using his measuring technique) to be four yards. (We should have made it three.) He then multiplies 4 by 6, according to his table, making it 12, counts out 12 tiles, and lays them down. So long as he uses the technique described for measuring lengths, he will always get the right number of tiles for any room with his 'queer' multiplication table.

And of course Gasking is perfectly right; this "queer" table of multiplication coupled with this equally queer method of measurement, will always compute the correct number of tiles for a floor.
But measuring and multiplying are usable, and are used, for more than just one purpose. When the builder has laid the tile he will very likely need to place some molding around the floor; this, of course, requires a linear measurement. He has forgotten the size of the room, and he discovers that he has mislaid his yardstick; so he bends down to measure the long wall with a foot ruler. Using the above technique, he measures the wall to be 22 feet long; but somehow this does not sound right to him, though he cannot quite remember what results he had before. So he counts the tiles, knowing that each one is one yard along a side; there are four along this wall. Since there are three feet in a yard, he multiplies (according to Gasking's formula)

\[ 4 \times 3 = 7-1/2 \]

Should he cut the strip of molding 22 feet long, or 7-1/2? Well, molding is expensive, so he had better look into this some more, to find out which is right. About this time his assistant arrives with the missing yardstick; the builder, who has begun to wonder about a lot of things, decides to compare it with his foot ruler to be sure that they are all right. He is delighted when he sees that the yardstick, measured Gasking-style, is four times as long as the foot ruler; he assumes now that the foot ruler must be too short, since the yardstick gave satisfactory results for laying the tile. Surely this will explain the discrepancy! Since there are four tiles along
the long wall, and each is four feet on a side (measured with the foot ruler according to the Gasking scheme), he multiplies

\[ 4 \times 4 = 9 \]

to find how many feet along the wall. Alas; the confusion is not dispelled but deepened.

The assistant, however, has a better memory than his employer; he recalls that, according to their original measurements and calculations, this wall was six feet long, not four. Warily, the builder computes

\[ 6 \times 3 = 10 \]

This should be the length of a six-yard wall in feet—according to the system which Gasking says will enable us to "get on perfectly well in the business of life." But he measured very carefully with the foot ruler, and made it more than twice that. Now he remembers that he has a fifty-foot steel tape in his truck; surely it will show which of these measurements is correct. But of course this hope is vain; the tape shows the length of the wall to be 12 feet. In disgust the builder tells his assistant to simply lay the molding along the wall and cut it to length.

We might further suppose that, having disposed of this problem, the builder now decides to figure out the volume of the room, so that he can order an air conditioner. But there is no relief in this;
for Gasking's technique of "measurement" and "multiplication" just does not work for anything except figuring areas; it breaks down if it is applied to anything else.

This is why Gasking has not made sense of his supposition. Of course it is possible to work out a "queer" multiplication table, and then design a measuring technique by which it can be applied--for a particular purpose. But real measuring, and real multiplication, work more widely: the builder could measure the room once, and then use the same figures to calculate the number of tiles needed, the length of the molding, and the amount of air conditioning required. He can multiply $4 \times 3 = 12$, and use that calculation in figuring his payroll, or the number of people seated in 3 rows, of 4 seats each, or anything else. One multiplication table will do; he does not need a different one, with an associated new technique of measurement, for each task.

Gasking, I imagine, would say that this only shows our system to be simpler and more convenient; the people he envisions could do all the things we do, though it would be unimaginably more complicated--they would have to learn a different arithmetic, and the related method of measurement, for every new job.

We could indeed imagine their doing something like that; but what they did would not be measuring, nor multiplying. These activities are interrelated, and integrated into countless other activities; their usefulness comes from their great generality. It
is not difficult to imagine ad hoc techniques which give satisfactory results for narrowly defined purposes: the ancient Egyptians used such techniques in building their pyramids, and carpenters today use them in building houses. But they are not alternative schemes of measurement or multiplication. By looking at only one possible use of these techniques, Gasking seemed to make the idea of such alternative schemes plausible; but when we see their role in its whole context, we see how absurd is the supposition.  

I - 2.

In this section I am trying to show that no sense can be given to the supposition that there might be radically different, but equally correct, ways of reasoning, inferring, calculating, etc. Michael Dummett has attributed to Wittgenstein the view I am attacking, calling Wittgenstein's position a "full-blooded conventionalism." Dummett does not accept the view he believes is Wittgenstein's, saying that it is altogether nonsensical: I agree with the latter, but I do not agree that it is an accurate interpretation of Wittgenstein's views on inference. Since Dummett's paper has been widely read and discussed, I shall discuss here the view he attributes to Wittgenstein; and I shall try to show that it is a welter of confusion which Dummett was wise to reject. In the second section of this chapter, I shall try to show how Dummett went wrong in interpreting Wittgenstein's meaning, and I shall outline what I take to be
Wittgenstein's position.

According to Dummett, Wittgenstein does not believe that anyone is ever compelled to make a particular move at any step in following a rule; one is always free to apply any rule in a way different from that in which it has always been applied in the past. Since everyone is always thus free, there is no way of being sure that concepts will be used in what we have regarded as a consistent way; someone else might do something which we call different, and yet claim that it is he who is correctly using the rule. So, concludes Dummett, it is only a matter of convention that we all (or nearly all) agree how simple rules are to be used. It is perfectly imaginable that some person, or some society, might infer and calculate in very different ways; and nothing could show that they were wrong. Dummett believes that this account is unsatisfactory, and so do I; I will try to show just how it is so.

Thus,

According to conventionalism, all necessity is imposed by us not on reality, but upon our language; a statement is necessary by virtue of our having chosen not to count anything as falsifying it. Our recognition of logical necessity thus becomes a particular case of our knowledge of our own intentions.  

Wittgenstein goes in for a full-blooded conventionalism; for him the logical necessity of any statement is always the direct expression of a linguistic convention. That a given statement is necessary consists always in our having expressly decided to treat that very statement as
unassailable; it cannot rest on our having adopted certain other conventions which are found to involve our treating it so. This account is applied alike to deep theorems and to elementary computations. To give an example of the latter, the criterion which we adopt in the first place for saying that there are n things of a certain kind is to be explained by describing the procedure of counting. But when we find that there are five boys and seven girls in a room, we say that there are twelve children altogether, without counting them all together. The fact that we are justified in doing this is not, as it were, implicit in the procedure of counting itself; rather, we have chosen to adopt a new criterion for saying that there are twelve children, different from the criterion of counting up all the children together. It would seem that, if we have genuinely distinct criteria for the same statement, they may clash. But the necessity of '5 + 7 = 12' consists just in this, that we do not count anything as a clash; if we count the children all together and get eleven, we say, 'We must have miscounted.'

The same is true, he says, of proofs of theorems.

. . . at each step we are free to chose to accept or reject the proof; there is nothing in our formulation of the axioms and of the rules of inference, and nothing in our minds when we accepted these before the proof was given, which of itself shows whether we shall accept the proof or not; and hence there is nothing which forces us to accept the proof. If we accept the proof, we confer necessity on the theorem proved; we 'put it in the archives' and will count nothing as telling against it. In doing this we are making a new decision, and not merely making explicit a decision we had already made implicitly.

Wittgenstein's conception is extremely hard to swallow, even though it is not clear what one wishes to oppose to it. The proof is supposed to have the effect of persuading us, inducing us, to count such-and-such a form of words as
unassailably true, or to exclude such-and-such a form of words from our language. It seems quite unclear how the proof accomplishes this remarkable feat . . . . For Wittgenstein, accepting the theorem is adopting a new rule of language, and hence our concepts cannot remain unchanged at the end of the proof. But we could have rejected the proof without doing any more violence to our concepts than is done by accepting it; in rejecting it we could have remained equally faithful to the concepts with which we started out. It seems extraordinarily difficult to take this idea seriously when we think of some particular actual proof. . . . We want to say that we do not know what it would be like for someone who, by ordinary criteria, already understood the concepts employed, to reject this proof. . . .

The examples given in Wittgenstein's book are--amazingly for him--thin and unconvincing. I think that this is a fairly sure sign that there is something wrong with Wittgenstein's account.13

Dummett makes much of Wittgenstein's point that, once we have calculated the sum of two numbers, say, we do not accept anything as counting against it. If, as he says, we count five boys and seven girls in a room, we say that there are twelve children without counting them all together; and if someone does count them and gets eleven, we do not even consider the possibility that 7 and 5 do not, after all, equal twelve. We assume that he has miscounted, or that one child has slipped out unobserved, or something. So far, so good. But Dummett thinks this means that only our "decision" to accept nothing as evidence against $5 + 7 = 12$ supports this equation. He takes Wittgenstein to say that we could as well have chosen to confer necessity on $7 + 5 = 11$, and that that would have been equally satisfactory. This, he says, is
...one of the big differences between Wittgenstein and the intuitionists. He appears to hold that it is up to us to decide to regard any statement we happen to pick on as holding necessarily, if we choose to do so. The idea behind this appears to be that, by laying down that something is to be regarded as holding necessarily, we thereby in part determine the sense of the words it contains; since we have the right to attach what sense we choose to the words we employ, we have the right to lay down as necessary any statement we choose to regard as such.14

Of course it is absurd to suppose that we could confer necessity on any statement we chose. It is true enough that we do not accept anything as evidence against the equation $5 + 7 = 12$; but it does not follow that we could equally well have conferred necessity on $5 + 7 = 11$. Let us see just what this supposition would amount to: we would count five boys and seven girls in a room, and we would conclude that there were eleven children present. Someone else might come along and count them all together, and he would say that there were twelve; but we would dismiss his claim out of hand. We would bring in eleven bottles of soda pop, and give one to each of the first eleven children; the last child, of course, would not get one—but we would suppose that he or she had somehow entered the room unobserved, though there is only one door and we had been watching it all along. We are familiar with all these children, and know each by name; we remember distinctly counting off each in turn. The children have been talking among themselves, and they can attest
that each has been there from the beginning. And yet we reject all this, holding firmly to $7 + 5 = 11$.

Clearly it is absurd to suppose that this could happen every time we considered seven objects and five objects; it makes no sense to suppose that we would have to assume inexplicable appearances and disappearances all the time. For our system of addition is interwoven with the counting and identification of objects; it is based on the fact that we can find out the total number of objects either by counting them together or in groups, and we get the same result either way. Only very rarely do we go wrong without being able to find out why. Our unwillingness to count anything as evidence against the ordinary arithmetical equivalences is an important feature of the system; but it is not itself sufficient: if we chose to regard other equations as necessary, the system would not serve the purposes for which we use it. Wittgenstein says that if calculation did not always get the same result, it would no longer be calculation. "And this is of course a grammatical remark about the use of the word 'calculation'. And this grammar has of course a point." Calculations such as $7 + 5 = 12$ are used for certain purposes, and it is because of these uses that they have the meaning they do. Our assurance that there can be no evidence against them is a part of the technique of calculating; it is not the foundation of those techniques. It is a necessary condition of our being
able to count and calculate as we do that we be able to use the results in certain ways; and if we simply chose which result to "put in the archives" the results could not have their present use.

The second point I have to make against the account Dummett ascribes to Wittgenstein has to do with the idea that we might be "free" to apply arithmetical or mathematical rules in any way we wish. Again, this supposition is wholly without sense. Of course, there is not ordinarily a man with a gun at our heads when we calculate; and if someone writes "7 + 5 = 11" he will not, in the usual case, be incarcerated. But this is not what is at issue; to say that we are "free" to calculate as we wish must surely mean that the customary way is not the only correct way—that someone who chose to do it differently would be only eccentric, not wrong. If we are free to calculate or infer any way we like, then it cannot be right to infer this but wrong to infer that; it must be a matter of individual taste, or caprice, free of any outside check. Everyone must have a perfect right to depart from the customary patterns of inference at will, and nothing can show that he is mistaken.

But this is just what is not the case: whatever account of inference we are to accept, it must reflect the fact that there is a difference between inferring correctly and inferring incorrectly; and calculating likewise. One who "chooses" to infer in a different way is not exercising an inalienable right; he is wrong.
Mathematical proofs, and ordinary arithmetical calculation, are compelling in the only way that is relevant: there are right results and wrong results; and it is, normally, possible to tell the difference.

The supposition that we might be free to infer in different ways is empty; in what sense am I free to sell 143 bottles of wine as twelve full twelve-bottle cases? I would be prosecuted for fraud, if my customer accepted the shipment. It would be no defense to say that I multiply differently—that I believe $12 \times 12 = 143$. The supposition simply makes no sense; if I know how to use the number system at all, I know (or can easily find out) how many bottles there are in twelve cases. A sarcastic prosecutor could set twelve full cases of wine before me and demand that I count them in such a way as to get 143; I could not do it, of course; for if I got that result I would not be counting. We are compelled to get 144 when we multiply $12 \times 12$ by the only form of compulsion relevant to arithmetic: 144 is the correct answer, and any other is wrong.

I have tried briefly to show that the account Dummett attributes to Wittgenstein makes no sense; this in itself should raise the question whether it is a correct interpretation of Wittgenstein's meaning. In the second part of this chapter I will try to show directly that it is an erroneous reading, by explicating what I believe to be the real point of these remarks of Wittgenstein's.
Dummett complains that Wittgenstein's account leaves mathematical inference wholly without foundation; that there would, on Wittgenstein's understanding, be a constant danger that communication would break down. One philosopher who has better understood this point is Joseph L. Cowan. Cowan says that Wittgenstein did for deductive inference what Hume did for induction: he gave an analysis so destructive that no one wanted to accept it, and yet no one knows what to oppose to it. That is, Wittgenstein showed that there is no way of justifying the procedures of inference we use, in terms of some other phenomenon.

Otherwise, though, Cowan thinks Dummett is correct; he says that Dummett shows an "excellent insight into Wittgenstein's position." And so it is not surprising to find that Cowan misinterprets Wittgenstein in much the same way as does Dummett. He says,

Wittgenstein's position, to put it with impossible brevity, is that each of our judgments is independent. A logical or mathematical proposition such as $2 + 2 = 4$ is true not because of prior "meanings" or "rules," conventional or otherwise, much less some necessary correspondence with reality or whatever. Such a proposition is true simply because and in so far as we chose to regard it as true.

Here again we see the idea that Wittgenstein leaves logical and mathematical inference up for grabs, so to speak. We could, on this
view, as well have adopted a system of mathematical rules in which
2 + 2 = 5, and we would be just as happy with it if we had.
And, once again, we can see that this mistake results from
looking at too narrow a range of examples. Cowan chides Dummett
for supposing that things simply could not happen in certain ways.
But Cowan thinks it is perfectly possible to imagine that

... things happened as though we always skipped
the numeral "12" when counting children (somewhat
as hotels and apartment houses do not have
thirteen floors)... we never catch ourselves or
others, and so on. Now none of this seems im-
possible. In fact one can almost see it unfolding
before one's very eyes.19

One can imagine it, I believe, only if one concentrates one's
attention closely on a small handful of examples, and does not heed
the consequences.

There would be other peculiar consequences, of
course. When we counted thirteen boys and thirteen
girls, we would count only twenty-five children... We could give twelve cookies to thirteen little
boys without generating quite such intense con-
flict as would now obtain.20

Surely Cowan's own examples show how absurd is this view. What he
means is that, when we counted the little boys, we skipped saying
"twelve"; and so there are really only twelve boys. But the
supposition is that we always skip the number '12,' not just some-
times; so of course we would skip it when counting the cookies, as
well. Therefore we would say there were '13' cookies, not '12,' although of course there would be—in our present system of numerals—12 boys and 12 cookies. There would be nothing at all peculiar in the consequence, except that in the system Cowan imagines we would be using the word "thirteen" to designate what we now call "twelve," and we would use "fourteen," for what we now call "thirteen," and so on. When we counted "thirteen" (in Cowan's terms) boys and "thirteen" girls, we would not have counted 25 children, but 24; and we would call this number "twenty-five."

The particular configurations of sound and lines by which we designate the numbers are, after all, arbitrary. What we call "twelve" the Germans call zwölf. And in what does this equivalence lie? What makes it a correct translation? Just in the fact that in German zwölf is used in the same way and in the same circumstances as "twelve" in English. Likewise, in Cowan's envisioned system, "thirteen" would be used as we use "twelve," and so on—and therefore would be the correct translation of "twelve." There is no question of skipping the number "twelve," only of renaming it.

Wittgenstein made a similar point in the Philosophical Investigations.

It looks as if it followed from the nature of negation that a double negative is an affirmative. (And there is something right about this. What? Our nature is connected with both.)
There cannot be a question whether these or other rules are the correct ones for the use of "not." (I mean, whether they accord with its meaning.) For without these rules the word has yet no meaning; and if we change the rules, it now has another meaning (or none), and in that case we may just as well change the word too.21

In other words, Cowan has not shown how we could count by skipping the number twelve; he has only shown how we could call all the numbers past eleven by different names. It is the use that determines the meaning; the only difference between Cowan's system and our own is that he writes $13 + 13 = 25$, in circumstances where we write $12 + 12 = 24$. But the two mean the same thing.

So Cowan has not made any sense of the notion, which he attributes to Wittgenstein, that it would be possible for us to count in these radically different ways. Once more we see that, when the role of counting is considered closely, these supposed alternative possibilities turn out not to be possible after all.

I - 4

A similar mistaken interpretation of Wittgenstein's views on inference has been offered by Charles S. Chihara.22 He argues that Wittgenstein's account of following a mathematical rule is basically an appeal to what we find it natural to say; and that it is easily imaginable that some others might find it natural to say something different. In this case, thinks Chihara, they would count and
calculate in an altogether different fashion from us. He says,

Suppose you write down the sequence 3, 6, 9 and say to a person: 'Now continue the sequence doing the same thing as I did in obtaining each term from its preceding term.' Imagine however that the person puts down 13, 17, 21. You immediately interrupt him saying: 'That's not right--you are not doing the same thing as I did. . . .' Might there not be various things he could do which could be correctly described as 'doing the same thing as you'? . . . And suppose you then say 'Look--just continue in the obvious way.' Would it not be possible for someone to take it as obvious that since one began the sequence from 0 by adding 3 three times to get the first three terms, one should continue the sequence by adding 4 four times, 5 five times, 6 six times, and so on?23

So let us suppose. . . that the Myonese. . . very easily learn the operation which we would describe as adding 1 once, adding 2 twice, adding 3 three times, etc. They use the notation

\[ \binom{n}{j} \]

\[ j=a \]

for operations of which sort where we would define

\[ \binom{n}{j} \]

\[ j=a \]

as the operation of adding a a times, adding \((a+1)(a+1)\) times, \((a+2)(a+2)\) times, . . . \(n n\) times. The Myonese use this operation to define sequences of natural numbers, it being understood that one obtains the first term in the sequence by adding to 0 and that successive additions yield successive terms.24
Now, we are to suppose that the Myonese find this sequences of numbers "natural"; i.e., that it plays the same sort of fundamental role in their life and language and mathematical system that our sequences of natural numbers plays in ours. For them, the sequence 0, 1, 2, 3, 4... is fairly complicated; they must stop and think out each step before proceeding. I have several interrelated objections to this.

First, consider what that sequence of numbers would be, expressed in our terms: 1, 3, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 26, 30... The Myonese, we are told, take this sequence as fundamental; ours is derivative from it, and can be expressed only in some abstract formula. So we must suppose that they have a means of expressing their sequence which does not depend, as does the above, on our sequence of natural numbers.

Even if we accept this, what of the intermediate numbers, 2, 4, 6, 7 etc.? Are we to suppose that the Myonese do not have them at all? Surely that cannot be; they must in some way be able to count a brace of birds or a pair of dice. Or are we to take it that the Myonese never have to count two things because, for some unimaginable reason, they never meet two things at a time? What would it be like to suppose this? Are there never two and only two apples left on a tree? Why? Does it never happen that two Myonese are together, no more and no less? Why do they never speak of one thing happening two days after another? Let us stretch our
imaginations to the limit and grant that in some way they manage to express these intermediate numbers, perhaps by some means analogous to our use of fractions. But this only leads us to a more fundamental objection.

Numbers do not exist in a vacuum; our concept of number arises out of the things we do in everyday life. As Wittgenstein says,

Counting and calculating are not--e.g.,--simply a pastime. Counting (and that means: counting like this) is a technique that is employed daily in the most various operations of our lives. And that is why we learn to count as we do: with endless practice, with merciless exactitude; that is why it is inexorably insisted that we shall all say 'two' after 'one,' 'three' after 'two' and so on. The truth is that counting has proved to pay. 25

Chihara's example requires us to imagine that the Myonese find it natural to count according to the above sequence: 1, 3, 5, 8, . . . . If a Myonese is picking apples, he finds it natural to pick first one, then two simultaneously on the next two occasions, then three simultaneously the next three times, etc. This way he has first one apple, then three, then five, then eight, etc. This is the natural way for him to pick apples; it would seem to him arbitrarily complicated and perverse to pick apples one at a time. (We will suppose that he has enough hands to pick as many apples at once as required; that supposition is easily swallowed by comparison!) If a Myonese comes across a single apple after he has begun the sequence, so that he cannot pick the normal (for him) number, he will have to
deliberate to see how to pick it; or perhaps he will not do it at all: it is a complex task with which he is unfamiliar. And do the Myonese women have one child first, then twins the next two times, followed by triplets on the next three deliveries? This is the sort of world Chihara is asking us to imagine.

But even imagining this grotesque world does not make Chihara's example intelligible. For notice that even to describe the Myonese behavior we must use the ordinary sequence of natural numbers: we say that the Myonese apple-picker picks one apple on the first occasion, then two on the second and third occasions, etc. We have to employ the natural numbers even to describe where the Myonese differ from us, because the natural numbers are the fundamental sequence for counting. So we have given no sense to the claim that the Myonese could use a different sequence as natural numbers. Are we to imagine that the Myonese women do not have a second confinement, but go directly from the first to the third? For according to Chihara the number two is, somehow, not the successor to the number one. An old joke says that it is always easier to make your second million dollars than your first, so you should skip the first and start immediately with the second; the humor lies in the logical impossibility.

Most important, why should we say that what the Myonese are doing is counting, when they utter their sequence? Chihara asks us to believe that they (naturally!) count: 1, 3, 5, 8, 11, 14. . . .
Now, of course no one wants to deny that, for some reason, they may find it natural to pick first one apple, then two twice, and so on; there might be sociological reasons for this, or physiological. But they would not be counting off the apples when they did it. Suppose we ask a Myonese to count off pebbles as we hand them over one at a time; if he says, "I, 3, 5, etc.," he is not counting. We still have no reason to say that the Myonese count in an odd manner; for we would have no reason to say that they were counting at all.

As always, the problem is that Chihara divorces the writing of sequences on paper from the normal activities in which the concept of number is grounded; he removes number sequences from their natural habitat and employment. It is easy enough to imagine the Myonese writing these sequences on paper, and stoutly defending their correctness. What is not imaginable is that they could be used as sequences of natural numbers; and so, a fortiori, it is unimaginable that they could be natural numbers. They simply cannot perform the function of the sequence of natural numbers.26

In this section I have attacked the claim, often supposed to follow from Wittgenstein's work, that fundamentally different practices of reasoning, inferring, counting, calculating, etc. are possible. I have tried to show that, when we take seriously the insight that concepts are grounded in practices, we see just why such different ways of reasoning are not intelligible, after all. In the next section I shall try to show that these relativistic theses ought not to
be laid at Wittgenstein's door.

II

In the previous section I tried to show that several relativistic theses attributed to Wittgenstein do not make sense; I tried to show, that is, that these supposed examples of radically different ways of reasoning, inferring, calculating, etc., are not intelligible; and I tried to show why this is true. I believe that this, in fact, was Wittgenstein's purpose in offering such examples: he meant to bring out just how it is that such suppositions are senseless. He wanted to show that they are unintelligible because the roles played by these activities require that they be done in certain ways, and not in others.

The absurd examples of different ways of inferring, reasoning, calculating, and intended to be just that—absurd; and we see why they are absurd by coming to understand the roles these practices play in human life. It is not enough, for example, simply to say that people find it "natural" to add one once, two twice, etc.; we must go on to explain how it is that this can be counting--i.e., how they can use this procedure to serve the purposes for which we count. The same is true, as I have tried to show, of measuring. The task seems possible only when we concentrate closely on one or two particular cases; when we look at the multitude of different but related uses to which counting and measuring can be and are put, we see that
it makes no sense to imagine that they could be done in these supposed ways.

In this section I shall explicate what I believe to be Wittgenstein's actual views on inference and logical necessity. I shall examine a number of the passages which have given rise to the idea that he subscribed to these relativistic conclusions; and I shall argue that they can far more plausibly be interpreted in other ways. Then I shall contrast these passages with others which, I believe, clearly show that he did not intend any such conclusions to be drawn. I believe that Wittgenstein's ideas on these subjects are far more valuable than many have thought, and I hope this will be clear from my discussion.

II - 1

Wittgenstein saw giving an adequate account of inference as an important part of his task. This task is the more difficult because of the many erroneous pictures of inference we are apt to have in our minds; we think, "It must be like this!" and so do not see how it really is. It is important to correct these wrong and harmful pictures, and this is one of Wittgenstein's main purposes.

We must get clear what inferring really consists in: We shall perhaps say it consists in the transition from one assertion to another. But does this mean that inferring is something that takes place when we are making a transition from one assertion to another, and so before the second one is uttered--
or that inferring consists in making the one assertion follow upon the other, that is, e.g., in uttering it after the other? Misled by the special use of the verb 'infer' we readily imagine that inferring is a peculiar activity, a process in the medium of the understanding, as it were a brewing of the vapour out of which the deduction arises. But let's look at what happens here.--There is a transition from one proposition to another via other propositions, that is, a chain of inferences; but we don't need to talk about this; for it presupposes another kind of transition, namely that from one link of the chain to the next. Now a process of forming the transition may occur between the links. There is nothing occult about this process; it is a derivation of one sentence from another according to a rule; a comparison of both with some paradigm or other, which represents the schema of the transition or something of the kind. This may go on on paper, orally, or 'in the head'.--The conclusion may however also be drawn in such a way that the one proposition is uttered after the other, without any such process; or the process may consist merely in our saying 'Therefore' or 'It follows from this,' or something of the kind. We call it a 'conclusion' when the inferred proposition can in fact be derived from the premise.

But still, I must only infer what really follows!--Is this supposed to mean: only what follows, going by the rules of inference; or is it supposed to mean: only what follows, going by such rules of inference as somehow agree with some (sort of) reality? Here what is before our minds in a vague way is that this reality is something very abstract, very general, and very rigid. Logic is a kind of ultra-physics, the description of the 'logical structure' of the world, which we perceive through a kind of ultra-experience (with the understanding, e.g.). Here perhaps inferences like the following come to mind: 'The stove is smoking, so the chimney is out of order again.' (And that is how this conclusion is drawn! Not like this: 'The stove is smoking, and whenever the stove smokes the chimney is out of order; and so. . . .' )
What we call 'logical inference' is a transformation of our expression. For example, the translation of one measure into another. One edge of a ruler is marked in inches, the other in centimetres. I measure the table in inches and go over to centimetres on the ruler.--And of course there is such a thing as right and wrong in passing from one measure to the other; but what is the reality that 'right' accords with here? Presumably a convention or a use, and perhaps our practical requirements. 29

Wittgenstein here is attacking several of these false pictures. The first plainly, is the idea that inference is a mental process, which goes on in one's mind as he makes an inference from one proposition to another. Some process may go on "in the head" in certain cases, of course; e.g., when one does mental arithmetic. Here the "process" involves filling in steps which are not repeated orally. But then how do we infer that \(1 + 1 = 2\)? Here there are no intermediate steps to be filled in, in the head or otherwise; this transition is not made in virtue of other transitions; rather, it is immediate. So its validity cannot depend on any such process. The point is that no such process is necessary to inference; one may simply say, "The stove is smoking, so the chimney is out of order again."

Philosophers have often been misled because they concentrated on the chain of inferences, rather than the individual links in the chain. The validity of the chain depends on the validity of the individual links--the immediate inferences. And it has often been thought that the validity of the links must also depend on something
further, namely some mental process of deduction. This process, whatever its nature, would be what underlies valid inferences, and what is missing from invalid inferences. Wittgenstein repudiates this notion, and argues that we call it a "conclusion" only if the inference really is justified. What makes a transition a valid inference is not an interior process which somehow guarantees its validity; rather, the justification lies in its surroundings: the stove is smoking because the chimney is out of order. The idea that what goes on in the mind is fundamental distracts our attention from the use of the expression—and that is the important thing.

Another picture which is under attack here is the idea of logic as an "ultra-physics." Sometimes it seems that logic is a description of a different kind of world than the physical one; the world of logic is much more pure and certain than the world of objects. When we say, "But still, I must only infer what really follows!" this seems to mean that I can only infer "what the logical machine really does produce." But this is a false picture; it makes it seem that logic compels us to infer as we do "like rails compelling a locomotive." We are not compelled in that sense to infer in the ways we do, and if we suppose that we are we get a wholly wrong idea of what the rules of inference amount to. Wittgenstein is trying to break the hold of that tempting picture, and to show just how these rules really do operate.

Of course, to say that logic does not compel us like rails
compel a locomotive does not mean that logic does not compel us at all. There is such a thing as logical compulsion, and we are seldom tempted to deny it. The problem is that we imagine it as a force which we cannot overcome. Wittgenstein is trying to show how it is that we are compelled to reach these logical conclusions and no others; we shall have more to say about the nature of this compulsion later; the point here is the attack on the false picture.

We have a feeling that the laws of logic are inexorable; that they are absolutely certain, and they admit of no exceptions.

We say: 'If you really follow the rule in multiplying, you must all get the same result.' Now if this is only the somewhat hysterical way of putting things that you get in university talk, it need not interest us overmuch.

It is however the expression of an attitude towards the technique of calculation, which comes out everywhere in our life. The emphasis of the must corresponds only to the inexorableness of the attitude both to the technique of calculating and to a host of related techniques. 32

The harm that this hysterical talk does is that it seems to require that we ascribe to the laws of logic some sort of existence independent of human beings and the way they infer; it sounds as if we mean that these laws are among the most fundamental laws of nature—or more so than, say, e = mc². But when we examine language closely and see how it operates we see that this interpretation is not necessary.
When Wittgenstein speaks of the "inexorableness" of our attitude toward calculating and other techniques, his point is much the same as those I made against relativistic positions in the first section of this chapter. Our attitude is inexorable: calculating must be done in just this way, else it is not calculating. The reason it is not calculating is that it cannot be used for the purposes of calculating. As we saw in the discussion of Cowan, we cannot use $7 + 5 = 11$ in the way we use $7 + 5 = 12$.

... what we call 'counting' is an important part of our life's activities. Counting and calculating are not--e.g.,--simply a pastime. Counting (and that means: counting like this) is a technique that is employed daily in the most various operations of our lives. And that is why we learn to count as we do: with endless practice, with merciless exactitude; that is why it is inexorably insisted we shall all say 'two' after 'one,' 'three' after 'two' and so on. . . .

It is all right to picture the rules of inference as "inexorable," so long as we recognize that the inexorability consists in this: that we have to count, calculate, and reason in certain ways for these practices to function as they do.

II - 2

Let us look some more at Wittgenstein's account of inference. His most famous discussion is doubtless in PI, 185; since this passage has often been misread, I shall examine it at some length.
Now—judged by the usual criteria—the pupil has mastered the series of natural numbers. Next we teach him to write down other series of cardinal numbers and get him to the point of writing down series of the form

$$0, \ n, \ 2n, \ 3n, \ \text{etc.}$$

at an order of the form '4\(\times\)n'; so at the order '4\(\times\)1' he writes down the series of natural numbers.--Let us suppose we have done exercises and give him tests up to 1000.

Now we get the pupil to continue a series (say +2) beyond 1000—and he writes 1000, 1004, 1008, 1012.

We say to him: 'Look what you've done!'—He doesn't understand. We say: 'You were meant to add two: look how you began the series!'—He answers: 'Yes, isn't it right? I thought that was how I was meant to do it.'—Or suppose he pointed to the series and said: 'But I went on in the same way.' It would now be no use to say: 'But can't you see...?'—and repeat the old examples and explanations.—In such a case we might say, perhaps: It comes natural to this person to understand our order with our explanations as we should understand the order: 'Add 2 up to 1000, 4 up to 2000, 6 up to 3000 and so on.'

Such a case would present similarities with one in which a person naturally reacted to the gesture of pointing with the hand by looking in the direction of the line from finger-tip to wrist, not from wrist to finger-tip.\(^{34}\)

The point of all this, I believe, is to show just how it is that our actions embody rules. Wittgenstein is trying to show that use is logically prior to any abstract statement of rules. There is a temptation to suppose that we can follow a mathematical rule only if we somehow have a formula in our minds—even if we are not aware of it, or do not know any mathematical notation. We think, that is,
that it is only in virtue of some mental knowledge of the formula that we can apply the rule. And it is certainly true, of course, that when we have learned algebra we need only be given the formula of an infinite series, and we can expand it as long as patience and paper hold out. The danger is that we are too apt to think that this is the fundamental case—that an abstract formula is logically prior to the actual application of any particular rule. It is precisely this that Wittgenstein is denying.

In point of fact, as the example shows, the ability to apply a formally stated rule is based on something else: our shared inclination to continue in a certain way. "...the possibility of getting him to understand will depend on his going on to write it down independently."35 No formula could tell him how to go on unless he had learned to understand how to apply the formula; and he learns this by coming to know how to go on. It is no good trying to explain to him what he should do in terms of the rule, when he comes to an impasse; for the rule is precisely what he does not understand. The rule has no power to force him to do this instead of that; it is only valuable when he does understand it. "For just where one says 'But don't you see...?' the rule is no use, it is what is explained, not what does the explaining."36

The rule cannot be appealed to here, and neither can anything else. This is the most fundamental level, and there is nothing more we can say to the pupil to make him understand.
He must go on like this without a reason. Not, however, because he cannot yet grasp the reason but because—in this system—there is no reason. ('The chain of reasons comes to an end.')

And the like this (in 'go on like this') is signified by a number, a value. For at this level the expression of the rule is explained by the value, not the value by the rule. 39

We have reached bedrock, for there are no more reasons to be given. This agreement on which is the right way to go on underlies the giving of reasons. As we have seen, some have thought that Wittgenstein here is advocating a strong conventionalism, by making this agreement the fundamental basis for inference. But this is wrong; all Wittgenstein is doing is calling attention to one feature of inference, not a sufficient condition. He is not saying that agreement is enough in itself for inference and communication, but only that it is necessary. So there is no implication that it would be possible for some group or society to agree to continue the series differently; more of this later.

This agreement in how to go on is very fundamental; if we did not agree on what is to count as going on in the same way, there could be no such thing as a mathematical series, or a language at all.

If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so.—. . . 38
'So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?'—It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.  

It is these agreements in judgment that make it possible for us to have practices like counting and calculating; we nearly all agree nearly all the time how simply arithmetical series are to be continued, and on the number of objects we count.

Philosophers are wont always to seek further explanations. This description of what actually happens does not satisfy them. They have been haunted by the possibility that the pupil simply will not accept what we tell him about the correct way of continuing; that he may insist that 1004, 1008, 1012...is right, and our way is wrong. They have thought that an adequate account of logic must somehow protect against this threat, and the only way this could be done, it seemed, was by giving a general justification of inference which would show that our way of continuing is correct, and his wrong. If our pupil remained obdurate, we could then refer him to the general proof, and he would agree that he had been mistaken.

What Wittgenstein has done is to show that such a general justification of inference is neither necessary nor possible. "Why do you demand explanations? If they are given you, you will once more be facing a terminus. They cannot get you any further than you are at present."  

The point is, the pupil could just as well refuse
to accept our supposed general justification as our instructions on continuing the series. At some point we must come to bedrock; there is nothing further to say, because we have already said it all. Any general justification of inference could only do so much: show clearly that this is the way it is. But we are already at that point; we expect the pupil to see that 1002, 1004, 1006. . .is the correct continuation of the series. No explanation of the inference can be any more compelling than the inference itself. "All I should further say as a final argument against someone who did not want to go that way, would be: 'Why, don't you see. . .'--and that is no argument."\textsuperscript{41}

We need not fly into a philosophical dither, for our practice of inference is not threatened.

This is a demonstration for whoever acknowledges it as a demonstration. If anyone doesn't acknowledge it, doesn't go by it as a demonstration, then he has parted company with us even before it comes to talk.\textsuperscript{42}

He has, in fact, not grasped what makes talk about it possible, for he does not share the judgments which underlie it. We could only say, with Frege, "...here we have a hitherto unknown kind of insanity."\textsuperscript{43}

Wittgenstein's point is that we should not demand more than this from an account of inference; this is all the account that is possible, and it is enough.
The danger here, I believe, is one of giving a justification of our procedure where there is no such thing as a justification and we ought simply to have said: that's how we do it.44

Here we come up against a remarkable and characteristic phenomenon in philosophical investigation: the difficulty--I might say--is not that of finding the solution but rather that of recognizing as the solution something that looks as if it were only a preliminary to it.45

The viability and validity of our patterns of inference do not await any justification, nor could any be provided. The philosopher's job is to see how these patterns operate, and avoid being confused by what he thinks must be the case.

...it is a peculiar procedure: I go through the proof and then accept its result.--I mean: this is simply what we do. This is use and custom among us, or a fact of our natural history.46

When we see this we may find it easier to resist the temptation to offer some general justification in support of the ways in which we reason. Justification and explanation serve particular purposes only.

II - 3

As we have seen, many philosophers have misinterpreted Wittgenstein's views on inference; they have thought that this account leaves us high and dry, logically speaking. Such men as Dummett and Chihara believe that if logic is grounded in actual practice in this
way, then there can be no such thing as logical compulsion; it must be just as right to infer in one way as the next. They have supposed that Wittgenstein meant there could be many different ways of counting, calculating, inferring, etc.; it must be just happenstance that we make the particular inferences we do.

It is not hard to see why some have supposed Wittgenstein to be saying that the pupil is not logically compelled to go on, 1002, 1004, 1006...; for they have thought what was needed was a further argument, and Wittgenstein offers none. Instead he says, in effect: "Even if you had a further argument, you would then want still another argument to justify that one; there is no satisfying your demands, because you are looking at the problem in the wrong way." So it is a mistake to take Wittgenstein's argument here as implying such a relativism.

However, it cannot be denied that Wittgenstein's point in PI, 185, could have been stated more fully. The passage does seem to allow the conventionalist interpretation: it seems to say that, if everyone agreed that 1004, 1008, 1012...were the correct continuation, then it would be correct, since no argument could show it wrong. In the previous section of this chapter I tried to show by means of examples that such conventionalist arguments for relativism founder when enough practical applications are considered; now I shall try to show in a similar fashion that Wittgenstein's account here does not commit him to such a position.
The example presupposes that the pupil already understands how to use the number system, not just by writing numbers on paper, but by applying them. Suppose, then, we ask the pupil to count off the ties in a certain section of railroad track by stepping on every other one. He marches off down the track, muttering to himself each time his foot falls on a tie, "two, four, six, eight, etc." But what happens when he reaches 1000? Now he steps only on every fourth tie, saying, "1004, 1008, 1012, etc."

How could this be the same? It is true that he is still counting the ties; he says "1004" on the thousand and fourth tie, "1008" on the thousand and eighth, etc. But he is not counting in the same way. Previously he skipped only one tie at each step; now he skips three. And he is aware of this; he is perfectly able to count.

The point is not that the pupil could not think that this was going on in the same way; perhaps he would think so. Perhaps, as Wittgenstein suggests is possible, he would find it natural to count by twos up to one thousand, by fours up to two thousand, etc. When we point out to him that he is now skipping three ties instead of one, he may indeed say this is irrelevant. He may, that is, refuse to accept our reasons for saying he is not now counting in the same way.

But it does not follow that he is still counting by twos, only in his way, not ours. What counts as going on in the same way
is based on agreements in judgment; but that does not mean there must be universal agreement. "...of course I don't make use of the agreement of human beings to affirm identity. What criterion do you use, then? None at all." It is relevant that he now skips three ties; this is a difference; and so he is not counting in the same way, whatever he says. We cannot attach any sense to his claim that he is continuing in the same way he began. We cannot understand why he says what he does. "He does what I can see—but I should never do it; I don't know, why he does it; his proceeding 'is unintelligible to me'." Argument has come to an end at this point, but not because he is just as right as we are.

Consider another application of the example. Our pupil this time is assistant to a wholesale grocer, and he is instructed to load 2000 cantaloupes onto a truck destined for a customer's store. He begins, taking a cantaloupe in each hand and placing them in the bed of the truck, saying under his breath, "2, 4, 6..." He continues in this manner until he reaches 1000. Then he begins to say, "1004, 1008, 1012...", while continuing to place two cantaloupes in the truck at each count. When he counts, "2000," will he have completed his task? Of course not. He will have loaded only 1500 melons on the truck; the customer will be outraged. He can say that he went on in the same way after the first thousand; but he did not. Up to the thousandth melon the numbers he muttered to himself corresponded to the number of cantaloupes in the truck; after that this
correspondence broke down. His bodily movements continued in the same way while his counting changed—in a manner that is relevant to loading cantaloupes. Coming up short by 500 cantaloupes is the sort of difference that matters; nothing the hapless stock boy can say will even begin to make a case that he continued correctly.

In the first of these two examples the pupil maintained the correspondence between the numbers he called out and the ties, while changing his physical actions to suit the change in his speech. That is, he would count "1004" on the thousand and fourth tie, and "1008" on the thousand and eighth, etc. In the second example the pupil continued the same physical motion, placing two melons in the truck with each number called out; and because he changed the numbers called out, the numbers no longer correspond to the number of melons on the truck. The two are equally imaginable, and they are equally failures to continue the series in the same way. For it is essential to the series that the method of counting off and the numbering sequence correspond if one is to come out right. This is one of the innumerable interconnections between arithmetic and counting and acting that underlie these practices.

Situations like these illustrate Wittgenstein's remark, "So much is clear: when someone says: 'If you follow the rule, it must be like this,' he has not any clear concept of what experience would correspond to the opposite."49 We might at first suppose that we
understand what it would be for a person to continue the series in this bizarre fashion, but our notion is not clear: when we look more fully into what would be involved, we do not know how to make sense of it.

These are the sorts of ways in which we would "get into conflict with practical consequences" if we counted, calculated, or inferred in ways other than the usual ones. The technique of counting off even numbers is dependent on the technique of ordinary counting; and, as we have seen, it makes no sense to imagine counting in a different way from the way in which we do. For unless the practice can play a certain role it simply is not counting; we must be able to use the technique in certain ways, e.g., to count railroad ties by twos. "...concepts help us to comprehend things; they correspond to a particular way of dealing with situations." A technique which breaks down when we try to use it to count ties or cantaloupes is not counting; and the pupil's way of continuing the series is not the correct one.

The obvious question now is, why did Wittgenstein fail to make all this clear? Simply because he did not intend PL, 185, to be a complete account of inference. It is located within a discussion of what is involved in meaning the pupil to go on in a certain way; its purpose is to show that this meaning is not some undetectable mental action that precedes or accompanies our words. He is trying...
to show here that certain pictures of meaning and inference are false and misleading; they tempt us to impose on language the features we expect, instead of paying attention to its actual operation. He surely did not intend to deny that there is such a thing as logical compulsion, but only to show more clearly in what it lies.

II - 4

The belief that Wittgenstein thought radically different ways of inferring were possible has been widely discussed, and its denial is central to my thesis. So it will be worthwhile to examine in some detail a few more of the passages which are thought to support this belief, and set against them some passages which show how false it is. This will also serve the purpose of further explicating Wittgenstein's actual views on the nature of logical inference.

Another passage which might seem to support the relativistic interpretation of Wittgenstein is PL, 186. I shall quote the entire paragraph in order to show that this interpretation is incorrect.

What you are saying, then, comes to this: a new insight—intuition—is needed at every step to carry out the order '+n' correctly. '—To carry it out correctly! How is it decided what is the right step to take at any particular stage?—The right step is the one that accords with the order—as it was meant.'—So when you gave the order +2 you meant that he was to write 1002 after 1000—and did you also mean that he should write 1868 after 1866, and 100036 after 100034, and so on—an infinite number of such
propositions?-- 'No: what I meant was, that he should write the next but one number after every number that he wrote; and from this all those propositions follow in turn.' --But that is just what is in question: what, at any stage, does follow from that sentence. Or, again, what, at any stage we are to call 'being in accord' with that sentence (and with the meaning you then put into the sentence--whatever that may have consisted in). It would almost be more correct to say, not that an intuition was needed at every stage, but that a new decision was needed at every stage.\footnote{52}

People like Dummett take Wittgenstein to mean that someone would have a right to decide to continue differently, like the pupil in Sec. 185. After all, if a new decision is required, why could he not decide that 1004, 1008, 1012 is the correct continuation of the series?

This passage can plausibly be taken in this way, only if it is considered out of context. If we understand Wittgenstein's purpose here, and if we take account of the many passages in which he denies that any other continuation would be correct, we will see that another reading is more plausible.

The point of the remark about a "new decision" being needed at every stage is the same as in 185: there is no use appealing to a rule to explain how the series is to continue, because the rule is itself what is being explained here. If we repeat "add two" we have accomplished nothing; the pupil already knows that that is what we have told him to do. Any rule that can be stated, at any point,
will require that the pupil understand how to apply it; if we could
give him a rule to explain what "add two" means at this stage, then
he would have to understand that rule if it were to do any good. He
would, in other words, have to understand how to go on. This, I take
it, is what Wittgenstein meant by a "decision"—the pupil must at
this point simply recognize that this is the correct step. There is
nothing to suggest that this is a decision based on personal taste,
where there is no right or wrong; 1002 is the correct next step, and
any other is wrong. The pupil certainly is not "free," as Dummett
thinks Wittgenstein means, to choose to adopt a different procedure;
for if he does so it is a mistake.

But isn't a rule something arbitrary? Something
that I lay down? And could I lay it down that the
multiplication 18 x 15 shall not yield 270?—Why
not? —But then it just hasn't taken place accord-
ing to the rule which I first laid down, and whose
use I have practiced.53

In other words, the calculation 18 x 15 has a use, grounded in the
technique of multiplying and the purposes for which it is applied.
And any result except 270 will fail to serve these purposes. So the
"decision" cannot—correctly—be made in more than one way.

Yet another passage which has been taken to show that
Wittgenstein would allow different methods of inference and calculating
is RFM, I, 113-115; e.g., by Edward J. Nell.54
'But you surely can't suddenly make a different application of the law now!'--If my reply is: 'Oh yes of course, that is how I was applying it!' or: 'Oh! That's how I ought to have applied it--!'; then I am playing your game. But if I simply reply: 'Different?--But this surely isn't different!'--what will you do? That is: somebody may reply like a rational person and yet not be playing our game.'

This has sometimes been taken to mean that rationality is a game which might be played according to different rules; i.e., that the imaginary pupil here would be replying rationally, though in a different way from the way we reason. I suggest, however, that he would only be showing the semblance of rationality. He would be replying like a rational person, not because what he said was actually rational, but in his demeanor and tone of voice. He would act surprised that we charged him with failing to continue in the same way, and would insist that the way he went on was the correct way; he would act, in other words, just as we would act if someone told us that 1002, 1004, 1006 was not the right way. But all this does not mean that his reply would be rational; the game he is not playing is simply the game of rationality.

Wittgenstein promptly denies that this person would be correct. It is quite clear that what he is doing here is the same as in PI, 185; he is merely envisioning the possibility that someone might not understand the correct way to go on, and showing that no rule we could give would force him to admit his mistake. He
surely does not mean that just any continuation of the series would be correct, for he says,

'Then according to you everybody could continue series as he likes; and so infer anyhow!' In that case we shall not call it 'continuing the series' and also presumably not 'inference.' And thinking and inferring (like counting) is of course bounded for us, not by an arbitrary definition, but by natural limits corresponding to the body of what can be called the role of thinking and inferring in our life.

For we are at one over this, that the laws of inference do not compel him to say or to write such and such like rails compelling a locomotive. And if you say that, while he may indeed say it, still he can't think it, then I am only saying that that means, not: try as he may he can't think it, but: it is for us an essential part of 'thinking' that--in talking, writing, etc.--he makes this sort of transition. . . .

Nevertheless the laws of inference can be said to compel us; in the same sense, that is to say, as other laws in human society. The clerk who infers as in (17) must do it like that; he would be punished if he inferred differently. If you draw different conclusions you do indeed get into conflict, e.g., with society; and also with other practical consequences. . . .

As before, Wittgenstein's intention is not to deny the reality of logical compulsion; but rather to show how it operates. He wants to get clear about the nature of its "inexorability."

'But then what does the peculiar inexorability of mathematics consist in?'--Would not the inexorability with which two follows one and three two be a good example?--But presumably this means: follows in the
series of cardinal numbers; for in a different
series something different follows. And isn't
this series just defined by this sequence?--'Is
that supposed to mean that it is equally correct
whichever way a person counts, and that anyone
can count as he pleases?'--We should presumably
not call it 'counting' if everyone said the numbers
one after the other anyhow; but of course it is
not simply a question of a name. . . .

'... doesn't it follow with logical necessity
that you get two when you add one to one, and
three when you add one to two? And isn't this
inexorability the same as that of logical in-
ference?'--Yes! it is the same. . . .

In what sense is logical argument a compulsion?--
'After all you grant this and this; so you must
also grant this!' That is way of compelling some-
one. That is to say, one can in fact compel people
to admit something in this way. --Just as one can
e.g., compel someone to go over there by pointing
over there with a bidding gesture of the hand. . . .

... Now we talk of the 'inexorability' of logic;
and think of the laws of logic as inexorable, still
more inexorable than the laws of nature. . . . There
correspond to our laws of logic very general facts of
daily experience. They are the ones that make it
possible for us to keep on demonstrating those laws
in a very simple way (with ink on paper for example).
They are to be compared with the facts that make
measurement with a yardstick easy and useful. This
suggests the use of precisely these laws of inference,
and now it is we that are inexorable in applying
these laws. Because we 'measure'; and it is part
of measuring for everybody to have the same measures.
Besides this, however, inexorable, i.e., unambiguous
rules of inference can be distinguished from ones
that are not unambiguous, I mean from such as leave
an alternative open to us.

Nothing in these passages suggests that Wittgenstein thought
inferring, or calculating, could be done in radically different ways;
on the contrary, in that case we would not call it "inferring."

Our rules of calculation are inexorable, in the only way they can be: there are right calculations, and wrong, and we can tell which is which. This does not mean that someone could not write down a wrong equation, and insist that it is right; it only means that we would not have to worry about it if he did.

...it never in fact happens that somebody who has learnt to calculate goes on obstinately getting different results, when he does a given multiplication, from what comes in the arithmetic books. But if it should happen, then we should declare him abnormal, and take no further account of his calculation.61

Again, Wittgenstein is battling against bewitchment by language; we are apt to think that logical compulsion is just like physical compulsion. We think, that is, that a person cannot calculate differently, because something prevents it. Of course, nothing stops him from writing anything he chooses on paper; but he is not calculating unless he gets certain results.

It is essential to calculating that everyone who calculates right produces the same pattern of calculation. And 'calculating right' does not mean calculating with a clear understanding or smoothly; it means calculating like this.62

'We all learn the same multiplication table.' This might, no doubt, be a remark about the teaching of arithmetic in our schools,—but also an observation about the concept of the multiplication table. ('In a horse-race the horses generally run as fast as they can.')63
The analogy is enlightening; no one would suppose that horses run as fast as they can in a race because some logical force prevents them from running any slower. Horses generally run as fast as they can in a race because it is not a race unless they do. Yet philosophers have sometimes thought that men multiply $2 \times 2 = 4$ because some logical force prevents them from multiplying $2 \times 2 = 5$. And then they have puzzled over the nature of this remarkable force. But of course we are logically compelled to multiply $2 \times 2 = 4$ because any other answer is not multiplication; there is no use seeking further to understand the "force."

This is logical compulsion; this is why we have to reason, infer, count, and calculate in certain ways and not others. Wittgenstein's purpose is to show that this is the way these practices operate in our language, and to break the hold of other models. He does not mean that it would be possible to do these things in other ways.

II - 5

Wittgenstein repeatedly returns to the theme of the interconnections between our actions and methods of inferring and calculating. He illustrated these relationships with many examples, some of which have been taken to show that we might infer and calculate according to rules radically different from our own. But this interpretation usually results from considering these examples in isolation
from their ordinary applications; and it is precisely these ordinary applications that must be understood in order to follow Wittgenstein's point. He intended, I believe, to show that we cannot change just one aspect of our patterns of thinking and acting without affecting others as well. And if we then try to imagine the changes necessary to make them come out right, we run into still further trouble. It is characteristic of the ways of thinking which we call "logical inferences" that, if we try to imagine them as different, we are forced to envision so many fundamental alterations in so many activities that the whole picture rapidly becomes incomprehensible.

Part of the task is to demonstrate just how it is that our practices of counting and calculating help us to "deal with situations." Our concepts of multiplying and dividing are closely interconnected with such procedures as counting and passing out objects. And these concepts reflect the behavior of the objects we deal with in the everyday world; we know what to expect of them, and they seldom surprise us; when they do, we can usually find out why--and this is important, too.

Put two apples on a bare table, see that no one comes near them and nothing shakes the table; now put another two apples on the table; now count the apples that are there. You have made an experiment; the result of the counting is probably 4. . . . And analogous experiments can be carried out, with the same result, with all kinds of solid bodies.--This is how our children learn sums; for one makes them put down three beans and then another three beans and then count what is there. If the result
at one time were 5, at another 7 (say because, as we should now say, one sometimes got added, and one sometimes vanished of itself), then the first thing we said would be that beans were no good for teaching sums. But if the same thing happened with sticks, fingers, lines and most other things, that would be the end of all sums.

'But shouldn't we then still have $2 + 2 = 4$?'

--This sentence would have become unusable.\textsuperscript{64}

The practices of counting and calculating involve and depend on certain aspects of the physical world, such as the fact that objects do not, in the ordinary case, vanish and reappear without visible reason. Wittgenstein's remarks on measurement can as well be applied to addition:

No one will ordinarily see this last proposition [i.e., that 12 inches = 1 foot] as an empirical proposition. It is said to express a convention. But measuring would entirely lose its ordinary character if, for example, putting 12 bits each one inch long didn't ordinarily yield a length which can in its turn be preserved in a special way.\textsuperscript{65}

And likewise,

The agreement of ratifications is the pre-condition of our language-game, it is not affirmed in it.\textsuperscript{66}

The point of this is not that $2 + 2$ might not equal 4, but that, the phrase "2 + 2" takes on a meaning and a use only where there is a practice of adding objects. If things behaved as Wittgenstein asks us to imagine, then "2 + 2 = 4" would not be false, but meaningless.
A similar example occurs later on in Part I of *RIM*.

Imagine someone bewitched so that he calculated:

```
3 3 3 3 2
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  i.e. 4 \times 3 + 2 = 10
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Now he is to apply this calculation. He takes 3 nuts four times over, and then 2 more, and he divides them among 10 people and each one gets one nut; for he shares them out in a way corresponding to the loops of the calculation, and as often as he gives someone a second nut it disappears.67

It may seem at first that this account makes it possible to attach sense to the claim that it would be possible to use "4 \times 3 + 2 = 10." But in order to make sense of it we have to swallow the remarkable assumption that nuts disappear into thin air. Perhaps, we might want to say, it is intelligible in these circumstances; but our comprehension is still very limited; we still do not know our way about. We know what to expect from nuts, and from other objects, in the ordinary way; but here we do not. The nuts disappear; do they go
somewhere else, or are they just gone? Do they reappear later? When and where? And are they the same nuts? (This might be important to someone who had grown them organically.) Just when do nuts disappear? And which nuts? Can we predict their disappearance, so that we can be sure to have enough left? Do the nuts disappear out of a fruitcake when we give someone a slice? And so other things besides nuts exhibit this strange behavior? Which things, and when?

I have tried to show in the previous section of this chapter that, although we might be able to imagine answers to all these specific questions, it is impossible to imagine answers that would work across the board. That is, we cannot imagine how we would count and calculate if objects in general always behaved this way. What can we make of this possibility?

'If humans were not in general agreed about the colours of things, if undetermined cases were not exceptional, then our concept of colour could not exist.' No:--our concept would not exist.68

Likewise, if we could not usually rely on the behavior of objects, our concept of number would not exist. But that is not the same as saying there would be a different concept of number.

II - 6

The last two examples of Wittgenstein's which I shall discuss are, again, cases where he appears to say that fundamentally different
ways of counting, calculating, or inferring would be intelligible. These examples, that is, might seem to contradict all the points that I have been trying to make in this chapter. But here again I wish to argue that Wittgenstein's purpose is rather to focus attention on the practical application of these procedures; he wishes to show that application is logically more basic than formally stated rules.

"But doesn't it follow with logical necessity that you get two when you add one to one, and three when you add one to two? And isn't this inexorability the same as that of logical inference?"--Yes! it is the same.--"But isn't there a truth corresponding to logical inference? Isn't it true that this follows from that?"--The proposition: 'It is true that this follows from that' means simply: this follows from that. And how do we use this proposition?--What would happen if we made a different inference--how should we get into conflict with truth?

How should we get into conflict with truth, if our footrules were made of very soft rubber instead of wood and steel?--'Well, we shouldn't get to know the correct measurement of the table.'--You mean: we should not get, or could not be sure of getting, that measurement which we get with our rigid rulers. So if you had measured the table with the elastic rulers and said it measured five feet by our usual way of measuring, you would be wrong; but if you say that it measured five feet by your way of measuring, that is correct.--'But surely that isn't measuring at all!'--It is similar to our measuring and capable, in certain circumstances, of fulfilling 'practical purposes.' (A shopkeeper might use it to treat different customers differently.)

If a ruler expanded to an extraordinary extent when slightly heated, we should say--in normal circumstances--that this made it unusable. But we could
think of a situation in which this was just what was wanted. I am imagining that we perceive the expansion with the naked eye; and we ascribe the same numerical measure of length to bodies in rooms of different temperatures, if they measure the same by the ruler which to the eye is now longer, now shorter.

It can be said: What is here called 'measuring' and 'length' and 'equal length,' is something different from what we call those things. The use of these words is different from ours; but it is akin to it; and we too use these words in a variety of ways. 69

It might be practical to measure with a ruler which had the property of shrinking to, say, half its length when it was taken from this room to that. A property which would make it useless as a ruler in other circumstances.

It might be practical, in certain circumstances, to leave numbers out when you were counting a set: to count them: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10. 70

Do these remarks mean that radically different ways of measuring or counting are intelligible, and that Wittgenstein meant to show this?

I believe not. In the first of these passages Wittgenstein is discussing the idea that the rules of logical inference are true. It is very tempting to suppose that these laws of logic are the truest thing there is or could be; that their truth is of the highest order. Against this, Wittgenstein is trying to show that, if we operated these practices differently, we would get into conflict not with truth, but with the way these practices are used. And we can imagine using these practices in related, but somewhat different ways.
But these differences are not radical or fundamental in the sense that interests us here: these alternative methods of measuring are logically dependent on the ordinary methods. We might, as Wittgenstein says, find uses for rubber rulers— in certain circumstances. A shopkeeper might indeed use such a ruler to treat favored customers more generously than others. But using rubber rulers would make no sense if there were not an underlying practice of using rigid rulers. (i.e., ordinary rulers—not rulers so rigid that they are incapable of the slightest bending.) For the dishonest shopkeeper's purpose would be to give the appearance of measuring with the usual sort of ruler. He would try to sell his favorites three years of cloth for the price of two, and so on. And of course this could only mean three years of cloth—measured in the ordinary way—for the price of two yards of cloth—measured in the ordinary way. If there were no such underlying practice, the rubber ruler would be an unnecessary shuffle: the shopkeeper could as well just set an arbitrary price for each customer. The procedure with the elastic ruler only serves to give the appearance of equal treatment.

Again, we might find it practical in particular circumstances to count, 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10. But this practice too would be parasitic on the ordinary methods of counting. We might imagine a fur trader counting up pelts of varying value; some are worth one dollar, some two. So he counts, 1, 2, (then a two-dollar pelt), 4,
5, (another two-dollar one) 7, 8, (two dollars) 10. He would be, that is, counting alternately by ones and by twos, according to the value of the pelt in hand. He does this for the particular purposes of the moment, because he is interested in the total value of the load of furs. But this does not mean, nor does Wittgenstein imply that it means, that it would be intelligible always to count so.

Instead, the purpose of these examples, as so often, is to cast light on the way in which the rules of inference, and of counting and calculating, are grounded in their use in ordinary circumstances. Of course we can imagine modifying those practices for immediate purposes: we sometimes count by twos, or threes, or fives, when it is convenient; and we sometimes measure by paces, which are not all of exactly equal length. But what gives these particular techniques their usefulness is the ordinary practices of counting and measurement. Wittgenstein's point here is to show how it is that logical compulsion operates, and how it takes its sense from every-day practices.

My purpose in this chapter has been to cast doubt on the view that it is, or would be, possible to reason in fundamentally different ways. I have tried to show that Wittgenstein's demonstration that reasoning is grounded in practices does not entail that it could be done in radically different ways, if only the practices were different. If I have succeeded, I have also cast doubt on the
relativistic or Fideistic thesis that different societies might infer differently, or that different linguistic practices might justify different logical conclusions. In the next chapter I shall examine this latter point from another angle.
FOOTNOTES


6 Ibid., p. 437.

7 Ibid., pp. 437-438.

8 Cf. Hector-Neri Castaneda, "Arithmetic and Reality," 37 Australasian Journal of Philosophy (1959); repr. Benacerraf and Putnam, Op. cit.; Castaneda argues that Gasking's supposed alternative accounts would fail if applied across the board, much as I have tried to show. He also argues, much less persuasively, I believe, that any system which did work across the board would reduce to our own, because it would embody Peano's axioms. It seems to me that no appeal to Peano's axioms can explain the way our system worked, but only describe that functioning.


11 Ibid., pp. 425-426.

12 Ibid., p. 427.

13 Ibid., pp. 429-430.

14 Ibid., pp. 433-434.


17 Ibid., p. 362.

18 Ibid., p. 363.

19 Ibid., p. 370; emphasis original.

20 Ibid., p. 370.


26. Cf. Barry Stroud, "Wittgenstein and Logical Necessity," 74 *Philosophical Review* (1965) pp. 504-518; repr. Pitcher, *Op. cit.*, pp. 477-496. Stroud has offered an interpretation very similar to mine; he shares my belief that Wittgenstein never intended to show that these alternative modes of reasoning were intelligible, but rather to show how and why they are not. However, Stroud seems to say that radically different ways of reasoning might be possible for radically different sorts of beings: he says that it is a contingent fact that we have the particular relations of logical necessity that we do. I argue, on the other hand, that it would not be possible even for radically different beings to have radically different ways of reasoning. Of course, they might well do things very different from what we do; but what they did would not be reasoning unless it could be made intelligible to us. And in that case, according to the way I have been using "radically different" it would not be radically different.


30. Ibid., I, 119.

31. Ibid., I, 116.

32. Ibid., V, 46.

33. Ibid., I, 4.


35. Ibid., 143.


37. Ibid., 301.


39. Ibid., 241.

40. Zettel, 315.

41. Remarks, I, 34.

42. Ibid., I, 61.
43. Ibid., I, 151.
44. Ibid., II, 74.
45. Zettel, 314.
46. Remarks, I, 63.
47. Ibid., V, 33.
50. Ibid., I, 116.
51. Ibid., V, 46.
52. Philosophical Investigations, 186.
56 Ibid., I, 116.

57 Ibid., I, 1, 4.

58 Ibid., I, 5.

59 Ibid., I, 117.

60 Ibid., I, 118.

61 Ibid., I, 112.

62 Ibid., V, 24.


64 Remarks, I, 37.

65 Ibid., V, 1.

66 Ibid., V, 6.

67 Ibid., I, 136.

68 Zettel, 351.
69 Remarks, I, 5.

70 Ibid., I, 139.
CHAPTER V

CONCEPTUAL SCHEMES

Introduction

In this Chapter I shall discuss the claim which is most central to Wittgensteinian Fideism, and which is its ultimate line of defense against attack. This is the belief that language is divided into numerous (or perhaps innumerable) logically discrete conceptual schemes. It is said that the criteria of truth, reality, rationality, intelligibility, etc. are grounded in the particular practices in which they occur, and are peculiar to those practices. Therefore no criticism grounded in the criteria of any one conceptual scheme are relevant to any other; for only its own criteria can be considered in its evaluation. Any attack from another conceptual scheme must, ipso facto, be invalid; for it must rest on criteria that are thus irrelevant. Since there is no single, all-embracing, over-arching conceptual scheme which includes all others, any attempt to criticize the logic of any of these discrete schemes begs the question, for its own criteria are no more central epistemologically than those of the scheme which it attacks. This view has been thought to follow from Wittgenstein's later work; my purpose is to show that it is untenable and profitless.
As we have seen in Chapter I, this form of conceptual relativism involves a cluster of beliefs about the nature of conceptual schemes; they can be stated explicitly as follows:

(a) There are many distinct conceptual schemes; e.g., science, religion, morality.

(b) There are, within any given scheme, rules of inference, criteria of rationality, etc.; and these are peculiar to that particular scheme. I.e., they are contained wholly within it, and no others are relevant.

(c) Therefore each scheme is conceptually isolated; i.e., none can be used to evaluate any others.

(d) One is free to choose in which schemes to participate and which not.

(e) One can move at will from one conceptual scheme to another, e.g., from that of religion to that of science and back.

Now, the most striking thing about these views, when they are grouped together like this, is the resemblance of conceptual schemes, viewed in this way, to formal deductive systems. These Fideistic philosophers, who consider themselves admirers of the later Wittgenstein, would doubtless deny that they construe language on a quasi-mathematical model; for one of the major goals of Wittgenstein's later work was to free philosophy from the influence of formal mathematics. But, on the Fideists' view, conceptual schemes clearly share many features with the deductive systems of formal logic:
there are as many separate deductive systems as one cares to construct; each has its own specified rules of inference, peculiar to itself; one is free to operate within any or all deductive systems, one after another, so long as he respects the rules of each.

I believe this notion of disparate conceptual schemes is incorrect, and that in fact there is far less similarity between language and deductive systems than is supposed by the Fideists' account. I believe that the various conceptual schemes in which the philosopher is interested neither are, nor could be, stated in terms of explicit rules of inference, etc., like a formal system. And I think this mistaken tendency to construe conceptual schemes on the model of deductive systems leads to several important and interrelated philosophical errors which are typical of Fideism.

1. The idea that we are free to make up conceptual schemes and choose their characteristics at will;

2. The idea that coherence of conceptual schemes is an all or nothing affair--i.e., that each is either wholly coherent or wholly incoherent;

3. The idea that conceptual schemes can never be criticized in their entirety;

4. The idea that there are "criteria" or "canons" of rationality, peculiar to each conceptual scheme;

5. The idea that there is a fundamentally important logical distinction between "first-order" and "second-order" language;
6. The idea that the various conceptual schemes have pre-determined boundaries which argument and criticism cannot cut across.

I shall discuss each of these in turn.

I have tried to show in Chapter III that Peter Winch was mistaken in his defense of some of the practices of the Azande. The Azande have certain beliefs about witchcraft; as they themselves explain it, all witches and only witches have a certain readily recognizable substance within their bodies. Yet the conspicuous absence of this substance in those identified as witches by other criteria is not taken as significance: that is, it is not taken to count against the belief that the person is a witch. We are tempted to say that the Azande hold an irrational belief, but Winch denies this; his argument can be paraphrased something like this: "It is true that to us--i.e., members of Western culture--this seems to count against the rationality of the Zande practice. But this is only because we are applying our criteria of rationality; according to Zande criteria the presence or absence of this substance is clearly not important at all. What appears to be a contradiction, properly viewed, rather shows the differences between the way the Azande operate with the concept of an object and our own way. So the Zande practice is perfectly in order, bizarre though it seems to us."
Against all this I claim that the concept of an object is not a matter of choice; if we accept Evans-Pritchard's account of the Azande—that is, if we accept that these people do in fact believe that all and only witches have this substance in their bodies—then we can not deny that its presence or absence is evidence relevant to the identification of witches.

For establishing the presence or absence of objects is a very fundamental part of language; any pattern of behavior which did not involve it would be unintelligible to us. In the normal case the Azande identify and locate objects in just the same ways as we do: it certainly makes a difference to a hungry Zande whether there is food in his bowl or not; and he is just as able as we to tell whether it is there. If it were otherwise, if the Azande consistently failed to distinguish between the presence and absence of objects, we would find their behavior incomprehensible; Evans-Pritchard would not have known how to translate their language into English.

Wittgenstein says, "What is a telling ground for something is not anything I decide."¹ What is a telling ground for believing something is built into the language: both the particular grounds for particular beliefs, and the general notion of a telling ground. That the Zande language operates intelligibly with the concept of an object is apparent from the very fact that Evans-Pritchard was able to understand their talk of objects; he was able to translate into English
their words for everyday objects, and also their word for witchcraft substance. So when it is said that the Azande believe all and only witches have this substance in their bodies, it follows logically that its presence or absence is important.

In saying that this is "logically" necessary, I am following Wittgenstein's usage.

What counts as an adequate test of a statement belongs to logic. It belongs to the description of the language-game.²

So is the hypothesis possible, that all the things around us don't exist? Would that not be like the hypothesis of our having miscalculated in all our calculations?³

Doubt gradually loses its sense. This language-game just is like that.

And everything descriptive of a language-game is part of logic.⁴

Wittgenstein's point here, I take it, is the one I am stressing. Conceptual schemes, or language-games, cannot operate in just any way that can be imagined; and the description of the ways in which they can and cannot operate is one of the functions of logic. (I have tried very sketchily to discuss in Chapter IV.)

The characteristics of the language of objects include being able to tell, usually, whether a given object is present or not; and also what this presence or absence licenses us to infer. It will not do simply to say that the Zande concept of objects is different, in
this one point; for to say this would merely be to question Evans- Pritchard's statement about the Zande beliefs. It makes no sense to say that witchcraft substance is found in all and only witches, and yet its presence or absence does not make a difference. What counts as evidence is not a matter of free choice; and this is evidence.

2

Fideists speak as though a linguistic practice or mode of discourse is either wholly coherent, or wholly incoherent; this confusion also seems to have its roots in an implicitly mathematical model of language. Clearly, this view is associated with the idea that ongoing linguistic practices are always and necessarily coherent: if a practice continues to function, so the argument runs, there can be nothing wrong with it. Obviously, it cannot be wholly confused and without sense; therefore it must be altogether in order. Thus the Fideists think it is not worthwhile to examine such functioning practices to see whether there might not be hidden incoherences.

Here the coherence of modes of linguistic discourse is being construed on the model of consistency within a deductive system. It is of great importance to mathematicians and logicians whether a contradiction--any contradiction--can be deduced from the premises of a system. If one can, then stern measures are required to set it right; it is intolerable that it be allowed to stand.
But, as I have argued in Chapter III, the situation is different in ordinary, non-systematic language. It is possible for incoherences to exist unnoticed, without the practice being thereby destroyed. Failure to recognize the significance of the evidence that the earth is round was unimportant in the Middle Ages; there was no need to take account of it, and so the incoherence did no harm. Only when more accurate geographical knowledge was required for practical reasons did it become necessary to question the "obvious" flatness of the earth. Likewise, I have outlined in Chapter III a hypothetical case in which the incoherence in the Azande's beliefs about witchcraft substance would surface; in such circumstances the contradictions, previously unnoticed and unimportant, would present problems, and would have to be solved by modifying the beliefs in one way or another.

So it is not the case that practices are either wholly coherent, without logical problems, or else wholly incoherent and without sense. Incoherences can exist in any of the concepts of a practice; they can be peripheral and trivial, or central and crucial. In the former case, minor modifications can be made to straighten out the difficulties, while leaving the practice substantially the same; the Azande might, for example, simply abandon their belief that witchcraft substance is found in the bodies of all witches; perhaps they would say that the witches had learned to expel it from their bodies by magical means, in order to avoid detection.
But if the incoherence is central, it may be that the practice cannot be substantially retained; it may be that revisions sufficient to remove the incoherence would leave the practice so altered as to be unrecognizable. This would be the case; e.g., if the Christian concept of God could be shown decisively to be fundamentally incoherent; any essential change in the concept of God would of course make something very different of Christianity. And there can be no advance assurance that such fundamental incoherences will not be found; only analysis of each case can reveal them.

This brings up the next confusion that stems from the mathematical model held by the Fideists: the claim that it makes no sense to criticize whole practices. The Fideists suppose that any criteria for criticism are contained entirely within the practice where they operate; the argument is that to attack the whole practice would be to undermine the very criteria on which the attack is based. Therefore, it is said, it is perfectly proper to criticize particular features of a practice, using the criteria of that practice, but no practice can be called into question as a whole.

Once the mathematical model is revealed and exorcized, this argument can be seen to be circular. For it assumes in advance that the only relevant criteria of criticism are those which are wholly contained within the mode of discourse; it assumes that no other
criteria could possibly be relevant, just as no argument from the premises of one deductive system could be relevant to any system based on different premises.

But this cannot be so blithely assumed; the question is precisely whether the particular argument in question is, or is not, valid--irrespective of its origins. Now, no one denies that there are some cases of such wholly self-contained criteria; in chess the move that leads directly to check-mate is the best move, according to the criteria of chess. And here no outside criteria are relevant; none could show that some other move would be better chess. However, it does not follow that all cases are analogous to this one; this is the whole question of Fideism writ small. When we cease to imagine that modes of discourse are like different deductive systems, we lose our assurance that whole practices cannot be validly criticized; we no longer have an advance guarantee about what kinds of logical argument can be valid.

As we have seen, it may be that incoherence will be revealed in the very most central and essential concepts of a linguistic practice--for example, in that of the Christian God. If such a crucial concept is revealed as incoherent, then that is a criticism of the whole practice. That is to say, the practice is shown to be unintelligible in its crucial aspects. Thus, whether a mode of discourse is attacked in part or as a whole does not depend so much on the source of the criticism as on its target.
In Chapter IV, I have discussed the claim that there are different "criteria" or "canons" of rationality in different conceptual schemes. Winch says,

Something can appear rational to someone only in terms of his understanding of what is and is not rational. If our concept of rationality is a different one from his, then it makes no sense to say that anything either does or does not appear rational to him in our sense.  

D. Z. Phillips offers a similar view.

A necessary prolegomenon to the philosophy of religion...is to show the diversity of criteria of rationality; to show that the distinction between the real and the unreal does not come to the same thing in every context.  

But as I have tried to show, it makes no sense to speak of different criteria of rationality. There may be very different forms of speech and behavior in different societies; but these are not the result of radically different criteria of rationality—for they can be made intelligible to us. The behavior of one group can be explained, in terms of its reasons, to members of another; when this cannot be done, then there is no point in saying that the behavior is rational at all. This, I believe, is the case with regard to the Zande practices which we have examined; there is no reason to say that the Azande are behaving rationally, though according to different criteria than ours; it is more to the point to say simply that they are mistaken.
Further, it is a consequence of my argument in Chapter IV that we should not speak of criteria or canons of rationality at all. The Fideists never offer any actual examples of such criteria or canons, either alien ones of our own; and for a very good reason. There are no criteria of rationality; or at least any such criteria are logically secondary. What is fundamental is the recognition of valid and invalid reasons and arguments—the agreement that we should go on in a certain way, and for certain reasons.

Thus those who speak of criteria of rationality are making the same error as those who misinterpret Wittgenstein's "1004, 1008" example. They are supposing that some formal rule lies behind the fact that we all reason in the same way; they think the rule must be logically prior to particular cases; they are putting the logical cart before the horse. I hope I have shown the error in this.

In much of the literature of Fideism it is taken for granted that there is an important difference between so-called "first-order" language and "second-order" language. First-order speech, in this sense, is that which typically occurs within the mode of discourse, and is practiced by its participants in their every day pursuits; second-order speech, by contrast, is speech about first-order language. The fundamental importance of this distinction is assumed, for example, by both Kai Nielsen in his attack on Fideism and
W. D. Hudson in his defense of it. 8,9

Now, so far as I can see, there are only two views on which this distinction ought rightly to assume great importance. The first is the supposition that ordinary language is always all right as it is. In that case, the first-order speech is guaranteed to be in order, i.e., coherent; while the second-order speech enjoys no such assurance of invulnerability to criticism. Thus the difference between the two orders is of great significance. However, I have tried to show, in Chapter III, that this position is untenable: there is no guarantee that an ongoing linguistic practice is free of incoherences just because it continues to function. If this argument is correct, then the only other basis for the stress on first- and second-order language is the implicitly-held mathematical model of language which I am attacking. That is, the assumption which appears to operate here is that a distinction of this sort is necessary in order to avoid the paradoxes to which self-reference leads in formal systems.

But, as Popper has pointed out, self-reference in ordinary language need not lead to paradox, precisely because ordinary language is not a formal system. 10 In fact, self-reference is common in ordinary speech; we often remark, "This discussion is very interesting; let's go on a while after the bell," and the like. These locutions cause no confusion; they are perfectly meaningful in their
context; no one sincerely claims not to understand what a comment like this means. The problems which cause such concern to the formal logician just do not arise here. And if they do arise, as for example when I say, "I am now lying," we chuckle and go about our business. Our language is not thrown into chaos or rendered meaningless. As Wittgenstein says, no one draws conclusions from the "Liar." The possibility of such paradoxical sentences in no way interferes with the day-to-day functions of language: stating, asking, questioning, persuading, disputing, etc.

So, I believe, the significance of the distinction between first- and second-order language dwindles to the vanishing point. It cannot be used, as the Fideists wish to use it, to rule out as irrelevant large segments of philosophical discourse; remarks about language cannot be simply dismissed without the bother of examining them closely. Rather, they must be treated in just the same way as any other philosophically significant speech: by careful attention to their logical status and consequences. Once the quasi-mathematical model of ordinary language is abandoned, the temptation to imagine a fundamental difference between first- and second-order speech should subside.

Of course, the very notion of language as neatly ordered into layers which do not overlap is alien to the spirit of Wittgenstein's later work. In urging that we pay closer attention to the actual use of language, he says,
One might think: if philosophy speaks of the use of the word 'philosophy,' there must be a second-order philosophy. But it is not so! It is, rather, like the case of orthography, which deals with the word 'orthography' among others without then being second-order.\footnote{12}

This is a far more realistic picture of language and the philosophy which treats it than we get from the Fideists.

6

Now the final mistake which I want to discuss as resulting from the quasi-mathematical view of language. It should be clear from what has gone before that the Fideists believe there are numerous conceptual schemes, with predetermined and impenetrable boundaries. The relation of this belief to the mathematical model of language is clear enough: formal deductive systems are easily distinguished from one another, and each is self-contained. This is perhaps the most fundamental of the Fideistic theses; and it is the Fideists' final line of defense against attack, as well as their first. This is the argument that purports to rule out as logically muddled, in advance, every effort to discover any impropriety in any mode of discourse.

Thus, the precise location of the boundaries between conceptual schemes is of central importance for this argument. These are the boundaries which limit philosophical inquiry; any misunderstanding about their placement might lead to untold wasted effort if, for
example, one were mistakenly to attempt philosophical criticism where it is not possible. (Such wasted effort, according to G. E. Hughes, is C. B. Martin's Religious Belief.)

And so it is surprising that the Fideists never make any serious attempts to show where these boundaries lie. They tell us that science must not encroach on religious language; and that British anthropologists cannot intelligibly criticize the logic of other societies, etc. But it is always assumed that there is no difficulty telling just what is scientific language, or religious language. This very important matter is, in fact, taken largely for granted.

Some Fideists have made some motions in this direction, but have failed, so it would seem, to appreciate the significance of the point for their central thesis. W. D. Hudson says,

By mapping the logical frontiers of religious belief, I mean avoiding the confusions which arise from failure to mark off its questions and answers from those of other kinds. One such confusion is that of which apologists for or against religion are guilty when they take belief in God to be the same kind of logical thing as a scientific hypothesis. . . .

A great many dilemmas, connected with religious belief. . . can be resolved, when the character of religious discourse as sui generis is clearly recognized. 13

Here Hudson plainly realizes that it is necessary to understand just what sort of business is about, what sorts of questions it can properly
deal with. But this involves not only ruling out certain types of statements as improper for, say, science—e.g., attacks on Genesis based on geological data. It also involves ruling out certain sorts of statements as improper for religion, too. It involves, that is, showing the location of the conceptual boundary between religion and science.

For this boundary, after all, just is the fact that some statements are proper in a religious context and others are not, and likewise for science. Some arguments are relevant to religious questions; others count for nothing there; and "mapping the logical frontiers" of any mode of discourse consists in showing what can properly be said in and about it.

So we can see now that the Fideistic idea of impenetrable logical boundaries between disparate conceptual schemes puts the cart before the horse. The various statements treated by logic do not come conveniently labelled "religious" or "scientific" for our benefit; this classification is part of the philosopher's task. Of course, the context often makes clear what a type of statement is at hand; religious statements are more apt to be found in sermons or creeds, and scientific statements in chemistry texts or reports of experiments.

But the context alone is not enough, for there is always the possibility that a conceptual blunder has occurred; and it is the philosopher's job to detect such misunderstandings. Such cases as the pseudo-dispute between the theologian and the geologist about
the way in which the earth was formed occur when one or both parties fail to understand correctly the logic of the discourse; so the philosopher must be prepared to do more than simply look at the source; he must examine the logical function of each statement in its turn.

This identification and description of the use of language in various areas is a major task of philosophy. And any logical barriers are discovered through such investigation; the boundaries do not precede and limit it. We do not learn that the geologist's attack on Genesis is invalid because it crosses conceptual boundaries; on the contrary, we learn where the boundaries lie by recognizing that the attack is irrelevant. Nor is there, I believe, any means of deciding on the validity of such analyses and criticisms wholesale; each must be studied in the closest detail. The way sentences operate determines to what mode of discourse they belong; and so each "mode" is only revealed as it is shown what sorts of sentences are appropriate to it and which are not.

There is nothing very new or remarkable about this observation; it merely reflects the situation in much of contemporary analytic philosophy. Ryle's and Wittgenstein's dissections of the language of mental acts are among the most famous efforts to explicate the "logical geography," or "depth grammar" of certain modes of discourse. The literature abounds with others. The point here is that
this runs counter to the underlying Fideistic notion that modes of discourse are marked off before the philosopher comes to them, so that he is confined to describing what he finds already in view.

If, now, these conceptual boundaries are neither more nor less than descriptions of the sorts of argument that are appropriate in different cases, the Fideistic stress on these boundaries is trivial: to say that criticism and argument cannot operate across conceptual boundaries just means that criticism and argument are inappropriate where they are inappropriate! Nothing very interesting is being said after all.

So there is no profit in characterizing different statements as belonging to one or another conceptual scheme, except to describe the results of an analysis of their logical behavior. We surely cannot, as the Fideists believe, avoid the task of philosophical analysis merely by classifying statements as belonging to different conceptual schemes. Let us take an actual example and illustrate just how this task proceeds.

Christians believe that Jesus of Nazareth said and did certain things, and died on the cross. His sayings and his death have for them a different and deeper meaning than the words and death of an ordinary man; but most Christians believe that he did say and do these things in the same sense as an ordinary man, as well as in another sense. Indeed, no account can do justice to traditional Christianity which does not involve these beliefs of fact; if it could somehow
conclusively be shown that Jesus did not say these things, or was not crucified, fundamental revisions would be required in the average Christian's belief.

Because these factual beliefs are so important, some Christians and apologists have taken the line that no evidence could possibly count against the Biblical account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, because for them the Bible is the logically ultimate authority. They choose, that is, to take nothing as counting against the Bible, either in its religious statements or its historical ones. Alasdair MacIntyre has made precisely this claim.14 Religious beliefs are offered as evidence for historical beliefs; the authority of the Bible is set up as unassailable—not only on religious questions, but also as to the truth of statements about ordinary events in the past. This, I suggest, is a case of a logical blunder of the type we are discussing: a misjudgment of the boundaries of conceptual schemes.

Christians are here asked to accept statements about the life of Christ on the basis of the Bible, not as a piece of evidence—even the very best—but as a criterion. Conflicting evidence is to be rejected out of hand, because the Christian is committed to taking the Bible as ultimate, and will count nothing as evidence against its reports. Let us see whether we can make sense of this idea; suppose we accept last Sunday's New York Times as the logically ultimate criterion of the truth about events reported therein.
Remember that the *Times* is not to be regarded as evidence of what happened during that week, not even as very good evidence; it is taken as the criterion of the truth. We cannot consider any evidence that any error, distortion, deliberate misrepresentation, etc., occurred; even if the *Times* prints a retraction next week, this cannot count against canonical edition.

If the *Times* said that a certain John Smith was killed falling into an excavation at the corner of Fourteenth and Main, then we must not doubt that he was. If a hundred respectable people solemnly swear they saw him a thousand miles away, and in perfectly good health, at the time of the reported accident, this must be explained away as a conspiracy, or mass hallucination, or something. It cannot be counted against the *Times*’ report. If there are buildings on all four corners of Fourteenth and Main, and the newest is twenty years old, and if thousands of people remember passing those buildings, and working in them, this is irrelevant; likewise we may not doubt that there could have been an excavation on that corner, just because it takes far longer than a week to construct a building. If Smith himself appears and testifies that he was in no accident, this proves nothing; we are not allowed even to suspect that the report of his death was exaggerated. What is printed in the *Times* must be accepted as the truth, and so nothing can be evidence against it. John Smith died in that hole.

Naturally, these odd consequences apply not only to Mr. Smith,
but to all of us; whoever was mentioned in that Sunday Times must consult it as the final authority as to what he said and did; if he remembers it differently, his memory must be discounted.

Of course, not even the Sunday Times reports everything that occurs during the week; so there is plenty of room for the operation of our normal concept of the past. Whatever was not reported in the paper may be learned about in the usual ways: asking those who were present, examining documents, looking for physical evidence, etc. Also, events since Sunday are not included in the crucial edition, and so they may be treated in the normal manner. We have two different ways of handling statements about the past; which one we apply in a given case depends entirely on whether or not the event in question was reported in last Sunday's Times.

Clearly all this makes a mockery of the concept of the past. Nothing could be more preposterous than saying that a man's own testimony cannot establish that he is alive! When we imagine that a recent or contemporary document might be taken as a logically ultimate criterion, we see that the supposition makes no sense, though its absurdity was not so apparent in the case of the Bible. We see now that talk of "logically ultimate criteria" is simply out of place here. What counts as a telling ground is not something to be decided; it is built into the language of the past. We cannot simply choose what to regard as a telling ground and what to ignore; for if we do we fall into this sort of absurdity.
Now, if the above argument is correct, it casts light on the language of past events. It shows something about how the truth about past events is ascertained, and what kinds of things are good reasons for beliefs about the past. It demonstrates that books, including the Bible, can be reasons or evidence for such beliefs; but that it makes no sense to say that any one is a logically ultimate criterion. To hold, as did MacIntyre, that nothing can count against the historical statements in the Bible is to make a conceptual blunder, as a result of overlooking some features of the language of past events. What is a good ground for beliefs about historical events is not a matter of free choice. As Wittgenstein said in a similar connection, "This doubt isn't one of the doubts in our game [of speaking about the past.] (But not as if we chose this game!)"15

So the logical boundaries of concepts are revealed by means of philosophical analysis; they are not predetermined and labelled in advance as religious, scientific, moral, or whatever. The Fideists put the cart before the horse in arguing that criticism cannot cross conceptual boundaries; the conceptual boundaries just are the lines which show the relevance and validity of different kinds of criticism. It is perhaps useful or convenient to say that religious language is not appropriately assailed on scientific grounds; but we should remember that this is the conclusion of a logical analysis of particular arguments—it is not a piece of
a priori knowledge that rules out such inquiry. We have no advance assurance that any sort of philosophical argument will or will not be valid; we can only take arguments as they come, and let the conceptual chips fall where they may.

This is perhaps the most serious consequence of the Fideistic view of conceptual schemes: it blocks the path of inquiry. Rather than contributing to the advance of philosophy, Fideism is an obstacle to its progress. For it fosters the notion that limits can be set to philosophy before it has even begun its work. I have tried to show that it is not so easy to avoid the task of philosophy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I will briefly recapitulate. There is a theme in contemporary philosophy which, following Kai Nielsen, I have labelled "Wittgensteinian Fideism"; its central notion is that linguistic discourse is logically divided into numerous categories, such as science, religion, morality, etc. There is said to be an unbridgeable logical gulf between these various categories, so that it makes no sense to speak of evaluating or criticizing any of them; for this, the argument runs, would involve the use of irrelevant criteria from outside the particular conceptual scheme in question.

Against this position I have argued that the various modes of discourse are neither so isolated, nor so well-ordered as the Fideists suppose. It is quite possible that an ongoing linguistic
practice may embody confusions, incoherences, or outright contradictions; it is the task of the philosopher to ferret these out.

I have further argued that the Fideists are mistaken in believing that rationality and inference have wholly different and unique meanings in the different modes of discourse. For this would mean that a reasoned inference in one mode of discourse would be wholly unintelligible in terms of others; but if a putative inference cannot be made intelligible, there is no basis for calling it a reasoned inference.

Finally, I have tried to show that the whole idea of discourse as separated into distinct areas is a logical muddle, and one which excludes philosophical analysis from areas where it is needed.
FOOTNOTES


2 Ibid., 82.

3 Ibid., 55.

4 Ibid., 56.

5 Peter Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society," 1 American Philosophical Quarterly (1964); p. 316; emphasis original.


12 *Philosophical Investigations*, 121.


15 *On Certainty*, 317.
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