

**The Meaning of Language:  
A Study and Critique of Wittgensteinian Philosophy**

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Gilbert Ryle has said that “the ‘master-issue’ with which Wittgenstein was concerned above all others was that of the nature of philosophy itself. What sort of activity is philosophizing? With what kind of problems should a philosopher deal? How should he proceed in his business?”<sup>1</sup> Whether this was Wittgenstein’s master issue or not, there can be no doubt that these questions exercised him often throughout his career as a philosopher. Of course, Wittgenstein was by no means the first philosopher to ask these questions, but he, more than anyone else, is responsible for the fact that philosophers are today more mindful of the nature of their methods than ever before.<sup>2</sup>

Quite different from most studies before his time, Wittgenstein’s philosophy concentrated on questions that had rarely been analyzed. Instead of focusing on the manner in which philosophical problems could be solved, he directed his attention to how these problems, which he saw as pseudo-problems, could be dissolved. Furthermore, this dissolution did not come from his creation of more philosophical theories or concepts, but rather from removing the false pretenses that he found had come to surround most philosophical notions.

How was Wittgenstein able to make such bold and unique conjectures? The answer lies in his thoughtful analysis of everyday language and its use. Dedicating what would come to be published as *Philosophical Investigations* to uncovering the misuses of language, his analysis is compelling, let alone contemptuous of any other philosophical investigation attempted in the history of philosophy.

The object of this thesis is to explain the major breakthroughs of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, including his ideas concerning meaning, language games, family

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<sup>1</sup> Pitcher, p314

<sup>2</sup> Pitcher, p314

resemblances, ordinary language theory, and private language. The source of these explanations will come from my own interpretation of Wittgenstein's most notable work, Philosophical Investigations. A critique of Wittgenstein's notions will then be presented, followed by my responses to both Wittgenstein's contentions and his opponents' objections. Lastly, evaluation will be made regarding the implications of Wittgensteinian philosophy and the particular world view it creates.

**Part 1: The Philosophy of Wittgenstein**

## **Section 1: St. Augustine's Theory of Learning**

The study of Wittgensteinian philosophy must begin with a detailed analysis of how meaning is drawn from the use of language. Turning first to an excerpt of St. Augustine's Confessions, Wittgenstein looks at a theory that is commonly known as the ostensive teaching of words, or denotative theory. Considered the most primitive means of teaching, the concept insists that one's acquaintance with words comes directly from his or her learning that words are names that stand for an object. For example, a mother teaching her child the word for "apple" would mean her pointing to an apple and repeating its name. Thus one's vocabulary grows in addition to one's understanding of meaning as the objects of one's environment are named. One might suggest that such learning exercises are identical to how one might train an animal. No explanations of any kind are given to the learner; rather the "animal" is trained to do certain things by gestures, rewards, punishments, etc.<sup>3</sup> Of course, Wittgenstein does not wish to open the debate that meaning is not often mimicking what we have learned from others, but makes the point that all understanding must not spring from mere training or mimicking alone.

In addition to its limits as to what can be named, the ostensive teaching of words can lead to many ambiguities that confuse an object's name with its other characteristics. For example, let's assume that the word "two" is to be explained to a child by means of ostensive definition. In an effort to convey meaning, the teacher points to two nuts, two apples, two houses, etc., while at the same time saying the word "two." Here, only confusion can arise because the child is unsure if the word "two" is naming the particular group of objects or rather a different characteristic all together. It can be argued that

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<sup>3</sup> Specht, p66

confusion like this can be avoided, specifically if the teacher points to various objects grouped in pairs and then said, “this *number* is called “two.” Even Wittgenstein agrees that the addition of the term, “this number” relays to the child how he is to differentiate between a thing’s name and its characteristic of quantity.<sup>4</sup> However, if the learner is able to understand this more technical form of ostensive definition, he must also already be familiar with what it means for objects to share characteristics, such as color, size and the word “number.” In other words, a person can only understand an ostensive definition if he somehow already knows how the word which is to be explained is to be construed.<sup>5</sup> In conclusion, ostensive definition is only able to explain the meaning of a word when the overall role of the word in language is clear.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, according to St. Augustine, there is no difference between kinds of words. Just as one teaches that the word “table” refers to a table, the same method of naming is used if one were to point at other objects and name them in the same manner. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, alludes to a much more complex idea about the differences between words and their varying types. Turning again to the example of the child learning that “two” is the name of a quantity, not the name of an object, there must be some way in which the child knows, beyond what he learned by listening to the word “two”, that there is a distinction between the object and its characteristics. Although Wittgenstein does not go into detail about how the child arrives at the knowledge of the word being something different than the object’s name, he does offer a description of how words play different roles in language. Ernst Konrad Specht, in his book, *The Foundations of Wittgenstein’s Late Philosophy*, explains the point with this example: “A

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<sup>4</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 3

<sup>5</sup> Specht, p69

<sup>6</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 30

child first of all learns the typical modes of application of individual words in a certain primitive manner in which no ostensive definitions are given. In this way, he gradually acquires an understanding of the typical characteristic of the individual kinds of words, or the 'place' of words in the language."<sup>7</sup> Thus, only when the child has learned that different words have different uses can he put new words that he has been taught by ostensive definition in the right position in linguistic context. This is made clearer with Wittgenstein's suggestion that the functions of words should be thought of as different tools in a toolbox: "There is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screw-driver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails, and screws. The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects."<sup>8</sup> This will later develop into what Wittgenstein considers a "language game." Furthermore, as Wittgenstein explains, the function of a word will vary depending on the circumstances in which it is used, as well as to whom it is spoken.<sup>9</sup> He notes how easy it is to ignore that words serve different functions. This is because words have a uniform appearance when spoken or when seen in script and print. When these differences in use are not realized or made note of, we often fail to understand the context in which a word is being used. Wittgenstein finds that this confusion is especially true in the study of philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

The previous example is not only valid for the understanding of ostensive definitions and word usage, but also for explaining the act of naming. It is one thing for a teacher to point at an object while saying its name in order to convey meaning to a child, but another for the child to respond using his own conjugated questions. If the child

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<sup>7</sup> Specht, p70

<sup>8</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 11

<sup>9</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 29

<sup>10</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 11

responds by saying the name himself, it means nothing more than he has the ability to regurgitate information. On the other hand, if the child partakes in his own question asking, specifically if he reverses the defining by himself asking, “What is that called?” or “What is that?” he must already be familiar with the linguistic framework “within which the question about the name of the object referred to is raised.”<sup>11</sup> Wittgenstein notes, “One has already to know (or be able to do) something in order to be capable of asking a things name.”<sup>12</sup> Here, he asks us to consider such a case:

I am explaining chess to someone; and I begin by pointing to a chessman and saying: “This is the king; it can move like this, ...and so on.” – In this case we shall say: the words “This is the king” (or “This is called the king”) are a definition only if the learner already “knows what a piece in a game is”. That is, if he has already played other games, or has watched other people playing “and understood” – *and similar things*. Further, only under these conditions will he be able to ask relevantly in the course of learning the game: “What do you call this, - that is, the piece in the game.”<sup>13</sup>

This case indicates that only someone who already knows how to do something can come to ask a thing’s name. If they didn’t know an object’s meaning, let alone its use, no question could possibly be posed.

This conclusion, as well as the other conclusions drawn in Wittgenstein’s arguments against St. Augustine’s learning theory, proves that the ostensive teaching of words only has legitimacy in a narrowly circumscribed region of meaning; it in no way describes meaning to its fullest extent. As Wittgenstein mentions, “Augustine describes the learning of human language as if a child came into a strange country and did not understand the local language; that is, as if he already had a language, only not this one.

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<sup>11</sup> Specht, p 69

<sup>12</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 30

<sup>13</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 31

Or again, as if the child could already *think*, only not yet speak.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, it is after this critique of St. Augustine that Wittgenstein begins his philosophical investigation into language and its meaning. Using his own examples to convey his ideas, Wittgenstein next directs his attention in the *Philosophical Investigations* to his explanation of language games, family resemblances, and ordinary language theory.

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<sup>14</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 32

## Section 2: Meaning as Use and Language Games

Just by looking to Wittgenstein's critique of St. Augustine's theory of meaning, it is clear that any possible explanation of meaning proposed by Wittgenstein will contain a whole kaleidoscope of possibilities. Simply put, Wittgenstein believes that no one theory will explain something as multifaceted as language. This tendency not to adhere to a formal method of philosophy is seen here as well as in many other areas of his investigation.

It should be noted, however, that many philosophers have upheld various referential theories, not just St. Augustine. For instance, Plato, too, believed that the naming and defining of words comes from identifying certain necessary conditions. For example, in order for a person to be called "mother", that person would first necessarily have to be a female, and secondly, would have to have offspring. If both of these conditions are not met, the person cannot be called "mother." Plato's theory of meaning lends itself to his concept of Forms. An essence, existing in what he calls "the world of Forms," is what defines what a thing is. For instance, all different types of love, such as one's love for his or her spouse, one's love for his or her child, or even one's love for his or her car, are all considered examples of love. Despite their taking place in different relationships, all varying types have an underlying and essential quality of love. This, of course, would be the Form, or essence of love. Lastly, one could call such a manner of defining a *closed concept* of meaning. Because certain conditions must be met in order for a thing to be given a certain name, there can be no question as to whether a thing is named correctly or incorrectly. Using the example of "mother" again, if one of the conditions of being a mother is not met, say the person in question is a female, but has no

offspring, she cannot be considered a mother because she does not meet all of the necessary conditions of motherhood.

Plato's theory appears quite reasonable, as well as does many other referential theories, but as Wittgenstein shows in his critique of St. Augustine, these types of denotative theories are not correct all of the time. First, instead of words being defined by means of certain necessary conditions are met, Wittgenstein insists that they can also be defined by their meeting certain sufficient conditions. In other words, if a name can be defined with certain conditions, and the name meets certain decisional factors held by the group or society that is using the name, then the name has meaning due to the understanding of its conditions of use. To clarify, I will again use the example of love. Plato agreed that the word "love" can be used in many different instances: the love between a father and child, the love between husband and wife, the love for one's profession, and even the love for one's pet. Furthermore, these different instances of love have their certain conditions. With the love a father has for his child, the conditions could be that (A) the father has a deep interest in providing for the child's health and well being, (B) the father has a desire to teach certain values to the child, and (C) the child is cherished by the father because she brings joy to his life. Likewise, the conditions of love between a husband and his wife may be (A) the husband longs to share his life with his spouse, (B) the wife is cherished by her husband because she brings joy to his life, and (C) the husband seeks companionship with his wife. The love between a person and their profession may contain conditions like (A) the person is thankful for his profession because it presents an active challenge in his life and (B) the person receives their income and livelihood from their profession. Lastly, the love for one's pet may consist of

conditions such as (A) the person seeks companionship with his pet and (B) the pet is cherished by its owner because it brings joy to his life. In all of these examples, it is clear that there are certain conditions for the word "love." Furthermore, these sufficient conditions justify why one might say, "I love my daughter", or "I love my wife." But what is most striking about this example is how it clearly shows that no one condition is consistent throughout all instances of love. Looking at the different lists of conditions for each relationship, no single condition can be found in every example. On the other hand, there are many conditions that appear in more than one example. For instance, it is a shared condition between both the love a husband has for his wife and the love a person has for his pet that the relationship brings about joy and companionship, yet both instances of love are not identical. Likewise, the conditions of love between a husband and his wife and also the love between a father and his child have similarities, yet it is not correct that the father would want to spend the rest of his life with his child. As this example illustrates, there are various sufficient conditions that determine how a something is to be named. Furthermore, the varying conditions of a particular word do not share a similar essence, such as Plato would suggest, but rather all have certain "family resemblance." (See Section 3) In conclusion, as Wittgenstein insists, meaning is derived from a word's condition of use.

As an introduction to another concept, Wittgenstein presents a scenario regarding the everyday use of language. Describing human dialogue in the most primitive way possible, he presents an example of a boy going to a store to pick up a few items. Equipped with a slip marked "five red apples", he goes to the shopkeeper who opens a drawer marked "apples." He then looks up the word "red" in a table and finds a color

sample opposite it, then he says the series of cardinal numbers – up to the word “five” and for each number he takes an apple of the same color as the sample out of the drawer. The test of the shopkeeper’s understanding of what is written on the slip is whether or not he carries out the actions the boy has asked him to do.<sup>15</sup> Specifically, the shopkeeper’s understanding of the word “five” is shown by his counting from one to five and stopping when he has reached the correct number. Conversely, if the slip would have said “four” or “six” and yet he still continued to fetch five apples, it would have indeed meant that he did not understand the meaning of the cardinal numbers. Thus, this example illustrates the importance of the shopkeeper knowing not what the word “five” names, but rather how the term is to be used in describing quantity.<sup>16</sup>

This point-by-point scenario describes the use of what Wittgenstein calls a “language game.” Described early in *Philosophical Investigations* as “consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven,” the term is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity; a “form of life.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, “language games” bring to light the idea that language is not one uniform thing, but rather a host of different activities. In the example above, the difference between the color of the apple and the quantity which is needed is conveyed through the different use of language games: one language game making reference to color, the other to quantity. Wittgenstein also stresses that there are innumerable types of language games. As he states, “.... language is used to describe, report, inform, affirm, deny speculate, give orders, ask questions, tell stories, playact, sing, guess riddles, etc.”<sup>18</sup> In

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<sup>15</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 1

<sup>16</sup> Hartnack, p64

<sup>17</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 19

<sup>18</sup> Grey, p83

each of these activities, language is playing a different role. For example, the language game used while playing a game of Monopoly might consist of utterances or phrases like, “give me \$200 for passing Go”, or “can you pass me a chance card.” These phrases are pertinent to the specific board game, but when they are uttered outside the context of the game, can be nonsensical.

The above example illustrates another important point made by Wittgenstein. Just as one would use a particular language game when playing Monopoly, that language game would only be understood by another person if he or she were aware of the context of the phrase. If a young man were to speak of receiving \$200 for passing Go in an instance other than while playing Monopoly, and those to whom he were speaking had no previous knowledge of the game, they would think him to be speaking nonsense. He would be using a language game out of context.

The idea of language games adhering to a particular context is critical to Wittgenstein’s philosophy and is best explained in the following example. A builder *A* and his assistant *B* are building a house. To communicate to each other, both workers use a language game consisting of the words “block”, “pillar”, “slab” and “beam.” *A* gets various building materials brought to him by saying to *B* the various names. When *A* calls out one of these names, *B* brings the appropriate object that he has learned to bring at such-and-such a call. No supplemental phrases are needed: the mere stating of a particular word is all that is needed to convey the point. This scene illustrates many important points that Wittgenstein wants to convey. First, the fact that both *A* and *B* can understand each other by simply calling out the name of an object indicates the use of a specific language game. It is obvious that the partners must linguistically be “tuned in”

to one another because without such mutual understanding, confusion might arise. Their way of communicating is a very simple language game containing just so many expressions as to enable each of them to make themselves understood in this particular task, but not for any other linguistic purpose beyond that.<sup>19</sup> Second, both builder A and assistant B must be aware of the same linguistic context. If either were not aware of the rules of the language game, one's uttering of the word "slab" might well be met with confusion because no imperatival phrases, such as "bring me..." or "I also need...", were included in the statement.<sup>20</sup> Lastly, the scenario once again proves that St. Augustine's ostensive theory of learning is inadequate in describing all meaning because obviously in this case, builder A's uttering of the word "slab" is not meant to teach assistant B what a slab is, but rather that he means for him to bring him a slab.<sup>21</sup>

The example also indicates that an object's name (and words in general) does much more than just serve as a title or mere description, as St. Augustine proposed, but also that words can convey understanding as to an object's use. Clearly, much more than a definition is being conveyed with the builder's utterance of the single word, "slab." This is proven by the assistant's reaction of bringing him the desired slab. On the contrary, an assistant who knows only what object the word "slab" names has no way of understanding what his fellow builder is trying to say. He would be confused as to what he is trying to convey by stating the single word. Thus, understanding is not solely determined by knowing a particular object's name, but also knowing, according to the particular language game, what one should do.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 19

<sup>20</sup> Specht, p43

<sup>21</sup> Hartnack, p65

<sup>22</sup> Hartnack, p 66

P.F. Strawson gives his own analysis of what Wittgenstein means by the term “language game.” In his review of the Philosophical Investigations, he understands Wittgenstein’s use of the phrase “language games” as “to refer to any particular way, actual or invented, of using language, e.g. to a particular way of using a certain sentence, or even a certain word, and also to the whole consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven.”<sup>23</sup> W. Stegmuller offers another explanation of language games. He explains, “Wittgenstein understands by language games sometimes those methods, mostly playful, by means of which children learn the use of their mother-tongue, but then also simple models of language and finally the whole of everyday language, together with the activities with which it is interwoven, are also so called.”<sup>24</sup> With Strawson and Stegmuller’s analysis in mind, as well as the examples posed by Wittgenstein, language games can be understood as follows:

- a) Certain primitive and simplified forms of language such as, say, those used by a child when learning a language, or such as can be artificially drawn up.
- b) Ordinary everyday language together with all of the activities and performances indissolubly belonging to it.
- c) Certain individual partial language systems, functional entities or applicational contexts that constitute part of an organic whole.<sup>25</sup>

Wittgenstein’s idea of “language games” is his first description of the many ways in which language can be used. Beginning with examples of how individuals use language in everyday life, Wittgenstein shows how each activity often has its own type of language. In summary, Wittgenstein replaces the concept of meaning as naming with the idea of meaning as use because this concept more appropriately illustrates how a word’s meaning is determined by sufficient conditions, not necessary conditions. Furthermore,

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<sup>23</sup> Specht, p42

<sup>24</sup> Specht, p42

<sup>25</sup> Specht, p42

one must understand that language games describe certain partial systems or partial functions of language.<sup>26</sup> These partial systems include everything that can be called a “linguistic act” or “linguistic performance.” Again, this is what is meant by the different acts of ordering, requesting, thanking, cursing, etc. Thus, Wittgenstein’s concept of language games makes the notion clear that language serves a multitude of different functions. The following chapter will further examine language games as well as Wittgenstein’s analogy of family resemblances and ordinary language philosophy.

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<sup>26</sup> Specht, p45

### Section 3: Family Resemblances and Ordinary Language Philosophy

The idea of language games is important in explaining how language works and what Wittgenstein calls the “family resemblances analogy.” Describing different uses of language as a game might well be the best way to describe how different types of language play a part in all aspects of language usage. But do the various “games” have anything in common? Do they have one essential feature? Wittgenstein considers the following clarification:

Consider...the proceedings we call “games”. I mean board games, card games, ball games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? – Don’t say: “there must be something common or they would not all be called ‘games’”, but look and see whether there is something common to all, for if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that...and the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing...I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than “family resemblances”; for the various resemblances between members of a family, build, features, color of eyes, gait, temperament, etc., etc., overlap and criss-cross in the same way. And I shall say: “games” form a family.<sup>27</sup>

With his description of family resemblances, he is denying that all games have any one thing in common; rather, language games have striking resemblances, just like members of a family. In other words, he is rejecting the search for essences. Furthermore, it is because of this familiar relationship that we are able to call all of these resemblances “language”, just as we are able to classify “games” without a specific criterion for what all games must be. One might say that Wittgenstein has taken “the easy way out” by insisting that such a loose relationship between language games exists. Instead of analyzing language games to the point that some underlying feature becomes apparent, a ritual that would be characteristic of a philosopher who searches for common essences

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<sup>27</sup> Philosophical Investigations, Section 66

among concepts, Wittgenstein chooses not to put the idea of language games under such misdirected scrutiny.

Wittgenstein's uses the discussion of family resemblances to mark the beginning of his overall assertion that no universal essences exist. Furthermore, one who believes that there is something common to the constructions of language is on the wrong track. As Wittgenstein puts it, "one might as well say, 'Something runs through the whole thread - namely the continuous overlapping of those fibers.'"<sup>28</sup> Extending his objection to any sort of an "underlying thread" or theory of essences, he makes reference to how an ordinary rope is constructed. Unlike what most tend to believe, a rope does not have one group of fibers that run the entire length of it. Rather, a rope is made up of many fibers that run through the length in order to give it strength. Such is the case in comparing different language games. Their resemblances represent the continual overlapping of the fibers that make up the rope. There is no underlying similarity, or thread, that runs through any series of language games. George Pitcher in his essay, "The Attack on Essentialism" agrees with Wittgenstein. Pitcher says that humans have a strange craving for unity, specifically in the uses and functions of sentences. Furthermore, this craving has gotten out of hand and the desires for universal truths has seeped into every aspect of life, including the study of philosophy.<sup>29</sup> Because of this tendency, both Wittgenstein and Pitcher reject philosophy concerning the acceptance of essentialism.

The concept of family resemblances lends itself to a more important point outlined by Wittgenstein: the idea that "no concept is closed by a frontier".<sup>30</sup> In other words, some concepts, such as the order of numbers or the rules of a game, may have

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<sup>28</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 67

<sup>29</sup> Pitcher, p217

<sup>30</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 67

some outlined limits, but overall there is no concrete model as to what a concept must necessarily contain. The example of games can be used again. Although most games have some defining rules, such as a baseball game consisting of nine innings or basketball games having four periods, not everything circumscribed by the game's rules has any explanation. For instance, in tennis, there are no formal rules about how high one should throw the tennis ball, yet it is undoubtedly true that the game is based on some formulation of rules or guidelines.<sup>31</sup> This description of rules prompts Wittgenstein to ask what still counts as a game and what no longer does. Can there be a given boundary? To this he answers no, simply because no boundaries have ever been drawn. Looking back to the first example listed in this section, it is clear that games have certain similarities; some games are played with two or more people, some games are played in periods, etc. Despite these easily recognizable similarities, however, one would have a very difficult time coming up with a definition that encompassed all aspects of all games. Because of this near impossibility, one might claim that it cannot be understood what a game consists of, due to the fact that the concept of "game" cannot be circumscribed in its entirety. This argument is similar to the example in chapter 2 that discussed the necessary conditions for what it means to be a mother. Wittgenstein makes the point that even though a clear and well-defined boundary cannot be prescribed to most concepts, we still have a workable idea as to what those concepts mean. We still make use of the word "game" as well as make judgments as to what are considered games despite our inability to define the term precisely. Likewise, to attempt to define anything exactly would be more trouble than it's worth. When attempting to find something's exact measure, how can you not be endlessly caught up in trying to define precisely what "exact" means? In

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<sup>31</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 67

summary, Wittgenstein finds that language need not be deemed uncertain or even unviable because of the inability for concepts to have definable boundaries. Rather, what we can make of certain concepts should be used to try to understand that concept even more; there is no need to discount a concept simply because its use in some cases remains open to decision.<sup>32</sup>

Wittgenstein's explanation of language games and his claim of how many words are best understood on the analogy of family resemblances lends itself to what is known as ordinary language theory. Although it is clear that Wittgenstein never wishes to adhere completely to any one given theory, let alone any one example, it can be rightly said that he is an advocate of what the theory presents. As a matter of fact, the phrase, "ordinary language theory" is never even used in the text, yet it is obvious through his use of particular examples that he would be more than partial to what the theory upholds.

What Wittgenstein *does* make reference to is what takes place in our everyday language, or "how the use of a certain word would be used in ordinary circumstances."<sup>33</sup> What Wittgenstein would define as ordinary language is "discourse that makes sense." This idea is clearer when seen in various examples posed in the text. For instance, any use of a particular language game conveys the idea that meaningful discourse is validated by whether or not we understand each other, not necessarily how formalized our language is. Referring to an earlier example, if builder *A*'s shouting of the word "slab" is sufficient for having his assistant bring him a slab, that is as complex as the language game needs to be. There is no need to make use of a formal language, which would be the case if the

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<sup>32</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 71

<sup>33</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 156

only way the builder could convey his point was by saying, “bring me a slab” or “pass me a hammer.”

In summary, all forms of language usage can each be considered to have their own language games, but any number of language games together cannot be said to have certain essences in common. Instead, language games are best compared to one another by pointing out their resemblances. From this notion comes Wittgenstein’s reassurance that a concept need not be completely defined with a set of necessary and sufficient conditions in order for meaning to be drawn from it. As his examples show, a picture does not need to be crystal clear in order for us to make out what it is a picture of. Lastly, Wittgenstein’s contentment with even the simplest language games and the meaning that each conveys indicates that he is an advocate of ordinary language theory. With all of these explanations in mind, attention will now be focused on the concept of private language.

#### Section 4: Private Language

Deep into his investigation, Wittgenstein considers what is widely known as private language, or a person's inner monologue, or inner verbal expression. The following will explain specifically what the concept of private language means and also why Wittgenstein comes to find such a theory as nonsensical.

The concepts held by Wittgenstein discussed thus far can be categorized as activities that are, for the most part, public. Activities, such as demanding, asking, requesting, riddling, etc., are all activities that are presented in a public manner. Furthermore, as Wittgenstein indicates, the usefulness or "success" of language is measured by our ability to partake in language games with others. In other words, if the person to whom we are talking does not understand the particular "language game" that is being made use of, and this misunderstanding would be made clear by signs that the person is obviously confused, the attempt to communicate either fails or results in nonsense.

In addition to public language, it might also be thought that there is a private language. This type of language might include a person encouraging himself, giving himself orders, or obeying, blaming, and punishing himself. A person could also ask himself a question and answer it.<sup>34</sup> One could also imagine a private language in which a person could write down or give vocal expression to his inner experiences, for instance, his feelings and moods. This might be very similar to what a person would jot down in a personal diary, i.e., "I felt like crying today" or "The blustery weather made me feel glum." Although all of these instances seem private in nature, Wittgenstein holds that there is no reason why they should be considered language at all. This conjecture is

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<sup>34</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 343

drawn from the fact that there is no way to validate if words are being used meaningfully when only experienced privately.

Looking back to Wittgenstein's explanation of language games, what determines understanding is the successful use of language games. Drawing from a previous example, if I am playing the game of Monopoly, I can say, "give me \$200 for passing go" and my opponent knows that I have just made it around the Monopoly board, it is clear that our specific game is working. Her passing me the money is enough to convey to me that she understands what I am trying to say. In the case of private language, such validation of understanding cannot be attained. For comment on a private activity to be explained, somehow another person besides the one having the sensation would have to, too, experience the particular sensation. This is clearly impossible. Because of this, Wittgenstein's first objection to private language lies in the inability of personal sensations to be experienced by others.

But what about the language that one claims to understand regarding inner experiences? For example, one can say to himself that he is experiencing head pain when he is experiencing something that he always has referred to as head pain. Is this not understanding one's private language? According to Wittgenstein, this, too, cannot be considered a private language because the person is simply *associating* names with sensations. How can he possibly know if his evaluation of his sensation is being done correctly?

Even if someone else were to hear someone say "I am having head pain" and that person were to respond, "I know what you are feeling because I also have experienced head pain", it would still not prove the existence of a private language because there is no

way to test if both persons' ideas of pain is the same. In other words, if we assume that Mr. *X* and Ms. *Y* are naming an inner body state, how can they ever check that they are naming the same thing? Since it is impossible for private sensations to be experienced by others, and no check on the sensation can be made, our ordinary use of sensation words cannot be considered meaningful.<sup>35</sup>

Another reason why Wittgenstein disregards arguments for private language is due to the words we often use when announcing we are in pain or a supposed inner state. How often have we heard someone say, "I know my head hurts", or, even in other instances, "I know that I am doubting." These phrases may be commonly used, but they illustrate that we do not have a clear understanding of some words and their uses. What does it really mean "to know" that you are experiencing something? Is there an actual inner process going on in your head that tells you that you know? Wittgenstein says no. As he explains:

"I know" has a primitive meaning similar to and related to "I see." And "I knew he was in the room, but he wasn't in the room" is like "I saw him in the room, but he wasn't there." "I know" is supposed to express a relation, not between me and the sense of a proposition (like "I believe") but between me and a fact. So that the fact is taken into my consciousness. (Here is the reason why one wants to say that nothing that goes on in the outer world is really known, but only what happens in the domain of what are called sense data.) This would give us a picture of knowing as the perception of an outer even through visual rays which project it as it is into the eye and the consciousness. Only then the question at once arises whether one can be certain of this projection. And this picture does indeed show how our imagination presents knowledge, but not what lies at the bottom of this presentation.<sup>36</sup>

This excerpt explains why the phrase "I know" leads to misunderstanding in language. First, even if "I know" is replaced with "I am of the unshakable conviction", it

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<sup>35</sup> Pitcher, p288

<sup>36</sup> On Certainty, p14

still does not absolutely prove that we positively know anything.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, even if we use “I know” to simply indicate that we are acknowledging something, or thinking something, like “I know I have a pain”, why verbally express that “I know.” Surely if you didn’t know, you wouldn’t be talking. Would you not think a person a fool if they walked around stating that they know they are entering buildings, or they know they are eating lunch? Examples like these show why Wittgenstein finds it nonsense to think we “know” when we are experiencing pain, or other inner sensations. One might ask then, whether private language exists by just saying, “I have a pain in my leg.” When a person uses a phrase like this, it may be true to him that he is experiencing what he considers pain in his leg. Wittgenstein would agree with this proposition. However, the occurrence of this pain as well as public understanding of this pain can never be known because a true “criterion of correctness” cannot be assessed.

Again, let us go over Wittgenstein’s analysis because it seems clearly reasonable that such a private language could exist. Do we all not make mental reference to our sensations? To better explain his position, he gives the following example:

Let us imagine the following case. I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain situation. To this end I associate it with the sign “S” and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have the sensation. I will remark first of all that a definition of a sign cannot be formulated. But still I can give myself a kind of ostensive definition. – How? Can I point to the sensation? Not in the ordinary sense. But I speak, or write the sign down, and at the same time I concentrate my attention on the sensation—and so, as it were, point to it inwardly. –But what is the ceremony for? For that is all it seems to be! A definition surely serves to establish a meaning for the sign. –Well, that is done precisely by the concentration of my attention; for in this way I impress on myself the connection between the sign and the sensation. –But “I impress it on myself” can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connection *right* in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say:

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<sup>37</sup> *On Certainty*, p16

whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about "right."<sup>38</sup>

Wittgenstein wants us to imagine someone who is trying to create a name for his or her own private sensation. The argument is that this cannot be done. As Wittgenstein reasons:

In order for "S" really to be the name of that kind of sensation, there must be a rule for applying it. In order for there really to be a rule, there must be something that counts as following the rule correctly and something that counts as violating it – ways of going on that count as the same way or as different ways."<sup>39</sup> In the example above, the person could believe that he is applying a rule correctly; there is no way for him or anyone else to check whether his belief is in fact true or false. "There is absolutely nothing he can do to constitute a real test of genuine correctness."<sup>40</sup>

Without the determination of the rule, a person can never succeed in giving "S" a meaning for himself.

What about a case where a person, upon sensing a certain bodily sensation, such as feeling the impulse to scratch an itch, was able to medically prove that such a sensation was taking place. For instance, if a doctor were able to scientifically prove that with a patient's insistence of an itch, some sort of mechanical tool would indicate such an irritation of the skin. Would this be enough to prove that private language is indeed accurate in determining sensations? According to Wittgenstein, this is still not enough evidence to prove that private language can be validated. Even in an instance like this, the language that we ordinarily use to describe our "inner experiences" is still not private because "the words which one uses to refer to one's sensations are still tied up with one's natural expression of sensations."<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, even when human sensations appear to

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<sup>38</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 258

<sup>39</sup> Martin, p46

<sup>40</sup> Martin, p46

<sup>41</sup> Pitcher, p255

be monitored by precise machines, as is possible in a doctor's office, the validation of those sensations would still be dependent on what we individually believe we are experiencing. A machine can read that certain nerves in the body are reacting in a manner that scientifically tend to indicate an irritation of the skin, but if a patient feels no such sensations, his not feeling the irritation is what would be considered as what he was truly feeling.

In conclusion, Wittgenstein attests that there is no such thing as a private language because the supposed meaningfulness of its words cannot be ascertained. Furthermore, one can't even understand his own private language because there is no way to associate names with sensations, even on a personal level. A person exclaiming, "I know I'm in pain" is incorrect use of language because how does he understand his pain? Thus, Wittgenstein would assert that any theory that relied on humans having the ability to name their own private sensations, in addition to the sensations experienced by others, is clearly a misunderstanding of the use of language.

## Section 5: Wittgenstein's View of Philosophy

All of Wittgenstein's notions combined present an overall perspective as to how we are to evaluate truth and meaning in the world. If anything, Wittgenstein's analysis of meaning, language games, family resemblances, ordinary language, and a supposed private language makes it clear that there is more to language than one might realize. Wittgenstein's views indicate that our words gain their meaning by use in a certain context. Furthermore, when words are taken out of a particular familiar context, nonsense can arise. A position such as this is only the beginning of Wittgenstein's elaborate discussion as to how the study of philosophy is attempted and carried out. With many of Wittgenstein's views now defined, attention now will be directed to uncovering the relationship held between language and philosophy.

Wittgenstein makes a deliberate attempt to avoid theories and universally applicable explanations. One might say that this attempt to merely illustrate instead of theorize might well be the only method he upholds throughout his investigation. Furthermore, Wittgenstein believes that in order to understand such concepts as "language" or "philosophy", one must not be burdened by the worry that comes from trying to make all concepts fit together. Ideas must be explained as they are, unhindered by the tendency to order truths around particular formulas or constructs.

Wittgenstein's view of philosophy is summed up best with his own words: "Philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*."<sup>42</sup> In other words, philosophical problems come to be because of a misuse of language. To best describe the many reasons as to why Wittgenstein holds this claim true, attention will first be paid to his criticisms concerning naming. To review: Wittgenstein rejects the denotative

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<sup>42</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 38

defining of words, also known as ostensive definition. He shows the theory's inability to explain how all things can possibly be named by mere pointing and name delineation. However, his dissatisfaction with the theory can also be extended to the problems that such a theory heaps on philosophy. Specifically, naming to Wittgenstein appears as "a *queer* connection of a word with an object." Furthermore, "you really get such a queer connection when the philosopher tries to bring out the relation between name and thing by *staring* at an object in front of him and repeating a name."<sup>43</sup> This type of naming is equated by Wittgenstein as being some sort of an "occult process." As he states, "we believe naming to be some remarkable act of mind, as if it were a baptism of an object."<sup>44</sup> This indicates that humans have some sort of an obsession with giving names to all things. In addition, our giving names to various objects and concepts leads us to uphold theories that seem correct, but are truly laden in nonsense. This is best illustrated by the following excerpt:

The word, "Excalibur", say, is a proper name in the ordinary sense. The sword Excalibur consists of parts combined in a particular way. If they are combined differently Excalibur does not exist. But it is clear that the sentence "Excalibur has a sharp blade" makes *sense*, whether Excalibur is still whole or is broken up. But if "Excalibur" is the name of the object, this object no longer exists when Excalibur is broken to pieces; and as no object would then correspond to the name, it would have no meaning. But then the sentence "Excalibur has a sharp blade" would contain a word that has no meaning, and hence the sentence would be nonsense. But it does make sense; so there must always be something corresponding to the words of which it consists. So the word "Excalibur" must disappear when the sense is analyzed and its place be taken by words which name simples. It will be reasonable to call these words the real names.<sup>45</sup>

The reason why naming often leads to philosophical misunderstanding is because we assume the language we use to name everyday things can also serve as the same kind of

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<sup>43</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 38

<sup>44</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 38

<sup>45</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 39

language we use to discuss philosophical ideas. According to Wittgenstein, the labeling of objects often conveys the idea that the object must necessarily exist. We begin to assume that because a sentence is grammatically correct, the objects of ideas described in the sentence must too necessarily exist. For example, it may be grammatically correct to say that “Excalibur has a sharp blade”, but without proof of the sword’s existence, the whole sentence becomes meaningless. This is the same problem that arises when we give names to particular philosophical concepts. Philosophers can give names to particular philosophical problems, like “the mind-body problem”, without having a clue as to what context the word is being used in. What results are problems that are unrelated to any recognizable context. In conclusion, instead of carelessly prescribing names and titles to objects and concepts, Wittgenstein asserts that the meaning of a word must be drawn from its use in a language game. If no particular language game can be made reference to in order to discuss the context of a certain object or idea, which is often the case in philosophical problems, meaning cannot be assessed and words have been misused.

Not only are philosophical problems created when we try to explain concepts outside of the context of language games, but also they are intensified by our tendency to think of such problems as complex and “hidden.” As Wittgenstein explains, “the essence is hidden from us”: this is the form our problems now assume.”<sup>46</sup> He is making the point that all of the attempts of past philosophy have been aimed at uncovering hidden phenomena. In order to find the answers to our endless philosophical problems, some miraculous concept needs to be brought to light. This idea that philosophy is a matter of unearthing mystical truths springs “right from an urge to understand the basis, or essence,

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<sup>46</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 92

of everything.”<sup>47</sup> But this way of conceiving philosophy is totally wrong according to Wittgenstein. Our method should not be to hunt out new facts; furthermore, we should not be seeking anything new by our investigations. What we need to do is dissolve these philosophical problems, which in reality are pseudo-problems, and realize that they are a result of our misuse of language.

With many of Wittgenstein’s notions now explained, it is clear to see why he holds such a unique view concerning the resolution of philosophical problems. His concepts of language coupled with his view of philosophy present an unprecedented breakthrough involving the meaning of language and the impacts it presents to philosophical investigation. But are these conjectures fluid enough to withstand criticism from other contemporary thinkers? The next section dedicates itself to this question as we further consider the soundness and reasonability of Wittgensteinian philosophy. Presentation and analysis of these critiques will follow in the same order that Wittgenstein’s ideas were explained in part one in sections 1 through 5.

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<sup>47</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 89

## **Part II: Wittgenstein's Critics**

**Section 1: Ernst Konrad Specht's Critique of "Meaning as Use" and "Language Games"**

Beginning with Wittgenstein's proposal concerning meaning as use, it is a common argument that despite Wittgenstein's attempt to define the meaning of a word as being a description of its conditions of use, this definition may be too vague. Ernst Specht strongly suggests that Wittgenstein's description of meaning as use may not be specific enough to prove the point that a word's meaning is conveyed in its use. Specht claims that further clarification must be made, specifically concerning the difference between a word's *use* and its *usage*. According to Specht, saying that a word has meaning according to its use expresses the fact that a definite word's use is normal. On the other hand, word usage expresses a different type of meaning in the sense that it describes the specific "use of the word", and also makes it possible that one can use a word correctly or incorrectly, according to whether it is in agreement with the rules accepted in the linguistic community or not.<sup>48</sup> Gilbert Ryle agrees with Specht, that "much more...insidious...is the confusion between a "use" i.e. a way of operating with something, and a "usage", which is a custom, practice, fashion, or vogue."<sup>49</sup>

To fix this supposed neglected distinction, Specht suggests that the use of the word "use" could be better defined in the following way. First, one must understand the totality of all uses or *modes of use* of a word within a language. A word can have several meanings while there can only be *one* totality of all uses. At the same time, however, it must also be noted that "use" does not necessarily mean the specific individual uses of a word. As Specht reasons:

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<sup>48</sup> Specht, p129

<sup>49</sup> Specht, p129

we are continually using the words of our language in new combinations; we are continually constructing new expressions and propositions with them, repeatedly using them in new situations. If we wanted to draw up a list of these uses of a word in this sense, one would have to enumerate an interminable number of propositions and contexts.<sup>50</sup>

Specht believes that Wittgenstein obviously must not have meant this kind of word usage when he indicates that the meaning of a word consists in its use. If, indeed, this is what he was trying to convey, “every word would have a multiplicity of meanings corresponding to the immense number of individual uses.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, because he feels that Wittgenstein has failed to consider a difference between “use” and “usage”, Specht dismisses the argument for meaning as use as being too vague.

Specht also holds that Wittgenstein’s use of the term “language game” may also be too vague. He begins his argument by giving the analysis of another philosopher, H.R. Smart, who also believes that the concept of language games needs a more thorough explanation. As Smart writes:

Only the operation of a symbolic calculus bears some remote analogy to the playing of a game, and it may well be that his early pre-occupation with symbolic logic tended to encourage Wittgenstein in the erroneous belief that such an analogy could be generalized so as to cover all language, and thus justify coining the phrase, “language game.” Thus games, in contrast to language, have no function whatever important for life. They serve no serious end; nor do they belong to the “form of life” of a society. Games are thus in no way an “instrument”, whereas language is essentially an instrument.<sup>52</sup>

In a last attempt to express his disregard for the concept of language games, Smart asserts that the acceptance of such a poorly articulated concept can only lend itself to confusion and obscurity. It serves no “enlightened purpose” and, as Smart suggests, should be disregarded.

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<sup>50</sup> Specht, p130

<sup>51</sup> Specht, p134

<sup>52</sup> As quoted by Specht, p47

## Section 2: Maurice Mandelbaum's Critique on Family Resemblances

Just as there are attacks on Wittgenstein's views on meaning and use, there are objections to his idea of family resemblances. One author who holds such a critical regard is Maurice Mandelbaum in his essay entitled, "Family Resemblances and Generalization Concerning the Arts." Unlike Wittgenstein, Mandelbaum asserts that there are, indeed, underlying commonalities among entities. To begin his critique, he looks to Wittgenstein's example of games and his analysis that they all have similar characteristics, but none that are completely essential. Similar to Specht's critique of meaning as use, Mandelbaum finds that Wittgenstein's examples may be too general. Surely, it must take more than a few examples to truly dismiss the concept that no essences exist among types of words? He argues that although Wittgenstein's examples of the diversity among various types of games may at first make his doctrine of family resemblances extremely plausible, when applied even more thoughtfully, it provides an inadequate analysis of why a common name, such as "game," is in all cases applied or withheld.<sup>53</sup> To make his argument, Mandelbaum uses an example that also makes reference to the playing of various games. He begins by describing a person who knows how to play a form of solitaire called Canfield; furthermore, this person is acquainted with a number of other varieties of solitaire. If this person were to see another person shuffling a pack of cards, arranging the cards in piles, some face up and some face down, turning cards over one-by-one, sometimes placing them in one pile, then another, shifting piles, etc., the observer might say, "I see you are playing cards. What game are you playing?" To this, the person with the cards answers, "I am not playing a game. I am telling (or reading) fortunes." Mandelbaum explains that ordinary usage would not

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<sup>53</sup> *Aesthetics: A Critical Analogy*, p139

sanction our describing fortune-telling as an example of playing a game, no matter how striking the resemblances may be between the ways in which the cards are handled in playing solitaire and in fortune telling. Providing another example, he further notes how while one might say that certain types of wrestling contests are sometimes characterized as games, an angry struggle between two boys, each trying to make the other give in, is not to be characterized as a game. Despite the different names given to each event, one can find a great many resembling features between such a struggle and a wrestling match in a gymnasium. To sum up his point, Mandelbaum suggests that what is crucial in the designation of an activity as a game is not merely the act of noting a number of specific resemblances between a game and other activities like it, but “involving something a bit more complex.”<sup>54</sup>

But what does Mandelbaum mean when he suggests that Wittgenstein’s family resemblances need to be more complex? Here, he suggests that closer attention should be paid to the notion of what constitutes a family resemblance. He illustrates this by describing a person being shown ten or a dozen photographs in which the subjects were markedly round-headed, had a strong prognathous profile, rather deep-set eyes, and dark curly hair. In some extended, metaphorical sense that person might say that the similarities of the features of those pictured constitute a “family resemblance” among them. But to define the resemblances as such would still be deemed metaphorical, since in the absence of biological kinship of a certain degree of proximity, the person looking at the pictures would be inclined only to be able to point out resemblances, not necessarily *family* resemblances. Thus, according to Mandelbaum, what marks the difference between a literal and metaphorical sense of the notion of “family

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<sup>54</sup> *Aesthetics: A Critical Analogy*, p140

resemblances” is the existence of a genetic connection in the former case and not in the latter. Specifically, the main argument against the notion of family resemblances lies in Wittgenstein's failure to make explicit the fact that the literal, root notion of a family resemblance includes this sort of genetic connection no less than it includes the noticeable physiognomic resemblances. This is precisely why Mandelbaum believes that if Wittgenstein were to extend his family resemblance analogy further, he would have surely realized that there are in fact attributes common to all who bear a family resemblance to each other: they are related through a common ancestry. To clarify, such a relationship is not one among the specific features of those who share a family resemblance, but a feature that nonetheless differentiates them from those who are not regarded as members of a single family.

Mandelbaum further uses this argument to specifically refute Wittgenstein's example of resemblances among types of games. If Wittgenstein's example is indeed accurate and it is possible that the analogy of family resemblances could tell us something about how games may be related to one another, one should explore the possibility that, despite their great dissimilarities, games may possess a common attribute which, like biological connection, is not itself one among their directly exhibited characteristics. This extension of the analogy does not seem to be explored by Wittgenstein. Thus, Mandelbaum contends that what constitutes a *family* is not defined in terms of the manifest features of a random group of people. Rather, family relationships, in terms of genetic ties, must first be characterized; then observation can be made as to how each member resembles each other. In the case of games, Mandelbaum suggests that “the analogue to genetic ties might be the purpose for the sake of which

various games were formulated by those who invented or modified them, e.g., the potentiality of a game to be of absorbing non-practical interest to either participants or spectators.”<sup>55</sup> In addition to this premise, if there were any such common feature, one would not expect it to be defined in something such as a game rule book, since rule books only attempt to tell a person how to play a particular game: our interest in playing a game, as well as our understanding of what constitutes a game, is already presupposed by the authors of such books.<sup>56</sup> In conclusion, Mandelbaum believes that if Wittgenstein would have put more effort into searching for more specific similarities among different language games, he would have surely come to realize that essences do indeed exist.

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<sup>55</sup> Dickie, p42

<sup>56</sup> Dickie, p43

### Section 3: Grover Maxwell and Herbert Feigl's Critique of Ordinary Language

#### Philosophy

The next critique of Wittgenstein will focus on his advocacy of ordinary language. This concept is best put under scrutiny by its opposing school of thought, ideal language theory. Loosely defined, this theory is based on the idea that the correct manner of philosophizing requires the use of a "perfect" language; one that people will most likely never come to completely know or master. The perspective of ideal language to which I will refer will be that of Grover Maxwell and Herbert Feigl in their essay, "Why Ordinary Language Needs Reforming." To begin, it must be made clear that in general both Maxwell and Feigl support ordinary language theory. Like many notable philosophers, they agree that most, or at least a large portion of philosophical problems arise in ordinary language, and hence, must be solved or dissolved in ordinary language. To attempt to solve them by "rational reconstructions", as an ideal language theorist would suggest, would be, "to do something totally irrelevant."<sup>57</sup>

Despite this support for ordinary language theory, Maxwell and Feigl make it clear that there are, indeed, some good reasons for the criticism of the theory. First, both authors question if the ordinary language philosopher can remain true to his own dictum. This argument stems from a position held by many of Wittgenstein's critics: the claim that such a theory is notoriously ambiguous and vague. Although some would argue that it is precisely the theory's vagueness that renders it such a rich and effective instrument in explaining philosophical problems, it can also be easily argued that these same problems arise due to a failure to distinguish among the various meanings or uses of a term.

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<sup>57</sup> Rorty, p193

Furthermore, according to Maxwell and Feigl, strict adherence to an ordinary language perspective can promote nonsensical claims in philosophy. As they suggest, when a method refuses to use any graduated standards or specific uses of terms, as is often the case in ordinary language theory, it becomes difficult to solve philosophical problems. Rudolf Carnap appears to hold similar objections to ordinary language theory.

As he reasons:

Does it follow from the fact that the same object can feel warm to one man and cold to another, that the object really is neither cold nor warm? In order to solve this puzzle, we have first to distinguish between the following two concepts: (1) "the thing X feels warm to the person Y" and (2) "the thing X is warm," and then to clarify the relation between them. The method and terminology used for this clarification depends upon the specific purpose we may have in mind. First, it is indeed possible to clarify the distinction in a simple way in ordinary language. But if we require a more thorough clarification, we must search for explications of the two concepts. The explication of concept (1) may be given in an improved [reformed] version of the ordinary language concerning perceptions and the like. If a still more exact explication is desired, we may go to the scientific language of psychology. The explication of concept (2) must use an objective language, which may be a more carefully selected, qualitative part of the ordinary language. If we wish the explicatum to be more precise, then we use the qualitative term "temperature" as either a term of the developed ordinary language, or as a scientific term of the language of physics.<sup>58</sup>

In summary, Carnap finds ordinary language theory to stand in the way of conclusions that can rightly be drawn from the use of definitive rules. Especially with the luxury of modern science, it seems wholly acceptable to have confidence in standardized methods, like ideal language theory, because the use of precise and unambiguous language often leads to more sound conclusions. Thus despite some of the noted benefits of ordinary language theory's uncircumscribed nature, it is often best to adhere to a more defined method, such as proposed in ideal language theory.

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<sup>58</sup> Rorty, p195

#### Section 4: A.J. Ayer's Justification for Private Language

A.J. Ayer disagrees with Wittgenstein's rejection of private languages. Ayer bluntly remarks that "in quite an ordinary sense, it is obvious that there can be private languages." This is so because almost anyone would agree that "they use such inner language everyday."<sup>59</sup> To clarify his point, Ayer holds that a language may be said to be private "when it is devised to enable a limited number of persons to communicate with one another in a way that is nonintelligible to anyone outside the group."<sup>60</sup> With this criterion, Ayer uses the examples of slang and family jargons as private languages. Furthermore, such languages are not strictly private, in the sense that only one person uses and understands them, but there may very well be languages that are. Ayer states: "men have been known to keep diaries in codes which no one else is meant to understand. If he carries his invention far enough, he can properly be said to be employing a private language."<sup>61</sup> Thus, according to Ayer, what makes a language private is simply the fact that it satisfies the purpose of being intelligible only to a single person or to a restricted set of people.

Moreover, Ayer insists that any sort of private language can be validated and understood. For Ayer believes that private languages are in general derived from public languages. Furthermore, even if there are private languages that are not so derived, they can still be translated into public languages.<sup>62</sup> A language ceasing to be private then is just a matter of translating the private language to everyday public language.

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<sup>59</sup> Pitcher, p251

<sup>60</sup> Pitcher, p251

<sup>61</sup> Pitcher, p251

<sup>62</sup> Pitcher, p252

Ayer also specifically attacks Wittgenstein's example of how a person cannot possibly keep a diary of his own sensations. Wittgenstein's reasons for this argument, again, is because the person keeping the diary has no criterion for correctness when naming his own sensations. To this, Ayer asks, "what reason have we for calling "S" the sign for the sensation anyway? "Sensation" is a word of our common language, not of one intelligible to me alone."<sup>63</sup> In other words, Ayer finds no reason as to why Wittgenstein can contend that sensations cannot be evaluated when the word "sensation" is a term derived from public language. Thus, because we can use the word in public language without any confusion, we should be able to use the exact same term as a criterion for correctness when conveying our private sensations to others.

Ayer's best attempt at dismantling Wittgenstein's objections to private language lies in his assertion that a criterion for correctness is not always needed. He outlines his argument as follows:

A point to which Wittgenstein constantly recurs is that the ascription of meaning to a sign is something that needs to be justified: the justification consists in there being some independent test for determining that the sign is being used correctly; independent, that is, of the subject's recognition, or supposed recognition, of the object which he intends the sign to signify. His claim to recognize the object, his belief that it really is the same, is not to be accepted unless it can be backed by further evidence. Apparently, too, this evidence must be public: it must, at least in theory, be accessible to everyone. Merely to check one private sensation by another would not be enough. For if one cannot be trusted to recognize one of them, neither can one be trusted to recognize the other.<sup>64</sup>

With this summary in mind, Ayer finds that Wittgenstein's major flaw is that individuals must come to trust some sensations, even if they cannot be validated by others. As he states, "unless there is something that one is allowed to recognize, no test can ever be

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<sup>63</sup> Pitcher, p252

<sup>64</sup> Pitcher, p256

completed: there will be no justification for the use of any signs at all.”<sup>65</sup> In support of this claim, he makes use of his own example:

I check my memory of the time at which the train is due to leave by visualizing a page of the time-table; and I am required to check this in its turn by looking up the page. But unless I can trust my eyesight at this point, unless I can recognize the figures that I see written down, I am still no better off. It is true that if I distrust my eyesight I have the resource of consulting other people, but then I have to understand their testimony, I have correctly to identify the signs that they make. Let the object to which I am attempting to refer be as public as you please, let the word which I use for this purpose belong to some common language, my assurance that I am using the word correctly, that I am using it to refer to the “right” object, must in the end rest on the testimony of my senses. It is through hearing what other people say, or through seeing what they write, or observing their movements, that I am enabled to conclude that their use of the word agrees with mine. But if without further ado I can recognize such noises or shapes or movements, why can I not also recognize a private sensation?<sup>66</sup>

This example is not used by Ayer to prove Wittgenstein wrong, but rather is mentioned to show that we trust information that is just as vague and invalidated as private language every day of our lives. If Wittgenstein thinks that a person writing down the sign “S” at the same time he has a sensation is just an “idle ceremony”, he will have to say the same of any other instance when our sensations are not completely validated by others. Ayer’s critique concludes:

There is, indeed, a problem about what is involved in endowing any sign with meaning, but it is no less of a problem in the case where the object for which the sign is supposed to stand is public than in the case where it is private. Whatever it is about my behavior that transforms the making of a sound, or the inscription of a shape, into the employment of a sign can equally well occur in either case.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, Ayer believes that Wittgenstein should not be so quick to disregard private language when oftentimes our public language lacks the same criterion of correctness.

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<sup>65</sup> Pitcher, p256

<sup>66</sup> Pitcher, p257

<sup>67</sup> Pitcher, p257

**Part III: A Response to Wittgenstein's Critics**

Now that Wittgenstein's views have been summarized and criticized, I will attempt a Wittgensteinian response to these criticisms. At first glance, there seem to be many well-made arguments against Wittgensteinian thinking. Ranging from attacks on his examples and analogies to criticism on the apparent vagueness in his work, the claims represent a few of the major criticisms that have been brought against Wittgensteinian philosophy. Despite the many critics of the work of Wittgenstein, I believe that none of the arguments brought against his ideas are detrimental to his insights regarding language. This will be shown in recalling various examples used by Wittgenstein as well as by my own interpretation of what the Wittgensteinian position upholds.

My first response to Wittgenstein's critics addresses the contention that Wittgensteinian philosophy is too vague. In many of the critiques, this was often the main, if not the only objection to Wittgenstein's methods. For Specht, the difference between "use" and "usage" was a point that he thought needed to be clarified, and for Mandelbaum, the analogy of "family resemblances" could only work in a limited number of examples. Maxwell and Feigl both note the imprecision of ordinary language philosophy, and lastly, Ayer finds that Wittgenstein's denial of private language is too simplistic and vague of a claim to discredit a language that seems obvious to any individual. Even looking to Wittgenstein's view of philosophy in general, especially his notion that philosophical problems are oftentimes just a misuse of language, there is reason to believe that Wittgenstein's philosophy is not as rigorous and systematic as it perhaps should be. All of these claims together are an attempt to discredit Wittgensteinian thought on the grounds that it is not complete enough to be a viable way of doing philosophy.

If this is indeed their complaint, perhaps these critics should read Wittgenstein again. Wittgenstein makes it very clear in *Philosophical Investigations* his belief that no one theory or concept will ever come to describe or explain something as multi-faceted as language, let alone philosophy. Moreover, examples and analogies can only be used to a certain extent in explaining specific ideas. Where Mandelbaum's analysis becomes weak is with his suggestion of there being a difference between resemblances and *family* resemblances. Mandelbaum suggests that Wittgenstein's description of family resemblances should have taken into account "genetic connections" as well as "physiognomic resemblances." In response to this criticism, Wittgenstein would say that Mandelbaum is taking the analogy of "family resemblances" much farther than the application that Wittgenstein wants to make. Wittgenstein was not making a point about genes, but about similar and dissimilar conditions for the usage of certain words. As he would say, any point can be proved or disproved if you extend an analogy to include everything. He might even suggest that Mandelbaum has what Pitcher notes as "an unhealthy obsession with essences."<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, some critics claim that Wittgenstein, as well as other ordinary language philosophers, adhere to a proposal as nonspecific as ordinary language philosophy in order to bypass arguments that inevitably arise from any method that follows a strict formula. How convenient for them to refuse to adhere to any one method of philosophy, critics might say. To this, Wittgenstein would respond that it is precisely this fixation with believing that philosophy is complicated, systematic, and "hidden" that has made it as impossible as it obviously has become. In conclusion, critiques concerning the ambiguous nature of Wittgenstein's philosophy are not strong enough to

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<sup>68</sup> Pitcher, p174

dismantle Wittgenstein's philosophy because he contends that only by using a variety of methods and technologies can something as complex as philosophy be explained.

But vagueness was not the only criticism of Wittgenstein's work. Specht held that Wittgenstein might have made his description of "meaning as use" more effective if he had defined "use" in a better way. Specht suggests that "one must understand the totality of all uses or *modes of use* of a word within a language."<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, Specht emphasizes that "it must be conveyed that every word has a multiplicity of meanings corresponding to the immense number of individual uses." In response, Wittgenstein would assert that one can never list all uses of a word. In accordance with ordinary language philosophy, the totality of a word's use cannot be listed because to do so would limit the creation of possible new uses. Wittgenstein says:

Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses<sup>70</sup>

So, in regard to Specht's suggestion that every word has a multiplicity of meanings, Wittgenstein would agree. Both Wittgenstein's descriptions of sufficient conditions and language games prove that he strongly upholds that words have a variety of uses and conditions, and in numerous cases we simply have no need to close down the possible uses of a word.

Lastly, Smart's argument against language games appears at most to be misguided. It is almost as if Smart understands the term "language game" as a general name for the collection of all uses of language. First, Smart argues that "it is an erroneous belief that such an analogy could be generalized so to cover all of language."

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<sup>69</sup> Specht, p129

<sup>70</sup> Philosophical Investigations, Section 18

The point must be made that Wittgenstein's language game analogy is not meant to "cover all language" or describe all language under one term. Rather, "language game" is a term meant to describe certain uses of language that are understood in a particular context. It is also clear throughout Wittgenstein's writings that he does not wish to define the collection of all language into a separate language game. To do so insinuates that all types of language games have one similar characteristic that allows them to be categorized together. Of course, Wittgenstein would not be a proponent of this categorization because he makes clear that there is no underlying similarity among all language games, just as is the case with different types of games. What is in accordance with Wittgensteinian philosophy are similarities among language games in terms of their family resemblances.

On the other hand, Maxwell's and Feigl's critique of ordinary language philosophy seems to be well grounded as a critique of ordinary language. Maxwell and Feigl asserted that the methods of ideal language philosophy were more suited for the intricate nature of philosophical study. This argument is coupled with Rudolf Carnap's conclusion that ordinary language philosophy is too subjective of a theory to be used in defining philosophical truths, especially when modern science has brought about the knowledge of certain empirical truths so well.

If this is truly the argument, I find it unfair that they necessarily exclude science and other empirical studies from the realm of ordinary language philosophy. It is correct that ordinary language theory suggests that philosophical truths need not be sought after or explained by a rigid system of rules and guidelines, but that contention alone should not be enough to allow the claim that ordinary language philosophy is opposed to

scientific study. Clearly, what is meant by ordinary language philosophy is the idea that understanding can be drawn from ordinary, everyday, language use. Looking to Wittgenstein, understanding is publicly displayed with the successful use of language games. Surely, the Wittgensteinian concept of ordinary language philosophy is not opposed to facts derived of science

Lastly, Ayer's arguments for private language are no doubt convincing at first glance, but he fails to address what Wittgenstein is really conveying in his argument against the existence of any such language. First, it is clear that Wittgenstein's and Ayer's definitions of private language are quite different. While Wittgenstein refuses what we consider an inner monologue or private voice to be any sort of a language at all, Ayer defines the term as "a language that is unintelligible to anyone outside a group."<sup>71</sup> In this case, Ayer's definition appears to be the one that needs to be criticized. If anything, such a language wouldn't even have to be private. To illustrate my point, Ayer may as well be describing a native Bushman language that is not understood by individuals not in the Bushman tribe. Surely, this would be a language that is unintelligible to anyone outside a group, but what does it really have to do with Wittgenstein's arguments against private language? Furthermore, it is Ayer's belief that, because private language is rooted in public language, it can be "translated." To this, Wittgenstein would argue that there is no possible way of "translating" or describing such private sensations. This is because first, we cannot create names for our own sensations and second, even if we could, there is no way of verifying if others are actually experiencing the exact same sensation. No rule or "criterion of correctness" can exist to verify private language because it is obvious that others cannot "feel what we feel."

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<sup>71</sup> Pitcher, p251

Lastly, Ayer's assertion that we can understand each other's inner language because we understand the term "sensation" from public use, too, is not a good enough argument to prove private language because there still is no way of feeling another person's sensations.

Ayer's last argument against Wittgenstein claims that, despite the inability of others to feel our sensations, we can trust that our naming of our sensations is correct. To make his point, he describes a situation where he trusts his memory, eyesight, etc. Furthermore, it is because of this trust of other sensations that he believes that private language, too, should be trusted. I believe that Wittgenstein would respond to this argument in two ways. First, all of the sensations that Ayer listed that we supposedly trust are sensations that *can* be proven or verified. Looking back to the scenario described in section 1 of this thesis, Wittgenstein uses the example of a boy who asks a shopkeeper for five red apples. If at any time the shopkeeper became confused by the boy's requests, the shopkeeper could take out a color chart and ask what the boy meant by the color red; or, if the shopkeeper was confused by the number, he could refer to a list of the cardinal numbers. No matter what the complication, it is reasonable that the misunderstanding could be resolved by using some rule, or criterion for correctness. This is very similar to the example that Ayer uses to attack Wittgenstein claim that we can't name or share our private sensations. Wittgenstein would respond by reasoning that when we have the ability to consult with others or to verify facts by looking at a chart, there is a rule guiding our judgments. Furthermore, this is precisely what is lacking when we think we are using a private language. Without some explicit description of what a certain sensation feels like, as well as proof that others have felt the exact same sensation,

there is no way to prove the existence of private language. Therefore, Ayer's description of private language does not dismantle Wittgenstein's argument that such a language cannot be shown to exist.

In addition to this argument, it is also clear that the wording of Ayer's arguments is contrary to anything that Wittgenstein would uphold. Looking to his example of the timetable again, he uses phrases like, "I am checking my memory..." and "I am trusting my eyesight." Is the man looking at the timetable really "checking his memory" and "trusting his eyesight"? Wittgenstein would say no. His negation comes from him disregarding the notion that a hidden inner process is taking place when we "check our memory" or "trust our eyesight." Our understanding, according to Wittgenstein, is not an inner sensation, but a public understanding that tells us "we can go on".<sup>72</sup>

In conclusion to these criticisms, it is clear through my own interpretation of Wittgenstein that all of these criticisms of Wittgenstein's position are not enough to dismantle Wittgensteinian philosophy. Many of the criticisms at first glance seemed detrimental to Wittgenstein's major points, but in thinking as Wittgenstein might have, it became clear to me that the objections have a well-grounded response. The next section will make reference to these responses, as well as outline the overall implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

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<sup>72</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 154

#### **Part IV: Overall Implications on Philosophy**

Whether or not it is the case that Wittgenstein's ideas are correct, it is unquestionably true that his view of what a philosophical investigation involves is profound and thought-provoking. Many ideas come to mind when pondering what possibilities a Wittgensteinian outlook presents to an evaluation of philosophy. With Wittgenstein's thoughts being so unique and monumental, accepting his concepts as true means disregarding many of the traditional methods that philosophical study has clung to the last 2000 years. Wittgenstein not only has influenced contemporary philosophy, but also has put into question *all* methods of philosophy before his time.

What does it mean to follow Wittgensteinian philosophy? What kind of world view do his ideas create? These questions are never directly answered by Wittgenstein, but in studying his work, we can come to some understanding of the implications it offers the study of philosophy, especially the manner in which philosophical problems are to be solved. Through a Wittgensteinian outlook, it would seem that much of what has been contended in philosophy is nothing more than ritual. We consider "the philosopher" one who sets his sights on uncovering mystical truths. One who strives to push his intellect to the point where all philosophical questions can be answered. With his mind focused upon finding the key philosophical theory to explain all questions of humankind, the philosopher is a seeker of hidden truths. According to Wittgenstein, however, philosophy is not a matter of solving a riddle or unearthing hidden truths, but rather a matter of dismantling the pseudo-problems created by our misuse of language. With this outlook, one is not a philosopher, but a language therapist, who sets his sights on dissolving philosophical problems, unclouded by the misconception that his efforts are in any way mystical or ritualistic.

A Wittgensteinian outlook not only alters the way in which philosophical problems are resolved, but also offers a new paradigm for how all unknown complexities should be considered. In terms of philosophy, it is reasonable to propose that many, if not all, past methods would become outdated and obsolete. Descartes' mind-body problem would be dissolved because, as Wittgenstein would put it, "mind" does not *name* anything; especially not some immaterial object in one's head! Even metaphysical studies regarding the existence of God would be limited because of the inability to understand God in a particular context. Along these same lines, doctors and psychiatrists who aim their studies at describing mental processes and inner sensations would have to redirect their studies. This would be because any attempt to explain inner mental processes would be nonsense. It would be considered a joke to look to one's hidden inner self to understand how one comes to know, or why one knows when they are in pain. Evaluations such as this would take place in the public world where understanding is based on the successful use of mental terminology.

Even if Wittgenstein was somehow proven correct in his thinking, is his philosophy anything that humankind is willing to accept? Is our obsession with rituals and essences apt to calm with the rational that such modes of thinking are a misguided waste of time? It is my belief that no matter what levels philosophical study progresses to in the future, no way of thinking will overcome the human desire to question and theorize. Even if our metaphysical questions about truth or existence come to be regarded as nonsense or mere misuses of language, or if our nagging philosophical problems are solved by refusing to acknowledge them as mysteries, I find it hard to

believe that humankind would ever deny its inquisitive nature by demoting the study of philosophy to an old, archaic, occult process.

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**Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, Wittgensteinian philosophy is based on many different concepts regarding the meaning and use of language. In the first chapter of this thesis, the notion of naming was discussed. Beginning with his critique of St. Augustine's theory of learning, Wittgenstein first illustrated in the *Philosophical Investigations* that the notion of ostensive definition is too narrow to explain all instances of meaning. After this criticism, Wittgenstein explained his own concept of meaning as a particular word's use. Instead of words being defined only in terms of necessary conditions, Wittgenstein insisted that words could also be defined by their meeting certain sufficient conditions. After the notion of meaning as use, the Wittgensteinian concept of "language games" was introduced. Consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, language games are described by Wittgenstein in order to bring to light the idea that language is not one uniform system, but at host of different activities.

Language games are not only important in explaining how language works, but the concept also applies to what Wittgenstein calls the analogy of family resemblances. This analogy illustrates that language games do not all have particular characteristics in common, but rather resemble each other, just as family members tend to have some varied characteristics. Specifically, it is this notion of family resemblances that also illustrates Wittgenstein's overall disregard of essences. Lastly, the analogy of family resemblances lends itself to Wittgenstein's idea that no concept is closed by a frontier. In other words, some concepts, such as the order of numbers or the rules of a game, may have some outlined limits, but overall there is no concrete model as to what a concept must necessarily contain. The chapter concluded with examples as well as descriptions of ordinary language philosophy.

The next chapter outlined Wittgenstein's attack on private language. Because he finds that there is no way of validating the existence of a language that is only experienced privately, Wittgenstein firmly holds that there is no reason to believe that such a language exists. Even in circumstances where individuals are positive that they are experiencing certain sensation, there is no way of checking to see if that sensation is what they think it is. Lastly, because no rule of criterion of correctness exists in explaining our sensations to others, there is no possible way of proving that private language exists.

The next chapter was a review of Wittgensteinian philosophy and the notion that philosophical problems are to be dissolved, rather than solved. With many of his concepts already reviewed, it was made clear in this chapter that there is more to language than one might realize. Also outlined was Wittgenstein's deliberate attempt to avoid strict adherence to theories as well as his tendency to associate all words as names of objects. Wittgenstein's philosophy is summed up best, however, in his own words: "Philosophical problems arise when *language goes on holiday*." In all of the Philosophical Investigations, no other phrase best summarizes Wittgenstein's disregard for the mystery that we have built into the study of philosophy and the rituals we have surrounded it with for the last 2000 years.

The next part of this thesis was dedicated to detailing many of the criticisms brought against Wittgensteinian philosophy. Beginning with a critique by Specht concerning Wittgenstein's idea of "meaning as use" and "language games", the main criticism was that Wittgenstein failed to make proper distinction between "use" and "usage." Further critique was made by Specht concerning the use of the term "language

game.” The next criticism was made by Maurice Mandelbaum and concerned Wittgenstein’s analogy on family resemblances. Suggesting that Wittgenstein’s definition of the phrase needed to be more specific, Mandelbaum made the point that there is a difference between resemblances and *family* resemblances, and if one acknowledges that this is a difference, it becomes possible to claim that essences exist. The next criticism was made by Maxwell and Feigl. They outlined the drawbacks of ordinary language philosophy. Their main point was that the indefinite nature of ordinary language philosophy left too much open to question, especially when compared to other contemporary methods of philosophy. The last critique in this section was made by Ayer and concerned his arguments that private language exists.

After these criticisms were explained, responses were given concerning how Wittgenstein might reply to each remark. In terms of Wittgenstein’s philosophy being too vague, it was my response that it is Wittgenstein’s belief that no one theory, concept, or analogy will ever come to describe or explain something as multi-faceted as language. Further, the criticism of Specht was refuted with the response that Wittgenstein strongly upheld that words can have a variety of different uses and meanings. Mandelbaum’s arguments were discredited because of the over-extension of Wittgenstein’s family resemblance analogy and Maxwell’s and Feigl’s critic of ordinary language theory was abated with the response that Wittgenstein’s acceptance of ordinary language philosophy does not necessarily mean he has a disregard for modern science and technology. Lastly, in response to Ayer’s arguments for private language, it was clear that Ayer failed to understand Wittgenstein’s argument. This was illustrated with examples that showed that because feelings, thoughts, and sensations are experienced privately, there is no way for

others to validate them. Furthermore, Ayer's argument that "he knows that he is sensing" was found to be nonsensical.

Lastly, it was brought to light what implications for all of philosophy would follow from the acceptance of Wittgensteinian ideas. It is through this "Wittgensteinian world view" that it was analyzed how philosophical problems are to be solved, or rather dissolved. Despite the reasonableness of Wittgenstein's arguments, however, it was my final belief that no matter what the direction of contemporary philosophical study, no way of thinking will dissolve the ritualistic nature we have always held toward the search for truth.

In conclusion, this thesis has been my attempt to explain many of Wittgenstein's concepts, to reveal many of the criticisms surrounding this philosophy, and lastly to respond to these criticisms through my own interpretation of what the Wittgensteinian position holds. My final conclusion is that despite these critics' best attempts, Wittgensteinian philosophy does appear to be sound in its analysis and reasoning. What still remains in question, however, is the manner in which Wittgensteinian philosophy will be extended by a future generation of philosophers and to what degree it will change the methods and purposes of philosophical study.

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