

# Thinking

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## Introduction

In this text, I describe and develop an investigative method inspired by Wittgenstein's works. Wittgenstein employs a "method of examples". He makes philosophical points by demonstrating how philosophical puzzles arise from our normal uses of so-called ordinary language. His examples are usually simple ones: builders issue commands, people compare shades of colors, objects are given names, etc. Whereas many philosophers investigate abstract problems and puzzles through analysis of exotic counter-examples, Wittgenstein employs tangible cases in order to examine how problems arise in the first place. In the broadest of terms, this is his philosophical problem-solving method.

Similarly, rather than treat a general, abstract problem from the start, I address questions that arise from real world situations. I show how understanding larger philosophical problems as collections of simple questions helps to contextualize and consequently better address and understand a more complex problem at hand.

The text itself demonstrates the method, and in this sense, is an argument in favor of using it on appropriate philosophical occasions. Its unconventional structure demonstrates a way that seems useful to me for developing our understanding of philosophical problems. The text introduces certain key ideas in the first half, gradually using certain words in a more and more regimented fashion. Then, in the second half, I make use of these preliminary discussions in order to talk about the same ideas more technically. Throughout, my aim is to keep my philosophical motivations on the text's surface; keeping in mind *how* philosophical problems arise is one way to do this, and I keep such things in mind by exercising familiar examples throughout the text. By doing this, I am able to examine insights into some subtle issues in philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, such as meaning, intention, and thinking.

The text uses ordinary words purposefully, e.g., “get”, “try”, “do”, and shows how we might marshal such basic notions to answer, or sometimes eliminate, complicated philosophical questions. A rudimentary example: if we want to investigate the concept of “meaning”, we talk about what it is like to get someone’s point, to try out a suggestion (such as from a coach or a teacher), or to use a word in a particular way for a particular purpose. We learn words when we put words to use, and this suggests that the notion of meaning is related to what we do with words. That is, an interest in how words work together underlies our interest in “meaning”, and so meaning and activity go hand in hand. Consequently, an investigative method that emphasizes how we act and behave in the world is appropriate for addressing questions about such topics.

Throughout the text I test insights against robust everyday activities rather than wholly-imagined “possible worlds” or exotic counter-examples. When an insight makes sense of the real-life cases that generate it, we both construct arguments in its favor, and gain a better understanding of when and how that particular insight might be helpful. Recurring examples include: playing tennis, playing piano, telling jokes, and riding a bicycle. I try to describe a wide range of activities in order to help us come to understand how we learn particular concepts, like “riding”, “playing”, and “telling”. How we come to learn these seemingly simple notions is a model for how we come to understand more abstract (and possibly more complex) notions, such as “thinking”, “meaning” and even “philosophy” itself. Generally, I will argue that to investigate, and to write about, our subtle understanding of everyday activities is one very productive way to do philosophy.

All of this is consistent with Wittgenstein’s investigative style in that his philosophical method involves doing many things in the world, and, more or less, reporting on those things. His examples are often stories about physical acts: the builder commands “slab”, we bestow names upon objects like

“Excalibur”, or we follow an instruction to pick red apples from a pile. He uses these sorts of examples to develop points about meaning, rules, intentions, mental images, and so forth, and I aim to accomplish similar ends.

Wittgenstein inspires the text; it is not about him. I do not intend for this work to be an interpretation of his philosophical work. Rather, I intend it to be a useful application of what I take to be his philosophical method, as applied to “thinking”, generally, and “philosophy” more specifically.

Philosophy, as I think of it, comes *from the world*; one might call it a public discipline. The philosopher harvests his topics and arguments in the world, and so thoughtful engagement with the world is one key to a philosopher's success. A consequence of this perspective is that I deliberately use active verbs. This might give the text an unfamiliar feel, stylistically; it might even feel like it is not a philosophical text from time to time. But by the end, it should be clear that our investigation has yielded useful results, if I am successful.

Since the essay is not about a particular philosopher, I do not intend to lean heavily on textual extractions from philosophical works or from secondary literatures that have developed in response to particular philosophers' works. However, I do use textual extractions in two ways. First, I footnote passages that inspire key ideas. My text never simply interprets a passage, but rather expands on what lessons I have taken from it. Footnotes catalog influences. Second, I use some extended extractions from works such as Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, *Blue Book*, and *Zettel*, as well as Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*, and Ray Monk's *The Duty of Genius*. The extractions should demonstrate, albeit only roughly, how other philosophers have treated similar themes as points of comparison with the vocabulary that I develop. I take the extractions to be compatible with what I write, and I try to contextualize the extractions to show that compatibility.

This also shows how the philosophical method I recommend works: rather than start with an extraction and try to interpret it as a thesis, then defend it, or refute it, I develop theses and vocabulary and show congeniality to others' similar theses and vocabularies. Importantly, this shows what I consider to be useful applications of others' philosophical thoughts. This is also a feature of the investigative method I develop: I argue that we develop our own ideas by observing how others develop similar ideas, then we exercise our own skills by writing stylized versions of those similar ideas.

All of this emphasizes skill building. The process of writing, and relatedly the process of philosophizing, can be characterized as “trying things out”. But not just anything. Part of our training in philosophy is to learn the constraints of the discipline, which is also to learn what the discipline is about and how we go about doing philosophical work. This text exemplifies and tries to describe both.

Novice students do not enter a classroom or pick up a philosophical text already knowing what counts as a philosophical topic, argument, concept, etc. Often, instructors assign a reading (or some related task), in part to develop a student's sense of what philosophical work looks like. But rarely do philosophers ever try to *say* what motivates them to pick out and investigate the phenomena and situations they encounter in the world.

For example, ethicists talk about theft and promises, but rarely would they talk about peeling bananas or sharpening pencils. In an ethics investigation, keeping the investigation's motivations on the surface helps to keep the teaching philosopher on task, and helps the student learn to connect this style of investigation to the world. Exercising our skills at identifying tangible, working cases accomplishes this end. Similarly, Logicians talk about the structures of arguments, but rarely of the structure of buildings or of DNA. Philosophers of science talk about how we search for verification of hypotheses, but rarely how we search for

missing socks. Students generally pick up on what counts as doing this-or-that by having been told that they are doing this-or-that, and so rather than using fabricated, abstract cases as models of the world (for example, Trolley Problems), I advocate using reports of activities that we actually engage in, both as teaching tools, and when investigating philosophical notions on our own. In this way, this text tries to talk *about* what counts as “philosophical” thinking in order to make some sense of what philosophers do, and all with the intention of improving *that* skill. This in itself is a philosophical pursuit.

Furthermore, beyond the skill of distinguishing a philosophical topic, there is the skill of producing philosophical works --- the skill of *doing* philosophy. Certain kinds of writing, teaching, debating, classifying, thinking, etc. count as philosophical pursuits, and if we aim to improve our philosophical skills, then our ability to communicate what we do when we do philosophy needs exercise. To accomplish this kind of improvement, we need a strategy. This text develops and implements one such strategy, largely by contrasting it with an uncodified yet pervasive pedagogic method that I will call “quote and interpret”, wherein the philosopher tends to focus his efforts on criticism and analysis over original production and development.

Consequently, the book has a novel structure. It is not the usual statement of problem, survey of existing literature, and recommended solution. It offers a way to investigate and talk about philosophical problems, a technique that I will call “statement and elaboration”. There are at least two benefits to this. First, it suggests an innovative philosophical technique that professional philosophers might employ in order to improve upon their own works. Second, it suggests a teaching technique that will benefit students, helping them to enhance their writing and thinking skills.

## Structure

This text began as an arrangement of paragraph to page-long reflections on what I take to be related philosophical topics. In the process of arranging these sections, I recognized that the remarks seemed to follow a pattern: what I put first was closely connected to what I put last; what I put second was closely connected to what I put second to last; and so on. It occurred to me that such a structure can be helpful, for often in philosophical works we apologize for exclusions due to space or time constraints, and promise to get back to excluded or condensed topics later in the text, after more has been said. This, to me, often sounds like an apology for a text's structure. So instead of forcing the sections into a form about which I would feel a need to apologize, I embrace what seems like a more natural structure, one that will help the reader along by emphasizing and introducing key philosophical concepts at the beginning, then elaborating on their significance and connections to one another at the end.

I realize that the structure is likely unfamiliar to most readers, but I am confident that if the reader keeps these introductory remarks in mind, plus a healthy dose of charity, the payoff is a technical innovation worth applying to a variety of related investigations.

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1, 16:

The first section, "Introduction to Philosophy", frames the sort of questions that will interest us in this investigation: What counts as "thinking"? How do we evaluate whether someone has a concept? How do we evaluate whether someone has improved a skill? What kinds of questions interest philosophers? The list could go on and on. The final section, "Philosophy", suggests possible responses to these questions, including when such responses and investigations

are appropriate. My goal is not to say once and for all what the discipline *is*; rather, the goal is to exercise our competence at identifying what counts as “philosophical” investigation, analysis, writing, and so forth. At the same time, the goal is to develop a vocabulary that we can use to introduce “Philosophy” to novices, to talk more clearly about our discipline to each other, and to exercise our own skills at doing philosophical work.

2, 15:

The second section, “Practice, Performance & Motivation”, introduces some of the main examples that we will pursue in the text: playing piano, writing essays, improving athletic skills, and telling jokes. Importantly, our interest here is in activities where we aim to improve upon a skill, which differs from other sorts of activities, like biking to the store as opposed to training for a triathlon, or telling a joke to a group of friends as opposed to developing a stand-up act. This sets up the next to last section, “Practice vs. Performance”. By this point, we will have developed a vocabulary that we can use to talk about how we differentiate between when someone practices and when someone performs. We learn to identify subtle differences in what sometimes appear to be the same activities. We “get” the differences, even though we might never say or explain what those differences are.

3, 14:

The third section, “Thinking”, develops a connection between philosophical inquiry and what we call “thinking”. Here we study what thinking is by considering activities, especially physical or worldly activities, that are obviously involve our having thoughts. The section illustrates a central theme of the text: that we build up concepts by showing what sorts of things go together (when teaching) or by trying out a variety of activities (when learning), and so we pay much attention to what we call “trying”. Also, “Thinking” helps to establish a specialized way to use the word “concept”, often employed as

a technical term in philosophy, and this will help us make sense of “Self-Evaluation”. In “Self-Evaluation” we investigate in more detail what it is like to learn criteria for what counts as a particular activity, like playing (e.g., games or music), thinking (e.g., philosophically), and acting (e.g., in theater). Self-evaluation is a specific kind of thinking and so I treat the two similarly. Self-evaluation and thinking are not activities hidden in our heads; they happen and develop *in the world*. One might say that “in the head” is part of “in the world”, or that “in the world” subsumes “in the head”. What happens in our heads, I try to show, should be no more mysterious than what we notice and talk about in the world.

4, 13:

The fourth section, “Improvisation, Innovation & Intention”, introduces guided trial and error as a learning tool through such examples as improvisational acting and recording spoken word performances. When we improvise, we try out new ideas on the spot, we invent dialogue and techniques, and as we evaluate the effectiveness of what we try, we sharpen our performance skills. This resembles what detectives do when they investigate and explain mysteries, and detective work resembles what philosophers do as well. Detectives and philosophers collect data and ideas and work out stories that tell how the data and ideas fit together. This section sets up “In The Head”, which addresses certain concerns that arise when we try to characterize a performer’s intentions, or when we measure a student’s progress, or our own progress, or to put it generally, when we try to evaluate actions and ideas. Activities like calculating and identifying colors might appear to happen only mentally or silently or to ourselves. Here the goal is to show that abstract verbs, like calculating, identifying, picturing, getting, arguing, having, playing, and a host of others describe, or stand for, bundles of activities that we learn *in the world*. We learn that *this* and *that* sort of activity should go together, and we learn the standards that we can

use to evaluate whether a performance went well or whether it went poorly. Here, verbs are the stars of the show.

5, 12:

The fifth section, “Practice & Constraints” investigates the competences that influence our trying to improve a skill. These things include how well we recognize and deal with the constraints of the medium in which we practice, the extent to which we grasp what counts as improving, and how we evaluate our own progress. A main goal is to connect “getting” with “concepts”, technical terms that we develop throughout the text, and which we will address often in the final sections of the work. This section sets up “Learning To Perceive”, in which we investigate what it is like to “get” what is going on in an activity with which we are not familiar; we might think of “get” as a subset of “understand” in that “get” often involves nearly-automatic responses to worldly phenomena rather than reasoned-out ones. Tennis is the main example. When we learn to watch tennis, we simultaneously learn how to use the words “play”, “spin”, “backhand”, “serve”, and so forth. Learning to use words that describe an activity is to learn about the activity, and in some cases, especially for “thinking” and “philosophizing”, it is to engage in the activity as well. As we get better at watching tennis, as we get better at identifying the subtleties of a player’s forehand, for example, we learn to identify different “styles” of play. Style, getting, playing, and so on, are aspects of activities that we “get” when we learn to consider bundles of activities purposefully. This, I argue, is how we learn concepts such as thinking, playing, joking, songs, sports, and most importantly here, philosophy.

6, 11:

The sixth section, “Getting It”, employs a wide range of examples in order to demonstrate some of the subtleties of human communication. Telling jokes, coaching, giving the meanings of words, and following and interpreting sheet music all help to show how much we must have in common,

linguistically and culturally, before we can begin to evaluate skills or develop new ones together. This sets up “Getting’ Style”, which investigates the complications of “going on together”. We examine parallels between philosophical and musical instruction, and the importance of a teacher and student sharing “intentions”. By this point in the text we are able to examine “intention” as an aspect of actions, always understood against a backdrop of human purposes, rather than as motivation that might be treated separately from actions or purposes.

7, 10:

The seventh section, “Distinction Upon Reflection”, emphasizes how our human purposes are closely tied to the way we talk about familiar activities. We start with the example of “walking”, which is not usually something that we describe as a combination of different actions, such as “moving one’s arms and legs while moving forward”. That we usually simply use the word “walking” helps to make a point about how we learn concepts, and moreover, we only raise questions about concepts in appropriate situations. At a comedy show, for example, we do not typically raise questions about the nature of jokes, or about the motivations for laughter. At a tennis match we do not wonder why the opponents strike the ball with the racket instead of throwing it back and forth over the net. Talking about aspects of concepts can mislead us into thinking that concepts are *things* that we can break into components, and that we can always meaningfully talk about those parts separately from the others, or even from the original concept. The point here is the opposite: we build up concepts by learning how to talk about human activities, which is often also to participate in these activities (especially in philosophical work). This sets up “Doubt Upon Reflection”, where we emphasize how much we must have in common before doubting even makes sense. We do not have doubts about the thoughts and actions of cats and dogs and robots, for example, and this is obvious. Doubting

relies heavily on agreement, shared intentions and expectations, and what we generally call “going on together”. All of this begins to suggest how we come to understand “meaning”, “evaluation”, “expectation”, and a host of other abstractions that eventually will help us to understand “philosophy”.

8, 9:

The eighth section, “Undoing & Developing Habits”, starts with an extended example of learning to ride a special kind of bicycle on which you cannot coast. For most of us, to not coast on a bicycle runs counter to our cycling habits, and so to ride a non-coasting bicycle --- to develop this new riding skill --- we need to undo certain habits. This is partly a metaphor for how the philosophical method developed here can help philosophers use an ordinary vocabulary to clarify extraordinary, technical vocabularies. Philosophers often develop thinking habits, such as invoking theoretical machinery to teach and to develop ideas about such topics as ethics, aesthetics, justice, and importantly in this text meaning. We investigate what it is like to develop such habits. This section dovetails with “Present Tense”, where we try to develop techniques to talk about evaluating and improving our in-the-moment skills. Evaluation is a past tense exercise; it is reflective in a way that performance is not. Yet, we expect that training and evaluation will improve our in-the-moment performances, and to investigate this point is to suggest directions for how we might develop effective training techniques. To do all of this is to develop a philosophical, investigative method.

## Motivation

Just as punch lines are not funny without jokes attached, a short paraphrase could not sum up this text's purpose without the investigation that follows. As a first try, we might say that what follows cuts across a wide range of philosophical discussions to show that we should think of philosophy as a hands-on activity. In contrast to a familiar image of a philosopher with his head in the clouds, I picture philosophers with their proverbial feet on the ground. Though philosophers address abstract topics in their written and spoken works, they learn, teach, and think about abstractions in tangible, active ways. And to describe what philosophers do and how they do it is to describe an investigative method.

This text describes, develops, and implements a particular philosophical method. I deliberately structured the text to show how to use the method by developing pictures of it in action. Roughly speaking, here I first introduce a technical vocabulary, then use that vocabulary in a progressively specialized manner, which, by the end of the text, helps us to say something *about* philosophical inquiry. The shape of the text is sort of circular, where the first section foreshadows the last, the second section predicts the penultimate, the third suggests the third to last, and so on. The value of this structure should become clearer as we proceed, and by the end of the investigation, the shape of the text should seem essential to its success.

Also, our interest is in training, and writing is an indispensable part of an effective philosophical training regimen. This text, any philosophical texts, I will argue, results from such exercise. Its shape arose seemingly naturally during a lengthy revision process, and after considerable experimentation with how to best argue its points. Writing trains the writer, and if at the same time *this* written work inspires or influences the reader positively, then it will have achieved at least two ends.

In an investigation of this broad topic, we might ask questions of the following forms: What is it that we do when we philosophize? What makes inquiry philosophical? What is the purpose of philosophical inquiry? How can we improve our philosophical thinking and writing skills?

Said this way, the goal might sound overly ambitious. Teaching, writing, and learning methods are not the sorts of things that philosophers usually write about at all, let alone expect to settle on in one work, or even over the course of a long and reflective intellectual life. So here I dare not imagine that any such settling will occur. Rather, I hope to say something useful about a particular, practical investigative method, while at the same time using that method to create this work. I offer *this text* as a model of one philosophical method.

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In each of the paired sections that make up “Thinking”, the later section deliberately uses the vocabulary of the earlier section in a somewhat more technical way, more technical if only because the reader has already read the related section once. This is not an apology for sloppiness at the beginning. On the contrary, as trained philosophers, it is often difficult to resist using our day-to-day vocabulary in technical ways. Our challenge here is to let our words do what they ordinarily do, and to show how ordinary uses become technical uses. For example, to talk about a “concept” or an “intention” without invoking the machinery of “Philosophy of Mind” is a challenge in itself for those steeped in particular philosophical traditions.

Also, it is a challenge to resist letting established analyses of well-vetted arguments and positions stand in for developing fresh versions of those arguments and positions. Though Ludwig Wittgenstein’s writings influence this text heavily, I never use his technical terms, including “form of life”, “family resemblance”, and especially the ubiquitous

“language game”. The exercise here is to create a technical vocabulary rather than to assume and use one that might not fit well with my purposes. Said differently: this is not an exegetical text so much as it is a record of useful philosophical exercises influenced by a specific body of philosophical works.

Here I emphasize examples: actors, comedians, tennis players, bicyclists, writers, musicians, and philosophy students populate the text. Each of these is a character of sorts, and in the interest of consistency, certain of the characters are “he” and certain others “she”, depending entirely upon who influenced the examples as I wrote them.

Since the examples in the text are essentially characters, and since characters typically *develop* in a story, it is reasonable to expect the examples to develop similarly over the course of our investigation. A reader might consider the pacing of the story and the treatment of the examples similar to the pacing and treatment of story and characters in films, novels, or theater. One might even be inclined to follow a story arc in this text: after sufficient introduction, the examples develop and interact with one another, the reader interacts with the examples, which is partly what makes this a philosophical text, and the final section describes how we got from “Introduction to Philosophy” to “Philosophy”. The story metaphor suggests how the philosophical method employed here works.

The word “method” plays more than one role in this text. Philosophers write, teach, learn, debate, develop ideas, organize thoughts, and so forth, and so our talk about their methods intersects with at least these activities. Sometimes “method” is a model that we use to organize our activities; “method” can work as an abstract noun. Sometimes “method” is a loosely grouped family of activities in which we participate when we practice philosophy; “method” can be shorthand for a collection of active verbs.

Similarly, “practice” does at least double duty. As a noun, the word “practice” comprises the various activities, methods or techniques that philosophers employ in their

work. At the same time, philosophers practice their teaching and their writing skills. They engage with students, use words and ideas, and interact with the world in deliberate, purposeful ways; “practice” also acts as a verb. As philosophers practice their craft, they improve specific verbal skills, thinking skills, communication skills and so on.

One only improves upon a skill when sufficiently motivated to do so. We can contrast this with simply exercising a skill, such as writing a quick note to a friend, as opposed to penning a novel. Here we are interested in methods that philosophers employ when they are motivated to improve upon skills like teaching, writing and learning.

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Investigative methods, particularly in philosophy, develop over generation, from Plato's dialogues, to Aristotle's treatises, to Descartes' meditations, to Kant's critiques, to Wittgenstein's investigations. Theirs and many others have rich histories all worth reporting on and developing further like I do here. Given this broad range of approaches to philosophical inquiry, I hope that talking about what it is like to do philosophy as I advocate will inspire discussions about and uses of alternative investigative methods from which students of many disciplines might profit.

Many philosophers' methods follow the form of divide-and-conquer. They often investigate phenomena like thinking, meaning, intending, morality, freedom, etc. by attempting to show how the phenomena break down into parts, such as propositions, objects, and rules. Rather than deconstruct complicated phenomena, the method I advocate here builds up complex abstractions from simple descriptions of seemingly mundane activities.

My approach to philosophical investigation is perhaps unfamiliar to philosophers with certain professional sympathies and intellectual investments. Philosophers often use a “quote and interpret”, top-down investigative style.

They often start with a concept or an expression of an idea, research a variety of philosophical treatments of similar ideas, extract selections from those treatments (quote), then criticize or expand upon the previous work (interpret). In the end, new philosophical ideas develop from analyses of extant ideas. Philosophers tend to extract *aspects* of a philosophical thesis, critically evaluate that aspect of the thesis, or point out its problems, shore up the arguments, polish it, and publish it. This is a caricature of a common investigative method, perhaps rendered too uncharitably for some tastes, and perhaps no philosopher recognizes himself in the caricature. But I aim only to describe a clear contrast to the method that I wish to develop here.

My approach to philosophical investigation is something like “statement and elaboration”, which I see as a bottom up style. I am curious about how we come up with our ideas, expressions, and explanations when we teach, learn, and research philosophical topics. Here, I aim to show a way to think about our words and our world by starting with simple examples of words and ideas in action. Then I elaborate on those examples in an effort to show how complex ideas might arise from simpler ones. For example, if we have an interest in the notion of “playing”, we might enumerate and investigate examples of what we call “playing”. We make statements about what activities count as “playing”, then elaborate on those statements by describing those activities in more and more detail. As we investigate in this way, we develop a richer, perhaps more technical, vocabulary. This exercise serves at least two purposes: we gain insights into the notion under investigation, and as we refine how we talk about what we investigate, we get better at *doing* what we investigate. This essay serves two similar purposes: to reveal insights into what we call “philosophy”, and at the same time, to improve upon our performance of “philosophical investigations.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is also an argument in favor of viewing Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* as accomplishing the same ends.

I am confident that this can be a constructive exercise and that this is an indispensable model of how to do philosophy. It is a lot to try, and I cannot say all at once how the method works; the whole text is my attempt to do so. Consider this a plea for charity.

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One might reasonably wonder: why bother talking about a plurality of investigative or philosophical methods? Short answer: because the sort of introduction to philosophy often practiced in academic environments hardly counts as doing philosophy, and things need not be this way. We serve students better when we challenge them to participate fully in philosophical investigations from the beginning.

At the same time, we as philosophers can sharpen our thinking skills significantly when we work to introduce philosophical ideas in ways that novice philosophers and students can follow (or *get*) regardless of their intellectual backgrounds. We can and should insist that novice philosophical work be legitimate philosophical work, just as in an introductory physics lab where students *experiment* from the start, and just as in a physical education class where students play sports when they first take the field. We do not tell physics students that introductory laboratory experiments are not *really* what it is like to experiment; similarly, we should introduce philosophy with the attitude that introductory students are *really* philosophizing.

Again in caricature, an ordinary introduction to philosophy as a discipline usually involves extracting readings from seminal works, dumbing them down, and occasionally asking students to make sense of these seemingly obscure and inaccessible discussions. Students often disinterestedly express this in the form of exam essays. Few professors would likely call this introductory activity “doing philosophy”, though it is the pervasive model of the discipline to which many first expose their students.

This resembles “quote and interpret” caricatured above. Often in introductory classes, professors state what abstract topic they will treat, for example “ethics”, then set students loose on a “classic” text, like Mill's *Utilitarianism*. Or a professor might prefer to introduce “skepticism” via Descartes' *Meditations*. In either case, the approach is the same: here is a problem, and here is a text that tries to address (or solve) the problem, often with little regard for the explicitly methodological considerations that inform such major works.

Next we typically ask students to answer questions about the texts, possibly challenging them to find flaws with the arguments, or to develop arguments that use lessons from the work under study. If a professor expects a student to write an essay, he will only on rare occasions provide guidance about how to write a philosophical essay. Furthermore, and confusingly, if a student structured his essay about, say, Descartes' *Meditations* like the text itself, the essay would very likely be deemed a failure. All of this is to say that introductory classes often take the form of quote and interpret, writ large, and rarely include concrete guidance about how to successfully employ philosophical, investigative methods. Again, it might be that no professor will see shades of his own teaching style in this caricature, but doubtless most will agree that at least certain aspects of the picture capture some of the current realities of introductory instruction.

After seemingly successful introductions to the discipline, students refine their investigative methods, likely including closer attention to particular readings, and discussions about larger portions of philosophical works. They might also begin to read secondary interpretations of primary works, using those as models of how to do philosophy. They typically develop affinities for particular interpretations of popular works, and they may begin to develop their own interpretations of those works. These students are *sort of* doing philosophy, we might think.

Should a student develop a sufficiently innovative interpretation of a classic philosophical text or topic, that student might write up the results, likely using the now-familiar quote and interpret style of investigation, including a “survey of the literature”, and attain a higher academic degree. This entitles the student, now a professional philosopher, to work with students new to the discipline, and to provide them with a similar philosophical model, which they might easily mistake for philosophy *itself*. Given these proper credentials, the professional philosopher will begin publishing articles and will have established himself as a contributor to the discipline.

In contrast, and to caricature my own view, here I argue in favor of employing a philosophical method that, if employed well, gets students to do philosophy from day one. That is, I recommend an alteration to how some philosophers view the tradition by describing a particular way to think about and talk about “philosophy” that is still a clearly identifiable part of the discipline. Rather than start with an abstract concept, like “meaning”, or “skepticism” and try to deconstruct it, or break it into parts, we start our investigations by enumerating situations where the notion in question arises. For example, “meaning” arises when we do not know how to use a word (what does this word mean?), or when we talk about why an event happens the way that it does (what is the meaning of this?), or when we are curious about the “significance” of a word or action (what did he mean by that?). Essentially, I advocate investigating abstract concepts by showing how we learn to identify the concept *in the world*.

The object of this text's investigation is, generally, “philosophy”, or what sorts of arguments and investigations count as “philosophical”. A philosophical investigation into “philosophy” will inevitably raise tangential, but interesting and helpful, investigations into a wide range of abstract activities, like thinking, intending, meaning, doubting, perceiving, trying, and importantly *getting*. We build our competence at identifying what counts as philosophy by

noticing the ways in which tangible descriptions of these seemingly intangible activities intersect. At the same time we exercise our skills at evaluating the usefulness and the purpose of philosophical ruminations.

Some might be tempted to call this “meta-philosophy”. But this would suggest that we use a vocabulary or investigative method that is *beyond* philosophy itself. This is not what I aim to do. If anything, this is philosophy of philosophy<sup>2</sup>. This is a way to talk about how we do philosophy; it is a way to talk about philosophical methods parallel to how philosophers of science talk about science or how philosophers of language talk about language. The oddity, or the novelty, of this text is that it is often its own object of study<sup>3</sup>.

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My inspiration in this pursuit is Wittgenstein, whose methods, style, and suggestions might be seen as rejections of the quote and interpret model of philosophical inquiry caricatured above. My take on his work and how to apply it is often at odds with the secondary literature that has grown out of his writings: this specialized literature seems to follow its own peculiar philosophical model, a model that is often in tension with Wittgenstein's. My work pays close attention to Wittgenstein's methods in a way that many contemporary commentators do not. In my estimation, many secondary interpretations of his works are consequently limited in their scope, and hindered by an absence of sensitivity to style and form.

One might wonder why I do not address this secondary literature critically. Why not apply my method to the same

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *PI*, 121: “One might think: if philosophy speaks of the use of the word 'philosophy' there must be a second-order philosophy. But it is not so: it is, rather like the case of orthography, which deals with the word 'orthography' among others without then being second-order.”

<sup>3</sup> This point will recur often in the text, particularly in “Self-Evaluation”, inspired largely by Wittgenstein's *Blue Book*, pp 7-8.

problems addressed in the literature to show that my preferred method is actually preferable? For one thing, most secondary works are *about* Wittgenstein's philosophy, whereas his investigations *inspire* this text. The philosophical examples that I use in the text serve to show how certain ideas and questions arise in the discipline, and coming to understand how philosophical puzzles arise is part of our training. Given this purpose, I aim neither to produce definitive analyses of isolated textual extractions, nor to develop theories about philosophical topics like “meaning”, “freedom”, “justice” and so forth. My purposes are so distinct from those of the secondary literature that addressing the literature directly would be more distracting than edifying. Furthermore, given that Wittgenstein, with few exceptions, never employed a quote-and-interpret style of philosophical investigation, we should wonder whether those who write up their interpretations of his works in almost exclusively such a style really *get* what he was up to<sup>4</sup>.

What we call “getting it” is, in some ways, the foundation of my work. We get jokes, meanings, hints, ideas, points, drifts and so on. There is no *getting* Wittgenstein's philosophy, I argue, without writing, thinking and experiencing philosophy as he did. One can say similar things of Plato, Kant, Hegel, or any serious philosopher. Getting what they are all up to means to do what they do. In Wittgenstein's case, he continually practiced and refined his investigative methods, and so here I try to do something like the same thing<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *PI* II-xi, p215: “But if a sentence can strike me as a painting in words, and the very individual word in the sentence as like a picture, then it is no such marvel that a word uttered in isolation and without purpose can seem to carry a particular meaning in itself.” It would be ironic to quote this passage and try, so soon, to tie it into my thesis --- but to think that this is my aim would be to misunderstand my point. I quote this passage because of its *influence* on my text. Often my footnotes and use of quotations serve to catalog influences rather than to expand upon an isolated point, or to make a tangential point, or some other purpose.

<sup>5</sup> In his later works, particularly his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein exercises a similar notion: fit. Cf. *PI* 136-8, 182, and 216.

Wittgenstein's works are repetitive, often saying the same things many times over and over with only slight variation. This can be somewhat off-putting, almost disorienting. The reader unfamiliar with his style or his methods might think: Didn't I just read that? But careful arrangement of seemingly-repetitive remarks helps Wittgenstein to accentuate often-overlooked aspects of philosophical questions and answers. He approaches topics from different angles --- sometimes quickly, sometimes with a measured pace, sometimes with just a glancing blow only to be addressed in depth later. He models his method partly on therapy, where the point is to develop an understanding of an issue rather than to get participants to agree with a proposition. Understanding an issue is akin to developing a competence. Wittgenstein's goal is to *get better* at philosophy, and we get better by participating in both training-oriented and therapeutic exercises<sup>6</sup>. We will return to this point over and over in the text, especially in the concrete examples mentioned above, such as learning to play piano, training for a bicycle race, practicing tennis, and developing more and more amusing deliveries of jokes.

On this model, one might say that philosophy is a taxonomic activity, largely concerned with organizing thoughts for particular purposes. But philosophers also concern themselves with explanations or descriptions of abstract phenomena, or with answering questions about causes of behaviors or motivations for actions, and so forth.

Philosophy is also something of a geographic activity, where we describe a cartographic conceptual terrain by describing how we picture a landscape from a wide variety of

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *PI*, 90, 107, 109, 118-133, esp. 125 and 133.

Also *Zettel*, 412 - 419:

"412. Am I doing child psychology? --- I am making a connexion between the concept of teaching and the concept of meaning.

"419. Any explanation has its foundation in training. (Educators ought to remember this.)"

angles. Philosophy is sometimes a game, sometimes an exercise in puzzle solving, sometimes it is like developing a good joke, where a final statement will tie a monologue together.

These are metaphors for techniques that we use to develop our understandings of philosophical abstractions. And these are mere suggestions of a much richer vocabulary that we will employ here to describe how we continually develop our competence with such abstractions. Very roughly, philosophy is talking about how we do what we do and why we do what we do.

All of this might make it sound as if we must play a bit fast and loose in philosophy, as if there is no concrete measure of what even counts as investigating philosophically. But I do not mean for the thesis to get so far out of hand: there are definite boundaries to what *makes sense* in philosophy. The trouble is that we cannot state what those boundaries are --- they are the boundaries of our expressive abilities. But this will not stop us from trying; it is just this effort that fine tunes and expands our capacity for expression. Furthermore, in trying this we develop our collective competence at evaluating what counts as philosophical inquiry and at evaluating how well we do it.

Just as we can think of “pitching” as constant refinement of “throwing a ball”, and we are all capable of throwing a ball, on day one of Introduction to Philosophy, the student is fully capable of philosophizing, if we conceive of our discipline in the right spirit and with the right methodological tools at our disposal. The philosopher trains with words and develops ideas, and any sufficiently serious student, adequately guided, can do this by simply taking pen to paper and writing, revising, refining, rewriting, and so on<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. PI, 130: “Our clear and simple language-games are not preparatory studies for a future regularization of language --- as it were first approximations, ignoring friction and air-resistance. The language-games are rather set up as *objects of comparison* which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language by way not only of similarities, but also of dissimilarities.”

Modestly then, I hope to show that the best way to introduce and to describe philosophy is as a method of practical refinement. We are writers who report what happens at the edges of our intellectual competences, and as we write more, those competences expand, allowing us to better report on what previously lay at the edges, and to more reasonably suggest what is yet to come.

Again, it is not appropriate to employ Wittgenstein's technical term "language game" here, and I cite this as an influential passage partly to show that we do not need to lean on his specific vocabulary to make our points. In this case, the vocabulary, the technical terms, and the investigative method developed here are not *preparations* for something yet-to-come. Each section should stand on its own merit.

# Thinking

## 1. Introduction to Philosophy

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*Where we parallel philosophical skills with other practiced activities, like music and sports, suggest some vocabulary that we will develop here, and indicate how Wittgenstein's investigative methods influence this text.*

*Follow-up: 16. **Philosophy**, dénouement.*

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Whether an introductory student in a college class, a well-practiced learner who teaches at a university, or a casual reader who pursues the discipline in his free time, the student of philosophy should develop a sense of what philosophers do, why they do it, and how they do it. Often, introductory students, professionals, and casual pursuers benefit from stating and restating the questions they investigate, how they proceed in their investigations and, importantly, why they investigate in the first place. To do this is to develop a vocabulary, which is to develop skills with words. In the process, we learn to make new words fit in with other words we already use, and we develop nuanced uses of those words and new ones. This results in our developing complex ideas and perspectives about how we understand the world and our activities in it. And this is one model of philosophical investigation.

But this is not an attempt to state once and for all what family of activities or what collections of words and expressions count as “philosophy”. Rather, here I aim to assemble certain aspects of “Ordinary Language” philosophy into a coherent description of the discipline in general. To do this, in my view, is to develop a method, and with this method one can introduce philosophy to others, or pursue philosophical investigation on one's own, or develop

innovative approaches to various skill-building enterprises, and so forth<sup>8</sup>.

Here I offer an investigative model that draws together aspects of others' philosophical strategies, in particular early 20<sup>th</sup> Century "Ordinary Language" philosophers. At the same time, I offer an account of the remarkable productivity of certain texts and authors, the most influential here being Ludwig Wittgenstein and his *Philosophical Investigations*. In the interests of avoiding self-defeat, I submit *this text* as an example of what results from employing the investigative method that it describes.

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Like the introductory piano student and the concert performer who both practice on the instrument daily, philosophers in the early stages of their study through those already widely-published and respected continue to develop their styles, their writing skills, and their teaching techniques. The method that I describe, then, takes the form of skill-building through training. We do not usually think of getting better at philosophy as something accomplished through training, but we do not often think about what skills we use when we do philosophy, for that matter. Here, I wish to do just that.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. PI, 118-133, esp. 133:

"It is not our aim to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of our words in unheard-of ways.

"For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear.

"The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to. ---The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* into question. --- Instead, we now demonstrate a method, by examples; and the series of examples can be broken off. ---Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem.

"There is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies."

Philosophy often takes a written form, but also: spoken argument, teaching, and debating. So part of my task here is to develop a competence at identifying the sorts of writing, thinking, arguments, and teaching that stand out as “philosophical”. To help us make this identification, we need to develop a vocabulary that we can use to talk about abstract concepts, including the word “concept” itself.

All of this is necessarily and unapologetically vague. Since I intend to develop a vocabulary to talk about thoughtful pursuits, I cannot state from the start how that pursuit will conclude; the reader must charitably pursue *with* me in order to reach the same conclusion that I reach. Part of the task, then, is to get competent with a particular vocabulary, a vocabulary to be developed throughout this text.

To begin, I develop a notion of “thinking” that might seem alien to the already-trained philosopher, since I include a broad range of seemingly unrelated activities under its description. I use a variety of ordinary words in increasingly specific ways, including “style”, “getting it”, “method”, “concept”, “intention”, and “practice”. By the end of this text, we should have refined our ability to use this vocabulary to distinguish a practical and effective pedagogic and investigative method.

Wittgenstein's influence on the project is partly stylistic and partly methodological. His method, including careful arrangement of terse philosophical remarks, allows him to develop a vocabulary that a well-read Wittgensteinian can employ as short-cuts in philosophical discussions. For example, “language game” and “form of life” act as technical terms in his works, though their sense changes over the course of Wittgenstein's writings, which is precisely what we should expect of a practicing philosopher, on the view developed here.

I do not directly address how Wittgenstein develops a technical vocabulary throughout his writings. Nor will I casually assume those terms, out of his specific context, to

address questions about what I call an investigative method. Wittgenstein, apparently frustrated with the state of early twentieth century analytic philosophy (and partly accepting blame for it), developed a vocabulary to help make clear what were the sources of his frustrations. If we employ a Wittgensteinian approach to contemporary philosophical puzzles, on this interpretation, we do not marshal his specific technical vocabulary for modern purposes, but rather we apply his techniques and his methods to achieve similar ends: to express a critique of a frustrating state of philosophical and pedagogic affairs.

When reading his works, one can sense Wittgenstein's desire to alter the course of ordinary philosophical and investigative pursuits, which partly explains his peculiar and unfamiliar style. I would like to try something along the same lines. I feel that a sort of complacency about the development of the discipline among some professionals, and a pervasive disregard for its neophyte practitioners has the potential to alienate both future students and current professionals. The discipline can remain intellectually, or even socially, relevant if we recognize and adapt to what separates contemporary students, including ourselves, from historic students of philosophy.

Contemporary students of philosophy encounter written words, philosophical ideas, and education in general, quite differently than they did a generation ago. Perhaps older generations deride current generations about their limited skills and attention spans. But Ancient generations would certainly deride these same modern critics on similar grounds: for their obsessive dependence on the written word, rather than the spoken, widely public words used in debate, performance, or *apology*. Contemporary students of philosophy encounter ideas and performances differently than did students a few generations ago. Consequently, we, as educators and continuing students of the discipline, need to accept, openly and charitably, how changes in the transference of ideas impacts philosophical pursuits. This text

is a consequence and development of that acceptance. Furthermore, I offer this text as an advance over Wittgenstein's philosophical style: it is a sustained narrative that completes some of his suggested connections between complex, abstract philosophical topics, and demonstrates that continuity through its unique structure.

The world's best concert pianists, the best tennis players, the best comedians and actors continually practice their crafts, both to develop their own skills and to relate better to contemporary audiences and competitors. Following Wittgenstein's methodological innovations, here my goal is to describe and to employ a style of investigation suited to its intellectual environment as water suits a fish. One can read this text as developing a method to teach philosophy, but it is at the same time a method to develop our own skills at expressing the puzzles that *are* our discipline. Though this may seem an immodest goal, I only aim to express one-among-many possible, effective investigative methods, including those yet-to-be-developed. If the method developed here helps the student of philosophy, or the student of any practiced craft, as much as it has helped me, then this text will have done an honest day's work.

## 2. Practice, Performance & Motivation

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*Where we describe different kinds of practicing, clarify the kind of purposeful practice that interests us here, and start to suggest connections between philosophical pursuits and the tangible examples that we will develop throughout the text.*

*Follow-up: 15. Practice & Performance, where we investigate our capacity to differentiate between practicing and performing.*

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The piano student works through scales and finger-strengthening exercises to improve his performances of compositions or his improvisational skills. The cyclist sprints and climbs and develops his cadence to improve his endurance on a long tour. The comedian works on his timing, inflection and gestures to improve his delivery, and he approaches his topics in sufficiently surprising ways to elicit laughs. Philosophers read widely, they discuss and interpret readings, and they teach innovative ideas and thinking and writing methods. Unstructured and unsupervised practicing, however, rarely enhances thinking and writing skills as rapidly as when teacher and student, or peer and peer, engage in guided exchange. Philosophers practice their craft by thinking and by writing, and practice of the one improves performance of the other.

Practice improves performance when both the practitioner wants to improve his performance and when his teacher aims to enhance the student's skills. Practice that improves upon a skill is a specific kind of practice; it is practice guided normatively and motivated by normativity. Teachers teach the way that they feel students should perform, and students aspire to an ideal, trying assorted methods that they feel might achieve that end. Teachers give specific instructions, often in a form like: "Do *this*" or "*this* is how to do X". Commands and instructions help to establish

standards that the student can use to evaluate his success or his failure. Students adjust what they do and the ways they do what they do until they find that, or are told that, they better meet the standards. As they learn to meet expectations, they develop their skills as performers and as evaluators. And their skills include grasping when they have said or done *enough*, when they should do or practice *more*, or when they have *completed* a task.

Deliberate, improvement-oriented activities contrast with such things as casually writing in a journal: usually, the journal writer does not try to improve his writing skills so much as to express a thought or to record a personal history. Similarly, in bicycling to the store, the cyclist does not try to improve his racing skills so much as to acquire consumable goods. We might say that in neither of these cases does the actor try anything new, or to *stress* a new skill in an effort to improve that skill.

Here I concern myself with practice motivated by a desire to improve upon a skill, where a teacher often guides a student's practice with a picture of how an idea or an activity would be best expressed or performed. This is what philosophers call a "normative" point; *standards* guide the activity. Students must develop a competence at recognizing when they perform a skill well, when they need to improve, and how they can improve. Given this, part of our task will be to develop our self-evaluation skills, which we will model on our evaluations of others' related performances. My concern, then, is with the sorts of practicing in which a teacher encourages a student to revise a technique, to try to improve upon a method, to expand his vocabulary, to develop an interpretation of a text, to investigate the reasons behind an event, and so on.

We can describe the interaction of teachers and students in a variety of ways: apprenticeship, indoctrination, taking classes, observing experts, and so forth. For the philosopher, guidance often takes the form of peer reviewed papers, participation in seminars or colloquia, and the often-

overlooked give and take exchanges that characterize explaining ideas to others, such as while teaching. In all of these cases, and countless others, the philosopher aims to synthesize or to generate novel ideas about broad topics like knowledge, morality, thinking, argument, etc. This process requires sharp, on-the-spot revisions and reinterpretations. The philosopher often *improvises* as he thinks up and arranges new expressions of familiar ideas.

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Writers, philosophers, actors, and athletes all fine-tune their performances through specific, targeted practicing. Comedic writers deliver jokes to audiences, try out different written expressions of what seems to work in a live performance, or push the limits of what sounds sensible or surprising to shock an audience into a laugh. Actors take direction. A director communicates to the actor what motivates him in a scene, and the actor tries out a variety of expressions to communicate that motivation to the audience. Athletes try to push themselves past their physical limits. They learn and they practice techniques to improve on their past performances, techniques that they might develop on their own, or that a coach might show them, or that they might stumble upon during their practice sessions.

Directors, coaches, and teachers motivate actors, athletes, and students: they communicate the *purpose* of training and trying things out. In cases like sports, the purpose of an athlete's training is obvious: to improve his performance in that sport. The sprinting cyclist trains to sprint faster and so the coach designs a training regimen intended to improve that aspect of the cyclist's performance. The director tries to tell the actor how his performance fits in with the whole production, and will give feedback and tips to help make this happen.

The philosopher's parallel task is difficult to describe, partly because the task is abstract, and partly because the task

is multi-faceted. The teaching philosopher needs to express a purpose or a motivation to students if the students' practicing is to pay off. At the same time, the philosopher as an independent learner needs to have a picture of his own purpose: a picture of what sorts of practicing will advance his cause, and what sorts of results would indicate advances.

Though the philosopher's task is abstract, we can address the task tangibly if we consider it in the right spirit. The philosopher is a specific sort of thinker whose most effective tools are written and spoken words. A reasonable start to our investigation, then, is to develop a concrete way to talk about thinking, bearing in mind that our purpose is at least two-fold: to describe to a student the skills that philosophers exercise, and to clarify for ourselves what it is like to improve our own skills at philosophical investigation.

Again, our temptation might be to *tell* students what philosophy is, but at this point our task is to introduce ideas that we (and perhaps not they) would call “philosophical”. And we do this in order to exercise a competence at using this word. Here we investigate thought, argument, and behavioral patterns, and we develop expository strategies for expressing what those patterns are.

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Philosophers often tend to talk or write about decisions, arguments, and actions, and rarely would they classify their writing as the action itself. To write about morality is not usually seen as *acting* morally; to write about a decision is not usually to *make* a decision<sup>9</sup>. But say that a philosopher develops an interest in talking *about* morality. One expository strategy is to talk about behavior patterns by inventing examples of what we (in the discipline) call “moral dilemmas”, or he might talk about non-controversial cases from news

<sup>9</sup> Importantly, in *this* case, the way that we talk about investigative methods is itself a philosophical investigation; we *do* what we talk about while we talk about it.

stories or from personal experience. Or a philosopher might develop an interest in logic, and so he will talk about argumentative patterns, perhaps by inventing a “calculus” or a symbolic system that expresses his analysis.

It might seem forced or artificial to put it this way, but our interest here is not always in talking *about* philosophy, or thinking, or meaning, though it will be fair enough to put it that way at times. We aim to develop our skills at *identifying* these things, at developing a competence with a vocabulary, and to develop a competence with a vocabulary is not (necessarily) to talk about that vocabulary. For example, to study what philosophers call “meaning” is not necessarily to talk *about* the phenomenon. To look at instances of when we easily recognize meaningful statements or symbols counts just as well as an investigation into the phenomenon as talking *about* the phenomenon. One might say that to do this is to talk about the phenomenon (meaning, for example) *indirectly*.

This suggests an expository strategy that does not involve invention of new words or concepts. Instead, like a reporter, we record observations, sometimes as paraphrases of complex situations designed to accentuate what we take to be important *aspects* of that situation: aspects of a situation that reveal insights about its significance. We record purposefully. We aim to show patterns in how we use words, or arguments, or how we react to morally questionable decisions, and so forth. For our purposes, doing this kind of reporting will count as saying *what something is*, and often, at the same, time will count as *doing* what we are talking about.

Again, this strategy will make more sense as we see it in action. So let us begin with a description of an activity central to philosophical work: “thinking”.

### 3. Thinking

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*Where we show that “thinking” can be construed broadly as hands-on activity, and suggest that we treat “philosophical” thinking similarly. Throughout, we continue to emphasize that our purposes deeply influence how we understand and improve upon our thinking skills.*

*Follow-up: 14. **Self-Evaluation**, where we show that our judgments about our own skills are modeled on judgments of others' skills, which we learn in the world.*

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Since philosophers spend so much time thinking, the philosophy student needs to develop a special sensitivity for identifying the sorts of activities that involve thinking. To develop this sense, we start by enumerating and describing “thoughtful” activities, and then we try to refine those descriptions. We can develop the specific case of “philosophical” from the general case of “thinking” by indicating what activities the description “philosophical” picks out. Through this exercise, the student of philosophy develops his own thinking skills, and as a consequence, develops his philosophical techniques.

Throughout this investigation, we will develop our own technical term: “thoughtful”. We will use it in a broader sense than its ordinary use, especially to describe activities that involve deliberation, consideration, reflection, intentional activities, and so forth.

Almost any activity might involve “thinking” under the right circumstances. For example, chewing is usually little more than grinding food, but to a food critic, much thought goes into the activity. The critic knows *how* to taste food in certain parts of her mouth, with certain parts of her tongue, and she chews at a deliberate rate, and so on. The rest of us mostly just chew. Similarly, for most of us, petting a dog is

little more than moving our hands across its fur, but for the trainer or the professional handler, strokes are deliberate and communicative. The handler's motions calm the dog during competition; she teaches the dog to tolerate children or to obey an owner's commands. Importantly, in these cases, there are standards against which we can evaluate whether the food critic *got it wrong*, or whether the dog trainer's work has been effective. In this text, our interest in thinking is akin to the food critic's interest in chewing or the dog trainer's interest in petting. Thinking is a specialized activity, for the philosopher. And there are standards against which we can judge the results of a philosopher's (and our own) work.

We encounter a wide range of grammatical variation with “thinking” words. For example, it suddenly *occurs* to me that I forgot your birthday. *I think* we should check the weather before we ride our bicycles. We *shouldn't* take the freeway during rush hour. Sudden realizations, expressions of what we normally do, or basic normative guidelines: these activities contrast with the sorts of activities under investigation here. Our interests include expressions like: I will have to think your proposal over. Your gift was exactly what I needed; how very thoughtful. We can figure out how to fix the bicycle's shifters if we think it through. These latter expressions stand out partly because they describe deliberate activities rather than off-the-cuff reactions and occurrences.

In each of the above examples, we could just as easily substitute “consider” (or a synonym) for “think” and make the same points: I will have to consider your proposal. Your gift was exactly what I needed; how very considerate. We can figure out how to fix the bicycle's shifters if we consider how they are supposed to work. This simple observation shows us much about “thinking” already; “thinking” comes in many forms. We can describe thinking activities just as well with synonyms. And importantly, thinking verbs suggest related adverbs. We deliberate, but we also perform actions deliberately. We think, and also perform actions thoughtfully. We argue, and also behave argumentatively. We convince, and

sometimes speak convincingly. We philosophize, often by speaking philosophically. Doing and describing, verb and adverb, are closely connected. The close relationship between “thinking” and “thoughtful” (in our technical sense) is a model of the relationship between “philosophize” and “philosophical”, which is a relationship that we will continue to develop in this text.

To enumerate examples like this is something of a therapeutic activity. Through the exercise, we come to recognize that “thinking”, in this example, is not a mysterious activity hidden in our heads; thinking happens *in the world*<sup>10</sup>.

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We learn what thinking is by noticing how we identify and describe “thoughtful” activities. For our purposes, clarifying “thinking” helps us to understand what philosophers do, which in turn will help us to recognize how we can develop our own philosophical skills by refining our investigative methods.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Zettel, 88-131, esp. 105-107, 110-111 ff.:

“110. 'Thinking', a widely ramified concept. A concept that comprises many manifestations of life. The *phenomena* of thinking are widely scattered.

“111. We are not at all *prepared* for the task of describing the use of e.g., the word 'to think' (And why should we be? What is such a description useful for?)

“And the naïve idea that one forms of it does not correspond to reality at all. We expect a smooth contour and what we get to see is ragged. Here it might really be said that we have constructed a false picture.”

Also, *PI*, 97:

“Thought is surrounded by a halo.---Its essence, logic, presents an order, in fact the a priori order of the world: that is, the order of *possibilities*, which must be common to both world and thought. But this order, it seems, must be *utterly simple*. It is *prior* to all experience, must run through all experience; no empirical cloudiness or uncertainty can be allowed to affect it-----It must rather be of the purest crystal. But this crystal does not appear as an abstraction; but as something concrete, indeed, as the most concrete, as it were, the *hardest* thing there is (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* No. 5.5563).

My investigative method includes making statements like “Thinking is \_\_\_\_\_.” With such epigrams, I do not equate thinking to a specific activity<sup>11</sup>. Rather, I intend to state something sensible about thinking, then show, through examples, how the epigram makes sense in a specific context. To do this is to talk about what we usually call “significance”. In the end, the reader should feel a familiar sense of *getting it* (akin to what we sometimes call “understanding”), much like one gets a joke, or feels the resolution of a melody<sup>12</sup>. This sort of activity, statement-and-elaboration, is a feature of what I advocate as a sound investigative method, and this can serve as a model of how we do philosophy.

When we say something like “This is That”, we do not often mean to *equate* one thing with another, though obviously sometimes we do, as when we say that two times two is four, or that bachelors are unmarried males. Often we mean to point out an aspect or a feature or a property of something, such as “this rose is red”, or “lemons are sour”, or “Tanya is smart”. For some purpose, we indicate that a rose is red, though we know and would not deny that it is also a

“We are under the illusion that what is peculiar, profound, essential in our investigation, resides in its trying to grasp the incomparable essence of language. That is, the order existing between the concepts of proposition, word, proof, truth, experience, and so on. This order is a *super-order* between---so to speak---*super-concepts*. Whereas, of course, if the words 'language', 'experience', 'world', have a use, it must be as humble a one as that of the words 'table', 'lamp', 'door'.”

TLP, 5.5563:

“In fact, all the propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order.---That utterly simple thing, which we have to formulate here, is not a likeness of the truth, but the truth itself in its entirety.

“(Our problems are not abstract, but perhaps the most concrete that there are.)”

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *PI*, II.ii., esp. p. 175: “The words 'the rose is red' are meaningless if the word 'is' has the meaning 'is identical with'. --- Does this mean: if you say this sentence and mean the 'is' as the sign of identity, the sense disintegrates?”

Also, *PI*, 558:

flower, and it is fragrant, and it is soft to the touch. Likewise, lemons are yellow, and they are fruits, and they are squishy. Tanya is poised, and she is beautiful, and she is talented. What we intend to convey influences what aspects of a thing or activity we choose to indicate. Here, I intend to say what makes thinking more than “operating with words”. I intend to show that we can construe thinking broadly to include not only operations with words, but manipulations of objects and instruments, development of physical skills, and skilled performances of compositions, scripts, jokes, and so forth.

We witness the chess player's thinking as he makes a move in the game; we witness the musician's thinking as she expresses herself through her instrument; we witness the comedian's thinking as he adjusts his delivery and his timing to get his audience to laugh harder and harder. The painter, the actor, the novelist, the tennis player, the surgeon: they all show their thoughts through their works, through their movements and through their expressions. To witness deliberate actions is to get to know “thinking”, and at the same time is to get to know activities like playing (games and music), expressing (jokes and ideas), acting, writing, operating, and so forth. This perspective benefits both the student of philosophy, who needs to understand what the discipline is, and the professional philosopher, who often uses

“What does it mean to say that the 'is' in 'This rose is red' has a different meaning from the 'is' in 'twice two is four'? If it is answered that it means that different rules are valid for these two words, we can say that we have only *one* word here. ---And if all I am attending to is grammatical rules, these do allow the use of the word 'is' in both connexions. ---But the rule which shews that the word 'is' has different meanings in these sentences is the one allowing us to replace the word 'is' in the second sentence by the sign of equality, and forbidding this substitution in the first sentence.”

And *PI*, 561:

“Now isn't it queer that I say that the word 'is' is used with two different meanings (as the copula and as the sign of equality), and should not care to say that its meaning is its use; its use, that is, as the copula and the sign of equality?”

“One would like to say that these two kinds of use do not yield a *single* meaning; the union under one head is an accident, a mere inessential.”

helpful reminders of how to practice the discipline effectively. Getting to know how we think, in general, helps us to develop our philosophical thinking skills<sup>13</sup>.

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We are usually quite capable of distinguishing between genuine and pretend facial expressions, and though we do not typically have a vocabulary to describe those differences (beyond “genuine” and “pretend”, perhaps), distinguishing and describing certainly involve thinking<sup>14</sup>. Distinguishing and describing do not always involve verbalizing ideas: talented painters can learn to represent genuine expressions without describing or explaining how they do so. They show their understanding by painting rather than by talking. Actors do a similar thing by acting, which is only partly talking, or in cases like silent films acting might not involve talking at all. We should say the same of philosophy. To investigate philosophically, partly, is to use words, vocabularies, argument structures, etc. But there is more to a philosophical performance, and this text aims to show that fact, much as a

<sup>12</sup> Notice how we do not typically say that we “understand” a joke, for example. To say that we “get” a joke is to say that we grasp that the one statement --- the punch line --- follows the setup; they go together. Similarly, we grasp when a melody has resolved, but that grasping is not something that we would naturally call “understanding”. Generally, in this text, when I choose the word “get” over the word “understand”, I aim to emphasize that the action or behavior in question is as natural (or effortless, perhaps) as laughing at a joke or feeling satisfied at the end of a song.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Zettel, 102-105:

“104. If he has made some combination in play or by accident and he now uses it as a method of doing this and that, we shall say he thinks.---In considering he would mentally review ways and means. But to do this he must already have some in stock. Thinking gives him the possibility of *perfecting* his methods. Or rather: He 'thinks' when, in a definite kind of way, he perfects a method he has.

“105. It could also be said that a man thinks when he *learns* in a particular way.”

<sup>14</sup> Cf. PI, II-xi, p228:

painter shows what sort of a glance his subject flashes, or as an actor portrays an emotional upheaval or comic relief. Philosophers do not simply use words in certain ways. They use words in certain ways for special purposes, like the actor's use of dialogue and body language, the painter's use of color and shape, the musician's use of notes and techniques, etc. The way that a philosopher uses words is part of what we might call his method. His thinking, and in the case of philosophy, often his writing, takes on an identifiable *style*. Consequently, we can begin to describe a philosophical method by trying to describe a philosopher's style of thinking.

What we call thinking involves improvisation. We might picture reading to ourselves without a written text. Thinking is to reading as improvisational theater is to, say, a production of Shakespeare. In improvisational theater, actors perform a scene, or communicate an emotion, or tension, or melodrama, or absurdity, or a serious tone, without reference to a script. They usually start with an idea then begin to play off of each other to work out that idea in a theatrical medium. Perhaps they aim to develop a script by improvising a scene many times and isolating what seemed successful. Perhaps they work on the tone of a scene by trying various inflections and gestures: a hand brushes the forehead at a dramatic moment; a suspect shies away when new evidence is revealed; a villain is emboldened as he escapes detection. These sorts of activities and expressions are “theatrical” thinking. Along with innumerable other activities and descriptions, these show us how we learn what counts as theatrical. This is a model of how we can learn what sorts of *thoughtful* activities count as philosophical.

“Imponderable evidence includes subtleties of glance, of gesture, of tone.

“I may recognize a genuine loving look, distinguish it from a pretended one (and here there can, of course, be a 'ponderable' confirmation of my judgment). But I may be quite incapable of describing the difference. And this is not because the languages I know have no words for it. For why not introduce new words? ---If I were a very talented painter I might conceivably represent the genuine and the simulated glance in pictures.”

Another aspect of the method developed here is to describe what verbs and phrases, what activities that is, *become* adjectives. Developing a script, working out a performance, learning to cry on stage: these activities and experiences shape our use of the adjective “theatrical” and its adverb sibling “theatrically”. A parallel investigation can elucidate what we mean by “philosophy”, “philosophical”, and “philosophically”. Rather than *break down* these words, we show how we build up complicated descriptions of our activities from more mundane descriptions, and this directly parallels Wittgenstein's investigative method<sup>15</sup>.

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When thinking about philosophical or abstract topics, we try to describe an “intellectual scene”, analogous to the improvised theatrical scene, without referring to anything already written. Sometimes, we might start with a general idea and let ourselves play off of similar ideas that previously occurred to us. Or, if we have been assigned to write a paper or to develop a thesis statement, we might work out a written version of the idea by trying out verbal descriptions of what occurs to us when we think about the topic at hand. As we try new and different techniques, our ideas might change or evolve, and we might then alter how we try to capture those ideas in writing. This is a complicated process, and so examples will help us make sense of the idea.

If I want to instruct a novice tennis player how to hit a backhand, I will describe the sorts of movements that she needs to make to swing a racket in this way. I might suggest that the movement of her arm should resemble the motion she uses to throw a Frisbee, assuming that motion is not alien to her. I might give her guidelines about where to place her feet relative to where she wants to direct the ball. Certainly at

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Zettel, 467 (and surrounding remarks): “Our investigation does not try to *find* the real, exact meaning of words; though we do often *give* words exact meanings in the course of our investigation.”

first, and very likely even as she develops a better and better swing, I will emphasize how much there is to *think about* when she hits a backhand. I will change what I say in reaction to how well (or how poorly) she hits the ball. My guidelines will *evolve*. And though I will use words, guidelines, rules and the like while training her, my goal as a coach will be to get her to no longer dwell on my words, but to simply hit a clean backhand. This is not to say that she will no longer be *thinking about* the guidelines: her backhand will *be* her thinking. And I will have given her the tools, or the standards, to develop her backhand on her own.

Philosophy is a similar case in that the goal is to do *something* without dwelling on rules or guidelines. But philosophy is a strange case in that the *something* that we do is thinking, which often takes a written form, a form very close to the guidelines that we learned as the discipline's *standards*. So though at first we focus on rules, guidelines, and the like, parallel to the tennis case, we eventually want to simply think and write philosophically<sup>16</sup>. Our goal is to learn standards that will allow us to develop our thinking skills on our own --- without having to directly compare our every thought against those standards.

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When we consider what thinking is, we can begin by imagining the sorts of things that we do when we describe ourselves as thinking<sup>17</sup>. When I think, and especially when I write philosophy, I shush idle chatter, I divert my eyes from

<sup>16</sup> Undoubtedly there will be times when revisiting the guidelines and rules that we used in our training will be beneficial, just as when the tennis player recognizes that her backhand fails her, she will almost surely profit from revisiting the fundamentals of the stroke. This might even happen in the midst of a match: often a frustrated player will take a practice swing after a missed shot, for example.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. PI, 327ff: "Can one think without speaking?" --- And what is *thinking*? --- Well, don't you ever think? Can't you observe yourself and see what is going on? It should be quite simple. You do not have to wait for it as for an astronomical event and then perhaps make your observations in a hurry."

distractions and look off into the distance, I shift back and forth in my chair, I rub the back of my neck, I often squint slightly, I breathe steadily and deeply, I sip coffee, sometimes I say what I think about out loud, or to myself, or I wander through the house, I run an idea past a colleague, I reflect on his reactions, I restate my case, I write down new ideas, I revise my original ideas, and so on. When I write about “thinking”, I picture what I do when I think and I start to describe that picture in words, and I pick out aspects of my behavior that indicate that I am thinking. I formulate my ideas in different ways, I react to these different formulations, and I observe others' reactions to the formulations. My thinking often manifests itself physically as I improvise with words.

This does not mean that in improvisation, for example, actors simply make an internal script external, or that in writing we simply externalize internal words<sup>18</sup>. Though in some cases this sort of characterization will be helpful, for example, if we aim to emphasize the *words* that actors use as opposed to the *way* that they use those words. Our concern is with the nature and effectiveness of trying things out, so we are not concerned with describing an inner mechanism or explaining what trying amounts to beyond human activity. For the purposes of this investigation, we describe actions and activities that count as philosophical with the hope that it will improve our skills at explaining effective teaching and training techniques. And while our explanatory skills

<sup>18</sup> Cf. PI, 305ff:

“But you surely cannot deny that, for example, in remembering, an inner process takes place.’ ---What gives you the impression that we want to deny anything? When one says ‘Still, an inner process does take place here’---and one wants to go on: ‘After all, you *see* it.’ And it is this inner process that one means by the word ‘remembering’. ---The impression that we wanted to deny something arises from our setting our faces against the picture of the ‘inner process’. What we deny is that the picture of the inner process gives us the correct idea of the use of the word ‘to remember’. We say that this picture with its ramifications stands in the way of our seeing the use of the word as it is.”

improve, our performance skills should similarly improve (barring “the centipede effect”).

When we try things out, we deal in more than words; we overlook important aspects of our activity when we attempt to characterize trying things out as externalizing an internal dialogue. For example, when we write, speak or even sign words, we deliver them with a particular style. Furthermore, words appear in the flow of a conversation, a book, a ceremony, a performance and so forth. “Externalizing an internal dialogue” captures a valuable aspect of thinking and trying things out, but how we decide to talk about an activity or process or event, or how we deliver that talk depends upon our purposes. It is a valuable exercise, especially when teaching or learning, to work out numerous ways to state or to explain why we do what we do, how we do what we do, and sometimes *what* we are doing.

We might want to teach an athletic skill, in which case we will likely be more physically demonstrative when we speak than when we teach, say, mathematics. We might want to teach writing, in which case we will be more attentive to our own choice of words, as well as a student's words, than in the case of teaching singing. When we teach singing, we likely will attend to the shape of a student's mouth or her posture, again acting more physically demonstratively than in the writing case. We might also want to report on an event, much as a journalist would do. Ideally, a reporter will tune her words to her audience: A newspaper columnist, for example, will use a different vocabulary than a court reporter. The columnist aims to paraphrase information sensibly to a general audience, whereas the court reporter aims to catalog the events in the courtroom clearly and accurately in case anyone ever needs to review the proceedings.

Even in casual conversation we often try things out. When I can personally engage with an interlocutor, I can alter what I say and how I say it until my interlocutor seems to get my point. For example, if I advance a proposition to my friend D., and he remains silent and a puzzled expression overtakes

him, I recognize this, and I restate my assertions or questions until D. nods or shakes his head and responds, for example, “I see --- so you mean ....” Sometimes, we wait for our interlocutors to paraphrase our points in agreeable ways, which indicates that what we said made sense to them. We might take note of what we said, how we said it, and so forth and use that style again under similar circumstances.

Our choice of words is as important as our inflection, emphasis, pacing, volume, and so on. While coaching a cyclist, I might emphasize active, positive verbs: “You've ridden this course a hundred times. Right now you *will ride* your best time ever!” --- drawing out the last few words for dramatic effect. When teaching writing, I emphasize the importance of choosing tangible subjects and active verbs: “‘It’ is a difficult subject to pin down, as is the action of ‘is’,” I tell a student. “Try to rearrange your sentences so that the subject *does* something,” again adjusting my inflection in order to draw attention to certain aspects of the instruction. When I tell a joke, I pause dramatically, I gesture in a mocked-puzzled tone, I let tension build in the audience and I deliver the punch line at the perfect instant. Coaching, teaching, and telling *are* thinking.

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Philosophers often use metaphors to talk about thinking, but these metaphors are not seeds of theories. We do not say, for example, that “thinking is arrangement of mental images” then search for a location where one might display such an arrangement. We do not say that “the brain is a gallery of mental pictures” then look for a place to hang oil paintings of ideas. We do not say that “thinking is reading to oneself without a written text,” and then proceed to investigate how it is possible to read in this peculiar way, though any of these characterizations might be helpful guides in particular investigations or for specific purposes. Our purpose is not to explain metaphors, but rather to describe what seem to be

exotic activities by showing how they arise from rather pedestrian ones.

We might say, for example, that thoughts are *objects* in order to clarify the metaphor that we sometimes “stop to arrange our thoughts”. Here we treat thoughts like physical (*real*) things in order to suggest how arrangement happens. We might use drawings or shapes as representations of thoughts and we might move them around in physical space to show how we combine this and that thought into larger, more complex thoughts. This activity can be helpful, especially when writing, but we overstep the limits of the metaphor if we insist, for example, that there actually *are* physical objects called thoughts. We use the object metaphor for a purpose, in this case, perhaps, to guide a student's writing, and we would be wrong to insist, without further explanation, that the metaphor extends beyond its original purpose. Its original purpose is what makes the metaphor significant. (Purpose is the glue that binds metaphors to our lives.)

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Wittgenstein addresses a relevant topic:

What we call 'descriptions' are instruments for particular uses. Think of a machine-drawing, a cross-section, an elevation with measurements, which an engineer has before him. Thinking of a description as a word-picture of the facts has something misleading about it: one tends to think only of such pictures as hang on our walls: which seem simply to portray how a thing looks, what it is like. (These pictures are as it were idle.) (PI, 291)

We want to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order with a particular end in view; one out or many possible

orders; not *the* order. To this end we shall constantly be giving prominence to distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook. This may make it look as if we saw it as our task to reform language.

Such a reform for particular practical purposes, an improvement in our terminology designed to prevent misunderstandings in practice, is perfectly possible. But these are not the cases we have to do with. The confusions which occupy us arise when language is like an engine idling, not when it is doing work.” (PI, 132)<sup>19</sup>

These points arise under different circumstances in the text. The former arises in the midst of a discussion about how we recognize pain and other similar behaviors by such things as facial expressions, bodily gestures, characteristic utterances and so forth. The latter arises during an investigation of what philosophers do, which is essentially an investigation of philosophical methods. The parallel metaphor, “idle pictures”, suggests that certain philosophical puzzles arise because we sometimes employ less-than-helpful investigative methods, and so the solution to the puzzle, sometimes, is to employ a

<sup>19</sup> Cf. PI 38, regarding language going “on holiday”, and especially 88:

“If I tell someone 'Stand roughly here' --- may not this explanation work perfectly? And cannot every other one fail too?

“But isn't it an inexact explanation?---Yes; why shouldn't we call it 'inexact'? Only let us understand what 'inexact' means. For it does not mean 'unusable'. And let us consider what we call an 'exact' explanation in contrast with this one. Perhaps something like drawing a chalk line round an area? Here it strikes us at once that the line has breadth. So a colour-edge would be more exact. But has this exactness still got a function here: isn't the engine idling? And remember too that we have not yet defined what is to count as overstepping this exact boundary; how, with what instruments, it is to be established. And so on.”

Also, *Zettel*, 237: “It might almost be said: 'Meaning *moves*, whereas a process stands still.'”

different method. And sometimes when we investigate differently, puzzles disappear<sup>20</sup>.

Similarly, investigating thoughts as if they are objects can be a helpful, guiding picture, but the picture has to do some work. If the picture remains idle, if only a snapshot guides an investigation, we might be misled to think that we can (always) explain what has gone on, including behaviors, intentions, expectations, meanings, to name a few, from *just* that picture.

A picture might be worth a thousand words, but a thousand stories give various significance to what a picture pictures; what went on before and after the time of the snapshot helps us pick out which story best suits our purposes. Said similarly: usually our task is to investigate moving pictures, because pictures in motion resemble our language and our lives. Sometimes it might seem appropriate to treat thoughts as fixed objects, but especially for our current pedagogic, investigative purposes, we are best to treat thoughts as moving dynamic *events*<sup>21</sup>.

Thinking happens *in the world*. The world does not hold still while we collect our thoughts, consider our options, or plan our next move. In philosophy, insofar as our object is to describe how we do what we do and why we do what we do, which, though an over-generalization, is a useful one in this context, the linguistic tools we use to achieve our purposes are more like those used by a film critic than those used by an evaluator of sculpture. Insofar as philosophers interest themselves in our actions *in the world*, their arguments, descriptions, and explanations are not *idle*.

<sup>20</sup> Note also *PI*, 133: "It is not our aim to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of our words in unheard-of ways. ... There is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed philosophical methods, like different therapies."

<sup>21</sup> *Cf.* *PI*, 663:

"If I say 'I meant *him*' very likely a picture comes to mind, perhaps of how I looked at him, etc.; but the picture is only like an illustration to a story. From it alone it would mostly be impossible to conclude anything at all; only when one knows the story does one know the significance of the picture."

Yet this does not deny the possibility or value of active language from a critic of not-in-motion art. Rodin's "The Thinker" sits in a thoughtful pose, which clues us in to the fact that thinking is more than an internal operation. Thinking is also, in this case, to sit in a certain, identifiable way, to lean one's chin on one's fist, etc. The sculpture is a three-dimensional snapshot of a thinker, which suggests that if we saw the sculpture in motion, we would see "thinking". The *locality* of thinking is the entire person, not merely the person's hidden, internal dialogue, and not merely a single representation of a thinking person. The sculpture of "The Thinker" could just as easily be "The Toothache", or "The Exhausted Athlete", or "The Bored Man", for we have no direct access to an internal state of the subject. Yet, we know and identify that he thinks, that the statue represents thinking.

If Rodin called the sculpture "The Fisherman" or "Winning The Marathon", we would not know what to make of it; we would not *get* Rodin's point. Obviously the figure is not in the midst of, or is not a representation of, fishing or running. Perhaps he just finished fishing and is looking at his catch, or perhaps this is a strange marathon where the winner is the first to strike this pose after running 26.2 miles. But these interpretations read more into the sculpture than seems appropriate. One gets "The Thinker" instantly<sup>22</sup>.

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If we met a person whose so-called internal dialogue suddenly became external --- he now says aloud all that he would ordinarily have said to himself --- we would witness his thinking style<sup>23</sup>. We would be able to evaluate, on the surface

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *PI*, 139(b): "I see a picture; it represents an old man walking up a steep path leaning on a stick. ---How? Might it not have looked just the same if he had been sliding downhill in that position? Perhaps a Martian would describe the picture so. I do not need to explain why we do not describe it so."

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *PI*, II.xi, esp. p220-2:

as it were, the inflection of his words, his pacing, his pausing, his stumbling and hesitations, and what we would call his “thinking” would include all of these descriptions of his thinking-out-loud. Moreover, this would be a tangible example of the fact that we deliver our internal dialogues in a particular style; we hesitate like the out-loud thinker, we squinch up our brows, we lean heavily on our fists, we gesture to ourselves, and this shows in our human activities.

Wittgenstein addresses a parallel point in *The Blue Book*, which is a collection of notes from his classes at Cambridge between 1933 - 1934. The text contains some of his first writings about such things as language games and meaning in a form that would eventually develop into his opus, *Philosophical Investigations*. In *The Blue Book* Wittgenstein suggests various problems that arise when we *locate* thinking in the head and suggests the significance of locating thinking elsewhere:

It is misleading then to talk of thinking as of a “mental activity”. We may say that thinking is essentially the activity of operating with signs. This activity is performed by the hand, when we think by writing; by the mouth and larynx, when we think by speaking; and if we think by imagining signs or pictures, I can give you no agent that thinks. If then you say that in such cases the mind thinks, I would only draw your attention to the fact that you are using a metaphor, that here the mind is the agent in a different sense from that in

“Silent 'internal' speech is not a half hidden phenomenon which is as it were seen through a veil. It is not hidden *at all*, but the concept may easily confuse us, for it runs over a long stretch cheek by jowl with the concept of an 'outward' process, and yet does not coincide with it.

“...The close relationship between 'saying inwardly' and 'saying' is manifested in the possibility of telling out loud what one said inwardly, and of an outward action's *accompanying* inward speech. (I can sing inwardly, or read silently, or calculate in my head, and beat time with my hand as I do so.)”

which the hand can be said to be the agent in writing.

If again we talk about the locality where thinking takes place we have a right to say that this locality is the paper on which we write or the mouth which speaks. And if we talk of the head or the brain as the locality of thought, this is using the expression “locality of thinking” in a different sense. Let us examine what are the reasons for calling the head the place of thinking. It is not our intention to criticize this form of expression, or to show that it is not appropriate. What we must do is: understand its working, its grammar, e.g. see what relation this grammar has to that of the expression “we think with our mouth”, or “we think with a pencil on a piece of paper”.

Perhaps the main reason why we are so strongly inclined to talk of the head as the locality of our thoughts is this: the existence of the words “thinking” and “thought” alongside of the words denoting (bodily) activities, such as writing, speaking, etc., makes us look for an activity, different from these but analogous to them, corresponding to the word “thinking”... (6-7).

Wittgenstein addresses a confusion about how we use the words “thought” and “locality”, and works to clarify those confusions by pointing out how we use these words in different senses in ordinary talk. Moreover we learn lessons by noticing how we err, or how words sometimes lead us astray<sup>24</sup>. Our parallel task is to clarify what counts as thinking by showing that when we think, we have more than an internal monologue: we interact with the world in certain, identifiable ways, and all of that activity, taken together, is what we call thinking. What we call thinking is a bundling of

<sup>24</sup> We will return to this point in more detail in “In The Head” and “Self-Evaluation”.

many activities, often including internal monologue. Learning to identify thoughtful actions is a competence that we develop *in the world*.

That we can call thinking a bundling of activities does not mean that we can just as easily *unbundle* thinking and figure out *what it is*. We might *unbundle* for a particular purpose, but the results of that investigation are tied to its purpose. Again, here, our purpose is to build skills.

For some specific purpose, we might pick out a single aspect of our thinking, such as a report of the words that we use in our internal monologue, and simply call that thinking. We use the word “thinking” and its various synonyms in a wide variety of ways (with different meanings in mind), and the way that we use the word on any given occasion depends upon our purposes. Our purpose here is to show what sorts of activities and practices help to improve particular skills, and so for our purposes, we are interested in far more than reports of words. We are interested in how we improve the process of reporting and how we develop a clear, appealing reporting style. If we conceive of thinking as an activity solely located *in the head* and if we over-emphasize reporting the dialogue that goes on in our heads, then we will overlook practical aspects of thinking that we need to identify and to exercise if we are to sharpen our (philosophical) thinking skills and techniques. These practical matters are often what makes our thinking interesting and important.

As a point of contrast, if we sat in a room looking at each other, silent and blank-faced, with books in front of us, we would not say confidently of one another: “He is thinking about the text”. I might say of you that you are “zoned out”, or that you “have something on your mind” or that you are “distracted”, and so on. But when you ask me for interpretations of the text, when you quiz me on its contents, when you inquire about what I take to be the main themes, and so on, then we are thinking about the text. Our thinking is reaction to one another; it is engagement with one another; it is trying out ideas and developing new ones in conversation.

Thinking, that is, derives its value as a concept from what happens *in the world*<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. PI, 693: “‘When I teach someone the formation of the series .... I surely mean him to write .... at the hundredth place.’ ---Quite right; you mean it. And evidently without necessarily even thinking of it. This shows you how different the grammar of the verb ‘to mean’ is from that of ‘to think’. And nothing is more wrong headed than calling meaning a mental activity! Unless, that is, one is setting out to produce confusion. (It would be possible to speak of an activity of butter when it rises in price, and if no problems are produced by this it is harmless.)”

This stands out because it emphasizes how our purposes affect the significance of what we say, of what we think, of what we expect, of how we follow orders, and so forth.

#### 4. *Improvisation, Innovation & Intention*

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*Where we connect word use and meaning to improvisation, develop a vocabulary to talk about how we recognize useful and novel techniques, and develop our technical use of “get”.*

Follow-up: **13. In The Head**, *where we investigate concerns that often arise when we try to characterize “intentions”, or when we talk about evaluation*

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Sometimes we sharpen our thinking skills by expressing familiar ideas in a variety of ways. For example, a common exercise in improvisational comedy is to have actors perform a given scene as it would play in different genres. Perhaps the given scene is “stranded in a lifeboat”: an instructor might have the actors perform as if they are in a noir film, then have them switch to Shakespearean tragedy, then to madcap comedy, and so forth. The exercise aims to challenge the actors’ skills by making them perform in ways that they ordinarily would not. In doing this, actors discover what works and does not work, or what they are good at doing in improvisational comedy, by inspiring them to try out innovative deliveries of generic material. They improve their improvisational and acting skills through exercises like this.

Philosophers can exercise similarly. Wittgenstein used a variety of expressive styles in his writings: from dialogue to diatribe, he repeated familiar topics and themes in order to show how philosophical topics (problems) arise in a variety of ways during our normal interactions with and thoughts about the world.

Sometimes we come up with innovative ideas by simply re-arranging familiar ones. Wittgenstein’s investigative style includes trying out fresh expressions of familiar ideas, and arranging them in clever ways. With this technique, he generates novel and illuminating exemplifications of apparently intractably complicated phenomena, like meaning,

understanding, sensation, intention, and expectation, to name a few<sup>26</sup>. In this sense, Wittgenstein's arrangement choices are as much part of his works' content as are his word choices, and those who study him should pay attention to this aspect of his works<sup>27</sup>.

Wittgenstein's posthumously published *Remarks On Color* illustrates his careful arrangement choices. The text, by and large, examines the relationships between color and meaning by describing how we learn color-words. The way that we describe the colors of things in the world parallels how we describe the meanings of words in our language. We try things out on the fly. We combine words in new and different ways, and we are able to identify colors that we have never physically seen. We create content in the moment, and we improve our skills at doing this by trying and failing, by trying and succeeding, and, importantly, by developing a sense of what counts as failure and what counts as success.

*Remarks On Color* is broken into three sections, where section I and section III are rearrangements of each other. We might say that Wittgenstein's rearrangement of the material

<sup>26</sup> For example, he suggests that our ability to identify colors that we have not seen --- our ability to describe or to choose between or to compare shades of colors --- is an example of our "thinking", and this is a reasonable topic to investigate philosophically. Cf. PI 383: "We are not analysing a phenomenon (e.g., thought) but a concept (e.g., that of thinking), and therefore the use of a word." He emphasizes our ability to identify colors that we have never seen before, and this sort of identification-ability resembles our competence with improvisation. In both cases, with practice we can get quite good at trying things out --- word combinations, identifications of obscure colors, physical feats, and so forth.

Also, PI 388: "'I don't see anything violet here, but I can shew it you if you give me a paint box.' How can one *know* that one can shew it if ....., in other words, that one can recognize it if one sees it?

"How do I know from my *image*, what the colour really looks like?

"How do I know that I shall be able to do something? that is, that the state I am in now is that of being able to do that thing?"

helps to highlight different aspects of the text's main themes. In particular, he highlights our senses of how colors “fit” together, or of what colors are sort-of this color or sort-of that color, or our ability to pick out particular colors that have only been described to us and that we have never seen.

The ways that we treat colors resembles our treatment of the meanings of words. For example, if someone asks us to pick out “burnt orange” (assuming that we have never heard a color described as “burnt orange”), we can imagine how a sort of “burnt” color and a sort of “orange” color might combine into one color and we can pick out a sample. We can marry the meanings of “burnt” and “orange” instantly. Our ability to combine meanings on-the-spot is an important aspect of our language-competence; it is (perhaps) *the* competence that allows for learning. In any case, our ability to do this is essentially an improvisational skill. Learning to re-form thoughts, ideas, notions and so forth *in the moment* is part of becoming a competent language user, and philosophy is a specific linguistic competence in which we do such things all the time.

To develop a vocabulary is often to learn how this word and that word combine in sensible ways to convey sensible thoughts. Philosophers often paraphrase one another in conversation when they try to make sense of each others' ideas. For example, I might say to my colleague D.: “When someone asks me for the meaning of a word, he is asking me how to use the word correctly in a sentence”.

D. might respond: “Sure, sometimes that's what they want, but sometimes they want you to say why you picked *that* word.”

“You mean its 'significance'?”

We will address similar topics later in a parallel section: “In The Head”.

<sup>27</sup> “Quote and interpret”, in this sense, is often the wrong tool to use to investigate Wittgenstein's works, as it typically pays less attention to the context of a quote --- rather emphasizing the content, as if content and context never mingle.

“Yes, which is certainly *part of* the use of a word. It's more subtle than just a question of grammar.”

“I didn't mean 'use' to be something *grammatical*, unless we include 'sense' and 'significance' in our meaning of 'grammar'.”

“That's more or less how Wittgenstein uses it. He makes it a technical term, so why don't we agree to use it similarly....”

The dialogue could continue with the interlocutors refining their uses of “significance”, “meaning”, and “grammar” until they are readily able to use the terms in sensible, technical ways with one another. They will have combined (or married, or unioned) various uses and meanings of rather mundane words into terms of art. They become competent with a new vocabulary, which they invented through a process akin to improvisation. Philosophers often exercise these sorts of linguistic skills and record their exercises in books or papers --- much as we are doing here. They develop common vocabularies to help make sense of specific philosophical problems.

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Wittgenstein deliberately developed a novel form in his early work. In his biography of Wittgenstein, *The Duty Of Genius*, Ray Monk discusses Wittgenstein's refusal to alter the form of his first work, *The Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, against recommendations that he would need to in order to make it publishable. *The Tractatus* is a brief but notoriously dense, nearly impenetrable series of carefully numbered, terse remarks about such topics as logic, language, ethics, and the world. Monk quotes the reaction to *The Tractatus* of one of Wittgenstein's mentors, Gottlob Frege. Frege was a German philosopher whose work in logic included early development of a “predicate calculus” and formalized proofs, all of which relied on a nuanced view of how language plays a role in such activities. Frege says:

The pleasure of reading your book can therefore no longer be aroused by the content which is already known, but only by the peculiar form given to it by the author. The book thereby becomes an artistic rather than a scientific achievement; what is said in it takes second place to the way in which it is said (Frege quoted in Monk, 174).

Wittgenstein vigorously rejects Frege's suggestion that he break the work into articles or more coherent sections in order to make it more accessible to the reader. To a potential publisher, Wittgenstein states:

It is quite strictly speaking the presentation of a system. And this presentation is *extremely* compressed since I have only retained in it that which really occurred to me --- and how it occurred to me....

The work is strictly philosophical and at the same time literary, but there is no babbling in it (Wittgenstein quoted in Monk, 177).

These exchanges suggest that Wittgenstein was well aware that his work introduced a formal novelty, especially in the field of philosophy, and that its form was part of its content. Altering the form, he apparently thought, would vandalize the content.

Wittgenstein retained a sensitivity to form in his later work as well. Less rigid and systematic, he specifically emphasized the significance of arrangement, though he remained consistently unhappy with the results. Monk reports that upon review of some “theses” that he had dictated: “... Wittgenstein became dissatisfied with their formulation, which he came to regard as sharing the mistaken

dogmatism of the *Tractatus*. Indeed, Wittgenstein was developing a conception of philosophy without any theses at all” (296). Furthermore, regarding Wittgenstein's editing and arranging methods:

Wittgenstein had a peculiarly laborious method of editing his work. He began by writing remarks into small notebooks. He then selected what he considered to be the best of these remarks and wrote them out, perhaps in a different order, into large manuscript volumes. From these he made a further selection, which he dictated to a typist. The resultant typescript was then used as the basis for a further selection, sometimes by cutting it up and rearranging it --- and then the whole process was started again. (Monk, 319).

As with *The Tractatus*, Wittgenstein's now-revised methods resulted in another novel philosophical form, this time without theses, more boldly repetitive, and loaded with examples. He often used real-life, tangible examples to illustrate how philosophical puzzles arise from our ordinary interactions with the world, from following simple orders, from doing simple calculations, from feeling a toothache, and so on. The sorts of examples that he integrated into his work were not of the same nature as those of his contemporaries. Monk notes that “[h]e took his examples, however, not from philosophers but from ordinary speech. And when he quoted from literature, it was not from the great philosophical works, nor from the philosophical journal *Mind*, but from Street & Smith's *Detective Story Magazine*” (Monk, 355). Monk later notes that “the ethos of the hard-boiled detective coincides with Wittgenstein's own: they both, in their different ways, descry the importance of the 'science of logic', exemplified in the one case by [Bertrand Russell's] *Principia Mathematica* and in the other by Sherlock Holmes” (Monk, 423).

Given this background, we can better understand what Wittgenstein aimed to accomplish in his writings. Like the detective, he collected clues to mysteries --- in his case, he wrote remarks aimed to clarify philosophical puzzles --- and he arranged those clues --- those remarks --- so to better understand how he might solve the puzzle at hand. Puzzle-solving, for Wittgenstein, took the form of elimination of problems by learning how philosophical problems often arise out of our illusions about ordinary talk. Ordinary styles of investigation are the appropriate methods or models to deal with such problems.

Detectives eliminate suspects by evaluating alibis and by spinning stories about how the evidence hangs together, often choosing the best explanation as the conclusion to the whodunit. Detectives collect and study clues, reenact crimes, visit scenes, and so forth. Wittgenstein thinks in a similar fashion: he writes and collects versions of ideas, arranges them in what appear to be sensible ways, and considers how ordinary, tangible sentiments develop into intractable, abstract theses and misleadingly general concepts. In doing so, Wittgenstein develops techniques, he improves upon his investigative methods, by noticing what works and what does not work, by noticing what seems to answer a question clearly, what seems to muddle the issue, what seems to assuage a “mental cramp”, and so on.

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Wittgenstein notes in *Philosophical Investigations*:

308. How does the philosophical problem about mental processes and states and about behaviourism arise? -----The first step is the one that altogether escapes notice. We talk of processes and states and leave their nature undecided. Sometime perhaps we shall know more about them --- we think. But that is just what

commits us to a particular way of looking at the matter. For we have a definite concept of what it means to learn to know a process better. (The decisive movement in the conjuring trick has been made, and it was the very one that we thought quite innocent.) --- And now the analogy which was to make us understand our thoughts falls to pieces. So we have to deny the yet un-comprehended process in the yet unexplored medium. And now it looks as if we had denied mental processes. And naturally we don't want to deny them.

309. What is your aim in philosophy? --- To shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle.

Certain philosophical puzzles arise when we talk of “states” and “processes”, or adopt these words as technical terms, without first investigating what states and processes are, or why (and how) we use these words in the first place. (This sort of investigation might look like the dialogue above where D and I develop increasingly technical uses of “meaning”, “significance”, “use”, and “grammar”.)

In philosophy, we sometimes wonder about “mental states”, and we proceed to investigate what it is that makes a “state” “mental”. Wittgenstein recommends that in this case we first need to understand what we call a state. To understand this, we investigate examples of what we call states; we collect examples of our use of the word “state” in action, we arrange those examples or elaborate on those examples in useful ways, and through this exercise, we understand states. (This resembles what we have done here with thinking.)

Through this process of collecting and rearranging clues and evidence, by generating content *on the fly* as it were, our

puzzle about “states” might disappear<sup>28</sup>. The fly-bottle metaphor illustrates the difficulty of *getting* the problem that one faces: the bottle puzzles the fly because the bottle thwarts his normal exit strategy: flying around. If he deviated from his normal path only slightly, and flew up, the bottle would no longer appear to be a trap. To notice this is not to deny that there is a bottle, rather it is recognize what problem the bottle poses. Wittgenstein suggests that we consider puzzles about “states” and such the same way: we do not deny “states” through our investigations. Rather, we often come to better understand what puzzles us in the first place by reviewing the problem differently than we have in the past, and often our puzzle will simply disappear<sup>29</sup>.

An analogy illustrates: I attempt to direct and to record a spoken interpretation of a written script<sup>30</sup>. I picture how it should sound: the inflection, the emphasis, the pacing, and so on. I describe this picture to the speaker. He then reads the script into a microphone in a style that he thinks matches my description. We both have hesitations about the performance. We listen to the recording. We discuss its successes and its failures. I revise my description and he revises his performance in an effort to codify our discussion about the first try. There are *aspects* of the first performance that we want to incorporate into the next, and one measure of success will be whether each of us recognizes similar aspects in subsequent takes.

We record again and the process continues. After many attempts, the reader decides to stand at the microphone rather than to sit, which opens up both his body and his performance, physically and metaphorically. The next performance, we agree, is the best. Success, in this case, relied partly on “standing up”, which was an improvised novelty,

<sup>28</sup> Though it might remain, depending on how we arranged our investigation, which depends on why we began an investigation in the first place.

<sup>29</sup> This theme will recur, especially in “Undoing and Developing Habits”.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. PI, 272ff., esp. 280. Also “In The Head” and “Self-Evaluation” later in this text.

and is now a recognizable technique that we might again successfully employ and even improve upon. It seems plausible that some version of this technique might help us to work through a future performance block.

In this case, the satisfying final product results from cobbling together many successful aspects of various techniques and versions that we tried out. This process is thinking, writ tangibly. Philosophical thinking resembles this case, especially in the non-verbal techniques or habits that contribute to successful performance. Established habits might include having a cup of coffee before starting to write, to read papers aloud in private or to small groups, to pace back and forth while conversing with an imaginary interlocutor, to deliver an official address to a committee, and so forth. Philosophers achieve satisfying results through their individual, peculiar practices of reading, writing, and teaching, and as they recognize and develop successful thinking and learning techniques. And as above, they develop technical vocabularies (much as we are trying to do here).

One develops a spoken delivery of a script by making it one's own, by performing it publicly, over and over, evaluating what works, and thereby developing an identifiable and effective style of delivery. In a clear enough recording, we might even hear the performer's technique: say, for example, that we recorded a musician's performance with a microphone that is sensitive enough to pick up assorted background sounds in the studio. If we listen closely, we might hear the noise of clothing moving, or shuffling sheet music, or we might hear an amplified rendition of the performer's breathing. Perhaps a singer moves his head in a certain way during the performance, and we can detect this by slight but regular variations in his vocal volume: he was nearer or further from the microphone as he danced through his performance.

Just as we can describe and draw inferences about a performer's vocal technique, we can describe and draw inferences about a philosopher's thinking techniques. And in

both cases, we study much more than just words (or content). We study delivery, arrangement, tone, shape, color and so on, and these metaphoric aspects of written performances help us to organize and understand both the content of the performance and the performer's intentions. This is *getting it*. *Getting it* is sometimes to sympathize (or empathize) with a performer's personal rituals, which is often a feeling that we get when we try things out for ourselves, or even imagine or picture ourselves trying, sort of a first-person understanding: "of course", "a ha", and "obviously" also capture aspects of the term. For example, a stage performance is "tortured", "electrifying", "understated", "devastating" depending on how convincingly the actor conveys how we should feel, and how well we respond to his delivery.

*Getting it* is purpose-sensitive. This helps us to avoid problems with *really getting it*. For example, I have not read every word that Wittgenstein ever wrote; I have not lived in Norway --- he did; I cannot whistle concertos --- he could; I have never been a prisoner of war --- he was; etc. Yet, I can still *get* Wittgenstein's method, his intentions, his philosophical sympathies, and so on, because I study his works with a particular purpose in mind. I do not study him in order to *be* him (to *really get* him), but rather to learn lessons from his methodology, to develop a philosophical style of my own, and to develop ways to apply that methodology to address contemporary issues. I learn that *this* concept and *that* concept (meaning and use, perhaps) are connected, and that to talk about that connection is to do philosophy.

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Gilbert Ryle was a contemporary of Wittgenstein and well-known for his "anti-Dualist" position, in which he denies that we should treat "mind" and "body" separately. He suggests that what we call mental phenomena, like thinking, intending, and so forth, are not mysterious, inaccessible phenomena controlled by the mind. Rather, we can describe

thinking, intending, knowing, meaning, and expecting in the same ways that we describe overtly physical actions like throwing, playing, and moving. In his *The Concept Of Mind*, he offers the following relevant observation:

This point, that the capacity to appreciate a performance is one type with the capacity to execute it, illustrates a contention previously argued, namely that intelligent capacities are not single-track dispositions, but are dispositions admitting of a wide variety of more or less dissimilar exercises. It is however necessary to make two provisos. First, the capacity to perform and to appreciate an operation does not necessarily involve the ability to formulate criticisms or lessons. A well-trained sailor boy can both tie complex knots and discern whether someone else is tying them correctly or incorrectly, deftly or clumsily. But he is probably incapable of the difficult task of describing in words how the knots should be tied. And, second, the ability to appreciate a performance does not involve the same degree of competence as the ability to execute it. It does not take genius to recognize genius, and a good dramatic critic may be indifferent as an actor or playwright. There would be no teachers or pupils if the ability to understand operations required complete ability to perform them. Pupils are taught how to do things by people who know better than they how to do them. (Ryle, 56)

To *get* the feeling of a musical composition, to *get* what is funny about a joke, to *get* what a philosopher tries to argue does not require that the student of the composition, the joke, or the argument be as competent as the professional, they need not have the same intentions or competences.

Sometimes “thinking” is overtly physical: we witness and grasp “thinking” when we see a sailor tie a knot, for example. Sure, the task of *describing* how he ties a knot differs from the actual tying; it might even be more difficult, in some sense, as Ryle asserts. But neither activity is more or less *full of thought* than the other. Both tying a knot and writing about tying a knot are complex activities, though in obviously different ways, but both certainly require, or *express*, thoughts. (Consider that both are deliberate actions, and earlier we connected our grasp of deliberate actions, or “deliberation”, with “thinking”.)

What students *get* depends upon their purposes. Some students will listen to a musical performance to pick up hints about how to play a composition better. Other students will listen to the same performance to learn about the structure of musical compositions. Other students will listen to the same performance to learn how to identify the composer's style. And they can all accomplish these tasks without being able themselves to mimic the performance in question, which some might say would be to *really get it*. We can say that students, critics, and observers *get* a performance, a joke, an argument when they react reasonably, when they gasp or guffaw at the right moments, when they recognize the inescapability of a conclusion given some premises, when they exhibit similar qualities in their own performances, jokes or arguments, and so on.

And all of this --- which aspects of a performance we evaluate, how funny we find the joke, how clear the argument --- depends heavily on our human purposes, and our grasping the intentions of the performer. Part of our task as teaching philosophers is to show students how to understand what we say to them, or what they read, or what counts as a valid move in an argument, and so forth.

Sometimes *getting it* manifests itself as appropriate reaction, as in laughing at a joke or keeping a secret. Sometimes *getting it* means to be able to reproduce an action, as in *getting* how to play “legato” on piano. But we do not

always expect that the person who *gets* it can reproduce the action or results that he *gets*. At a comedy show, for example, though the audience *gets* the joke, they are not going to be able to tell the joke like the seasoned comedian. Comedy is not for amateurs<sup>31</sup>.

Similarly, we do not expect that a novice philosophy student will be able to produce a major work, or write a bound-to-be-classic paper. Yet we reasonably expect that the novice student will understand what it is like to answer philosophical questions, and what sorts of questions we would call “philosophical”. We reasonably expect that the student sharpens his skills sufficiently to at least express a few insights into the topic at hand; we expect that the student can express what he understands. We also expect that students learn how to practice the activity that they are working on and what sorts of techniques might improve their performances.

Students and professionals alike sharpen their skills by trying new deliveries and arrangements of familiar material. The actor who can extract a laugh and a tear from the same dialogue is an obviously skilled and well-practiced performer. The philosopher whose examples and prose, upon re-arrangement, highlight a wide range of aspects of a puzzle is a well-practiced writer and communicator and thinker. The actor's and the philosopher's intentions are metaphorically written in their performances. They sharpen their skills by trying things out and by practicing at the limits of those skills.

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<sup>31</sup> This use of “get” is a good example of the technical distinction I would like to make from “understanding”.

## 5. Practice & Constraints

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*Where we consider the significance of the environment in which we practice our skills, which might include the limitations of written instruction (such as with sheet music), or limitations of the activity that we practice (such as the motions necessary to propel a bicycle). This starts to suggest how we might understand the significance and limitations of our technical use of the word “concept”.*

*Follow-up: 12. **Learning To Perceive**, where we examine the relationships between learning to observe a new activity, improving one’s own skills with that activity, and coming to understand the activity’s standards.*

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To learn piano, we get used to doing things with our hands that we do not ordinarily do, and at the same time, we learn to listen to music in new ways. Learning piano is like picking up a complicated habit: warming up, sitting in a particular position, keeping the wrists raised, and so on are all aspects of piano playing that are not themselves what we would call “playing piano”. But they are *aspects* of piano playing that we sometimes emphasize when we *practice* piano. We perform certain actions, like pressing keys or looking at sheet music, and counting out beats or humming vocal lines. But these movements, behaviors and words are not, taken by themselves, “playing piano”. We practice specific *aspects* of piano playing, but “playing piano” comprises more than what we practice.

Piano-playing movements usually happen in an easily identifiable context. If we saw someone typing on a typewriter with his wrists raised like a pianist, we would not say that the typist is both typing and practicing piano, unless other considerations made sense of that characterization; he might hum a particular note every time he hits a particular letter

and we might recognize that the notes he hums correspond to the location of the keys on a piano keyboard. We might recognize in his piano-player-like behavior that he is trying out a melody or practicing a song, albeit in what we think is a strange way. Under normal circumstances, we easily distinguish typing from playing piano, even though both activities involve similar finger motions.

When a piano player intends to improve his skills, his practicing is not simply habitual behavior. We improve a skill when we operate at our limits and when we push ourselves to do better than ever. We struggle with our limitations, or sometimes we relax our ways out of a mental slump. We learn to operate effectively within an activity's constraints. We try techniques that we have never tried before. We experiment. Again, examples illustrate these metaphors.

A grade one piano text guides students by extending their limits through training and by trying novel exercises. First the text and the teacher show students such things as simple finger exercises, scales, and chords. In early lessons, students learn to read notes, to recognize intervals both by sight and by ear, to understand basic chord structure, and so on. Each new lesson introduces an idea or a technique that lies just outside of the student's competence. Each lesson offers the student a new skill, be it practical or theoretical.

The first few exercises in an introductory piano book might involve working on posture, warming up the hands and fingers, and showing what shape the finger should have when striking a key. Then, the text might show what lettered notes correspond to each key, which is the beginning of the student's preparations for reading music. Perhaps then a few bars of music show how to warm up one hand, then the next, demonstrating the connection between sheet music and which keys to press on the keyboard. Then, the text challenges the student to play a simple song; the "Ode to Joy" is a popular first exercise. In this case, the challenge is to move the fingers in a way that is slightly more complicated than a basic warm-up exercise; the text challenges the student to *try something*

*new*. Exercises like this continue, each introducing an aspect of playing piano that the student has not yet done: playing simple chords, playing notes of different lengths with different hands, learning expressive aspects of playing legato, demonstrating intervals, which the student will later apply to theoretical exercises, and so on. Exercises like these introduce the student to new aspects of playing and at the same time teach the student how to practice, how to read sheet music, the significance of sheet music, and a host of other basic skills. And all of this counts as “playing piano”, even though it is a learning exercise.

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When I practice piano, I have sheet music from which to work. The sheet music suggests how I should move my fingers around the keyboard and provides helpful hints about how the performance should sound. It does not, however, completely dictate how the performance should sound; sheet music is a suggestion of how to interpret the written form of a sonic idea back into a sonic performance. Sheet music is a guide that musicians interpret in (or into) their performances, but it also provides constraints on what counts as a performance of *this* piece. Sheet music is a *standard*.

In philosophy, and in writing in general, sensible sentence structure, length requirements and relevant topics constrain our work. For example, we do not write philosophical treatises on baking cookies, but logic or debating techniques are perfectly acceptable topics. Also, this text is too long for a seminar paper or a journal article, but too untested (and perhaps too short) to be a seminal or defining work. We *get* this from exposure to a wide variety of activities and writings that we call philosophy. Importantly, within these given constraints of structure, topics and themes, length requirements and so forth, there is room for limitless variety.

This is not to say that philosophical treatises will never include cake recipes, for example. Rather, that sort of formal novelty would alter the perceived constraints of a philosophical treatise, and in order to achieve this, one must talk *about* philosophical treatises while writing one, or at least the philosopher will need to show continuity between his novel activity and the more familiar method. As an historic example: the move from the penny farthing to the safety bicycle marked a fundamental change in how we thought of two-wheeled, human powered transportation, its perceived constraints, possible uses and so forth changed along with this formal change. The safety bicycle was a radical change from the tall-wheeled bicycle, but it was, at the same time, a fathomable change. Philosophy, literature, and art have seen similar changes over generations: from Nietzsche to James Joyce to Picasso, pushing of long-standing formal limits resulted in useful alterations of how we perceive their respective disciplines<sup>32</sup>.

Plato's dialogues, Aristotle's treatises, Descartes' meditations, Kant's critiques, Wittgenstein's investigations: we might say that these were born of intense practice, or through deliberate writing rituals. Yet, though their forms differ dramatically and in innumerable ways, they are all uncontroversially philosophical works. None pauses to share cooking recipes or to develop character motivations or plot devices or to advertise a professional service.

Ryle offers insights into the relationship between style and constraints when he addresses a philosophical position called mechanism. Roughly stated: given a state of affairs and a set of rules, we can predict future states of affairs, including human behavior. As a parallel case, the rules of a game, he argues, do not force a player's hands. The rules show us what moves are possible but not which will happen. He uses chess as an extended illustration:

<sup>32</sup> The point of this digression is neither to overstate the case, nor to start a new discussion in this work. Rather, this is merely to point out that our story arc, is a reasonable, if not familiar one. (Cf. Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and Paul Feyerabend's *Against Method*.)

An illustration may elucidate this point. A scientifically trained spectator, who is not acquainted with chess or any other game, is permitted to look at a chessboard in the intervals between the moves. He does not yet see the players making the moves. After a time he begins to notice certain regularities. The pieces known to us as 'pawns', normally move only one square at a time and then only forwards, save in a certain special circumstance when they move diagonally. The pieces known to us as 'bishops' only move diagonally, though they can move any number of squares at a time. Knights always make dog-legged moves. And so on. After much research this spectator will have worked out all the rules of chess, and he is then allowed to see that the moves of the pieces are made by people whom we know as 'players'. He commiserates with them upon their bondage. "Every move that you make", he says, "is governed by unbreakable rules; from the moment that one of you puts his hand on a pawn, the move that he will make with it is, in most cases, accurately predictable. The whole course of what you tragically dub your 'game' is remorselessly pre-ordained; nothing in it takes place which cannot be shown to be governed by one or other of the iron rules. Heartless necessity dictates the play, leaving no room in it for intelligence or purpose. True, I am not yet competent to explain every move that I witness by the rules that I have so far discovered. But it would be unscientific to suppose that there are inexplicable moves. There must therefore be further rules, which I hope to discover and which will satisfactorily complete the explanations which I have inaugurated." The players, of course, laugh and explain to him that

though every move is governed, not one of them is ordained by the rules. “True, given that I start to move my bishop, you can predict with certainty that it will end on a square of the same colour as that from which it started. That can be deduced from the rules. But that, or how far, I shall move my bishop at this stage of the game is not stated in, or deducible from, the rules. There is plenty of room for us to display cleverness and stupidity and to exercise deliberation and choice. Though nothing happens that is irregular, plenty happens that is surprising, ingenious and silly. The rules are the same for all the games of chess that have ever been played, yet nearly every game that has ever been played has taken a course for which the players can recall no close parallels. The rules are unalterable, but the games are not uniform. The rules prescribe what the players may not do; everything else is permitted, though many moves that are permitted would be bad tactics” (Ryle, 76-7).

Though Ryle intends to clarify what he considers a troubling aspect of mechanism, that it cannot account for variety and nuance within codified constraints, the point applies as well here. We could, for example, teach a piano student all of the rules for which keys to press when reading from standardly notated sheet music. We will be able to predict which note the student will hit next, assuming that he does not make an error. We will be able to predict whether the next note will be as loud as the previous note, whether its duration will be shorter or longer, whether the performer will depress a pedal, etc. Yet, though we can predict these things in every performance of the piece, any two given performances will be entirely distinguishable to the trained and attentive ear. In practice, then, we learn what constrains our performances, such as the tones available on the piano, or the physical

possibility of reaching this and that note, and we learn what freedoms we can express within those constraints. This suggests something about what we call “style”: as we become more familiar with our own capabilities within a given context, we develop a style through trying things out --- through practicing. We make an activity our own.

We can teach the philosophy student rules of logic, argument and rhetoric, the sorts of words and phrases that philosophers tend to use: “just in case”, “there is a sense in which”, “it could be argued that”, “we can distinguish between”, “on this interpretation”, “reason”, “theory”, “conception”, “discourse”, “articulation”. And yet variety in philosophical writing persists. If we assign a single paper topic to a hundred students, we will receive, barring plagiarism, a hundred different papers. The papers will be predictable, but different in unpredictable ways. Yet over time, through much practice, by producing numerous versions of the same ideas, philosophers develop identifiable styles. They develop their peculiar ways of stating their cases, making their points, or trying to convince their readers of a position or a conclusion.

These examples make tangible an otherwise intangible aspect of philosophical investigation. The philosopher has neither a written nor a visual representation of an idea to perform nor mechanical constraints, like the cyclist. At best, we might say that he is constrained by the need for subjects and verbs, familiar sentence structures, and so forth. If the philosopher wants to learn which expressions best make his point, which expressions his audience *gets* or even understands, he must practice those expressions diligently, often, and in a variety of ways. He might try different verbs, simpler sentence structures, or perhaps more complex, different arrangements of the same ideas, re-expressions of his thesis or of his conclusion, and so on.

A skilled philosopher has learned more than just esoteric technical terms, or the rules of logic, or familiar arguments in a particular sub-literature. The skilled philosopher knows how to operate within constraints, which is to say to create within

constraints. We might say of a musician: she does not simply play from sheet music; she performs compositions. The especially skilled musician develops subtle playing techniques, and audiences can identify her delivery. Similarly, the philosopher is a subtly skilled verbal performer, well practiced in the arts of argument and explanation.

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Sometimes, we recognize subtleties in what we do when we lean hard against distinctions between seemingly similar processes. For our purposes, we can recognize usually-overlooked aspects of our writing skills if we develop a crisp distinction between “drafts” and “versions”, or to put the point in verb-form: between drafting and versioning. Of course, we do not want to take this admittedly-artificial distinction too far: we make this distinction here for a particular purpose, and that purpose is to say something *about* our purposes when we work with words, which is to make a point about our writing methods. We will call all the same activities writing or telling or conversing or recording or transcribing or relating under different circumstances, when subtle distinctions between drafts and versions seem superfluous.

When we write a draft, we work with a single arrangement of specific ideas. We revise our prose. We clarify unclear points. We might add a paragraph here and there, or remove redundancy, but the basic form of our work remains intact.

When we write a version, we try out different arrangements of similar ideas. Perhaps we experiment with arrangements because in the past we developed novel interpretations of texts and ideas by doing so, or we found that re-expressing what appears to be the same idea helps us to develop new ideas. The comedian tells the same joke in different ways, perhaps with different setups to the same punch line, in order to sharpen his delivery skills, or to make

the joke funnier. When we “version”, we aim to express the same themes or concepts or ideas as in previous attempts, but we alter our presentation's structure, or style, or vocabulary. We purposefully push our ideas in different directions than in previous versions, and we accept that by working on future versions similarly, we will achieve similar results.

When we work on drafts, we attend to aspects of our writing to which we do not attend (at least not as fervently) when we work on versions of similar themes and ideas. To work on a draft is to attend to grammar and spelling and paragraphing. To work on a version is to attend to style, structure, and vocabulary; it is to question assumptions that we might have made; it is to alter our prose style in an effort to alter an audience's reaction to our text; it is to start the project over if necessary, and so on. When trying out versions of ideas, we might reject anything that we have produced. When drafting, we expect that the content of the work will remain relatively intact, and so we simply aim to clean up a particular version of our work.

Distinguishing between drafting and versioning clarifies our attitudes toward the products of our writing activities. When drafting, we do not look to alter the content, the ideas or the concepts, of our writing significantly; we look to clean up the prose. When versioning, we look to evaluate the content for changes; we challenge our content more vigorously than when drafting.

Making this distinction is an exercise, and fleshing out the distinction will help us get a better handle on the method we are developing here.

The distinction serves at least two purposes. First, the point of this text is to say something *about* a philosophical method, specifically to show how ordinary vocabulary *becomes* technical vocabulary under special circumstances. In this case, we need to talk about the process of writing, which is to say collecting words into coherent sentences, figuring out how to say this or that more clearly. Put simply, we work on a skill.

We improve skills as we learn to distinguish good performances from poor ones (particularly our own, in the case of writing), and our competence at making this kind of distinction depends on our sharing criteria for what counts as good and what counts as poor. Why make “draft” and “version” into technical terms? Because the act of making them into technical terms is an example of our method. Philosophers must learn to use ordinary words in special ways, and so must we.

Second, the distinction itself is a useful one for writers to make. It helps us say something about our purposes when we write. Earlier we said that philosophical writing isn't just any writing, but even among activities we call “philosophical writing” our different purposes affect how we go about our business. “Drafting” and “versioning” are two ways to describe what might appear to be the same activity, namely “writing”. Our learning to employ these words in a more nuanced way than usual helps us better understand the philosophical method under investigation here.

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An example from Ryle, where he teases out the nuances of following a tune, helps to clarify how drafting and versioning apply to our task here. From his essay “Sensation and Observation”:

Let us consider a slightly different situation in which a person would be described as not merely hearing something, and not merely listening to something, and not merely trying to make out what he was hearing, but as identifying or recognising what he heard, namely the case of a person who recognises a tune. For this situation to obtain, there must be notes played in his hearing, so he must not be deaf, or anaesthetised, or fast asleep. Recognising what he hears entails hearing.

It also entails heeding; the absent-minded or distracted man is not following the tune. But more than this, he must have met this tune before; and he must not only have met it, but also have learned it and not forgotten it. If he did not in this sense already know the tune, he could not be said to recognise it on listening to it now.

What then is it for a person to know a tune, that is to have learned and not forgotten it? It certainly does not entail his being able to tell its name, for it may have no name; and even if he gave it the wrong name, he might still be said to know the tune. Nor does it entail his being able to describe the tune in words, or write it out in musical notation, for few of us could do that, though most of us can recognise tunes. He need not even be able to hum or whistle the tune, though if he can do so, he certainly knows the tune; and if he can hum or whistle plenty of other tunes, but cannot produce this one, even when prompted, we suspect that he does not know this tune. To describe him as knowing the tune is at the least to say that he is capable of recognising it, when he hears it; and he will be said to recognise it, when he hears it, if he does any, some or all of the following things: if, after hearing a bar or two, he expects those bars to follow which do follow; if he does not erroneously expect the previous bars to be repeated; if he detects omissions or errors in the performance; if, after the music has been switched off for a few moments, he expects it to resume about where it does resume; if, when several people are whistling different tunes, he can pick out who is whistling this tune; if he can beat time correctly; if he can accompany it by whistling or humming it in time and tune, and so on indefinitely. And when we speak of him expecting

the notes which are due to follow and not expecting notes or bars which are not to follow, we do not require that he be actually thinking ahead. Given that he is surprised, scornful or amused, if the due notes and bars do not come at their due times, then it is true to say that he was expecting them, even though it is false to say that he went through any processes of anticipating them.

In short, he is now recognizing or following the tune, if, knowing how it goes, he is now using that knowledge; and he uses that knowledge not just by hearing the tune, but by hearing it in a special frame of mind, the frame of mind of being ready to hear both what he is now hearing and what he will hear, or would be about to hear, if the pianist continues playing it and is playing it correctly. He knows how it goes and he now hears the notes as the progress of that tune. He hears them according to the recipe of the tune, in the sense that what he hears is what he is listening for. Yet the complexity of this description of him as both hearing the notes, as they come, and listening for, or being ready for, the notes that do, and the notes that should, come does not imply that his is going through a complex of operations. He need not, for example, be coupling with his hearing of the notes any silent or murmured prose-moves, or 'subsuming' what he hears 'under the concept of the tune'. Indeed, if he were told to think the thought of 'Lillibullero' without producing, imagining or actually listening to the tune itself, he would say that there was nothing left for him to think; and if he were told that the fact that he could recognise the tune, even though played in various ways in various situations, meant that he had a Concept, or Abstract Idea, of the tune, he would properly object that he could not think what

it would be like to be considering or applying the Abstract Idea of 'Lillibullero', unless this meant merely that he could recognise the tune, when he heard it, detect mistakes and omissions in it, hum snatches of it, and so on.

This enables us to reconsider what was said earlier, namely, that a person who recognises what he hears is not only having auditory sensations, but is also thinking. It is not true that such a person following a familiar tune need be thinking thoughts such that there must be an answer to the question, 'What thoughts has he been thinking?' or even 'What general concepts has he been applying?' It is not true that he must have been pondering or declaring propositions to himself, or to the company, in English, or French; and it is not true that he must have been marshaling any visual or auditory images. What is true is that he must have been in some degree vigilant, and the notes that he heard must have fallen as he expected them to fall, or shocked him by not doing so. He was neither merely listening, as one might listen to an unfamiliar air, nor yet was he necessarily coupling his listening with some other process; he was just listening according to the recipe.

Ryle rightly emphasizes recognition, and makes clear that recognition and what I am calling style are closely related. Again: "He need not, for example, be coupling with his hearing of the notes any silent or murmured prose-moves, or 'subsuming' what he hears 'under the concept of the tune'. Indeed, if he were told to think the thought of 'Lillibullero' without producing, imagining or actually listening to the tune itself, he would say that there was nothing left for him to think...." There is no thinking about a tune without thinking of a particular expression of that tune; to think of the tune is to express the tune. Though we might not have heard this

version of the song or the joke or the idea in the past, we easily recognize it for what it is. We might say that version is to tune as draft is to performance.

One might say that, armed with the sheet music, a listener can grasp the unexpressed tune. But the sheet music is a list of rules or of constraints on the performance: a set of guidelines that show how a musician should operate her instrument.

Knowing a concept is like being able to recognize a tune as a particular tune, or consciously working on a draft of a particular version of an idea. We *know* the idea and we can get better at expressing it in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. We sensitize ourselves to situations and to purposes.

To understand a particular song is to be able to perform it in different styles, or to be able to recognize it when it is played in different styles, or to be able to pick a particular sonic pattern out of noises *in the world*. To “get the concept” of a philosophical term is often to be able to use that term in a wide variety of ways --- sometimes to be able to use the adverbial form of a verb in ways that we all understand, for example: mean / meaningfully, philosophize / philosophically, argue / argumentatively. Sometimes “getting the concept” manifests itself in our ability to explain the terms to a neophyte --- which is essentially to re-learn the term, or to express what it means in a *learnable* way. All of this implies that as we learn a concept, we learn what makes it recognizable in some medium. We might recognize the same tune in an orchestral performance and in the notes whistled while one works. Similarly, how philosophers employ terms of art, like “meaning”, “concept”, “method”, and so forth, differs from, yet is deeply connected to, how those same words fit into everyday talk. To show *how* everyday talk evolves into technical talk is a philosophical project, and the way that we undertake this project here illustrates a philosophical, investigative method.

This discussion begins to suggest how we use the word “concept”. As a counterpoint, sheet music does not represent

“the concept” of a tune any more or less than a particular performance does. It does so in a different way. “Having the concept” of a tune, as Ryle puts it, involves the ability to follow the tune, or to recognize a performance of the tune, or sometimes to play the tune, and so on. But *that* we might say “she has a concept of the tune” does not imply that there is a general *thing* called a concept that we can or should or need to investigate<sup>33</sup>. Sometimes it simply implies that she is prepared to take action. Again, we only make a statement like “she gets the concept” under circumstances when it makes sense to invoke something like “concept” or “getting”; sometimes it will be more appropriate to simply say “she played it right”, or “I recognized what she played”, or “she plays with a lot of feeling”. One must be careful not to assume that when something like a “concept” is under investigation, it immediately follows that the investigation is about a *thing*. Often our circumstances and purposes, especially in this text, suggest that we are better served by investigating actions.

We can all likely agree that the listener *thinks* as she listens. Of course, nothing stops us from saying “she gets the concept”, as when perhaps a musician plays a particularly pleasing rendition of a piece. Our task is to remain clear about the implications and applications of such a statement, which is to remain attentive to the context in which we say such things. To reiterate from Ryle: “This enables us to reconsider what was said earlier, namely, that a person who recognises what he hears is not only having auditory sensations, but is also thinking.” Ryle suggests that the listener's capacity to recognize this performance as a version of the tune, to hum bits of it, to detect errors in the performance, to expect certain notes to follow one another, to be surprised if they do not, to recognize when the performance has ended, and so on, are thoughtful events and experiences, and they are connected to “getting a concept”. We might treat the listener's complex behaviors, expectations, recognitions, etc. as a unified activity, and we can call that activity “thinking”.

<sup>33</sup> Again, *Cf.* PI, 291, 132 and related discussions in the section “Thinking”.

Of the same behavior, we might say: “she gets it,” or “she has the concept,” etc<sup>34</sup>.

None of this asserts that we cannot talk about concepts. The task here is to clarify, not to restrict. Moreover, to say that we cannot talk about concepts would be as absurd as saying that we cannot talk about jokes or songs. We can easily ask the comedian to tell the one about the purposeful chicken's trip across the asphalt, and he will not be puzzled about what we expect to hear. There is no denying that, in this sense, there are jokes. But were we to root around looking for a thing that is the joke, or a perfectly clear, canonical formulation of the joke, we will not find it in the way we look for a missing sock (search for a thing) or how we try out bicycles until we find one that suits our tastes (search for a feeling).

Certainly we can talk about and make sense of things like “meaning”, “morality”, “free will” and so forth, but we go astray, usually using inappropriate investigative methods, if we aim to discover a thing that *is* meaning, or a singular description of what we deem moral (good) behavior. Wittgenstein's favored philosophical method, to try out arrangements of examples, is something like a comedian's method: they tell jokes over and over in various venues until their delivery achieves the desired effect on most of the audience, until most people seem to *get it*. Wittgenstein observes and reports --- gives examples --- and arranges his observations in ways that highlight certain aspects of those examples, aspects that show what often interests us about philosophical puzzles.

To use Wittgenstein's methods, and the sort of derivative method that I advocate here, to investigate “meaning”, “morality”, “intention”, “thinking”, and so forth, we do not start with the concept-word then try to figure out what the concept *is*. Moreover, only under special circumstances would

<sup>34</sup> Doing this suits our purposes here since the task is to show the relationships between philosophy and thinking and concepts, and moreover to show that all are hands on activities. We think and philosophize in the world. We will revisit this theme again in “Self-Evaluation”.

anyone interest themselves in what something like “meaning” is, and often these include doing philosophy or teaching. Under those circumstances, the method recommended by Wittgenstein --- recommended only through the fact that he used it --- is to *relearn* the concept. He recommends, by example, that we come to understand what a concept is by coming to understand how we learned the word in the first place, or how we would teach the word, or what effects the word has when we use it, and so on. Philosophy, on this model, is a process of creative construction rather than a process of clever deconstruction. We *get* a concept by recognizing how the concept-word works *in the world*.

## 6. Getting It

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*Where we investigate some of the subtleties of learning to use new words, and how this influences the way that we pay attention to “aspects” of what we learn. This starts to suggest how we might understand our technical use of the word “intention”.*

*Follow-up: 11. **Getting Style**, where we investigate the impact that context has on “going on together”.*

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There are no jokes. There are only versions of jokes.

One might object: there is “Why did the chicken cross the road?” And there is the obvious answer, “to get to the other side”. One could claim that these words, in this order, *are* the joke. Perhaps we can call these words, in this order, the canonical formulation of the joke, yet we must say the words, or write them or tell them before we can call them *the* joke.

The barest formulation of the joke might be as follows:

Q: Why did the chicken cross the road?

A: To get to the other side.

But even this, even just the typewritten words, with no mention of our intending them to be a joke, is not devoid of expressive power, for the words appear in the flow of this essay, where I have made it sufficiently clear that jokes are at issue, not examples of questions and answers. Furthermore, there is more on the page than just the words or the joke. There is, in this case, my having chosen to indent the words that *are* the joke, so to make the words stand out from the rest of the essay in a particular way. I assume that the reader grasps that the two indented lines are the joke. I assume that the reader, if asked to tell the joke about the purposeful chicken, would not start with: “The barest formulation of the

joke might be as follows: ....” Then say the letter “Q”, ask the question, unflinchingly say the letter “A”, then state the obvious answer without pausing. One might even say that a better written version of the joke would include stage direction:

Why did the chicken cross the road?  
{Dramatic pause}  
{Incredulously} To get to the other side.

Still we might have to tell the reader that we mean the words surrounded by set braces to be direction, so you do not say those words when you tell the joke. Or furthermore, no matter how well the joke teller delivers the joke, it will not always be funny to an audience, depending on the circumstances under which the teller does his telling. For example, if a comedian bursts into a courtroom, interrupts the proceedings with a perfect delivery of the purposeful chicken joke, then casually wanders off, the judge and jurors will likely feel more disoriented than amused.

To complicate the matter, a reader will read the words with his or her own peculiar style. No two readers' internal voices will be exactly the same. The reader reads with a style just as the writer writes with a style and just as the comedian delivers his jokes with his own style. There is no expression, to oneself, in public, in writing, and so on, without expressive style.

The way that someone tells the joke, and even *who* tells the joke, influences whether it comes off as funny. For example, a monotone machine-rendering of the chicken joke, made audible through, say, a computer speaker, wouldn't likely be funny<sup>35</sup>. But a clever comedian might work this kind of delivery into his act, perhaps mocking a humorless person's utter lack of joke-telling prowess. But then if the comedian

<sup>35</sup> Of course, it *could* be funny under some circumstances. But more likely than not, we would end up laughing at the odd delivery more than at the joke itself.

continued to speak *only* in monotone, we would likely find the act tedious in short order.

Symmetric with expression is reception. In the case of one person laughing at a joke and another person failing to perceive the humor in the same expression, they receive the same expression differently and so they react differently. Sense of humor is a receptive competence as well as an expressive one. And there is a lot more involved in “getting it” than just hearing and knowing the words.

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We learn how to *use* words --- that is, we learn their meanings --- by doing things with them. In philosophy, we learn words by writing, debating, and explaining with them. Sometimes we explain the meaning of a word by using other related words in relevant ways: we might say that the meaning of “ethics” is “the study of the rightness and wrongness of actions”. Or we might say that the meaning of “logic” is “the study of argumentative form and the principles of inference”. And for particular purposes, these other-word definitions might suffice. But when we learn the discipline, as opposed to when we explain the discipline, we learn the words *in action*. We learn logic by doing logic: by working through proofs and determining the valid structures of arguments. We learn ethics by analyzing and evaluating specific situations and generalizing about the decisions and reasoning that inform human behavior. These are all necessarily vague points and suggestions: the upshot is that we often *get* the meanings of words by putting words to use.

An example of learning a word by putting it to use illustrates the point. My piano teacher tells me to play this stanza *piano*. But I only know the word “piano” as a noun. “Piano” is also an adverb indicating a manner of play: “In a soft or quiet way.” To explain, my teacher points to the script “p” above the staff, plays a few measures prior to the mark loudly, then plays quietly when he plays the notes that follow

the “p”. He tells me: “See, that's how to play piano.” How might we evaluate whether I understand what my instructor showed me about playing “piano”: “in a soft or quiet way”? In this case, context will make all the difference.

My instructor could later quiz me by asking “What does it mean to play *piano*?” Out of the context of learning how to play in a soft or quiet way, I might answer, “To press the keys of *this* instrument, in which hammers strike taut strings.” My answer might not address the sense of “piano” in which the instructor was interested, but I am correct, in some sense. He might contextualize his question: “I meant to ask you for an adverbial sense of 'piano', the way that I taught you to play at the previous lesson.” The instructor noticed that we were not *going on together*; I did not understand what he asked in this case. But that does not mean that I was unable to understand what he asked at all; I needed a nudge to point me in the right direction. After he puts his question in context and I revise my answer, my answer might meet his expectations. My answer might include playing a few notes in the way that he taught me in order to demonstrate that I actually can play *piano*, or I might simply say the words he used to describe “piano”, “in a soft or quiet way”. Saying and playing might both be legitimate answers to my instructor's question.

But what if every time I saw a script “p” above a measure of music I played the same notes that I played the first time my teacher showed me how to play *piano*? That is, what if I misunderstood the connection between his demonstration (on the piano) and his description (in words); what if I thought he meant that to play piano one plays *these* notes in a soft or quiet way? Then does my performance of these same notes every time I see a script “p” demonstrate that I misunderstood the adverbial sense of the word “piano”, or that I misunderstood how to use the word, or that I misunderstood its meaning, or that I misunderstood my instructor's instruction?

What if, by coincidence, the next time I saw the script “p” above a measure of music, the measure contained the

same notes as the first measure I played with a script “p” above it, but the notes were of different lengths? Say I played the measure exactly as the first measure I had seen and in a soft and quiet way. My teacher stops me and says, “No, that's not correct”. So I repeat the same differently-timed notes but even quieter. He repeats, “No no! Not even quieter. These are all quarter notes. You are holding the first note too long.” --- “But this is what you taught me to play when I see script 'p'.”

Is it that I cannot read sheet music? Is it that I do not understand the significance of the script “p”? Is it that I heard a tune in my head and accidentally played that? How might we characterize my misunderstanding? Compare: how might we characterize the understanding that we call *getting it*?

Perhaps the problem with my performance is that, though I performed as I intended, my intentions did not meet my teacher's expectations. I had not learned the lesson that he expected me to learn, and that became evident through my performance, in as much as my performance is an expression of what I intend to play.

My teacher evaluates whether I understand what he meant by “playing piano” by having me try out his instructions. At the same time, I am able to better understand his instructions by trying them out and listening to his criticisms and suggestions for improvement. I get a better sense of what he originally meant when I use or try his instructions in different ways<sup>36</sup>.

When it is clear that I do not get the point, he will demonstrate again: “Play it like *this*” he says, emphasizing the word “this” just as he hits the notes that I have not been playing correctly. I notice the differences in the sounds of his

<sup>36</sup> Cf. PI, 692:

“Is it correct to say: 'When I gave you this rule, I meant you to ..... in this case'? Even if he did not think of this case at all as he gave the rule? Of course it is correct. For 'to mean it' did not mean: to think of it. But now the problem is: how are we to judge whether someone meant such-and-such? ---The fact that he has, for example, mastered a particular technique in arithmetic and algebra, and that he taught someone else the expansion of a series in the usual way, is such a criterion.”

and my performances. I watch how his hands move around the keyboard and I notice how he raises his wrists slightly when he plays softly, perhaps I should try an exaggerated version of his technique. I do, and a few tries later, it works. I do it again a few more times in a row and we both agree that I *get it. We go on together.*

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Upon reflection we recognize how complicated it is to talk about getting the meaning of a word, or the point of an essay or a painting, or how to play a song on piano, and so on. Depending on the circumstances or the activity, getting might involve verbal skills, performance skills, or appropriate behaviors and reactions. Our evaluation of whether someone gets our point, our joke, our instructions, etc. is equally complicated.

Doing philosophy often involves reflecting on what goes without saying in ordinary activities, like deciding whether to tell the cashier that he gave us too much change, or whether to stop to help a stranded bicyclist fix a flat tire, or whether to read for class instead of joining friends at dinner, or telling a white lie to protect a friend's secret. In these cases, we usually just do what comes naturally; in philosophy, we labor to talk about what *just doing* amounts to and why it seems so natural.

When we engage in everyday activities we do not think about foundations, or grounds, or rules, or why we do what we do. Usually, *reasons* are not part of the activities that we explain, partly because explanation and reasoning are discursive things, reflective in a way that doing need not be. Explanation is something like a report of reflections about what we do or what we observe, and so we typically only explain things when talking about an activity serves some purpose: teaching, learning, and philosophical investigation are often that purpose.

For instance, when we ride a bicycle, under normal conditions, we do not think about or pay specific attention to

things like balance or pedaling or turning. Indeed, sometimes a codified rule or a stated technique seems intuitively wrong. For example, to turn left on a bicycle, the rider should press on the left side of the handlebars. This rule puzzles many new riders until they try it; it turns out that riders best control their turns by leaning, and “pressing” makes a rider lean the correct way.

In most cases, successful riding is non-reflective riding, but we might start to think about what specific skills we can identify when someone asks us “how do you do that?” Or if we are racing and falling behind, we might wonder to ourselves, “how can I catch up?” Or near the end of a long ride, as we fatigue our form suffers and we focus on improving the efficiency of our pedaling stroke and our posture. But in most cases, at most times when on a bicycle, there is simply riding, and simple riding does not depend on anything that we might think about in the exotic cases, like teaching or racing or enduring.

Giving reasons resembles giving meanings. “Meaning” is of no interest in the course of most activities. Questions about a word's meaning tend to arise when communication starts to fail, or when it makes sense to question someone's competence, and so forth. Only upon reflection is there any *thing* called meaning, and reflection only arises amid confusion or puzzlement or wonder. In our normal interactions with the world, however, we are rarely confused, puzzled or otherwise rapt in wide-eyed wonder. Reasons and reflection are rare events in life, but common events in philosophy. The danger, particularly for philosophers, is to import the common-ness of philosophical questions within the discipline into regular interactions with the world.

Said similarly: philosophers often forget how easily we sometimes solve ordinary, “worldly” problems. If I do not seem to follow my piano instructor's point when he asks me to play “piano” in a soft or quiet way, rephrasing or contextualizing his question is simple: “No, I'm not asking about the noun 'piano' ...” etc. In this case, we might say that

the *meaning* of “piano” was of interest. But notice how briefly “meaning” was at issue, and how easily my confusion was resolved<sup>37</sup>. Some philosophers might consider examples such as this as illustrative of our need to develop clearer language, or a need to investigate the very nature of what we call “meaning”, perhaps in an effort to remove future, similar confusions between teacher and student. While something like “theory of meaning” might show us an effective technique for such avoidance under certain circumstances, that technique will be one among many resolution strategies. Often, however, ordinary strategies like rephrasing, contextualizing, or physical demonstration will work just as well at clearing up confusions. Our competence at knowing which technique will work best is the sort of competence that we exercise in philosophy all the time. We try this and that technique, and upon reflection, we identify which techniques work best in which situations. Enhancing our methodological repertoire, then, builds our philosophical, investigative skills.

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Wittgenstein shows the sources of philosophical confusions by allowing philosophical puzzles, notions, concepts, etc. to arise through ordinary uses of language. By giving ordinary examples of seemingly special philosophical problems, he is able to show us important features of philosophy's puzzles, features that we might overlook when we approach philosophical problems as if they *always* arise under special circumstances. Simply: he demystifies philosophical problems.

Demystification does not eliminate philosophical problems. Rather, demystification shows when philosophical problems arise, which is not as often as many philosophers seem to believe. For example, problems with the nature of “meaning” or problems with “foundations” for the existence of an external world only arise under exotic circumstances.

<sup>37</sup> Compare again the fly bottle metaphor from *PI*, 309.

Say that a child wants to know when he might use the word “phenomenon”. We might answer that “the word 'phenomenon' means \_\_\_\_\_”. If (and this is an extremely odd case) the child is not familiar with the notion of “meaning”, he might look puzzled and ask “what is the word 'means'”. Under these circumstances, we want to tell the child how “meaning” works, and this sort of ordinary activity makes “meaning” appear to be a legitimate, tangible object of study. We might simply say, “meaning is use”.<sup>38</sup> But that is far from all that we could say. We might say that the “meaning” is what *fills in the blank*, as in the example above. “Meaning” might amount to paraphrase.

Some philosophers seem to think that the blank in “the word 'meaning' means \_\_\_\_\_” is a special case that requires theory or esoteric philosophical techniques to fill in. But the “problem of meaning”, or the need for a “theory of meaning” rarely arises; we do not need a complicated apparatus to fill in a blank. Yet, that it is so difficult to say anything clear *about* “meaning” often seduces philosophers into believing that there must be more cases where saying what the nature of meaning comes to is necessary (or helpful) just to get on with related activities, like the cases of teaching new words, grammar, and so forth. We usually only need to investigate how it is that the metaphoric blank came about in the first place, and this knowing-how often solves our puzzle. We often do this by trying out a variety of explanations and rearrangements of what we already know. We explain things to people when it seems that they need a better handle on an idea, and grasping *when* someone's understanding is incomplete is itself a linguistic competence.

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. PI, II-xi, p215: “When I pronounce this word while reading with expression it is completely filled with its meaning. ---'How can this be, if meaning is the use of the word?' Well, what I said was intended figuratively. Not that I chose the figure: it forced itself on me. ---But the figurative employment of the word can't get into conflict with the original one.”

We understand different aspects of a problem when we approach that problem both from different perspectives, and by varying how we pay attention to the problem. For example, if I aim to study specific content of a philosopher's writing, I might pay close attention to the verbs that he uses. Of the same philosopher, for some other purpose, I might want to pay attention to the structure of his writing. To do this, I will likely pay more attention to how he breaks his works into sections, or how he connects one section to the next. Knowing *what* to pay attention to, given our purposes, is a skill that we learn in philosophy by reading and re-reading, writing and re-writing, etc., by trying things out for ourselves.

Imagine that I tell you every turn to take on a walk. Proceed eastward on this street for a quarter mile, then turn left. Follow the curves for a half mile, etc. When you arrive at the destination, you would not likely recognize the shape of your path; on a walk, one does not usually attend closely to the location and radius of curves and turns in the road. However, you will be more familiar with the terrain, like the bumps in the road, the gentle inclines, and the spots where the pavement is wearing out, than, say, a cyclist or a driver who took the same path. The cyclist, having taken the curves faster, will better appreciate the sharpness of the curves, for example. Yet a hang glider will have a bird's-eye view of the landscape and of the path that you originally walked. A traveler's chosen mode of travel determines his impressions of where he has traveled. We can think of different kinds of reading and writing in this way.

For example, on a first reading of *Philosophical Investigations*, we might go through it somewhat quickly, just to get a feeling for what it is about. Certain themes might stand out, like meaning, following rules, expectations, behavioral expressions, and so forth. If our interest is in simply listing themes of the text, this quick reading might suffice. But if we want to develop a better sense of Wittgenstein's take on, say, meaning, then a slower, closer reading is in order. Perhaps we then dwell on the early part of

the text, familiarizing ourselves with details, like his reading of Augustine's talk about "naming", or about how we use words as an influence on what we call "meaning". If we want to dig deeper, we might try to come up with a way to talk about the underlying structure of the text, perhaps noting how he pursues tangents as a way to suggest what will be important to consider later. In all of these cases, how we read the text and why we read the text are inextricably connected.

Just as the pedestrian, the cyclist, the driver, the pilot all have importantly different perspectives of the city, readers' and writers' purposes inform how they approach and perceive a text, including *this* text. Wittgenstein shows us how philosophers can view their works, and by extension others' works, from analogous perspectives. Wittgenstein alludes to a similar process in the Preface to *Philosophical Investigations* where he uses "journeys" and "landscapes" as metaphors to describe his method:

After several unsuccessful attempts to weld my results together into such a whole, I realized that I should never succeed. The best that I could write would never be more than philosophical remarks; my thoughts were soon crippled if I tried to force them on in any single direction against their natural inclination. ---And this was, of course, connected with the very nature of the investigation. For this compels us to travel over a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction. ---The philosophical remarks in this book are, as it were, a number of sketches of landscapes which were made in the course of these long and involved journeyings.

The same or almost the same points were always being approached afresh from different directions, and new sketches made. Very many of these were badly drawn or uncharacteristic, marked by all the defects of a weak draughtsman.

And when they were rejected a number of tolerable ones were left, which now had to be arranged and sometimes cut down, so that if you looked at them you could get a picture of the landscape. Thus this book is really only an album.  
(v)

He approaches topics not only from different directions, but with different paces, and in doing so, he aims to show the reader how to address the themes of the text in different ways. He addresses themes, like “meaning”, “intention”, “expectation”, “rules”, “naming” and so forth by developing numerous ordinary examples of each, and he shows how such abstractions get their value from ordinary activities.

Given this, a student is best served to read Wittgenstein in particular, and philosophy in general, at different paces. Sometimes it is valuable to go through a text somewhat quickly, to skim the text perhaps, to get a sense of its structure. We often refer to a story's “arc” to metaphorically describe this. Sometimes the student will want to investigate nuances in a text, and will read much more closely or slowly than in the previous case. The student might address specific details of specific arguments. Or sometimes a student will profit from a meta-analysis of a text, the proverbial bird's eye view, when he aims to understand why a text is arranged a particular way, perhaps when investigating for a biography.

Similarly, ordinary trips through the city, by different means, help us learn to talk about the city's shape, its stature, its odors and aromas, its population and demographics, and so on. Ordinary trips through the city, that is, help us to grasp and establish a vocabulary that we can use to talk about the city, and anyone who has traversed the cityscape on foot, by bicycle, in an automobile, and seen the whole from far above will have a comprehensive grasp of a large city-describing vocabulary. We get how best to describe things, how to get around, how to understand our own ideas by trying descriptions, following directions, writing, etc. And to develop

our skills at reflecting on those activities is often to improve our skills at doing them.

## 7. Distinction Upon Reflection

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*Where we examine the relationship between parts of an action and a whole action, emphasizing that our ability to identify “aspects” of an activity is essential to our ability to improve our competence with that activity.*

*Follow-up: 10. **Doubt Upon Reflection**, where we examine the importance of shared (or relevantly similar) intentions for “going on together”, which is essential for successful teacher-student interactions, and consequently skill-building.*

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We might call “walking” and “humming” doing two things at once<sup>39</sup> because they do not usually happen together. Of an odd man who *always* hums when he walks, we might reasonably say that he is simply “walking”, but that he walks oddly. Of a normal walker, we do not say “he moves his arms and legs in a regular fashion as he proceeds forward,” because moving arms and legs in a regular fashion *is* walking (as is paying attention, avoiding obstacles, balancing on one foot at a time, etc.) Yet “walking” is not two motions that we *bundle up* and call one; only upon reflection, under reasonable circumstances, do we pick out aspects of walking to describe *what it is*. Only under special circumstances will we try to describe as seemingly basic an activity as walking as a *grouping* of other activities, perhaps when we sprain an ankle and try to walk on it, or when we recover from a knee injury will we find it useful to reflect on *what walking is*. We can treat thinking, knowing, getting, understanding, intending and many abstract gerunds similarly.

Moving your legs and swinging your arms are two separate motions, but walking is one motion. Pedaling and adjusting the direction of the front wheel are two separate motions, but riding a bicycle is one activity. Formulating ideas and moving a pencil across a piece of paper are two separate

<sup>39</sup> Compare *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle, 138ff.

activities, but writing is one. And all of the -ing verbs here, like pedaling, can be described similarly by multiple other verbs: pedaling is pushing down with one leg while pulling up with the other, or pedaling is making circles with one's legs by bending one's knee, and so on.

Certainly, people who walk also pay attention to where they are going, or else we might call it “stumbling” or “ambling”. Walkers also move their heads around; we might say that a stiff-headed walker is “marching” or “stomping”. Yet if a walker moves his head too much, perhaps looking around more often than we expect, we might say that he is “wandering” or “searching”. In all of these cases, we would doubtless agree that the subject is walking, but in cases like stumbling or marching, it is not the walking part of the activity that stands out.

Rarely would we point out the bend in the stumbling subject's elbow, for stumbling has little to do with elbows. Rarely would we point out the color of the marching soldier's eyes, as this is obviously irrelevant to “marching”. Similarly, we would not usually describe the marching soldier as “walking”, as we clearly see that his walk is purposeful in a special way, yet he performs most of the same movements of the ordinary walker. Soldiers typically march in a robust context, including while training with legions of other soldiers, or at a display of their training, such as at boot camp graduation. In such circumstances, it would seem odd to say something like: “Look at how orderly they walk together” or “Isn't it amazing how people of so many different heights can march together?” In the former case, it seems that we don't *get* what marching is, or when it is appropriate to use the word “march” as opposed to “walk”. In the latter case, it seems that we have missed something important about marching, namely that how tall the soldiers are is (usually) not relevant to how well they keep in step with one another. We talk about the skill of marching soldiers because their individual movements are synchronized, indistinguishable.

The soldier who is out of step stands out, like the orchestral musician who hits a bad note.

We could pick out other aspects of the actors' physical performances and talk about their performances in those terms, yet this would change nothing in their performances. Similarly, we could talk about the actors' intentions, their motivations, what goes through their heads, and so on, but these are simply other aspects of their performances.

We might be tempted to think that these aspects are parts of actors' performances, that if we assembled enough parts, we could wholly characterize the performance. That is, we might be tempted to think that walking, for example, is made up of moving one's arms and legs in order to induce forward motion. Or walking is made up of controlled falls from one foot to the next. Or walking is pushing one's legs by rotating the hips while coordinating arm sway. The point is that we could isolate and describe countless bodily motions that we observe in agents who walk, but *that* would not tell us what walking *is* once and for all; all of our descriptions would be purpose-laden. This purpose-laden-ness suggests that our descriptions, our articulation of *aspects* of walking, in this case, help us to better understand the activity we call "walking". (And here what is in question is "calling", or the use of a particular word.)

There is the performance, and there are the aspects of the performance that we choose to pay attention to for our specific purposes: the latter does not build the former. Talking about isolated aspects of particular performances helps to build our vocabulary for talking about general performances. At the same time, talking about particular actions, especially our own, can help our performance skills. "Self-evaluation" is a form of practicing. But there will always be more aspects to pick out than we have already isolated and discussed. Over time, we develop our competences at figuring out which aspects of a performance demand our attention, what we need to practice given our purposes.

What does this say about practicing writing and philosophy? Writing, reading, studying, doing philosophy are all complicated activities in the same ways that walking, pedaling and playing are complicated. When we talk about improving upon our performances of such things, we pick out aspects of the activity that stand out. For example, if a writer peppers his writing with passive voice, this stylistic quirk might stand out to the attentive reader. (Compare the previous sentence with: "It stood out because the paper was written in the passive voice.") In a case like this, an attentive reader, or instructor, could point out the quirk and help the writer change the habit, assuming that the habit distracts or confuses a reader, likely by emphasizing relevant or wise subject and verb choice, or by providing rules of thumb, such as "If you cannot tell who performed the action, then rewrite the sentence." For a while, the writer will have to attend closely to his subject and verb choices, but with sufficient practice, he will effortlessly create clear, active sentences. His writing style, we would likely agree, will have improved.

Like any activity, when we become accustomed to doing it in a certain way, we become desensitized to how we do it. When developing our skills --- when we try to improve --- we attend to aspects of our performances that stand out as aspects that could use improvement. I might try to improve my pedal stroke while bicycling because my knees get sore after a few hours. I might try to improve my timing when I tell a joke because few people laugh when I deliver the punch line. I might try to improve my footwork in tennis because I always find myself arriving too late to strike the ball cleanly. Sometimes we are able to identify deficiencies on our own because of the nature of the activity, or because we are used to trying things out, or we have developed a skill at observing our own deficiencies, or we are working out the details of an innovative performance technique, and so forth. Sometimes we need a more skilled instructor to isolate where we go

wrong and to help us develop better techniques. In telling jokes, riding a bicycle, and philosophizing, we develop our skills similarly.

While writing, we develop ideas because writing is reflecting; writing is a specific kind of thinking. Philosophical writing is a specific kind of thoughtful writing, as opposed to, say, writing in a journal, or writing a comedy sketch. As we write down ideas and reflect on them, we *get* which ideas count as philosophical. We *get* the distinction between, say, philosophical and scientific writing by reflecting on how we write or how others write, and by trying out different writing styles. And when we try out different styles, and reflect on that trying, we learn to recognize our own habits, for better or for worse, and we can then start to refine our skills by attending to specific aspects of our writing.

## 8. Undoing & Developing Habits

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*Where we examine the importance of learning to train our attention on helpful aspects of the activities that we intend to improve --- as opposed to continuing to use the same tools and techniques without re-evaluating their effectiveness, given our purposes.*

*Follow-up: 9. **Present Tense**, where we examine how we talk about the skills that we aim to improve in terms of prediction, execution, and evaluation.*

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Aficionados of fixed-gear bicycle riding sometimes refer to coasting as “a pernicious habit”. On the fixed gear bicycle, the chain directly connects the rear wheel and the cranks; when you pedal forward, the wheel moves forward; when you stop pedaling, which takes some effort, the rear wheel stops turning; when you pedal backwards, the rear wheel turns backwards. Cranking and moving are directly related; there is no coasting on a fixed-gear bicycle.

Most bicycle riders are naturally accustomed to coasting, where if the rider stops pedaling, the rear wheel continues to roll forward while the rider's legs remain at rest. For riders accustomed to coasting, fixed-gear riding initially challenges their skills, or more neutrally, fixed-gear riding challenges their habits. The fixed-gear bicycle quickly informs the rider that coasting is a no-no; riders who try to coast will find themselves launched forward by the cranks' inertia.

For most bicycle riders, considerations about coasting never arise. If we asked most riders “How often do you coast?” they would likely have to consider the question carefully, for this aspect of bicycle riding has never stood out, and why should it? The first few tries on a fixed-gear bicycle invariably gets the rider to thinking about his coasting habits, because not-coasting is now paramount to remaining upright. We might contrast this with more straightforward questions like “How do you rehydrate after a long ride?” or “When do you

use hand signals?" These sorts of considerations arise naturally when riding a bicycle; coasting versus not-coasting is a somewhat exotic consideration.

For example, it is common for a bicycle rider to coast while applying the brakes at a stop. The feeling of pedaling while stopping is unnatural to novice fixed-gear riders. New fixed-gear riders, that is, have to remain conscious of their pedaling techniques as they come to a stop. This new consciousness can be overwhelming, and some new riders abandon this style of riding almost immediately. Those who stick with it find that they need to *unlearn* old habits and to develop new ones; riders achieve this by combining trying and reflecting.

New riders need to develop a habit of pedaling while stopping, for the distraction of constant attention to one's pedaling makes riding the bicycle both dangerous and decidedly unpleasant. The activity is dangerous if attention to pedaling diverts the rider's attention from road hazards or from traffic. The activity becomes unpleasant if the rider feels anxious about remaining constantly attentive to his pedaling technique.

But once the new fixed-gear rider develops new habits, once, that is, the new fixed-gear rider stops thinking about what he does while riding, he begins to appreciate his new habits and to further develop his riding skills and techniques. He develops a new riding style.

To generalize: in the midst of day-to-day activities, we do not think about how we do what we do. It does not occur to us to consider our techniques, our feelings, or our habits until something influences us to do so. If a coasting bicycle rider simply switched to a different coasting bicycle, he would not attend to his pedaling technique the way that a novice fixed gear rider does; reflecting on coasting would serve no purpose. Perhaps he would attend to the fit or feel of the different bicycle, or perhaps he would notice the weight of the bicycle while cranking up an incline, and so on. We might say that what the new bicycle rider tries out, whether it is a new

fixed-gear bicycle or a new road racing bicycle, depends upon what makes the experience novel.

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Learning, in philosophy, takes a similar form. The topics that the discipline treats are often quite ordinary: they are activities and observations that we often do and see, and so we are *used to* them. For example, in the course of a normal day we use words, we communicate, we trade ideas with others but we rarely (if ever) wonder about the nature of words, or how human communication works, or how other people understand what we say. Just as a competent bicycle rider simply rides a bike, we as competent word users simply use words. Sometimes a change in familiar circumstances, like learning to ride a fixed-gear bicycle as opposed to an ordinary coasting bicycle, inspires thoughts about or investigations into our ordinary activities.

Often, philosophy is extraordinary treatment of the ordinary. Philosophers might marvel at the fact that we can use words and *mean* something by them. I might marvel at the fact that an idea *in my head* can get into another's head simply by using words or gestures. This might inspire us to investigate how *meaning* comes about, or we might investigate how we know that my idea is in your head, and so on. Investigation into “meaning”, for example, often takes the form of a disruption of habits. When we investigate meaning, we ask how and why we use words, which we usually do non-reflectively, and we look closely at what effects our words have *in the world*. This resembles how we *undo* cycling habits: we pay close attention to activities that we ordinarily do non-reflectively. Then, because of this attention, we learn new habits, new ways to act non-reflectively, and we acquire skills at paying attention to our actions in ways that we were not able to before; we learn about our non-reflective actions. Also, we learn when it is appropriate to attend to these aspects of our actions. It would be too overwhelming to have to consider

all of this at once while writing, just as constant attention to when we coast, when we brake, when and how we steer, and so forth would likely distract us to the point of crashing on a bicycle.

Perhaps we pay attention to meaning as an aspect of word use when we teach new words. Students will be interested in the meaning of the words that we expect them to learn, and so our task will be to communicate what we ordinarily *do* with the word. We often do this by showing students how to use words in sentences, or we might investigate the etymology of a word in order clarify the word's meaning.

Just as we do not always attend to how we crank the pedals on a bicycle while we ride, we do not always attend to the phenomena that we call “meaning”, or to the existence of *other minds*, or the nature and reliability of human experience, and so forth. However, sometimes philosophers' enthusiasm about discovering novel aspects of our ordinary actions inspires them to treat molehills like mountains. Some philosophers get wrapped up in puzzles to the point of crippling ordinary activities, rather than enhancing our understanding of those activities<sup>40</sup>.

Keeping the *purpose* of philosophical investigation in mind helps to prevent overzealous application of particular philosophical tools and techniques. Competent tool-users know not only how to use their tools, but when to use them as well. Our aim, as philosophers, is often to get sufficiently skilled at using specific methods and techniques so that we can use them *in the moment*, non-reflectively, rather than only deliberately or while distracted by an investigation. To understand when to invoke talk of a specific technique, to understand when it is appropriate to do philosophical analysis or explanation, to understand when to simply do what you know you can do, this is “mastering a technique”; this is

<sup>40</sup> Cf. PI 133: “... The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.”

“making it your own”. Mastery is a refined ability to act *in the moment*.

## 9. Present Tense

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Where we examine how we talk about the skills that we aim to improve in terms of prediction, execution, and evaluation.

Follows: **8. Undoing & Developing Habits**, where we examined the importance of learning to train our attention on helpful aspects of the activities that we intend to improve --- as opposed to continuing to use the same tools and techniques without re-evaluating their effectiveness, given our purposes.

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In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein directly addresses “thinking” and how we might describe what goes on “in our heads” while we act thoughtfully. For example:

318. Suppose we think while we talk or write --- I mean as we normally do --- we shall not in general say that we think quicker than we talk; the thought seems *not to be separate* from the expression. On the other hand, however, one does speak of the speed of thought; of how a thought goes through one's head like lightning; how problems become clear to us in a flash, and so on. So it is natural to ask if the same thing happens in lightning-like thought --- only extremely accelerated --- as when we talk and 'think while we talk.' So that in the first case the clockwork runs down all at once, but in the second bit by bit, braked by the words.

Here Wittgenstein expresses something of a frustration: perhaps that we do not have adequate words to describe what happens *in the moment*, because description of an event is something that we do *after the fact*. We do not say “what a great serve” before the tennis player strikes the ball. We do

not laugh at a punch line before the comedian delivers it. We do not say “that is a good argument” before the philosopher constructs it. Of the tennis player, we might say “she's serving well; I bet this one will be an ace”. Of the comedian: “His delivery is so well-timed, this should be good for a laugh.” Of the philosopher: “He has been studying linguistics so his new arguments ought to be innovative.” These are *predictive* statements, in the future tense, if you will. Evaluations, somewhat symmetrically, are in the past tense. What we do in the seemingly-infinitesimal time between the two *is* (to perform) our skill. And so the challenge here is to describe how to improve our skills by talking about what goes on before and after their exercise.

The relationship between prediction, execution, and evaluation is complicated, and we need to pay close attention to the verbs we use to connect agents with outcomes, namely, we pay close attention to *active* verbs, as opposed to attributive verbs (especially forms of to be). Expending this effort now should result in a sort of *effortless* future execution of the skill that we exercise (here, of course, philosophy). Call it a competence or a mastery, or a skill that we hone or sharpen, our interest here is in talking about what goes on between “I intend” and “I did”.

One might object that we can narrate while we perform some action. Public demonstrations of mechanical skills often take this form, such as a chef publicly preparing a dish, or a glass-blower demonstrating and describing how he crafts a vase. At a bicycle wheel building seminar, the instructor might describe his actions: “Now I tighten each spoke a quarter turn” ... “Now I check where the wheel isn't true” ... “Now I check the spoke tension” ... etc. The timing of his words might match his actions quite closely, but his evaluative statements cannot. Present tense evaluations sound odd to the ear. Saying “I do this well” as he adjusts a spoke to true the rim does not sound like a competent evaluation, as he has not even checked his work yet. Even “this is about as close as you can get” is something to say *after*

making an adjustment, insofar as it is an evaluative statement.

Public description picks out aspects of our actions that we feel *should* be described to our audience. Over time, we develop the ability to determine whether talking about this or that aspect of what we are up to will help our audience get our point. We learn to pick out what makes our actions significant, what we need to say in order to get others to follow our instructions, to “go on” with us. For example, the wheel builder who describes how he sits on his chair while building the wheel fails to highlight the more important point: getting the wheel straight and strong by adjusting spoke tensions and keeping a keen eye on trueness. (But we can imagine a situation where describing how you sit is important, e.g., at the wheel building seminar for people with lower back pain. But such a case is far from run-of-the-mill)<sup>41</sup>.

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When we ride a bicycle, we simply ride. We do not normally attend to what we need to do to remain upright, or

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Zettel, 100ff.:

“100. Let us imagine someone doing work that involves comparison, trial, choice. Say he is constructing an appliance out of various bits of stuff with a given set of tools. Every now and then there is the problem 'Should I use *this* bit?' ---The bit is rejected, another is tried. Bits are tentatively put together, then dismantled; he looks for one that fits etc., etc. I now imagine that this whole procedure is filmed. The worker perhaps also produces sound-effects like 'hm' or 'ha!' As it were sounds of hesitation, sudden finding, decision, satisfaction, dissatisfaction. But he does not utter a single word. Those sound-effects may be included in the film. I have the film shewn me, and now I invent a soliloquy for the worker, things that fit his manner of work, its rhythm, his play of expression, his gestures and spontaneous noises; they correspond to all this. So I sometimes make him say 'No, that bit is too long, perhaps another'll fit better.' -----Or 'What am I to do now?' -----'Got it!' -----Or 'That's not bad' etc.

“If the worker can talk --- would it be a falsification of what actually goes on if he were to describe that precisely and were to say e.g., 'Then I thought: no, that won't do, I must try it another way' and so on --- although he had neither spoken during the work nor imagined these words?

how to steer, or how to move our legs to turn the cranks. We attend to such things when something happens that makes them seem immediately relevant. We might hit a pothole, and in an instant, we attend to our balance; we might gather more speed than we are used to on a downhill, and in an instant, we attend to our steering abilities; we might begin to tire after hours of riding, and suddenly we need to think about how to conserve energy. When we attend to our skills, we consider what worked for us in the past and how we can apply these techniques in the moment. What did we do to remain upright when we learned to ride a bicycle? What did we do to retain control of the machine when we first started going fast? What can we do to make our cranking motion more efficient and thereby less tiring? We hope to identify a technique that we can employ in the moment that will allow us to concentrate on our overall purposes more than on a temporary situation, in this case.

Sometimes, we will apply lessons from what we have done in the past to what we will do later, and in cases like this, we will say that we learned something. In the process that we call learning, we attend to specific aspects of our activities for the purpose of improving our skills at doing that activity. We review what we did, we formulate hints, reminders, rules of thumb and such, and we apply those rules (etc.) as we attend to what we do in future performances. When we practice, we attend more closely to the present than when we perform. Eventually, we get sufficiently good at an aspect of the activity that we no longer need to attend to it in the present (or to “be conscious” of what we are doing). We develop, sharpen, or master a skill.

“I want to say: May he not later give his wordless thoughts in words? And in such a fashion that we, who might see the work in progress, could accept this account? ---And all the more, if we had often watched the man working, not just once?”

“101. Of course we cannot separate his 'thinking' from his activity. For the thinking is not an accompaniment of the work, any more than of thoughtful speech.”

But any given aspect is not all that we can attend to as we learn. Attention to past performances will inevitably bring out different aspects of our present skills that we can sharpen, assuming, as always, that our goal is improvement. Sharpening our writing skills is like this, and consequently, sharpening our skills at doing philosophy is like this as well. For example, if we want to adjust a habit of writing in the passive voice, at first it takes considerable effort and attention to construct active sentences. But later this becomes natural; it is simply how one writes. When working on drafts, we can attend to an aspect of what we wrote after we wrote it. This is specific attention to a “past performance” for a particular purpose, and eventually, we will be able to simply write without paying attention to this particular purpose, or to attend to a more general purpose instead. Learning to hit a tennis ball resembles this as well: at first, players struggle to make contact on the racket's sweet spot, to move their wrists correctly during the stroke, and so forth. Eventually, there is simply writing, there is simply the backhand, and so on.

We talk about our actions after we perform the actions. We evaluate our piano performances, we evaluate how well we played in a tennis match, we evaluate whether our jokes worked for the crowd after the fact. Even if we adjust our actions in the midst of a performance, if we respond to our audience on the spot, we do so *after* we evaluate the audience's reaction or some tangible results of what we have done. For example, I might tell a joke and the audience does not laugh. I sense that the topic is not suited to their tastes, or I sense that I rushed to the punch line, so I adjust what aspects of the jokes I emphasize, or I slow down my delivery by inserting incredulous gestures into my act. My mark of success is getting the result that I anticipated.

My predictive and my evaluative thoughts converge in a *competence*. And the location of that competence is “I”, the active agent<sup>42</sup>.

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A similar process describes how we learn words and develop concepts. Over time, we learn to use words effortlessly. We pick out new words in the flow of conversations, and we start to develop our sense of how they fit, which is to say, what the words mean. We pay attention to when conversation partners use certain words, how their inflections change when they use these words, their facial expressions, their gestures, the reactions of others in the conversation, and so on. After a while, we learn the meaning of the new word and we no longer pay close attention to its use, or to its fit. That is, we are now competent to evaluate what counts as a correct use of a word<sup>43</sup>. Competence amounts to something like: we no longer need to pay attention to how we use the word *while we use it*.

Wittgenstein raises similar issues later in *Philosophical Investigations*:

Only if you have learnt to calculate --- on paper or out loud --- can you be made to grasp, by means of this concept, what calculating in the head is.

...

Someone tells me: “Wait for me by the bank”.  
Question: Did you, *as you were saying the word*, mean this bank? ---This question is of the same kind as

<sup>42</sup> This marks one path to trace through Wittgenstein, suggestive of Kant's points about space, time, and rational agency. Of course, this is a much more complex thesis than can be defended here, but this gesture is an indication of how deeply (and differently) these concerns run through much philosophical inquiry.

<sup>43</sup> What counts as “correct” is free to change as well. Meaning, use, and evaluation are all *moving targets*.

“Did you intend to say such-and-such to him on your way to meet him?” It refers to a definite time (the time of walking, as the former question refers to the time of speaking) --- but not to an *experience* during that time. Meaning is as little an experience as intending.

But what distinguishes them from experience? ---They have no experience-content. For the contents (images for instance) which accompany and illustrate them are not the meaning or intending.

The intention *with which* one acts does not 'accompany' the action any more than the thought 'accompanies' speech. Thought and intention are neither 'articulated' nor 'non-articulated'; to be compared neither with a single note which sounds during the acting or speaking nor with a tune.

'Talking' (whether out loud or silently) and 'thinking' are not concepts of the same kind; even though they are in closest connexion.” (PI, II.xi., p216-7)

In the vocabulary we have developed here, thought does not accompany speech; thought is an aspect of speech that we can describe (for certain purposes) *after* we have spoken. We might say that our ability to think *is* our competence. We might say that our intention *is* our action. Our outward expressions *are* our inward expressions<sup>44</sup>.

When we say “I have a thought”, we do not mean that we both “have a thought” and that “we are currently thinking that we have a thought”. To say “I have a thought” is to report that something occurred to you (past tense), or is in the process of forming; it is not to say that you are in possession

<sup>44</sup> Here we should treat “is” like the “is” in “Lemons are yellow”.

of a thing; it is to say that you are prepared to say something, for some given reason.

“Have a thought”, in the present tense, is not a present action; it describes an event of the past, namely the occurrence of a thought, that a thought occurred to you, and suggests that one is prepared to say or do something relevant to the situation in which he had the thought. “Have”, in this case, attributes a property or a disposition or a state, etc. Differently: “have”, in this case is lingering, as in I have a cold, in contrast to, say, a tennis partner asking “where is the ball?” to which I respond “I have it”.

Reflection on the former sense of “have” is of interest here. Philosophers have thoughts, skills, ideas, notions, and so forth. And to reflect on the various ways in which we have such things is to exercise a philosophical skill<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> “Having” locates agency, and the active, reasoning agent is squarely located in the present, but described by others in the future, in terms of intention, and in the past, in terms of evaluation. Others do not describe my “I” in the present tense. Again, this is a complex point, and here I only point out how naturally it seems to arise in the context of this investigation.

## 10. Doubt Upon Reflection

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*Where we examine the importance of shared (or relevantly similar) intentions for “going on together”, which is essential for successful teacher-student interactions, and consequently skill-building.*

*Follows: 7. **Distinction Upon Reflection**, where we examined the relationship between parts of an action and a whole action, emphasizing that our ability to identify “aspects” of an activity is essential to our ability to improve our competence with that activity.*

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Say that I train a parrot to utter a few words. When I enter the room, the parrot squawks, “Hello”. I immediately recognize the utterance as the word “Hello”, but I do not want to say that the bird *meant* to greet me. Though it appears that the bird used the word correctly, and though the bird might even exhibit greeting-like behavior, I have misgivings about the supposed greeting because a parrot uttered it. I resist thinking that meaningful uses of words sometimes come out of non-human entities, for it appears that meaning, in language, is a human phenomenon. I do not believe that the parrot means anything by the sound he makes, for he simply cannot *get* what it is like to utter a social greeting. The bird does not do what I do when I say “hello”.

Perhaps I teach a three year old child to use the words “psychological phenomenon” in a correct way. I tell the child that whenever he hears someone say the words “happy” or “sad” or “hungry”, he is to respond “that is a psychological phenomenon”. Is this a meaningful use of these words? Again, we should have misgivings --- but this time the issue is not the humanity of the speaker. How can it be, we think, that a three year old child understands what counts as a “psychological phenomenon”? But again, by all appearances, the child used the words correctly, though we should be skeptical that he intended to do so, or that he intends to convey what we would

when we use the same words. He intends, perhaps, to follow an instruction, but he cannot possibly *mean* what he said<sup>46</sup>.

We could establish that the child, the parrot, a robot --- questionable language-users --- cannot pass a test where we challenge their usage skills in ordinary conversation<sup>47</sup>. Once established, we might say, “see, the child does not really know the meaning of those words”. But why would we not doubt a philosophy professor who had not yet passed a similar test? And moreover, should we perform a test for every word that the child or the professor utters? Of the professor, we might say “we have no reason to doubt”. Of the other words, we might say that there is no test to determine if someone understands how to use the word or understands its meaning. How would we evaluate, for example, whether a language-user understands the word “is” or “this”?

How would we describe the meaning of the word “the”? What explanatory method or technique will help us give the meaning of “the”? How would this method differ from giving the meaning of “square” or “giraffe” or “Excalibur”? Moreover, why do we tend to think that every word we use has a definable, or fixed, or ostensive meaning? Compare: we

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *PI*, II-xi, p215 and remarks 43 and 138:

“43. For a *large* class of cases --- though not for all --- in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.

“And the *meaning* of a name is sometimes explained by pointing to its *bearer*.”

“138. But can't the meaning of a word that I understand fit the sense of a sentence that I understand? Or the meaning of one word fit the meaning of another? ----- Of course, if the meaning is the *use* we make of the word, it makes no sense to speak of such 'fitting'. But we *understand* the meaning of a word when we hear or say it; we grasp in a flash, and what we grasp in this way is surely something different from the 'use' which is extended in time!”

Some interpreters might read remark 43 as Wittgenstein's assertion that *meaning* is *use* --- though “use”, here, is offered as a helpful thing to talk about when we define “meaning”. We only define “meaning” under exotic circumstances, and those circumstances often involve philosophical investigation. Our task here is not to *define* words; our task is to develop a competence with a specific vocabulary.

do not think that all words have synonyms or antonyms. For example, if a philosopher were to ask us “what is the opposite of ‘giraffe’” we would probably not know what sort of response he expected to hear<sup>48</sup>. Similarly, we *get* which words we would quiz someone about if we doubted their competence with our language, because *getting* this is one aspect of knowing our language. We do not wonder whether Polly the Parrot knows the meaning of the word “a” when she squawks “Polly want a cracker”. For this purpose, “a” is not the sort of word that we treat as if it has a meaning, and why we grasp this fact does not depend on a “theory of meaning”, just as our grasp of the fact that “giraffe” does not have an antonym does not depend on a theory of synonymy. Grasping these sorts of things is our competence with our language. We do not necessarily need complicated evaluative tools; simply recognizing that there is a question is one form of evaluation.

Having a reason to doubt, similar to being puzzled about the meaning of a word, turns out to be dazzlingly complicated upon reflection. Upon reflection, we can read intentions into actions --- the actions of the piano student, of the parrot, of the three year old, of the robot, of the philosophy professor.

Remark 138 helps make further sense of how use and meaning might be connected to something like “fit”, which is close to how I use the word “get” here. Getting the meaning of a word does not equate to our capacity to evaluate, for example, grammatically correct usage of a word. “My cloud hurts” is a grammatically correct use of “cloud”, but these words, which we grasp in an instant as it were, rarely “fit” together. What skills and experiences we need to “grasp in an instant” --- which in our vocabulary is close to “getting”, or grasping that one thing follows another --- is the focus of our investigation. “Use” is part of the story, in a sense of “use” somewhat synonymous with grammatically correct “usage”. But to investigate *suitable*, or *purposeful* “uses” of words requires a different kind of effort. *This* is part of such an effort.

<sup>47</sup> And what form these challenges take will depend upon our purposes. We might be interested in their understanding of metaphor, or cadence, or imagery, or verb choice, etc.

<sup>48</sup> A sufficiently robust context might make clear what might count as an antonym here, but we can imagine that it would be far from an ordinary, run-of-the-mill case.

We bring our skills, our competences, our understanding, our capacity to go on together to any interpretive task.

We read others' intentions as we read our own. We empathize, we picture ourselves performing the same action, we try the actions ourselves. We repeat the actor's words in a similar style, we enthusiastically mimic the swing of the tennis player, we beam gleefully when a comedian's audience laughs with us. In any successful performance, actor and audience, reader and writer, athlete and fan, teacher and student silently share their intentions and expectations, they *get* one another. And this is partly the origin of our doubt about how the parrot, the robot, the three-year-old uses words: we do not think that they are using *our* language. They might use the same words that we use, but it does not sound like *our language*<sup>49</sup>?

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That we are able to recognize each others' intentions suggests that we are also able to recognize each others' mistakes. We are able to evaluate one another. When the tennis player hits the ball out of bounds, we can imagine that she did not intend to do exactly that, and so she and we share in her disappointment. When the comedian's timing is off, when his joke bombs, we imagine that he meant it to be funny, and so we share his embarrassment. When a writer's argument confuses us, we imagine that it was meant to clarify, and so we share in the feeling of failure that he would feel

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Zettel, 103: "We shall be making an important distinction between creatures that can learn to do work, even complicated work, in a 'mechanical' way, and those that make trials and comparisons as they work. -----But what should be called 'making trials' and 'comparisons' can in turn be explained only by giving examples, and these examples will be taken from our life or from a life that is like ours." In Wittgenstein's vocabulary: situations like those currently under investigation are situations in which we find ourselves puzzled by or at odds with different "forms of life" --- a technical term hinted at in this extraction. He often uses "form of life" to help explain the sources of our doubts, misgivings, hesitations, puzzles, and so forth --- much like we do in the kind of explanation and investigation we are doing here, but without relying on Wittgenstein's technical vocabulary.

were he to learn of our confusion (such as through a book review).

If we found out that the tennis player did not intend to hit the ball in bounds, that the comedian did not intend to make us laugh, that the philosopher intended to confuse the reader, we would not know what to make of their actions. What we took to be an error, the performer did not recognize as such, and we wonder how this can be? How is it that someone who appears to be playing tennis could think that trying to hit the ball in bounds is an error? It is not that we disagree about the game: it is more like we are playing different games, as if we cannot effectively communicate about the game. We clearly are not *going on together*. We do not get the participants' actions, how one action follows from the last.

Similarly, publicly sharing your doubt about something depends on *going on together*. When an economist says to us that she does not think that the economy will rebound quickly, for various stated reasons, we can doubt that her analysis is correct for other various reasons, and we can probably come to some agreement, or at least recognize the sources of our disagreement. But if the economist says to us that she thinks all hard currency will turn into cheese by the end of next month, we cannot even disagree with her assertion. We have no way to make contact with it, insofar as we have never seen paper or metal turn into a dairy product, and we do not expect to ever see such a thing. We react similarly to the skeptic who asserts that he cannot be sure about the existence of the external world. We wonder what sense this makes of “sure”; how could anyone believe such a thing? How could anyone even learn the word “sure” while doubting the existence of the world?

The world, it seems, is where we learn the word “sure”, as well as the word “doubt”. We use these words *because* we learned them *in the world*. The world, it seems, is the source of our shared language. The words “sure”, “certainty”, “doubt”, and so forth would not arise were it not for the world's

existence, insofar as human communication requires multiple human agents, and those agents must occupy a *space*. And so we should wonder how we could *go on* with someone who appeared to deny our conditions for *going on*.

Though we might say that the skeptic is mistaken, were we to accuse him of a mistake, he would not recognize it as such. He might similarly wonder how it is that our sense of “sure” extends to something mysterious, like the existence of matter, for example, about which we do not admit the possibility of a mistake.

Cases where the notions of “mistake” and “doubt” break down are exotic and rare. Usually, puzzles about how things should be, such as discussion between D. and myself about how we should arrange an audio recording, go smoothly. We discuss, we develop ideas together, we converse casually, we come to some agreement about how to proceed. Coaches are able to help tennis players improve because they would all agree, even though they never have to say this, that the ball needs to remain in bounds. Comedians improve their skills because they agree, again silently, that making an audience laugh is the point of their vocation. And writers and philosophers work to improve upon their ideas because clarity is paramount in the field.

In all of these cases, we have learned through simple experience, through codified rules, through personal practice, and so on, to recognize what works and what does not work within the field. That is, we learn what makes hitting a ball with a racket and running around a court “playing tennis”; we learn what makes standing in front of a crowd and speaking in absurdities “comedy”; we learn what sorts of topics, thinking styles, and investigative methods are “philosophy”. We learn to connect technical vocabularies with specific actions. And when we develop short-hands or paraphrases of the longer stories that give significance to these connections, we call these “concepts”.

## 11. *Getting Style*

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*Where we investigate the impact that context has on “going on together”.*

*Follows: 6. **Getting It**, where we investigated some of the subtleties of learning to use new words, and how this influences the way that we pay attention to “aspects” of what we learn. This suggested how we might understand our technical use of the word “intention”.*

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The reader's style should complement the writer's style in order for the reader to best understand the writer's intentions, though understanding the writer's intentions will not always be the reader's purpose. Just as the best musicians have mastered their instruments in a wide variety of performance styles, the best readers can read in many voices. Reading Wittgenstein's works and *getting* them, as we get a joke, takes practice.

Knowing about Wittgenstein and how he wrote and what his philosophical interests were helps us to learn how to read his works. And we can get better at reading his works as we learn more about his writing and thinking processes, and as we continue to think seriously about his ideas, possibly trying to connect them to our own, and making sense of how his philosophical method influences the results of his investigations. As a point of contrast, if we read a Raymond Chandler novel the same way we read Wittgenstein's works, we would likely barely grasp that there is a mystery to be solved; we might think that the arc of the pulp detective story is an argument in favor of a particular investigative method rather than just Chandler's writing style. We might misread Chandler's colorful similes as literal descriptions of states of affairs in the world, but they are more illustrative of a seedy, urban aesthetic than an attempt to objectively catalog sense impressions.

If a philosophy student reads Wittgenstein in the same way he reads, say, Kant, then the student will not *get* what Wittgenstein aims to accomplish. It will not be clear why or how one point follows from another. We do not read a newspaper in the same way that we read Aristotle, and we do not read Wittgenstein like we read a newspaper.

Each time through a text, one will inevitably pick up on different ideas or themes. Just as no two matches are identical in tennis, chess, or bicycle racing, and no two performances of a concerto or of a play are identical, no two readings of a text are exactly the same. At the very least, the reader is a more-experienced reader the next time around simply for having read the text previously. The reader develops a sense of the writer's style. The reader better understands the writer's point of view; perhaps he becomes more sympathetic with the writer's contentious ideas after additional times through the text. Or on the contrary, perhaps the reader comes to understand that the writer is sloppier than upon first glance. Perhaps the reader comes to view the ideas expressed in the text as superficial, or poorly argued, or that the expression is stylistically flawed.

Insofar as reading is performance, we can get a better sense of the relationships between student, instructor, and writer by investigating various aspects of other performances, and how all those involved *get* one another.

A metaphor illustrates the point: a written philosophical work is the philosopher's sheet music. As reader, the philosopher resembles the performer. As writer, the philosopher is the composer. The two, however, often fade into one another.

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Musicians read sheet music, interpret it, arrange it, work out proper fingerings, make margin notes and so forth, so that when they perform the piece, the audience will appreciate their interpretation-as-performance. Philosophers read books

and articles, they glean new ideas or new expressions of familiar ideas, they critique these ideas, they make notes and so forth, so that when they write or teach, they will accurately and convincingly communicate their interpretations of books or conversations or ideas. In general, the audience *gets* what the performer is up to, what the performer's take on the piece is. The audience is not puzzled by *what comes next*; this seems to follow from *that*.

When a musician practices, she notices which passages trouble her, where her skills need sharpening, or where she does not feel *connected* to the composition. She will work on those passages, perhaps playing a few measures prior to the trouble spot, then playing through the trouble spot, then finishing with a few easily-played measures.

She might approach difficult performances from different angles. For example, if she tends to rush through a hard spot, she might consciously slow down or play at half speed to reinforce her ability to determine the tempo. Perhaps a trouble spot reminds her of another piece that gave her similar difficulty. She might then return to that piece and work through it again to reinforce the skills that she built then. She might choose to play in different locations, at different times, and so on. When practicing her skills, the musician often varies or experiments with her techniques and works to break bad habits or patterns in order to improve her performance. This is to say: she will better express her intentions, her picture of how the composition should sound, in a way that the audience will appreciate.

When a performer returns to a piece after a while, she might “rediscover” it. It could be that her skills have improved dramatically since she first learned the piece, and now her *perspective* on how to play it has changed. Perhaps she understands the structure of the piece better, or feels that she has a better sense of what the composer aimed to communicate in his composition. Intervening experience inevitably alters one's perspective on what one already knows or already can do.

A writer might write an outline or a sketch of an idea (something akin to sheet music) and might write a few versions of a paper based on that outline. He might find that at certain places the pacing of his prose does not suit the topic at hand. He might revisit his own archives and re-read similar material that he thought worked well in the past, or he might read a novel that is paced as he intends to pace his work, just for inspiration. To do this is something like “performing” as a writer.

*This* text developed similarly. It began as an arrangement of paragraph- to page-long reflections on various related philosophical topics, partly aimed at developing a fresh picture of how to teach “critical writing”. The most basic picture of the then-underdeveloped method was strategic or *purposeful* rearrangement.

Rather than impose a perhaps-inappropriate structure on this philosophical work, I chose to allow its structure to evolve *organically* through writing, arranging, reading, rearranging, editing, reading, and so forth. It occurred to me that this kind of method was both parallel to Wittgenstein's investigative style, and to the structure of a good detective story. Research into Wittgenstein's background, particularly via Ray Monk's *The Duty Of Genius*, revealed his penchant for pulp detective fiction, congruent with my interest in film noir. Consequently, Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett were instant influences, as well as the well-regarded film versions of *The Big Sleep* and *The Thin Man*. This suggested a shape that the already-developing pages might take: establish what the mystery is (largely, teaching philosophy), introduce the characters (examples), collect clues (“thinking”, “meaning”, and other philosophical puzzles), and figure out how the clues tell a story that answers the mystery, all neatly summed up at a Nick-Charles-esque dinner party where all the key players hear out the detective's take on how the pieces fit together.

While the text's shape developed, its content and style developed as well. Philip Marlowe is a man of action, and the philosophical detective should be as well. I began to focus on

active connections between subject and object --- a difficult task in philosophy, which often relies heavily on “is” connections or attributions.

With action comes evaluation: what do we think *will* happen, and how do we evaluate *what* happened? At the interface between the two is the active agent. And so the text, at times, suggests tangential discussions of agency, including relationships between *worldly* evaluation and self-evaluation (more to come on that point).

Furthermore, the text has something of a familiar dramatic structure: exposition, followed by rising action, climax, followed by falling action, concluded with dénouement. But in this case, the symmetry between the rising and falling action is pronounced, so pronounced that it suggests a structure rarely seen in a philosophical work. Yet I feel that it is a wholly appropriate expository device, given the nature of the current investigation.

The point is this: to create this work, I exercised techniques and developed structures found in literature, film, and academic works. But I worked to *marry* those techniques and structures into a helpful expository form, constrained in certain ways by the subject matter, but paced like a good old-fashioned detective story.

In addition to the detective story, this work is influenced by hypertext, which I have long thought of as a valuable heuristic for understanding Wittgenstein's works. An apparent change of topic in Wittgenstein's writings resembles what we do when we click a hyperlink, except that given the linear constraints of philosophical writing, Wittgenstein essentially clicks the link for the reader.

In preparing this text, I noticed myself coming back to a few key topics repeatedly. And I noticed that what I wrote at an early point would seem more reasonable at a later point, after I had elaborated on how some of the key topics connected to the earlier point. This inspired a *circular* arrangement: we end where we began. But a round-trip through the text accomplishes more than guided restatement:

the exercise required to make the trip inevitably strengthens the reader's ability to find his way about. The reader, in this case, should end up with a better sense of how meaning, intention, thinking, motivation, and so forth connect to philosophical investigations.

Each section in the first half of the text makes a statement about *this* philosophical, investigative method, and matches up with a later section that, more or less, elaborates on the earlier statement. We make the statements first, in part to show how they fit together, before we can elaborate on them successfully, and in conjunction with one another.

Again, the point is that a variety of literary influences inspire how *this* work was written, much as a variety of musical influences inspire a performer's delivery of any given composition. The analogy is of course not perfect: *this* is not a performance of an already-written composition. *This* is a performance of a work that I also composed. And so we will profit from also considering compositional influences.

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Composers and songwriters often sit with an instrument, say a piano or a guitar, and work out melodies, chords, bass lines, etc. Perhaps they have tunes in their heads and try to come up with techniques for playing those tunes. Then they work to describe those techniques in a written form, usually by writing sheet music. Perhaps they also record rough versions of what they have written so that they have a history of what sorts of sounds occurred to them while writing.

The process of expressing a picture in the head *in the world* might seem mysterious to a non-composer, in particular, or to a person unfamiliar with expressing innovative ideas, in general<sup>50</sup>. Comedians, songwriters, improvisational actors, and even philosophers, often express

<sup>50</sup> Compare *TLP*:

“3.1 In a proposition a thought finds an expression that can be perceived by the senses.

their innovations in public performances. But their innovations should not sound so foreign that the audience or the performers cannot *connect* with the picture.

A colleague wrote a response to a criticism of a piano composition whose then-standard performances, in his estimation, were not good representations of the written piece; this composition challenges the technical skills of the best pianists. He summarized his analysis of the problems involved in playing complicated pieces, such as the ones in question, as follows:

... [W]e musicians can only play musically when we truly own the technical requirements of the work, when the clever fingerings have been found and the exercises done; sometimes we must wait until a great performer shows us what the music can be, to give us a standard towards which to strive, to convince us that a particular mess of gropings around a resonator contains beauty.<sup>51</sup>

“3.11 We use the perceptible sign of a proposition (spoken or written, etc.) as a projection of a possible situation.

“The method of projection is to think of the sense of the proposition.

“3.12 I call the sign with which we express a thought a propositional sign. --- And a proposition is a propositional sign in its projective relation to the world.”

Also, *PI*, 139:

“When someone says the word 'cube' to me, for example, I know what it means. But can the whole *use* of the word come before my mind, when I *understand* it in this way?

“Well, but on the other hand isn't the meaning of the word also determined by this use? And can these ways of determining meaning conflict? Can what we grasp *in a flash* accord with a use, fit or fail to fit it? And how can what is present to us in an instant, what comes before our mind in an instant fit a *use*?

“What really comes before our mind when we *understand* a word? ---Isn't it something like a picture? Can't it *be* a picture?

He suggests that the capacity to play extraordinarily complicated compositions develops through intense practice, and what we might metaphorically refer to as “soaking in the piece”. His suggestion that “we ... can only play musically when [or perhaps, after] we truly own the technical requirements...” indicates that there is more to the performance than the “technical requirements”; the performer develops a sense of the piece's musicality over and above technique. Pollini, the performer in question, “had to live with [Boulez's *Deuxieme Sonate*] for 20 years” before he was able to deliver a master-performance --- now the defining performance of the piece. This does not say that a different performance could never accentuate new aspects of the composition; indeed, we should expect that a future virtuoso will interpret the composition sufficiently differently that we might call his a “revolutionary” performance.

But it is this first command performance by Pollini that gives an audience a frame of reference from which they can judge future performances. Pollini's performance helps the audience understand the composition, *how* to hear it, what counts as a master-performance, *how it fits* with related, contemporary compositions, and so forth. It takes an exceptionally skilled interpreter or performer to show us, in this case, *how to hear* the composition.

“Well, suppose that a picture does come before your mind when you hear the word 'cube', say the drawing of a cube. In what sense can this picture fit or fail to fit a use of the word 'cube'?---Perhaps you say: 'It's quite simple;---if that picture occurs to me and I point to a triangular prism for instance, and say it is a cube, then this use of the word doesn't fit the picture.'---But doesn't it fit? I have purposely so chosen the example that it is quite easy to imagine a *method of projection* according to which the picture does fit after all.

“The picture of the cube did indeed *suggest* a certain use to us, but it was possible for me to use it differently.”

Here we are interested in talking *about*, in Wittgenstein's terms, “projecting” a thought *in the world*. The way we go about doing this is a “method of projection” (sort of), and our ability to convey a meaningful, or perhaps useful, expression of what is *in our heads* is a skill that we can exercise and develop. Again, that is our point here.

<sup>51</sup> From <http://www.rhyschatham.net/nintiesRCwebsite/BvsS.html>

Similarly in philosophy, instructors, commentators, *professionals*, answer the call to help students and readers learn to grasp the significance, application, and further possibilities of philosophical works. Students learn to *get* that *this* is a philosophical investigation, while *that* is a detective story, just as they learn to *get* that *this* is a competitive tennis match, while *that* is a practice session with a coach. We want students, novices in general, to respond to our telling them that *this* is practice, while *that* is professional engagement, with “I *get* it”. And that we as philosophers pick out *this* and *that* topic, and investigate in such detail, to such lengths, is an activity that students need to come to regard as reasonable, given how the discipline goes.

## 12. Learning To Perceive

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*Where we examine the relationships between learning to observe a new activity, improving one's own skills with that activity, and coming to understand the activity's standards.*

*Follows: 5. **Practice & Constraints**, where we considered the significance of the environment in which we practice our skills, which might include the limitations of written instruction (such as with sheet music), or limitations of the activity that we practice (such as the motions necessary to propel a bicycle). This suggested how we might understand the significance and limitations of our technical use of the word "concept".*

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When I watch a tennis match, I can follow the participants' actions. I know what comes next during match play: serve, switch sides, play a tie-breaker, etc. I am familiar with the rules of the game, I have watched many matches, I have tried to play, players have explained shots and spin and strokes to me, and so on. Someone unfamiliar with the game needs to learn how to watch the game. One might start by learning the rules so to be able to follow the action. But we would not likely say of that person that he understands the game. He might not, for example, be able to distinguish between forehand and backhand: all he sees is that the ball travels over the net and he notices where it bounces in the court and whether the shot results in a point or not. He might not notice the nuances of the players' strokes, such as how they impart spin to the ball. He might not notice how, with different spins, the ball bounces differently. A spectator's capacity to notice all of these things, and more, is the spectator's capacity to appreciate tennis. We might characterize the development of the spectator's capacity to understand tennis as learning to perceive the game, for

example, to cheer at the right times: after a well-executed ace serve rather than during the toss.

The experienced tennis spectator understands, for example, that when the players switch sides, they are not “playing”, though switching sides is clearly part of “playing the game”. If we quiz the novice spectator about whether the players are playing during a changeover, the novice might say, “I can tell that they are not playing right now because they are not swinging their rackets. But are they only ‘playing’ when they swing their rackets?” We might respond by telling the novice that we use the word “play” in different senses: when a question arises about what the participants are doing, we say that they are “playing tennis”. But when the question is about when “play will resume”, we might respond “after the changeover”. “Play” will resume, which means that the players are not currently “in play”, but the changeover is still part of playing tennis. And this is not to say that the participants are both playing and not playing; rather, what is in question determines how we use the word play. And learning the subtlety of using that word is part of understanding what is going on in a tennis match. One learns what cluster of obviously deliberate actions, taken as a whole, count as a tennis match. We learn and can identify what counts as a tennis match despite the fact that we will never be able to state a full list of deliberate actions that count as playing tennis. We grasp, for example, what distinguishes warm-up from playing, what distinguishes practice from warm-up, and what distinguishes hitting a tennis ball against a wall from playing a match. We become competent perceivers of tennis.

This parallels the thinker and the philosopher. Students learn when and how their best thinking happens, and how to record it in writing or through other performances. Students learn to recognize where and how their thinking and writing could improve, and they become more and more competent at self-evaluation as they practice their skills, and as they study others' skills.

If I study a particular tennis player assiduously enough, I will develop a sense of her style. After a while, I might notice her footwork when she receives serve: perhaps her gracefulness stands out, or perhaps she is a clumsy returner. I might notice that when she is down in the set she tends to hit more aggressive shots, perhaps playing closer to the lines, or she might tighten up and play more conservatively until she regains an edge. She might have a habit of using extra time between points when her opponent outplays her, pushing the rules to their limits to get in her opponent's head. Through close watching, through study of her habits, I can learn to see a player's style and to sense what might be her next move. I can *get* how she perceives the game: I *feel* what she will do next, akin to how I feel the resolution of a melody.

The ability to sense an opponent's style, “without thinking”, we sometimes casually say, is often what gives one player an edge over another. At first, we might have to remain particularly attentive to our opponent's subtle moves. But as students of the game, we can learn simply to react, much like the fixed-gear bicycle rider *unlearns* his coasting reflex. And this does not deny that we are thinking while playing; “without thinking” does not mean thoughtlessly in any ordinary sense. We are not verbally or internally attentive to particular aspects of the opponent's game, but still our playing reflects our thinking. Being proverbially “in the zone” is not to play thoughtlessly: it is to attend to one's play in a particular, silent way.

Similar lessons apply to reading and to writing. The reader who is in the zone, who silently attends to a writer's style, struggles little as he grasps the lessons of a text. A reader who practices reading a particular writer's works learns to read those works more effectively, much as the tennis player who learns her opponent's style is able to compete against the opponent effectively and without struggle.

A reader might “practice” reading Wittgenstein's works by reading them at different paces. Considering that his

collections of remarks cover a wide range of topics, one might get accustomed to reading through the remarks for the purpose of picking up textual themes. One might also look for characters in the remarks; the ubiquitous “interlocutor” is something of a main character, and the reader needs to get used to how Wittgenstein employs that character and for what purposes. (It is easy to confuse what the interlocutor claims with the points that Wittgenstein might endorse.)

One might also read Wittgenstein's texts at an extremely slow pace in order to pick up on the subtleties of his style. For example, some speedy readers read remarks where he connects “meaning” and “use” as his advocating a “theory of meaning”. But a slower reading, attentive to the context in which he makes such statements, reveals that “use” is no less complicated than what we call “meaning”. For example, the reader might detect that “grasping in an instant”, close to what we call “getting” here, is an important aspect of what we call “meaning”. If we did not grasp “meanings”, “uses”, “intentions”, “purposes” and the like in a flash; if we had to *investigate* them every time we tried to communicate, or if we thought of them solely as phenomena that happen “in the head” then human communication would fall to pieces.

### 13. In The Head

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Where we investigate concerns that often arise when we try to characterize “intentions”, or when we talk about evaluation

Follows: **4. Improvisation, Innovation & Intention**, where we connected word use and meaning to improvisation, developed a vocabulary to talk about how we recognize useful and novel techniques, and developed our technical use of “get”.

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If we think that a performer has an image of the perfect performance in her head, then we might wonder how to characterize her intentions. Her intention might be to express a visual duplicate of the image so that others might share what she sees in her head, or to make a clear recording of a melody or song, or to make an audience laugh and so on.

Say that I have the sound of a piano performance in my head: I express what I hear in my head by playing the piano. I might say that a particular note “occurs to me”, and I know which key to strike in order to get the piano to produce its version of that note. As the tune runs through my head, I am able to strike the keys that correspond to the notes, almost in real time.

But what if, as I hear myself play, I determine that I made a mistake: I hear *in the world* that the note I struck on the piano did not correspond to the one *in my head*. I might realize in a flash, as it were, that I hit the wrong note. Or it might be that the piano is severely out of tune. Or it might be that, though *this* instrument looks like a piano, it makes different sounds than the instrument we usually call a “piano”. Errors raise questions.

It could be that *this* is a legitimate piano, but that I did indeed hit the wrong note: my skill at selecting the correct key to strike on the keyboard, to produce the note that

corresponds to the one *in my head*, might be deficient. Perhaps, in this case, I need more practice.

But then it seems that only *I* can judge the points at which my performance mirrors my image. To the listener *in the world*, I might just be a bad composer. Or the listener might be intrigued that I would hit a “bad note” just then: perhaps this is a style of composition with which he is not familiar. If I simply continue to play, acting as if I had not erred in striking *that* key, my action might reinforce a listener's notion that I meant to do what I did --- that I did not err. (Or that I'm a poor judge of my own performances.) Given that only *I* can know what was *in my head*, it seems, only *I* can recognize when I have committed an error<sup>52</sup>.

If I am able to express my picture of the melody precisely on the piano, then I apparently do not stand in need of practice. But how is an evaluator *in the world* to know that the tune *in my head* was the one I played? The evaluator could ask me to write the tune down as sheet music, and then evaluate whether my performance matches what I had written down. But how is sheet music a better representation of what I intended to play than my playing *in the world*? I might be an incompetent writer of sheet music, which might disqualify what I write from being a *standard* to which my performance should conform.

At issue here is how someone *in the world* can evaluate what is *in my head*. Against what standard, we might ask, can we evaluate what is *in someone's head* (including our own). To address this issue, we should exercise caution when using the *in the head* metaphor, and investigate how melodies, words, ideas, and the like get into our heads in the first place. To do this is, partly, to investigate how the metaphor helps us in our explanatory activities.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Zettel, 453: “(As one can sometimes reproduce music only in one's inward ear, and cannot whistle it, because the whistling drowns out the inner voice, so sometimes the voice of a philosophical thought is so soft that the noise of spoken words is enough to drown it and prevent it from being heard, if one is questioned and has to speak.)”

See also *PI*, 692, as referenced in Section 6 above.

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Wittgenstein addresses relevant aspects of this sort of problem in *Philosophical Investigations* when he considers calculating in the head and knowing what a color looks like:

385. Ask yourself: Would it be imaginable for someone to learn to do sums in his head without ever doing written or oral ones? --- “Learning it” will mean: being made able to do it. Only the question arises, what will count as a criterion for being able to do it? -----But is it also possible for some tribe to know only of calculation in the head, and of no other kind? Here one has to ask oneself: “What will that be like?” ---And so one will have to depict it as a limiting case. And the question will then arise whether we are still willing to use the concept of 'calculating in the head' here --- or whether in such circumstances it has lost its purpose<sup>53</sup>, because the phenomena gravitate towards another paradigm.

386. “But why have you so little confidence in yourself? Ordinarily you always know well enough what it is to 'calculate.' So if you say you have calculated in imagination, then you will have done so. If you had *not* calculated, you would not have said you had. Equally, if you say that you see something red in imagination, then it will *be* red. You know what 'red' is elsewhere. --- And further:

<sup>53</sup> Compare 345: “... Orders are sometimes not obeyed. But what would it be like if no orders were ever obeyed? The concept 'order' would have lost its purpose.”

Also Zettel, 133: “Like this, e.g., 'If all moves were *always* false, it would make no sense to speak of a “false move”.' But that is only a paradoxical way of putting it. The non-paradoxical way would be: 'The general description . . . makes no sense'.”

you do not always rely on the agreement of other people; for you often report that you have seen something no one else has.” -----But I do have confidence in myself --- I say without hesitation that I have done this sum in my head, have imagined this colour. The difficulty is not that I doubt whether I really imagined anything red. But it is *this*: that we should be able, just like that, to point out or describe the colour we have imagined, that the projection of the image into reality presents no difficulty at all. Are they then so alike that one might mix them up? --- But I can ask: “What does a correct image of this colour look like?” or “What sort of thing is it?”; can I *learn* this?

(I cannot accept his testimony because it is not *testimony*. It only tells me what he is *inclined* to say.)

387. The *deep* aspect of this matter readily eludes us.

388. “I don't see anything violet here, but I can shew it you if you give me a paint box.” How can one *know* that one can shew it if ....., in other words, that one can recognize it if one sees it?

How do I know from my *image*, what the colour really looks like?

How do I know that I shall be able to do something? that is, that the state I am in now is that of being able to do that thing?

In these remarks, Wittgenstein invents a dialogue that shows, partly, when further questions about what happens in the head stop being helpful. Dialogue is appropriate given that Wittgenstein often emphasizes how we use words, and so to observe words and phrases in action shows us how certain

philosophical puzzles arise by paying attention to our purposes, which is easier to show in a dialogue than in abstraction. Dialogue also shows us what it is like when philosophical questions have been adequately answered.

We might find ourselves puzzled over what happens in our heads when we reflect on activities like calculating, matching colors, or more generally “thinking”. With thought experiments, Wittgenstein encourages us to try out a wide range of uses of “in the head”. When we imagine scenarios where people only calculate in the head, we then see how the qualifying metaphor works in our language, which is to point out a contrast with other activities that we also call “calculating”<sup>54</sup>.

Furthermore, we can try out paraphrases of the metaphor, such as “to ourselves”, “silently”, “without words”, and so forth, and we might identify that all of these work similarly when we talk about “calculation”: we use them in order to contrast one sort of calculation activity with another sort. We recognize that tangible calculation is a model of silent calculation. And if we only performed silent calculations, then qualification of the word “calculation” with “in the head” would then be unnecessary; we would never have a reason to say that we calculate “silently” or “in the head” because there would simply be “calculation”<sup>55</sup>.

We use metaphors and qualifications *because* we learn that a wide range of activities count as “calculation”. We learn the word “calculation” by doing and responding to a wide range of activities that others tell us *is* calculating.

<sup>54</sup> There are, of course, other uses of “calculation”, such as how we describe a killer who is cold and calculating, or a tennis player who calculates when to play more aggressively given her opponent’s style, or an actor who times his expressions just right in order to elicit a particular emotional response from the audience. To calculate is also to judge, to plan, to evaluate, and so on. Here, somewhat artificially, we try to limit the case to mathematical calculations that we do *in the head* --- partly because such calculating activities have obvious *in the world* counterparts.

<sup>55</sup> Compare typically contrast-less cases: “chew with your mouth” or “it’s raining outside”. We simply chew, and it simply rains.

Tangibly, we can do sums in a variety of ways: with marbles, or on an abacus, or with a digital calculator, or by making significant marks and symbols on paper, or by speaking a series of familiar steps out loud, or by calculating in the head. But the last two methods are not possible without having first learned to do sums; there is no calculation in the head and there is no recitation of familiar steps prior to learning what counts as calculating *in the world*. Again, Wittgenstein makes this point by suggesting a thought experiment where we imagine that there are no such things as calculations *in the world*. How then, we should wonder, would anyone learn to calculate? How would we teach in-the-head-only calculation? Moreover, how would the qualification “in the head” apply to calculation? What purpose would the qualification serve? We imagine how the phrase “in the head” might lose its purpose.

The dialogue generates a rhetorical task to describe an unimaginable activity, and this shows us something about the nature of both the dialogue and the task. It shows what would be involved in giving significance to “in the head” under the dialogue's constraints. To ask “what job would 'in the head' do if we only ever calculated 'in the head'?” is to take “in the head” in the wrong spirit; “calculation” does not start in the head.

Given that we all learn calculating by learning a family of related counting, discounting and multiplying activities, we cannot really imagine what it would be like to learn calculating without these worldly experiences. Parents show children how to count their fingers and toes, and how (in most cases) the five fingers on this hand and the five fingers on that hand make ten fingers, that two fives make ten. Teachers show us piles of blocks or balls; they count out loud how many objects are in the piles, they remove objects, counting as they go, and recounting the diminished pile; they build stacks of blocks, piling and counting them one at a time.

Later, we might introduce students to symbolic representations of these physical activities, perhaps using

paper and pencil, and we guide them through techniques that they can use to calculate on paper. At the same time, students usually learn similar techniques that do not require pencil and paper yet achieve the same results, and these techniques, taken together, *are* calculating in the head. But students are “made able to do” calculations in their heads because they know what it is like to count objects in the world, and because they know how this activity can be represented symbolically, and because they know that they can produce the same results without relying on any physical or symbolic representations. They are able to do calculations in this particular way, and we call this “in the head”.

In these cases, “in the head” could just as easily be said “without reference to symbols” or “without writing anything down” or “without counting objects in a pile”, just as we earlier paraphrased calculation as “silent”, “to ourselves”, or “without words”<sup>56</sup>. Appropriate paraphrases of “in the head” serve our purposes, and to learn which paraphrases are appropriate to our purposes is, partly, to learn to calculate. We commonly learn how to use a word like “calculate” in learning to calculate<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> Note the dangers of *forcing* a vocabulary, such as what often happens in “justified true belief” talk in philosophy (of mind). Often, simple paraphrases help us see that some of our (alleged) philosophical puzzles result more from insistence than from discovery. For example, in a philosophy of mind seminar, discussions about whether my bicycle is still locked safe and sound at a rack nearby might involve my “belief” that the bicycle is still where I left it. I might protest that “it’s not that I *believe* that the bicycle is there; I just *figure* that it still is.” To this one might *insist* that my “figuring” is a case of “belief” and that the pertinent question is whether I am justified to hold that belief. But consider a variety of reasonable paraphrases: “I (believe / think / assume / figure / feel / hope / imagine / guess / suppose) that my bicycle is still locked to the rack”. What I suppose, guess, imagine, hope, feel, figure or assume is not usually something that I would even consider *justifying* --- and that tells us something about the alleged puzzle. The puzzle about “belief”, in this case, essentially vanishes as we see that “belief”, in any technical sense, is not *really* at issue --- let alone justification or truth.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *On Certainty*:

45. We got to know the *nature* of calculating by learning to calculate.

We identify colors similarly. We learn colors by rote, through observation, and through exposure to color-talk. These processes do not stain our memories or fix color samples physically in our heads. To say of a color that I see it in my head is to say that I will be able to pick it out, to indicate it, in the world without, say, comparing to a sample. We describe something as “in our heads” when we know that we can behave or react or speak or play in a certain, agreeable way when we encounter that something *in the world*.

We say that we have a tune in our head when we can imagine a performance of the tune, our own or someone else's. We practice the tunes in our heads on piano, for example, in an effort to re-create our picture of a performance. But the picture is not a mystical “object” that takes up physical space inside a person's body. Often, “I have a picture of \_\_\_\_\_” roughly means “I can do or recognize \_\_\_\_\_”. Sometimes “in the head” is just the right paraphrase of “I can do that”. This can help us better understand one aspect of a philosopher's task: to express the ideas *in his head*.

46. But then can't it be described how we satisfy ourselves of the reliability of a calculation? O yes! Yet no rule emerges when we do so. ---But the most important thing is: The rule is not needed. Nothing is lacking. We calculate according to a rule, and that is enough.

47. *This* is how one calculates. Calculating is *this*. What we learn at school, for example. Forget this transcendent certainty, which is connected with your concept of spirit.

48. However, out of a host of calculations certain ones might be designated as reliable once and for all, others as not yet fixed. And now, is this a *logical* distinction?

49. But remember: even when the calculation is something fixed for me, this is only a decision for a practical purpose.

## 14. Self-Evaluation

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*Where we show that our judgments about our own skills are modeled on judgments of others' skills, which we learn in the world.*

*Follows: 3. **Thinking**, where we showed that “thinking” can be construed broadly as hands-on activity, and suggested that we treat “philosophical” thinking similarly. Throughout, we have emphasized that our purposes deeply influence how we understand and improve upon our thinking skills.*

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At the start of his chapter titled “Self-Knowledge” in *The Concept Of Mind*, Gilbert Ryle states: “The sorts of things that I can find out about myself are the same sorts of things that I can find out about other people, and the methods of finding them out are much the same” (Ryle, 155). He continues later, in a section called “Self-Knowledge without Privileged Access”:

Now in almost the same way as a person may be, in this sense, alive to what he is doing, he may be alive to what someone else is doing. In the serial operation of listening to a sentence or a lecture delivered by someone else, the listener, like the speaker, does not altogether forget, yet nor does he have constantly to recall the earlier parts of the talk, and he is in some degree prepared for the parts still to come, though he does not have to tell himself how he expects the sentence or lecture to go on. Certainly his frame of mind is considerably different from that of the speaker, since the speaker is, sometimes, creative or inventive, while the listener is passive and receptive; the listener may be frequently surprised to find the speaker

saying something, while the speaker is only seldom surprised; the listener may find it hard to keep track of the course taken by the sentences and arguments, while the speaker can do this quite easily. While the speaker intends to say certain fairly specific things, the hearer can anticipate only roughly what sorts of topics are going to be discussed.

But the differences are differences of degree, not of kind. The superiority of the speaker's knowledge of what he is doing over that of the listener does not indicate that he has Privileged Access to facts of a type inevitably inaccessible to the listener, but only that he is in a very good position to know what the listener is often in a very poor position to know. The turns taken by a man's conversation do not startle or perplex his wife as much as they had surprised and puzzled his fiancée, nor do close colleagues have to explain themselves to each other as much as they have to explain themselves to their new pupils (Ryle, 179)<sup>58</sup>.

Ryle argues that we know our own thoughts, we get into our own heads, in the same sorts of ways that we evaluate others' performances, deliveries, styles, and so forth. We do not evaluate ourselves using a different set of evaluative skills from those that we use to evaluate others. Self-knowledge resembles other-knowledge more closely than we likely realize.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. PI, 318-20 on "speed of thought". Also, Zettel, 90ff., esp. 92:

"Did you think as you read the sentence?' --- 'Yes, I did think as I read it; every word was important to me.'

"That is not the usual experience. One is not usually half-astonished to hear oneself say something; one doesn't follow one's own talk with attention; for one ordinarily talks voluntarily, not involuntarily."

Self-knowledge and other-knowledge differ in degree. We are extremely *close* to ourselves; we usually understand ourselves without struggle; what we say, think, or do rarely puzzles us. This does not mean that our own actions *never* puzzle us, but that others' actions puzzle us far more often than our own. Ryle argues that this results from "proximity", to put it metaphorically.

A tangible example illustrates:

When we write, we often overlook simple mistakes, especially when we do not seek to discover the errors in our writing. Though the writing is our own, though we stand metaphorically closest to the work, we fail to recognize everything about what we have produced. If, say, I review my work to evaluate the content, then I will not likely discover as many spelling or grammatical errors as when I read with that aspect of the work in mind. An editor, whose role is to find these sorts of errors, will discover things about my writing that, even though I created the text, I will not usually discover on my own.

I can describe the ins and outs of my text when quizzed about certain aspects of its content. But likely, if quizzed about where there are grammatical errors in the text, I will not be able to answer; one would imagine that if I knew about the grammatical errors, I would have already fixed them.

If my aim were to produce grammatically correct prose, if maybe I were writing a style guide, then I would attend to grammatical errors more closely. I would, perhaps, be able to identify where I introduced illustrative errors on purpose. Perhaps I introduced an error in order to demonstrate a point about readers' attentiveness (there is one such error in the first paragraph of this example<sup>59</sup>). In this case, I know about certain errors in the text because of my purposes --- because I have attended to the text in a certain, purposeful way.

<sup>59</sup> The word "the" appears twice in a row. Were an editor to remove that "error", then the footnoted sentence above would be an error. This again shows us an important connection between our purposes and, in this case, what we consider to be a "mistake".

So though I am in some sense closest to the text --- I am usually the person who is most familiar with my own purposes and my own intentions --- it does not immediately follow that I am the best judge of certain aspects of the text. In fact, I am sometimes in a poor position to judge the work, for example in finding grammatical errors, given my content-oriented purposes. I can only attend to certain aspects of my own thoughts and work, just as I can only attend to certain aspects of others' behavior and expression, and always only for certain purposes on any given occasion.

Furthermore, when others read and comment on our work, they are able to point out aspects of our ideas that we might not have immediately recognized. They indicate where our expressions are unclear, or where more development would help the reader. And as we develop further, we recognize new, novel aspects of our own work that we had not previously recognized. Again, this process demonstrates that, even though we are in some sense closest to our own work, we do not wield a distinct kind of authority over the thoughts and ideas that the work contains, or over its potential applications.

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Wittgenstein addresses similar concerns in various places<sup>60</sup>. For example, from *The Blue Book*:

I suppose we imagine the correspondence to have been verified experimentally. Let us imagine such an experiment crudely. It consists in looking at the brain while the subject thinks. And now you may think that the reason why explanation is going to go wrong is that of course the

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *Zettel*, 100ff, esp.:

“101. Of course we cannot separate his 'thinking' from his activity. For the thinking is not an accompaniment of the work, any more than of thoughtful speech.”

experimenter gets the thoughts of the subject only *indirectly* by being told them, the subject *expressing* them in some way or other. But I will remove this difficulty by assuming that the subject is at the same time the experimenter, who is looking at his own brain, say by means of a mirror. (The crudity of this description in no way reduces the force of the argument.)

Then I ask you, is the subject-experimenter observing one thing or two things? (Don't say that he is observing one thing both from inside and from the outside; for this does not remove the difficulty. We will talk of inside and outside later.) The subject-experimenter is observing a correlation of two phenomena. One of them he, perhaps, calls the *thought*. This may consist of a train of images, organic sensations, or on the other hand of a train of the various visual, tactual and muscular experiences which he has in writing or speaking a sentence. --- The other experience is one of seeing his brain work. Both these phenomena could correctly be called "expressions of thought"; and the question "where is the thought itself?" had better, in order to prevent confusion, be rejected as nonsensical. If however we do use the expression "the thought takes place in the head", we have given this expression its meaning by describing the experience which would justify the *hypothesis* that the thought takes place in our heads, by describing the experience which we wish to call "observing thought in our brain".

We easily forget that the word "locality" is used in many different senses and that there are many different kinds of statements about a thing which in a particular case, in accordance with general usage, we may call specifications of the

locality of the thing. Thus it has been said of visual space that its place is in our head; and I think one has been tempted to say this, partly, by a grammatical misunderstanding. (7-8)

Given the vocabulary developed here so far, we can recognize what makes talking about self-evaluation so complicated: to talk about self-evaluation is to talk about “thinking”, “locality”, the “in the head” metaphor, and so on. Observing our own thoughts and activities resembles observing others' thoughts and activities, perhaps more than we realize. For example, I observe that I think not merely by attending to a silent dialogue, but I also notice my physical behavior. When I cramp up while writing, I stop moving the pencil, I raise my hand to my forehead, often I rub my eyes or my chin, I take a deep, slow breath, I shift in my chair, I look into the distance, I look around the room, I stand up and wander across the room, and so on. This is one of the jobs that “think” does.

Countless varieties of thought-oriented behaviors happen *in the world*, and these behaviors are what we observe and learn about when we learn the word “thinking”. To think is not simply to sit still and silently speak or *consider* an internal dialogue. If internal dialogue were all that thinking amounted to, then we would lose our reason to care about whether cats or dogs or robots do not think while they sit still and ... (do whatever they do) ... which could very possibly be to attend to their own internal dialogue.

If thinking were just silent dialogue, then thinking would just be hearing voices. We do not, for example, tell a child: “when you hear your own voice in your head, then you are *thinking*” and expect that the child will have the faintest idea what thinking is. When I observe another person doing things that I have learned to associate with the word “thinking”, I recognize that he is thinking, even though I do not have direct access to what is “in his head”, to his silent dialogue. Similarly, I can observe that a person is thinking while I speak to him on the telephone: he pauses, he sighs, I hear papers

shuffle, I hear a chair creak, etc. Though I do not have direct, physical access to his room, though I cannot see how he behaves, I still gather that he is thinking. I know what he is up to<sup>61</sup>.

Wittgenstein develops more tangible examples of how we measure ourselves in *Philosophical Investigations*:

279. Imagine someone saying: “But I know how tall I am!” and laying his hand on top of his head to prove it.

280. Someone paints a picture in order to shew how he imagines a theatre scene. And now I say: “This picture has a double function: it informs others, as pictures or words inform ----- but for the one who gives the information it is a representation (or piece of information?) of another kind: for him it is the picture of his image, as it can't be for anyone else. To him his private impression of the picture means what he has imagined, in a sense in which the picture cannot mean this to others.” ---And what right have I to speak in this second case of a representation or piece of information --- if these words were rightly used in the *first* case?

We learn what it is like to “intend” when we witness others' reactions to their own behaviors. The pianist who stops playing when he hits a bad note did not intend to hit the bad note, and so he stopped playing. The tennis player who hits the ball out of bounds gasps, grunts, behaves frustratedly

<sup>61</sup> Especially in *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein develops several related topics, including how we know that someone is in pain, how we identify “expectation”, how we know that someone means what he says, and so forth. It would be interesting to develop further investigations of each of these topics and assorted others using a method like the one employed here, but at this point, those developments would be distractions. Again, our focus is on “thinking” and improving thinking skills.

because she did not intend to make an error. We learn to talk about others' behaviors and reactions with words like "intend", "try", "mean", "want", "hope", "expect", and so on. And so we learn to measure our own behaviors, reactions, and intentions from those of others. We do not learn to measure ourselves from the inside as it were, and apply those measurements elsewhere in the world. We do not place our hand on top of our head to show how tall we are, because height is a measurement that we make against yardsticks --- by making comparisons --- *in the world*. We intend and we think publicly, and so we evaluate thoughts and intentions, our own and others', with the same criteria that we learn *in the world*.

Relatedly, I often do not know what I can do until I practice. The same goes for our evaluations of others' capabilities: we always evaluate actions when we evaluate skills, our own or others'. I do not know whether I can ride a bicycle twenty miles in one hour until I try. If I try and fail, then the way in which I fail suggests what skills I need to improve, assuming that I aim to achieve this average speed at some point. To evaluate our own skills, we must exercise the skill; to evaluate others' skills, they must exercise those skills. Self-evaluation of a skill requires performance just as much as other-evaluation, insofar as skills are located in persons and observable activities.

We learn to see relevant aspects of others' performances, depending on why we watch the performance, depending on our purposes. The tennis coach watches the player's feet when she hits a forehand if she tends to misdirect shots from that side. The piano teacher notices the student's posture if he complains about pain in his hands or in his back. Writing instructors create assignments to work specific skills, like those involved in composing position papers, news reports, business plans, and so forth, and they notice how well their students adapt their writing styles to those specific tasks.

We evaluate our own performances in the same way that coaches and instructors evaluate others' performances: we

learn to see ourselves. We learn how our performance should look and feel from the perspective of the person doing it, from our perspective, but we learn these things from having watched others, from having been coached, trained, drilled, instructed over time.

With all this emphasis on “purposes”, it is worth pausing briefly to highlight some of the subtleties of how easily we distinguish behaviors that, on the surface, might look *the same*, though they are quite differently motivated. Practicing and rehearsing will be our clearest cases.

## 15. Practice & Performance

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*Where we investigate our capacity to differentiate between practicing and performing.*

*Follows: 2. Practice, Performance & Motivation, where we described different kinds of practicing, clarified the kind of purposeful practice that interests us here, and started to suggest connections between philosophical pursuits and the tangible examples that we developed throughout the text.*

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I practice piano so that at a recital I will perform as well as I can, or so that in the studio I can perform a piece flawlessly in just a few takes. One would think, though, that in at least one of the practice sessions I would have already performed as well as I can, since such a result shows that I am prepared for a recital or for a studio session. As a scheduled performance draws near and my skills at playing the piece improve, my practice sessions approach command-performance level. At some point, because my skills have improved, certain aspects of what I have been calling “practice” and what I have been calling “performance” merge; the sonic outputs of each activity become indistinguishable.

But we can usually easily distinguish a practice session from a publicly accessible performance. When I practice the piece, I do not wear formal clothing, there is no audience present, I sometimes stop when I err and adjust my fingerings, I mutter to myself about how I am doing, and so forth. At a public performance, I am formally clothed, my friends and relations are present, there might be recording equipment on site, I work through errors on the spot, and I remain silent throughout so that the judges can hear the piano as clearly as possible or so that a microphone does not pick up my remarks during a studio session. The purpose of practice is to improve a specific aspect of my performance, for example the act of pressing keys correctly on the piano, and I hope that I can

press the keys as skillfully as in my best practice sessions under the pressure of performance conditions.

Relatedly, couples marry in a ceremony where the words “I do”, spoken by the marriage candidates, followed by the words “I now pronounce you...”, spoken by the officiant, validate the participants' intentions and confers public recognition of their contract. Rehearsals often precede the marriage ceremony. In rehearsal, the participants practice the movements that they are to perform and the order in which parts of the event should happen. The officiant runs through an outline of what she will say, what any other speakers will say, what music will be performed, and crucially, because of inevitably frazzled nerves and uncontrollable excitement, when to say “I do”. All of the participants are present, all agree that the purpose of the ceremony is marriage, the two to be married fully intend to marry one another, and so on, yet to rehearse the ceremony is not to perform the ceremony. No one is actually married by rehearsing a marriage.

An obvious deflation of the example is “of course, it's just a rehearsal”. But “just” hides the interesting details of the relationships between practice and performance and rehearsal and ceremony. In a way, we want to make sense of what work the word “just” does in the deflation. In another way, we want to make sense of what “it” is: if “it” is the rehearsal, then the reasonable paraphrase “the rehearsal is just a rehearsal” seems profoundly unhelpful<sup>62</sup>.

At the rehearsal, we rehearse the ceremony exactly as we will perform it the following day, but with occasional commentary and direction by the officiant. But this cannot be all that differs. What if, during the actual ceremony, we mistakenly stand in the wrong places and the officiant corrects us. Her direction, in this case, does not reduce the *actual* ceremony to rehearsal; the ceremony still counts as a marriage. On the other hand, if during our second run

<sup>62</sup> Although even this *could* be helpful. For example, if I am overwhelmed with anxiety during my wedding rehearsal --- so much so that the practicing seems to be doing me no good --- the officiant might try to relax me by saying, “Look, the rehearsal is just a rehearsal”.

through the rehearsal, we do not need any direction, we have not yet married, because, it seems, we did not intend for this instance of the ceremony to be the one that counts. Yet tomorrow, at the actual ceremony, we will be sincere and our actions will count as a proper performance of the ceremony and will establish that we are now married.

The actual ceremony could go catastrophically wrong and the marriage would still be valid. The flower girl might trip on her way down the aisle, the ring bearer might drop the rings, the best man might sneeze at the moment that I say “I do”, masking my pronouncement from the audience, and so on. Countless minor inconveniences or errors could make this instance of the ceremony seem entirely unlike any previous one. Yet it still counts as a marriage.

Does it count because we simply all agree that this is the real thing? If so, then how is this fact made public? Did everyone assert out loud, prior to the ceremony, that “this counts as a marriage”? Even if they did, is this sufficient evidence that everyone really agrees? Perhaps they all had their fingers crossed and did not really mean it. Perhaps the whole event is an elaborate hoax where the officiant, a con-artist, does not have the legal or religious authority to declare a marriage valid, so though everyone present thought that it was a marriage, it was not, by legal or religious standards.

In a way, rehearsals are drafts of the ceremony. They are practice that aims to put the participants at ease and aims to make the ceremony go smoothly when it counts, but how we perform the event will not change. As we get better at practicing the ceremony, we say of our practice, “this could have counted”, as opposed to when we are just starting to learn and we think, “I will have to work on this”. We can compare and contrast cases like piano recitals and marriage ceremonies to doing philosophy, where philosophical performance can take the form of conversations, debates, teaching, writing, and so on.

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In some cases, philosophers aim to produce what we might call a command performance: a public, spoken version of their ideas. To teach philosophy is to try to deliver philosophical ideas to an audience clearly and effectively, and the practice that goes into this is like practicing piano for a recital or a studio session. As the teaching philosopher prepares his notes for a lecture, he might pace while stating his case aloud. He might make refinements to his lecture based on how the words sound in the ear. He might pay attention to cadence, inflection, emphasis, and so on, depending on which ideas he wants to emphasize or accentuate in his “command performance”. He might record versions of himself giving the lecture and listen back to them in order to pick out what works and what does not work, and to revise his notes accordingly. He might even include stage direction in his notes, based on how well his delivery worked in the recordings that he studied.

Sometimes a philosopher's final product is a written work. A written product will not include stage direction, for example, and it might not be obvious to a reader where the writing philosopher means to emphasize or inflect differently, though writers and publishers often use font styles to suggest such things. Still, the writing philosopher will have practiced for the final written product by producing version after version of his ideas. He might have taken direction from an academic supervisor or a colleague or from a wide variety of readers who represent his intended audience.

Piano recitals and weddings resemble some philosophers' final products and command performances. But a philosopher usually feels that there is more to say, or that he might fabricate a better expression of his ideas. The discipline continues. From this perspective, like tennis champions who continue to study the game and practice their shots, like comedians who continue to work on new material and improve their delivery of tried-and-true jokes, and like newlyweds, who perform the ceremony once, but develop

their commitment every day, philosophers constantly try out new ideas and refine arguments by writing papers, by speaking to colleagues, by lecturing to students, and so on.

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The novice piano player plays piano when he hunts and pecks across the keyboard, when he struggles to learn the relationships between written music and how to operate the piano, when he still says the notes out loud as he tries to follow the music, when he counts every beat in his head or attends diligently to a metronome, when he studies chord structure and develops his hands' habits of fingering chords effortlessly, and so forth. The first day that the student hammers out notes on the keyboard, with a teacher present, or working through a self-guided lesson book, or with nothing but his wits about him, he plays piano. It would be clear to anyone who watches his actions that he intends to play. We can contrast this with a child who, out of curiosity about the device, randomly presses keys and giggles excitedly when sounds come out, or with a cat who skittishly walks across the keyboard as a cacophony of notes frighten her to the floor, or with an adult who casually drags his fingers across the keys as he walks past. The novice piano player has a lot to learn, but we can immediately recognize his disciplined practicing on the instrument.

The novice tennis player plays tennis when she hits seemingly every ball into the net, when she fails to recognize the effect of spin, when she stands flat-footed and facing the net, woefully unprepared, while the ball passes her by. The first day on the court, with an instructor, with a friend, or by herself with just a racket and a ball, the novice player "plays" tennis. As with the novice pianist, we recognize that the tennis player wants to hit the ball in a certain way, we recognize that she tries to emulate well-established movements of professionals, we recognize her intentions as her actions, as the things she says, as her mere presence on

the court, wearing sneakers, holding a racket, bouncing a ball, attempting to serve and so on. We can contrast this with a child who wanders around swinging a racket, with a salesperson at a sporting goods store who demonstrates his swing, with the chair umpire who is clearly part of the game but is not playing, and so on. They all do tennis-related activities, but we immediately recognize that theirs is not the disciplined practice that what we see in novice players as well as champions. Like the novice pianist, the novice tennis player has a lot to learn, but still, she plays tennis as she learns tennis. And we expect her to learn continually, from hitting around with other novices to competing at the highest levels of tournament play.

In the cases above, to play and to practice coincide. For the tennis champion, playing tennis is mostly practicing for big matches and tournaments. For the comedian, playing small clubs, telling jokes at parties, and improvising with friends are all practicing for bigger venues or for his funniest performance yet. Pianists mostly work out fingerings, sharpen their delivery of standards, and develop their improvisational skills in preparation for public performance or studio work. To practice tennis is to play tennis. To work on your delivery is to do comedy. To work on scales and fingerings --- to sharpen existing skills --- is to play piano. Similarly, writing, lecturing, debating are all doing philosophy. And rarely when we do philosophy do we attempt a command performance. Philosophers, like professional tennis players, pianists, cyclists, and comedians, are diligent practitioners of a craft who seek continued improvement on their prior performances.

## 16. Philosophy

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*Dénouement.*

*Follows: 1. Introduction To Philosophy, where we paralleled philosophical skills with other practiced activities, like music and sports, suggested some vocabulary that we developed here, and indicated how Wittgenstein's investigative methods influenced this text.*

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“(The philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas. That is what makes him into a philosopher.)” (Zettel, 455)

“Anything your reader can do for himself leave to him.” (*Culture And Value*, 77)

“A main cause of philosophical disease --- a one-sided diet: one nourishes one's thinking with only one kind of example.” (*Philosophical Investigations*, 593)

This immodestly titled section really has modest aims. Given all that I have just said, the reader should *get* that I do not intend to have a final word on what philosophy is. Just as I have construed thinking broadly, I wish to do the same with philosophy. We might start by saying that philosophy is a special kind of thinking.

Throughout this work, I have emphasized purposes. We call debating, sprinting to the finish, or improvising on piano “thinking” when it seems right to do so. We get what one means by the word “style” when we apply the word to music, or painting, or writing, or comedic delivery. We understand the point of practice as it applies to tennis, cycling, and acting. We get that the participants in the wedding rehearsal do not

intend to wed until the official wedding: we understand the purpose of the event, like we understand the differences between practicing piano and giving a recital.

In part then, my purpose has been to develop a way to say what philosophy is when saying such a thing seems useful or helpful, such as when introducing the topic to undergraduates, when discussing philosophical matters with friends and colleagues, or when we feel the need for helpful reminders about what philosophers do and how we do it.<sup>63</sup> Just as the tennis player needs a simple starting point to understand what the word “tennis” covers, we need a simple starting point to understand what counts as philosophy. The philosopher's craft is communicating ideas through thinking, lecturing, conversing, teaching, writing, and so on.

Hopefully the reader will have appreciated my emphasis, throughout this work, on active verbs. Philosophers do many things: they systematize, they analyze, they write, they debate, they think, they investigate, they argue, and so on. And they do these things for specific purposes. Those purposes differ from philosopher to philosopher, obviously, and by this point, my purposes should be sufficiently clear: to develop sound teaching practices, to develop a clear prose style, and to work out techniques and methods that will help others do the same. The application of the method developed here is wider than the discipline that we call philosophy.

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Thinking and writing are both performances. They resemble piano recitals and tennis matches and stand up comedy, and so similarly, they are activities that we need to practice if we aim to improve our skills. To think is to do more than to operate with words, it is more than to evaluate arguments, it is more than reading, writing, lecturing, and so forth. The pianist thinks by moving her fingers across the

<sup>63</sup> Cf. PI, 127: “The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose.”

keys; the tennis champion thinks by darting across the court to track down a ball; the comedian thinks by gesturing hyperbolically to enthuse his audience. The philosopher thinks by observing behaviors, events, conversations, and objects, by improvising his thoughts in writing, by communicating them in a classroom, by debating with other philosophers, and so on.

I do not mean to *insist* on a vocabulary by using the verb “to think” in this perhaps-strange way. Pianists play piano, tennis players play tennis, comedians tell jokes. They also compose, serve, and deliver. They perform, slice, and act. The point is that all the things they do are “practiced” and “thoughtful”, especially when they aim for peak performance. All of this practicing, performing, and development is a model of how a philosopher, particularly insofar as he is a writer, develops his philosophical skills. And those skills are tied closely to “thinking”. The philosopher engages with the world thoughtfully, and reports on that engagement in a wide variety of ways. As he does so, he develops a style.<sup>64</sup>

Developing a verbal style is something like developing a musical style. A skilled listener can identify a performer by her delivery on the instrument. A “signature” delivery develops in practice as the musician works on scales, interval exercises, fingering techniques and so forth. Over time, a piano student will inevitably develop what we might call quirks. Maybe she hits a D that follows a C slightly harder than a D that follows a B or any other note, and this might make the interval stand out to the listener. Or maybe the player usually rushes ring-finger-to-middle-finger combinations as compared to middle-finger-to-index-finger combinations, and

<sup>64</sup> It is worth noting at this point that at nearly the very end of *Philosophical Investigations* (II-xi, p230), Wittgenstein connects “concepts” and “style”. He suggests that just as concepts are not “whimsical”, neither is “style”; style arises out of practices, which arise out of context --- or perhaps culture --- which is the background against which we learn concepts. But this is only one explanatory path --- one that suits our current purposes quite well. That is, this is not *the* way that concepts and styles arise; it is *a way that makes sense* given the task here --- to talk about teaching, learning, and building related skills.

so choice of fingering affects the style that we hear. Taken together, all of these quirks, and others possibly never-to-be-identified, constitute what we call a style of playing.

Writers, like musicians, develop distinctive styles when they regularly polish and challenge their skills. If they do not write regularly, their thinking will inevitably suffer from a lack of clarity or precision. Except in cases that we might call genius, a philosopher who does not practice his or her technique will not develop a clear, precise, broadly understandable and appealing philosophical style.

Perhaps one philosopher's clarity is another's obfuscation. Perhaps not all philosophers aim for clarity. Perhaps style seems irrelevant in academic, philosophical work. But I contest that clarity, style, appeal, and the like are indispensable aspects of successful engagement in philosophical pursuits. Philosophical thought comes *from the world* --- it is a public discipline. What is in our heads grew in the world, and it is a fundamental responsibility of the philosopher to deliver the fruits of his thinking back to the world not only unbruised, but improved, and wholly digestible.

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Piano students develop skills by working on scales, by playing simple songs, by doing finger strengthening exercises, and a range of other drills. Perhaps the piano student develops a preference for practicing certain exercises in a certain order: basic finger warm-ups, followed by scales, followed by chords, followed by runs through parts of larger compositions. How the student builds skills comes about after much (literally) banging around on the piano. The student will make false starts, he will reject some techniques as ineffective, some techniques will come easily, others will require more technical practice, and so on. If a pianist did not practice the craft, only playing when called upon to perform, those

performances most likely would be dreadful. Writing is much the same.

If we gave piano students some sheet music, a set of rules for translating the written notes to keys on the keyboard, and told them to learn to play the composition that we had given them, they might be able to learn how to play that one piece, but they would be far from what we would call competent piano players, and this would show very quickly. They would not know any scales, they would likely have no sense of intervals, or of chord structure, or any of the subtleties of good technique. Piano students build their playing skills through deliberate practicing.

Similarly, if we assign essays to philosophy students without first building up their technical abilities, they might become skilled assigned-essayists, but they would be far from what we would call skilled philosophers or writers. They would not, for example, learn to pick out reasonable essay topics from the ebb and flow of their readings, debates, conversations, lectures, and so on. A student of philosophy who does not engage regularly or thoughtfully with the world will suffer a parallel failure; building a skill at being a writer involves more than writing down ideas and working on drafts. Building a skill as a philosopher involves more than writing seminar papers and studying great works. Were we to fail to address skill building in our teaching activities, we would be *selecting* those who already *get it* rather than training those who could, but have not yet developed philosophical thinking skills. We can and should aim to expand philosophy's audience, partly by challenging our own pedagogic practices.

Success as a writing student depends on exposure to good expression in addition to regular practice. If their goal is to learn the art of the essay, then students should *study* good essays, which is different from merely reading good essays. Students should learn to play with words. For example, they could exercise their joke-telling abilities to develop a sense of timing, which we might call the oral equivalent to arrangement. Similarly, learning *delivery*, as one would do in a

theater class, helps to emphasize sensitivity to context. Any of these exercises, and many of their ancestors, will enhance a student's respect for what words can do, and what it is like to use words well in a performance. Given that the philosopher operates with seemingly impossibly complex and abstract words and ideas, such practice can only benefit his work.

Diverse, daily exercise is crucial if novice philosophers expect more than dreadful results when instructors call upon them to perform. Diverse, daily exercises resemble practicing scales or doing sprints: pianists do not play scales in their public performances; long-distance cyclists rarely sprint on hundred mile rides; philosophers do not necessarily directly use what they practice when called upon to write or otherwise perform their ideas. Philosophers do not tell jokes in professional papers, but telling jokes builds philosophical skills, such as timing and delivery. Philosophers do not portray Hamlet during lectures, but acting helps to build a philosopher's sympathetic portrayal of his material. The range of skills that students build while practicing a craft will affect their public performances, regardless of whether the products of those skills appear on the surface of their actions.

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Still, we have not directly said much about what philosophers study. Certainly introductory students would profit from hearing a description of the topic on day one of a philosophy course. Instructors will profit from hearing each others' descriptions of the discipline --- from hearing other philosophers' self-evaluations --- for the philosopher's own take on the topic originates in others' takes. Professional tennis players practice serves, pianists practice long-known compositions, Olympic cyclists still work on their cadence and endurance every day. These are *fundamental* activities, and revisiting the fundamentals rarely results in wasted effort.

We learn philosophy through examples. Philosophy, we might say, is a concept, and just as we learn and build

concepts by exposure to simple cases, we understand what counts as philosophy through exposure to what we call “philosophical” works and ideas. This text is an example: it investigates what counts as thinking, how we improve our writing skills, how we identify intentional actions, among other topics.

We learn to talk about complex concepts by learning to arrange simple ideas and observations, and the shape of this text exemplifies one such method of arrangement. We end where we began, with “philosophy”, but with a newly-refined vocabulary<sup>65</sup> that we can use to better describe both the discipline and how we *get better* at it. The second section of the text, “Practice, Performance & Motivation” introduces the penultimate section of the text, “Practice & Performance”; “Thinking” sets up “Self-Evaluation” and so on. The text deliberately introduced its vocabulary in one order, and then implemented that vocabulary in an increasingly more technical manner in the reverse order. Though in an unconventional way, the whole text argues in favor of using this method of arrangement as a pedagogic and investigative tool by demonstrating a helpful implementation of the technique<sup>66</sup>. And talk of *how* we construct arguments is philosophical talk.

Also, the text emphasizes what I call “statement and elaboration”, as described throughout the text. By using this technique as part of the investigation, by using the technique to develop a description of the philosophical method of which it is a part, we learn the ways in which, and the occasions upon which the technique proves useful. Specifically, it proves useful when something stands in need of elaboration, or when we are unclear about an abstract topic, or when, perhaps as instructors, we need to state rules of thumb or practical guidelines to students, or even to ourselves.

<sup>65</sup> We can now use the word “thinking”, for example, to talk about deliberate, hands on activities, as opposed to just so-called mental phenomena.

<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, one could read the sections of this text in the reverse order and still accomplish the same goals.

This suggests that we also develop a competence at identifying *when* we need to say more: to explain, to describe, to help the reader or interlocutor along. This depends on our having developed a competence at *reading* situations, and that we *get* one another fairly clearly. The tennis player who does not recognize clumsiness in her footwork needs instruction, and statement and elaboration might help. We might tell her: "Try to take just one full step when returning a serve." And we would go on to describe how to achieve this by starting in the right place, with your feet pointed in the right direction, by reading the serve and reacting appropriately and so on. She will recall these descriptions --- she will attend to her play in a certain way --- when we remind her of the "one step" guideline, until eventually the skill becomes part of her normal play. Just as we describe "walking" as one activity, though we could describe it as many activities, like moving your arms and legs to proceed in an intentionally forward direction, we describe "receiving serve" as one activity, though it includes starting with your feet in this spot while attending to the server's motions, etc.

Similarly, when we talk about or teach about "philosophy" we mean many deliberate actions and activities to which we might attend for certain purposes, but many of which we simply *master* as techniques, and do them almost effortlessly. Our coaching and instruction skills depend on the ability to recognize or to distinguish aspects of an activity that the actor could improve. And our ability to isolate and to state clearly and understandably what aspects of a performance the performer could improve *is* our teaching skill.

The novice writer perhaps fails to use appropriately active verbs, or tends to over-complicate his sentences with too many subordinate clauses, or has a poor sense of paragraphing. As instructors, we identify and state basic rules and guidelines that help the student attend to aspects of his work that he previously had not recognized and isolated. Through practice, the need for such attention fades and the

writer simply *writes*. The philosopher, insofar as he operates with words, learns to pay attention to abstract words and events and activities in a special way; he learns to write about the attention that he has paid; he learns to lecture about it, to debate about it, to develop new ideas by shifting his attention and so forth. Eventually, the philosopher will pay attention, write, learn, and lecture *naturally* in a philosophical way about philosophical topics. Our task, then, as instructors of philosophy is to guide the student's attention. But first we have to attract the student's attention.

The brand new philosophy student will not likely get the concerns of an advanced philosopher on day one of Introduction to Philosophy. Advanced philosophers who study different sub-disciplines often do not get each others' concerns either. Given this, any philosopher profits from continually working to refine his ability to state simply, in a wide variety of ways, what he does, how he does it and why he does it, and to be prepared to elaborate on those statements in ways that are sensitive to his audience. The philosopher's ability to do this is his effectiveness as an instructor and as an adaptable practitioner of the discipline.

The philosopher must be a student of his times. While introducing the topic, he must be able to marshal the verbal and thinking skills that students already have. For example, students a few generations ago encountered more written ideas than visual ideas, as compared to today's students, given the pervasiveness of television, movies, advertising, the Internet, and so forth. The skilled instructor, then, will recognize this fact and use it to his advantage while introducing and developing "philosophy" with his students. The skilled instructor might recognize that contemporary students "think in chunks" more than they "think in structures", and so the skilled instructor will adapt his methods to reflect this observation. The method developed here is sensitive to such a shift: contemporary students, insofar as they *get* sound-bytes, respond well to a method of "statement and elaboration"; "statement" is a sound-byte, and

elaboration is the process of coming to understand the significance of that statement. Students develop their skills through learning how to arrange paraphrases, or *statements*, and how to elaborate on those paraphrases sensitively, and how to arrange statements and elaborations into coherent works. Wittgenstein's hypertext-esque structure is a model of how to do philosophy in this manner.

Again, this is an example of what we study in philosophy: we study how we think and how we can improve our thinking skills. We study the structures of arguments. We study verbal performance methods. We refine our own communication techniques so that we better express the results of our own thinking. Philosophy comprises numerous other topics not explicitly addressed here: right and wrong actions, freedom, justice, aesthetics, intentions, judgment, and so on. We should recognize similarities between these themes, and we should recognize how we might apply the method developed here to investigations of these topics, just as we applied it to thinking, practice, getting it, and so forth.

Put simply, philosophers talk and write about how they do what they do and why they do what they do. In the current text, I talk about how I write and think. I arrange tangible examples and descriptions of ordinary activities in an effort to show how complex, abstract topics arise; thinking, evaluation, and intention are among the main topics we have treated here. I have done this with the aim of appealing to a general audience without sacrificing rigor. I assert that we *can* clearly describe how we think and how we can improve our thinking skills. Ultimately I hope that the investigation here will benefit both an introductory and a professional audience, a possibly impossible, but worthy task.

The student of philosophy, as well as the professional practicing philosopher, thinks and writes daily, he develops a style, and he develops techniques, methods, and habits that enhance his written and spoken performances. He measures his success by whether an audience gets his ideas and arguments, by whether they sympathize with his

philosophical concerns, and by how they contribute to conversations and debates. He thinks as he measures this success, he sharpens his conversational skills and his writing skills, he alters his intentions and his delivery to suit his audience, and he is able to do so because, through his regular practice, he has developed a command of his discipline. He masters his craft, yet continues to develop that mastery by engaging thoughtfully with the world.

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