

# WITTGENSTEIN ON GRAMMAR, THESES AND DOGMATISM

P. M. S. Hacker

## 1. *Misunderstandings*

There are many misunderstandings, misrepresentations and misinterpretations of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Those that I shall address here concern first, the periodization of Wittgenstein's thought; secondly, the supposition that his conception of what he called 'grammar' in the *Philosophical Investigations* was fundamentally different from the conception he had when he was writing the *Big Typescript* and had a more limited role; and thirdly, the suggestion that what Wittgenstein deemed to be grammatical statements are dogmatisms, theories or doctrines and that these are inconsistent with his meta-philosophical remarks in the *Investigations*. The second and third bundle of misunderstandings seems, like so many, to stem from the school of American Wittgensteinians. Unfortunately, it is spreading to other climes.

A party game much indulged in by many philosophers studying Wittgenstein's works is 'Counting Wittgensteins'. The operative question is 'How many Wittgensteins are there?' – and the winner is the one who can find the most. This game should be shunned, for it breeds confusions. Wittgenstein wrote only two books – both masterpieces – which are fundamentally different from each other. All the other books published under his name are unfinished or discarded writings. One can speak of an early philosophy and of a later philosophy. There is no 'middle philosophy' or indeed 'last philosophy', since he produced no works between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*, and no works after the *Investigations*. What we can speak of are the indistinctly marked phases in the development of the ideas of the *Investigations* between 1930 and 1946 – *indistinctly* in as much as progress was not made on all fronts at the same time, and one has to trace the developments on each front separately (as is done in the four volumes of the *Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations*). We can also speak (cautiously) of the unfinished projects, e.g. of a book on the philosophy of mathematics and another on the philosophy of psychology. And we can speak of the late notes on certainty, and explore the extent to which they modify conceptions advanced in the

### *Investigations.*

After completing the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein gave up writing philosophy for ten years. When he returned to Cambridge in 1929, it was not part of his intention to overturn his first philosophy. On the contrary, his purpose was to turn from the treatise on logic – the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* – to what he called ‘the application of logic’ as envisaged in that book (TLP 5.557). But his tentative plans rapidly unravelled. He came to recognise what he called in the Preface to the *Investigations* ‘grave mistakes’ in what he had set out in his first book. He was helped to do this, he wrote, by the powerful and assured criticisms he received from Frank Ramsey between January 1929 and January 1930. So he embarked upon the writing of a second book that would stand in contrast to his ‘older way of thinking’ (PI, Preface). This took sixteen years, in the course of which his ideas evolved and developed. In the early years he tried out various lines of thought, some of which proved to be dead-ends (e.g. the symptoms/hypothesis relation, the ‘phenomenological’ conception of material object statements as hypotheses, the notion of *Satzsysteme* (‘propositional systems’) of determinates of determinables, methodological solipsism, the ‘I’ as subject/‘I’ as object distinction). So too he tried out various forms of presentation, initially the conventional chapter structure of the *Big Typescript* (followed by the different form of the ‘Umarbeitung’ and ‘Zweite Umarbeitung’), subsequently the sequential language-game formation of *Eine Philosophische Betrachtung* (the rewritten German version and extension of the ‘Brown Book’), before finally hitting upon the devices – the method of presentation – of the *Investigations* (initially composed as consecutive prose rather than as separate numbered remarks).

It is misleading to speak of ‘the Middle Wittgenstein’ or ‘the second (third, fourth or fifth) Wittgenstein’. There is only one Wittgenstein. What is true is that in the course of the sixteen years between his return to Cambridge and his completion (more or less) of the *Investigations*, his thought evolved dramatically (especially between 1929 and 1933) as he repudiated much of his earlier philosophy and strove to formulate quite different solutions to the problems. His endeavours to write a book on the philosophy of mathematics were put aside in 1944 and never resumed, although it is clear from his notes that he hoped to complete the project (with the title ‘Beginnings of Mathematics’). After 1946 most of his writings (1900 pages) concern the philosophy of psychology. It seems that he

intended to produce a book on this subject too. The remainder of his fragmentary writings are on colour and on knowledge and certainty. There is no reason to suppose that these were intended to form a book of any kind.

Thus far by way of reminders. It is by now well known that in 1929/30 Wittgenstein's thought underwent a dramatic transformation relative to the *Tractatus*. He described the methodological transformation in various ways: it was a transition from the method of truth to the method of sense (MS 106 (Vol. II), 46).<sup>1</sup> In his lectures, he declared that what he was introducing was in effect a new subject – with his work a 'kink' in the development of philosophy had occurred comparable to the introduction of Galileian kinematics into physics. A 'new method' had been found, he announced – a method that turned philosophy into a matter of skill (M 322).<sup>2</sup> In discussion with Desmond Lee in 1930 he remarked that 'in philosophy, all that is not gas is grammar' (LWL 112).

There can be no doubt that one of the important transformations in his thought in the early 1930s is the abandonment of the notion of a hidden logical syntax of language as envisaged in the *Tractatus* in favour of the notion of grammar in which *nothing is hidden* (BT 418, PI §559). But although everything is *in view*, it is extraordinarily difficult to attain *an overview*. Philosophical investigation moves in the domain of grammar; philosophical problems are, at root, grammatical confusions and are to be resolved by grammatical clarification; grammatical clarification is to be achieved by marshalling an ordered array of familiar rules (grammatical rules) for the uses of words. The *Big Typescript* is the provisional culmination of Wittgenstein's attempts between 1929 and 1933 to develop his new conception of (among other things) grammar, grammatical confusion, grammatical problems, grammatical propositions and remarks. For it was in the notebooks of these years that he developed his new philosophical *Weltanschauung*.

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<sup>1</sup> Some commentators have been puzzled about this remark, since it seems that Wittgenstein had already made this move in the *Tractatus*. However, it is arguable that what he had in mind is the abandonment of the conception of ineffable insights into the metaphysical structure of the world (illicitly expressed by the malformed sentences of the *Tractatus* and licitly *shown* by ordinary empirical sentences in use). It is of these that he wrote in the author's Preface 'the truth of the thoughts that are here set forth seems to me to be unassailable and definitive'. These insights into the essence of the world and into the nature of all possible representation are replaced by grammatical platitudes that are no more than rules for the use of words that determine what does and what does not make sense. So, for example, instead of the strictly ineffable insight that the world consists of facts not things, we have the strictly grammatical platitude that a description of (any part of) the world is what is called 'a statement of facts'. And this is no more than a rule for the use of the phrases 'a description of the world' and 'a statement of facts'.

<sup>2</sup> Rather than the *Wesensschau* of genius.

What I aim to do is to give an overview of his remarks on grammar in the *Big Typescript* and then to examine whether the conception of grammar in the *Philosophical Investigations* differs from, or conflicts in any significant way with, that hammered out by 1933. Subsequently I shall explain how the conception of grammar and of grammatical propositions is perfectly consistent with the meta-philosophical remarks of the *Big Typescript* that are retained in the *Investigations* and with the new ones there. Any appearance of inconsistency is the product of misunderstanding.

## 2. Grammar 1929-33

There are 1837 occurrences of the expression ‘Grammatik’ and its cognates in Wittgenstein’s *Nachlass*, as recorded in the Bergen edition. Among the manuscripts the use of the term peaks in MSS 108-116 (Volumes IV-XII), and among the typescripts in TSS 211-213, i.e. in the work done between 1930 and 1933 culminating with the *Big Typescript* (217 occurrences). This should be altogether unsurprising, since it is here that he evolved his new ideas. In the *Investigations*, ‘grammar’ and its cognates occurs 35 times and in *Philosophy of Psychology – a Fragment* (previously denominated Part 2 of the *Investigations*) it occurs 20 times. Among the remarks on grammar in the *Investigations*, 9 are derived from the *Big Typescript* and a further 4 are similar to remarks there, 4 remarks are from earlier MSS not incorporated into the *Big Typescript*, 4 from MSS 114-5 (*Eine Philosophische Betrachtung*; in effect, from the *Brown Book*). The rest date from manuscripts written between 1936 and 1945.

The general conception of grammar, as Wittgenstein used the term in the *Big Typescript*, can be articulated by the following interconnected elucidations:

i. Grammar, *qua discipline*, is a normative description (and investigation) of language (BT 191v, 192v) – in the sense in which jurisprudence is (among other things) the normative description of the laws of the land. A normative description is a statement of, and a clarification of, rules. It no more *lays down* rules that determine what makes sense than jurisprudence lays down laws determining what is legal. It is a *descriptive activity* (hence unlike *prescriptive* jurisprudence). Grammar, *qua object* of grammatical investigations, consists of sense-determining rules of a language. What belongs to grammar in this sense is everything required for determination of meaning, for comparing a

proposition with reality – hence for understanding (BT 42). (Compare: ‘What belongs to chess is everything that has to be settled before the game can commence.’)

ii. Like the traditional grammarian, Wittgenstein investigates rules of language. But the rules the grammarian neglects are precisely those that are of philosophical interest, and the differentiation between kinds of words that is of philosophical concern is irrelevant to the grammarian’s enterprise. It would be misleading to say that what Wittgenstein deals with is what is *essential* whereas what the grammarian is concerned with is what is *inessential*. But one might come closer to the truth by saying that what he, Wittgenstein, means by ‘grammar’ differs from what the grammarian means (BT 413).

In his lectures at the time, Wittgenstein insisted that ‘Of course, there isn’t a philosophical grammar and an ordinary English grammar, the former being more complete than the latter’ (AWL 31). Both investigate grammar, but for quite different purposes and with quite different interests, although the philosopher will occasionally leave ‘the realm of what is generally called grammar’ (ibid.). Waismann attempted to reconcile the tension here (PLP 66f., 135ff.).<sup>3</sup>

iii. Just as certain laws only become interesting when they are transgressed, so too certain grammatical rules only become interesting when philosophers want to transgress them (BT 425). For philosophical problems and confusions are rooted in the urge to push up against the limits of language (the bounds of sense<sup>4</sup>). The result of succumbing to this urge is nonsense – i.e. combinations of words that lack sense.

To be sure, we need to bear in mind how we actually talk about rules in philosophy, that is – when we are clarifying grammatical questions – so that we keep our feet on the ground and don’t construct castles in the air. For example, one gives rules such as ‘ $\sim\sim p = p$ ’; or one says that ‘ $a = a$ ’ makes no sense and one then describes a notation (as in the *Tractatus*) in which this formulation (as well as ‘ $(\exists x)(x=x)$ ’) is avoided; or one says that it makes no sense to say that something ‘seems to seem red’ (BT 243).

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<sup>3</sup> For detailed examination of this issue, see ‘Rules and Grammar’ in G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein : Rules, Grammar and Necessity*, Vol.2 of *An Analytical Commentary of the Philosophical Investigations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> extensively revised edition (Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2009), pp. 41-67.

<sup>4</sup> The expression ‘bounds of sense’ is not Wittgenstein’s, but Strawson’s Kantian phrase. Nevertheless, it is apt for Wittgenstein’s conception of the limits of language, since the limits of language are precisely the bounds of sense, and transgressing the limits of language, like transgressing the bounds of sense, does not yield a description of impossible possibilities, but nonsensical forms of words.

iv. The meaning of a word is determined by its grammar, i.e. by the familiar, accepted, rules for its use. Grammar is the account-books of language (BT 58) – it explains the meaning of words (BT 37). Just as one can read off the state of a business from its account-books, ‘everything that’s “business” in logic’ has to be stated in grammar (BT 526). The location of a word in grammar is its meaning – its position in grammatical space (BT 30). The meaning of a word is what we explain when we explain its meaning (BT 37). An explanation of meaning is a rule for the use of the expression explained. The meaning of a word is laid down in the grammar of the word (BT 58) – in the rules for its use.

v. Categorical expressions (e.g. ‘shape’, ‘colour’, ‘number’) indicate grammatical rules that apply to different kinds of words (BT 32). Hence explanations of meaning such as ‘Red is *this*  colour’ can be understood only by someone who already knows his way around in grammar (BT 36). Such expressions show the post where the new word is stationed (BT 209v) – they indicate a range of grammatical rules that apply to the word in question.

vi. There is no semantic (meaning-endowing) connection between language and reality or a meta-logical connection between propositions and the facts that make them true. This has two aspects:

(a) Ostensive explanation remains within language and belongs to grammar (BT section 12, title). It does not make a ‘connection’ between language and reality. It is a preparation for the application of language, but is not itself an application (BT 42v-43).

(b) Although intentionality (the pictoriality of the proposition) seems to demand a connection between language and reality (e.g. between the expectation that *p* and its satisfaction, or the proposition that *p* and the fact that makes it true), the ‘connection between language and reality’ is made through explanations of words, which in turn belong to grammar – so language remains self-contained, autonomous (BT section 43, title).

Like everything metaphysical, the (pre-established) harmony between thought and reality is to be found in the grammar of the language (BT 188).

vii. What *a proposition* is (i.e. what *counts* as a proposition) is determined in grammar (BT section 18, title). Furthermore, the description of how a proposition is verified is a contribution to its grammar – it is only a particular form of the question ‘What does one do with this proposition?’ (BT

265).

viii. A proposition is completely logically analysed when its grammar has been completely clarified (BT 417). Whether one proposition follows from another must emerge from the grammar of the latter and from that grammar alone. This can't be the result of an insight into a new sense, but only of an insight into an old sense (BT 310). There can be no surprises in grammar (BT 62).

ix. Grammatical rules determine the sense of a sentence: and whether a combination of words makes sense (BT 79, section 19, title). Hence they also determine when a form of words makes *no sense*. The question 'How do you know you can't *divide red*?' (or 'How do you know that nothing can *simultaneously be red and green all over*?') is itself nonsense, since the form of words 'divide red' ('is red and green all over') makes no sense. The sentence 'You *can't* divide red' is a grammatical proposition (a rule) that excludes a form of words from use (not a possibility from reality (BT section 19)). Such propositions draw a boundary between sense and nonsense (BT 80).

x. The rules of grammar are, in a sense, arbitrary (BT 99). They are arbitrary in the sense in which the choice of a unit of measurement is arbitrary (and they are non-arbitrary in the sense in which it isn't). That is, they may be practical or impractical, useful or useless, *but not true or false* (BT 236 - 236v). Grammar is not *accountable* to any reality, for the rules of grammar determine meaning and are not answerable to any meaning (BT section 56, title). Means-ends rules (e.g. rules for cooking) are non-arbitrary, since the activity they regulate is defined by its end – specifiable independently of the rules for achieving it (BT 236-7). Rules of grammar, by contrast, are not determined by reference to an independently identifiable end. The purpose of grammar is nothing other than the purpose of language (BT 194).

xi. Rules of grammar *cannot be justified* by reference to reality (i.e. *there is no such thing* as justifying rules of grammar by reference to 'necessary facts' that correspond to them – since there are no such things). It makes no sense to attempt to justify the rule that nothing can be red and green all over at the same time by reference to the 'fact' (the 'necessity in nature') that nothing can be red and green all over at the same time (BT 193v, 236-9). For the appearance of an objective necessity is no more than the shadow cast by grammar upon the world.

xii. *Grammatical propositions or remarks* are expressions of rules for the use of the

constituent words, often in the misleading guise of a description of reality. Logico-grammatical ‘must-s’ and ‘can’t-s’ indicate norms of representation (BT 17).

xiii. The essence of things is to be clarified by making the grammar of their verbal expression explicit. For example, the essence of thought is elucidated by describing the grammar of ‘think’ (BT section 54).

xiv. Our grammar is deficient in surveyability (BT 417). Logically different expressions often look alike and logically similar expressions often appear to be quite different. Hence the method of philosophy is the surveyable representation of grammar (BT section 89, title). It dissolves philosophical problems by bringing to mind and ordering familiar grammatical rules for the use of words that shed light on the conceptual, grammatical, problems. The work of the philosopher consists in marshalling recollections (of the familiar uses of words) for the purpose of resolving philosophical problems (BT 415, 419)). Philosophy does not explain things in the sense in which physics does, it only describes the grammar of problematic words and propositions. It leaves grammar as it is, for it is not its task to produce a different, let alone a better, grammar, but only to lay bare the confusions generated by existing grammar (BT 417-19). The results of philosophy are the discovery of some plain piece of nonsense and the bumps that the understanding has got by running up against the limits of language. These bumps make us see the value of that discovery (BT 425).

I have passed over various inconsistencies in the *Big Typescript* and disregarded those remarks that are no more than the decaying corpse of Wittgenstein’s phenomenological reflections in 1929/30. For these rapidly disappear from his thought after the *Big Typescript*, long before the composition of the first draft of the *Investigations* in 1936/7. I have also not paused to examine Wittgenstein’s hesitations with the emerging ideas and struggles with the residues of old ones – that would be too lengthy a task and to little present purpose. Rather, I have focused on those elements of his reflections on grammar and meaning, and on his new method of philosophical investigation that, as I shall now show, remain constant. It is these that are of pivotal importance for the understanding of the *Philosophical Investigations* and for his later work on the philosophy of mathematics (between 1937 and 1944).

### 3. *Grammar in the Investigations*

The question we are addressing is whether Wittgenstein's conception of grammar and of the role of grammatical investigations in philosophy underwent any radical change once he began work on the early draft of the *Investigations* in November 1936. More specifically, did he repudiate any of the points we have just specified?

We can distinguish the following array of observations:

1. Grammar, qua object of grammatical investigation, consists of rules for the use of signs that determine their meaning (PI brf §108, §558, and *passim*). Grammar, qua investigation, *only describes*, but does not explain, the use of words (PI §496, cp. BT 191v). This parallels (i) above.

2. The meaning of a word is what an explanation of its meaning explains (PI §560; cp. BT 34). Explanations of meaning (e.g. ostensive explanations) are rules for the use of words (PI 28-33; cp. BT section 12). This is parallel to (iv).

3. Categorical expressions such as 'number', 'length', or 'colour' show the place in grammar that we assign to an explanandum (PI §29; cp. BT 32). Hence an explanation of the form 'This number (length, colour) is called ...' can be understood only by someone who already knows the role of the word in the language (PI §30). This is parallel to (v).

4. There is no semantic, meaning-endowing, connection between language and reality. (a) Ostensive definitions do not connect words to world, language to reality. Samples are instruments of language and belong to the means of representation not to what is represented (PI §16, §50). (b) The resolution (and dissolution) of the problems of intentionality do not (and cannot) demand a meta-logical connection between words and world to explain the pre-established harmony between language and reality. Rather 'It is in language that an expectation and its fulfilment make contact' (PI §445, cp. BT 371). This is parallel to (vi).

5. Asking whether and how a proposition is verified is only a special form of the question 'How do you mean?'. The answer is a contribution to the grammar of the proposition (PI §353, cp. BT 265). This is parallel to (vii). Note that nothing stronger than this remains of Wittgenstein's brief flirtation with verificationism in 1929-30.

6. The rules of grammar are arbitrary in the sense that the purpose of grammar is nothing but

that of language, so grammatical rules are not means-ends rules that determine how a language must be if it is to achieve its end (PI §497; cp. BT 194). This is parallel to (x)

7. There is no reality lying behind a notation (e.g. the use of 'is') to which its grammar conforms (PI §562; cp. Vol. XI. 68 (this part of the MS dates from 1933)). This is parallel to (xi).

8. Grammatical propositions or remarks are expressions of rules for the use of words, often in the misleading guise of descriptions. 'An order orders its own execution' is a grammatical proposition correlating 'the order to V' with 'executing the order to V' (PI §458; cp. BT 90v). This is parallel to (xii).

9. Essence is expressed in grammar. Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is (PI §§371, 373). This is manifest in grammatical propositions: Understanding is not a mental state but akin to an ability (PI brf §149); meaning something is not a mental activity (PI §693); 'inner processes' stand in need of outer criteria (PI §598); I can know that you are in pain, but not that I am in pain (PI §246), and, in PPF §315: 'I can know what someone else is thinking, not what I am thinking' – which is a cloud of philosophy condensed into a drop of grammar. This is parallel to (xiii)

10. Wittgenstein's philosophical inquiry into logic, language, meaning, etc. is a grammatical one. It sheds light on the problem by clearing away misunderstandings concerning the use of words. (PI §90; brf §108; §124). Our grammar is deficient in surveyability. 'To mean something' looks like 'to think something', but it isn't; 'to understand' appears to signify a state one is in, but it doesn't; the contrast between conscious and unconscious looks like the contrast between visible and not visible, but it isn't; and so forth. A main source of our misunderstandings is that we lack an overview of our use of words (PI §122; cp. BT 417). Those misunderstandings are brought about, among other things, by misleading analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of our language (PI §90). These lead us to run up against the limits of language (PI §119). Clarity comes from grammatical investigation, from a surveyable representation of the grammatical rules that shed light upon the puzzles and confusions at hand. This is parallel to (xiv).

Three points are noteworthy. First, by contrast with the *Big Typescript*, far more about the conception of grammar is taken for granted in the *Investigations* and not explained. This is evident in

the relative paucity of remarks corresponding to (i) to (iii), even though everything said *is perfectly consistent with them*, and indeed *is elucidated by them*. The most obvious explanation of this is that in the *Big Typescript* (and the antecedent writings which it collates), Wittgenstein was clarifying for himself the scope and nature of grammar as he used the term. So, by the time he came to write the *Investigations* he took all that for granted.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, the concept of grammar is little invoked in the clarification of the nature of necessity. For this topic, by and large, was hived off to be examined in the projected book on the philosophy of mathematics.<sup>6</sup> It is important to note a couple of the most important of the remarks on grammar and necessity in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. To accept a proposition as unshakably certain, he observed, means to use it as a grammatical rule – it is this that removes the uncertainty of it (RFM 170).<sup>7</sup> In mathematics we are convinced (by proofs) of grammatical propositions – for the propositions of arithmetic are the grammar of number, and the propositions of geometry are a grammar for spatial relations. So the result of our being convinced is that we *accept a rule* (RFM 162). The connection which is much stricter and harder than a causal, experiential one, is always a connection in grammar (RFM 88). The *must* corresponds to a track that we lay down in language. In short, Wittgenstein's conception of mathematics is crucially interwoven with his normative conception of grammar. For his conception of mathematics *is* a normative one, and cannot be understood independently of the fundamental idea that propositions of mathematics are norms of representation.

Thirdly, far from abandoning the salient features of the concept of grammar that he hammered out in the early thirties, Wittgenstein elaborated it further. (I) He clarified his ideas on concept-identity and meaning-change (an issue raised but not resolved in the *Big Typescript*). Not every grammatical

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<sup>5</sup> Note that in RPP I, §1050 Wittgenstein observes that grammar is 'the logic of our language', that grammar consists of conventions (RPP I, §550). Many other remarks on grammar, reiterating conceptions formulated in the period of the *Big Typescript*, occur in Wittgenstein's later writings and compilations. For example: Z §§55, 208, 320, 331, 437, 491, 590, 717; RPP I, §§1, 46, 472, 550, 693, 1085,.

<sup>6</sup> For detailed examination of Wittgenstein's clarification of the nature of necessity, see G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar, and Necessity*, vol. 2 of *An Analytic Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> (extensively revised) edition (Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2009), pp. 241-370.

<sup>7</sup> It is noteworthy that when he started reflecting on Moore's peculiar propositions, he noted that it is not only grammatical propositions (rules for the uses of words) that are thus removed from possible doubt, but also empirical propositions of the world picture. Hence the problems of *On Certainty*.

difference implies a difference in meaning. We must distinguish between what is essential and what inessential (PI §§561-8). (II) He introduced the now famous distinction between depth grammar and surface grammar (PI §664; derived from Vol. XII, 132), 1936). This is, incidentally, one of the least helpful of Wittgenstein's figures of speech, since the geological metaphor, apt for the *Tractatus*, is inappropriate for the conception of the *Investigations*, which demands a topographical metaphor. The intended contrast is between what one notices on superficial glance, and what one discerns when one looks carefully around. So, for example, 'to mean something by a word' looks at first glance like a verb of action, but when one examines its use, it is evident that it is not. (III) Grammatical investigations can be made by means of 'exercises', for example, by comparing the grammar of 'understand' with that of expressions for mental states such as 'feeling dejected', 'being excited the whole day', 'being in pain uninterruptedly' (PI brf §149). This will make clear how misleading it is to think of understanding as a mental state. For one may feel dejected all day and mercifully cease to feel so when one falls asleep – but one doesn't cease to understand something when one falls asleep. One's dejection may be broken off by the visit of a jovial friend, but flood back when he leaves. By contrast, one's understanding of something cannot be broken off by distraction of attention and later resumed. And so forth. So too one should undertake the exercise of comparing the grammars of 'to understand', 'to know', 'to fit', and 'to be able to' in order to shed light on the grammar, and hence the nature, of powers (PI §182). Or, again, in order to get clear about what it is to mean something by a word or utterance, one should compare the grammar of 'to mean' with that of 'to think' – one can think quickly or slowly, but not mean something quickly or slowly, one can be interrupted in the middle of thinking, but not in the middle of meaning, one can try to think of something, but one cannot try to mean something; and so on (PI §§660-93 *passim*). One might also add a further important observation: (IV) There is a fluctuation in grammar between criteria and symptoms (PI §354). (But note that this is not a new addition from 1937. It is derived from Vol. XI, 72ff, written in 1933/4.)

We may conclude that there is no *fundamental* change in 1937, or indeed later, in the salient features of Wittgenstein's conception of grammar, of philosophy as a grammatical investigation, or of philosophical problems as *au fond* grammatical ones. There are obvious changes: in the *Big*

*Typescript* he was still occasionally prone to conceive of language as a calculus of rules, and hence of grammar as rules of a calculus – but that had virtually disappeared long before he wrote the *Investigations* (it was no more than some of the eggshells of his old views still clinging to his ideas in 1931). There are far more interesting developments concerning the relationship between a rule and what counts as accord with it, and between following a rule and a practice – which is pivotal to his elucidation of necessity. But it does not alter the correctness of the above itemized insights.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4. *No theories! No theses! No opinions! No dogmatism! – a question of consistency*

In the *Investigations* Wittgenstein makes a variety of observations about the nature of philosophy. These include the following assertions: (a) ‘If someone were to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree with them’ (PI §128). (b) There should be no theories, and nothing hypothetical, in philosophy (PI §109). (c) One must avoid dogmatism in philosophy – which consists in supposing that reality *must* conform to a model (‘Vorbild’) which we employ as an object of comparison – a sort of yardstick (PI §131). Similarly, in his 1939 lectures he remarked that what he was doing in his lectures was *not*: advancing *opinions*. Nor was he trying to get his pupils to change *their* opinions (LFM 103). Indeed, he went so far as to say that in his lectures he won’t say anything that anyone can dispute – or, if anyone does dispute it, he will let that point drop and pass on to something else (LFM 22). What he was trying to do was to get them to engage in a certain kind of investigation.

These methodological remarks have led some interpreters to suppose that Wittgenstein’s observations on grammar in the *Big Typescript*, and his grammatical remarks (e.g. that grammar cannot be justified by reference to reality; that grammar is arbitrary; that grammar determines sense and is antecedent to truth) are theses, theories, opinions and dogmatisms, which he cannot, on pain of inconsistency, have continued to hold when he wrote the *Investigations* (the ‘third’ (or, on some counts, the ‘fourth’) Wittgenstein!). For these assertions are ‘substantial’. They are ‘views’ or ‘opinions’ or ‘philosophical doctrines’. This is an egregious misinterpretation of Wittgenstein, coupled

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<sup>8</sup> It is, however, noteworthy that Wittgenstein became increasingly sensitive to the contextualization of questions concerning meaning and understanding, and hence too those concerning sense and nonsense. A sentence may accord with the rules of grammar and yet its utterance may still be nonsense if the context is inappropriate. But this too does not imply the *repudiation* of any of the insights we have elaborated above.

with incomprehension of what he meant by ‘thesis’, ‘theory’, ‘dogmatism’ and ‘opinion’.

If there is any methodological inconsistency between Wittgenstein’s remarks on the nature of philosophy, on the one hand, and his remarks on grammar (as well as his grammatical remarks (propositions, statements)), on the other, it is already present in 1933-4. His unqualified objection to viewing philosophical questions as akin to scientific ones, and philosophical clarifications as akin to scientific theories or hypotheses long antedates the composition of the *Investigations*. Indeed, he thought that these misconceptions were the main source of metaphysics in the modern era (BB 18, 35). The conception of philosophy that he advances in the *Investigations* does not differ in this respect from what he wrote in 1933-4. *Investigations* §128 on theses in philosophy goes back to MS 110 (Vol. VI), 259 and to conversations with Waismann in 1931 (WWK 183f.). Indeed, it was in those very conversations that he already endorsed what he called ‘a non-dogmatic procedure’ in philosophy – long before he compiled the *Big Typescript*, which, to the blinkered eye, seems full of dogmatism. As regards his remarks in 1939 eschewing opinions in philosophy (LFM 103), these are already to be found in his 1934 lectures (AWL 97).

There is no textual evidence whatsoever to indicate any change in his conception of grammar or his conception of philosophy between 1933-4 and the writing of the *Investigations*. It is implausible to suppose that such a blatant inconsistency as that proposed should not have been noticed by Wittgenstein. It is even more implausible to suppose that he *did notice* it but *didn’t note* it. And it is no less implausible to suppose that he noticed it, but made no adjustments whatsoever to his remarks to eradicate these alleged theses, theories, dogmatisms and opinions. By far the better supposal is that there is in fact no inconsistency whatsoever. That supposal rests foursquare on the correct interpretation of what Wittgenstein meant by ‘thesis’, ‘theory’, ‘dogmatism’, ‘hypothesis’ and ‘opinion’. Once that has been clarified it will be evident that grammatical propositions, observations and remarks are not (A) theses, (B) theories or hypotheses, or (C) opinions, and (D) that there is nothing dogmatic about them.

A. Wittgenstein’s remark about theses (2 July, 1931) was directed at Waismann’s *Thesen*, circulated to members of the Vienna Circle in 1930 and again in 1931. These *Thesen* were a simplified re-presentation of the propositions of the *Tractatus*, (e.g. ‘Reality consists of facts not of

things’, ‘Every state of affairs is complex’, ‘Only a fact can express a sense’). Wittgenstein discussed the issue with Waismann (WWK 183f.). Such a rehash of theses, he said, is no longer justified. His point is that *if* there were any theses, they would be grammatical propositions that everyone would agree with (e.g. red is a colour, 2 is a number) – and, of course, *these are not theses*, but rules for the use of words (e.g. ‘A is red’ |– ‘A is coloured’). What he did not say (but could have said) was that most of Waismann’s theses were in fact confused (it is misguided to say that reality consists of facts; rather: a description of reality consists of a statement of facts – and that is not a thesis, but a grammatical proposition). To be sure, not all grammatical propositions are immediately obvious (e.g. that – as he later elucidated – there is no such thing as transparent white glass; that arithmetical propositions are norms of representation; that there cannot be a private ostensive definition; and so forth). That is why one must make the grammar clear to oneself, proceed by very short steps in such a way that every single step becomes perfectly obvious and natural, and then no dispute whatsoever can arise (WWK 183).<sup>9</sup>

A grammatical proposition is no more a thesis than is the proposition that the chess king is the piece that gets checked. That is a rule of chess, not a thesis. So too, it is not thesis that red is darker than pink, or that nothing can be red and green all over. Nor is it a thesis that knowledge is not a mental state, that meaning something is not an activity of the mind, or that understanding is akin to an ability. These are grammatical remarks.

B. In general, Wittgenstein associated the term ‘theory’ with the hypothetico-deductive theories of the natural sciences. Theories in philosophy were misguided attempts to mimic theory-construction in science. They parodied scientific theories in attempting to *explain*, by means of explanatory *hypotheses*, involving *assumptions*, *idealizations*, and *suppositions* (e.g. the explanatory role allocated to Platonic Ideas, Cartesian simple natures, Leibnizian monads, or *Tractatus* objects and simple names) – rather than giving descriptions of grammar. Such theories strove, like the natural sciences, for *complete generality*, were held to be *refutable* by a single counter-example, and they aimed to explain why reality *must* be thus or so. This, he held, is the source of metaphysics. But philosophy is purely descriptive – it describes the grammar of our language in order to clear up

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, that is wildly optimistic. It presupposes that one can always get people to see what is obvious – and that is obviously untrue (see the controversies about private ostensive definition, or about the standard metre)!

conceptual confusions and unclarity.

Clearly, it is not a theory, let alone a hypothesis, that red is a colour, that red is darker than pink, or that nothing can be red and green all over – any more than it is a theory, let alone a hypothesis, that bachelors are unmarried men. Nor is it a theory or hypothesis that there can be no such thing as a private language or a private ostensive definition – even though it is not immediately obvious (just as it is not immediately obvious that one cannot trisect an angle with a compass and rule). These are exclusionary *rules* – and what they exclude is a meaningless form of words. But of course, it has to be shown, step by step, *why* such forms of words are meaningless – for they don't *look* meaningless. They are constructed on the model of perfectly meaningful forms of words – and that is why they take us in. They can be shown to be meaningless by assembling and marshalling a select array of familiar rules for the use of words.

C. When Wittgenstein emphasized that he was not advancing *opinions*, and was not trying to get his students to adopt opinions, he meant exactly what he said. It was not *their opinion* that red is a colour, nor was it *his opinion* that π is not an enormous number (LFM 32), or that the connection between a mathematical proposition and its application is roughly<sup>10</sup> that between a rule of expression and the expression itself in use – which is what he tried to show his students (LFM 47). What he was trying to do was to get his students to engage in grammatical investigations – and the upshot of grammatical investigations is not the acquisition of new opinions. As he put the matter in 1934, 'We constantly move in a realm where we all have the same opinions' (AWL 97) – and that realm is the realm of grammar. For in as much as we agree in the language we use the only disagreements will not be of opinions, but of misunderstandings.

D. From time to time Wittgenstein worried about whether he was not being dogmatic, and in his notebooks he made some remarks about what he meant by 'dogmatism'. He gave various related explanations. Dogmatism consists of ascribing to an object represented features of the prototype in terms of which one represents it (BT 260). This is manifest outside philosophy in Spengler (BT 260), who insisted that cultures *must* have features of the prototype in term of which he described them (a life-cycle). In particular, it is characteristic of misguided philosophy to insist that things *must* be thus-

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<sup>0</sup> The qualification is because of the apparent application of mathematical propositions to mathematics itself.

and-so, because this is how one has resolved to represent them. Indeed, the *Tractatus* was guilty of this sin – for he had argued that there *must* be independent elementary propositions, even though he had not yet found any, or that every proposition *must* have a determinate sense, no matter how vague it was – since he committed himself to representing vague propositions by means of disjunctions of propositions with a determinate sense. What is the nature of a dogma in philosophy? – he queried in the *Big Typescript*. Is it not the assertion that there is an objective necessity in nature for every possible rule (BT 196)? – that rules of grammar (e.g. that nothing can be red and green all over) are answerable to necessities in reality – as he had once thought (RLF 168f.).

Of course, there is nothing dogmatic about asserting grammatical propositions – which, to be sure, are merely norms of representation, not descriptions of reality. There is nothing dogmatic about the grammatical proposition that red is darker than pink, or that pain is a sensation. Nor indeed is there anything dogmatic about the grammatical proposition that there is no such thing as a private ostensive definition, or that the meaning of a word is not the object it stands for, or that for the most part, the meaning of a word is its use. Rules of grammar, in Wittgenstein's sense of the term, do not describe necessities in the world, they are expressions of rules for the use of words. But philosophers commonly take their shadows to be *de re* necessities – and so fall into confusion and misconceived mythologizing.

One may safely conclude that Wittgenstein's above observations on the nature of grammar (as he used the expression) in the *Big Typescript* are not repudiated or abandoned in the *Philosophical Investigations*. It is patent that the conception of philosophy he advanced in the *Investigations* is, in all respects pertinent to his grammatical investigations, perfectly consistent with that proposed in the *Big Typescript*. And it is obvious that his diverse grammatical remarks in the *Philosophical Investigations* are no more theses, doctrines, theories, hypotheses or opinions than is the proposition 'a bachelor is an unmarried man'.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> I am grateful to Hanjo Glock and Hans Oberdiek for their comments on the draft of this paper.