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# The place of the philosopher.

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**FIVE COLLEGE  
DEPOSITORY**

THE PLACE OF THE PHILOSOPHER

A Thesis Presented

by

JEFFREY BARJA DIAMOND

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

February 1986

Political Science


THE PLACE OF THE PHILOSOPHER


A Thesis Presented

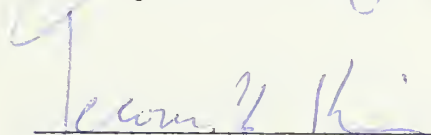
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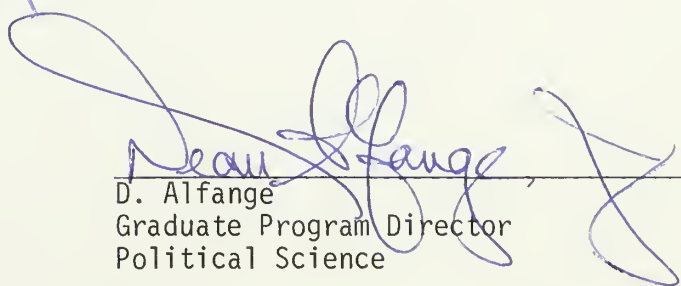
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JEFFREY BARJA DIAMOND

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for my mother and father

...find your place in the human world

Persius

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have drawn inspiration and learning from a number of sources in my academic and political life. But this paper in particular demonstrates something of that debt which I share with many other students at Berkeley, to Professor Hanna Pitkin.



ABSTRACT

THE PLACE OF THE PHILOSOPHER

February 1986

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The text of this essay falls in three sections, and is chiefly organized around a discussion of the development, consequences, and legitimacy of three notions, or understandings, which have profoundly shaped reflective and philosophical inquiry. Put briefly, these understandings are: that the use and meaning of our concepts are essentially determined by general principles or rules; that cultural conventions, because they are artifacts, are consequently "artificial" --indifferent or opposed to what is genuine and true; and that the purpose and role of the mind and language is to correctly represent to us the objects of the world.

In the first section we shall examine individually the appearance of these notions in Greek antiquity. In the second section, we look at their re-emergence or reinvigoration as a part of the intellectual shift occurring in the early modern era, and at a subsequent analysis and critique by Hegel of the self-understanding in which they each play a role. In the third section, as in the first two, attention is given to the consequences of these understandings--fostering intellectual isolation, elitism, and paradox. But in this final section, the analysis and critique is carried further with the help of the philosophical perspective of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

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## C H A P T E R I

### INTRODUCTION

Reflection necessarily both presupposes and entails a certain degree of detachment. It involves a kind of "stepping back" to view things differently from how we do when we are going about the business of our lives. During the course of our cultural history, the practice of reflecting has been constituted and shaped in particular ways. One result of some of these ways is that sometimes that "step back" looks more like a chasm separating the thinker and the world he lives in. And as a consequence, the vastness of this distance may undermine the usefulness of that view which reflection was meant to provide.

This essay will attempt to sketch the development and consequences of chiefly three conceptions, which together have profoundly shaped the tradition of Western philosophical thought. Finally, in the third section, the legitimacy of these understandings will be explored with the help of insights largely derived from the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

## CHAPTER II

### DISCUSSION I

Aristotle describes the experience of "wonder that things are as they are" as the beginning of philosophy.<sup>1</sup> The historical origin of philosophy is often considered the speculations of the Ionian nature philosophers of the 6th century B.C. Prior to this time it seems people did not so much offer what we might call "rational explanations," but rather mythological ones. According to Sheldon Wolin, before the nature philosophers, "men were concerned not with 'how' things operated but what superhuman agency was directing them."<sup>2</sup> It is probably possible to overstate the distinctness of "pre and post-philosophical" thought; but this does not belie the occurrence of an important shift.

The objects of speculation and discussion by the nature philosophers were often such things as fire, water, earth, and air. They were interested here not in this or that fire, or this or that piece of earth--the specific entities which one comes across in one's non-intellectual or philosophical encounters with the world. They spoke of general entities, and it is this sort of entity which serves as the object of inquiries asking, for instance, "what is the nature of \_\_\_\_\_." That is, these general concepts had their place not in the everyday experience which dealt with particular fires and such, but in those activities reflecting a speculative or philosophical attitude.

Just as such intellectual practices as considering the nature, causes, dangers, uses, etc. of fire (in general) are familiar to us, so the general concepts which are part of these practices are naturally also familiar. But this may not always have been so. Bruno Snell argues that the linguistic construction used to express a general concept in Greek only came into use after the writing of the Homeric epics.<sup>3</sup> This construction consists of a singular definite article in conjunction with a noun, adjective, or verb in the infinitive. Thus for instance the article to followed by the noun hydor is translated by the general concept "water".

According to Snell, the generic article does not appear in Homer, nor even yet in Hesiod. For instance, whereas Plato employs the generic article in speaking of "justice", Hesiod uses the plural of the article and noun--suggesting to Snell a meaning like "the series of individual just acts."<sup>4</sup> Similarly Snell claims that the constructions in Homer suggest that ancient thought had no general concept: "the horse in Homer is never the concept of a horse (the notion of that animal as a species), but always a particular horse."<sup>5</sup> The extent to which general concepts do appear in early Greek writing is in the form of personifications. Thus "fear" (phobos) is represented as a demon.

Some classicists have voiced skepticism about what sort of conclusions can be made from the linguistic evidence which Snell interprets.<sup>6</sup> The fact that the Greeks may not have had words for general concepts does not preclude the possibility that they could still conceive in that manner. As Snell himself shows, Cicero

expressed general concepts circuitously in Latin which had no specific formulations for general concepts.<sup>7</sup> But it is significant that no such circuitous constructions seem to appear in early Greek, and it would be difficult to deny that Snell is on to something about the conceptual-linguistic development which fostered not only the Ionian nature philosophies, but subsequent philosophical speculation as well.

Among subsequent philosophers, Socrates is often credited with a role in the history of ethics analogous to that which the Ionian philosophers played in the history of nature philosophy. According to the account in the Phaedo, as a young man Socrates undertook the study of Anaxagoras' philosophy, but found its "scientific" and naturalistic approach unsatisfying. For Socrates the important questions concerned the purpose and meaning of all the things in the universe--he sought to discover "what is best for each and what is the universal good."<sup>8</sup>

Futhermore, by discussing the ethical notions which men lived by without recourse to mythological authority, Socrates set ethical speculation and inquiry on a new footing. According to Cicero and others, Socrates' greatest achievement was that he brought philosophy down "from heaven to earth", and to the everyday life of men.<sup>9</sup> Hegel excoriates these later philosophers insofar as they thus construe Socrates' philosophy as a "domestic or fireside philosophy, which conforms to all the ordinary ideas of men."<sup>10</sup> In truth, it was only because Socrates did bring speculation and inquiry down to earth and and everyday life that he succeeded in challenging the accepted wisdom of his time.

Socrates' method consists of inducing another to pose a claim as to the nature of courage or friendship or some such thing--thereby supplying the "material" for the philosophic exercise; Socrates then applies himself to this material by questioning and probing. Socrates typically begins the discussion by directing his interlocutor in a manner similar to that seen in the following passage from the Euthyphro. Euthyphro is seeking to prosecute his father for the death of a servant. Since Socrates is himself present at the court to answer charges of impiety, he asks Euthyphro for a definition so that he may "have it to turn to, and use as a standard whereby to judge your actions and those of other men."<sup>11</sup> Their discussion continues:

Soc: I suppose that piety is the same in all actions, and that impiety is always the opposite of piety, and retains its identity, and that, as impiety, it always has the same character which will be found in whatever is impious.

Euth: Certainly, Socrates, I suppose so.

Soc: Tell me, then, what is piety and impiety?

However, after Euthyphro's response, Socrates directs him again:

Soc: ...please try to give a more definite answer to the question which I asked you just now. What I asked you, my friend, was, what is piety? and you have not explained it to me to my satisfaction. You only tell me that what you are doing now, namely, prosecuting your father for murder is a pious act.

Euth: Well, that is true Socrates.

Soc: Very likely. But many other actions are pious, are they not, Euthyphro?

Euth: Certainly.



Soc: Remember, then, I did not ask you to tell me one or two of all the many pious actions that there are; I want to know what is characteristic of piety which makes all pious actions pious.<sup>12</sup>

Here, and in a number of other dialogues, Socrates introduces the general concept into ethical discussion: in order to know what piety is, one must know what it is "itself," i.e. not just instances of it. Since Socrates this notion has become part of our common stock of understandings. But the consistent difficulty which Euthyphro and others have in grasping Socrates' meaning in this respect suggests that this way of putting things, and the intellectual practice it corresponds to, was not yet familiar to Socrates' contemporaries.

In fact, Euthyphro's response was in a sense an appropriate one within the context of a more traditional Greek ethical discourse. This traditional ethical discourse consisted not of teaching by definitions, but by examples--of which the poets offered many.<sup>13</sup> However, the "language game", as Wittgenstein might say, that Socrates introduces is of a different sort: it invites its participants to search themselves and attempts to systematically formulate what it is they believe, and then exposes this formulation to criticism--or better put--to guided self-criticism.

In this way the socratic practice of philosophy represented an important and valuable tool in achieving greater self-awareness. But in so doing Socrates postulated a theoretical knowledge (even if not for mere mortals) above and beyond the knowledge of particular, practical applications. And as we shall see, this eventually proves to be a problematic postulation.

---

In that early "mythological era" of Greek history, it appears that people did not conceive of custom as something "merely conventional", and conceptually opposed to nature. As Wolin says,

Prior to the development of Greek philosophy in the sixth century B.C., man had thought of himself and society as integral parts of nature, subject to the same natural and supernatural forces. Nature, man, and society formed a continuum.<sup>14</sup>

Or as F.M. Cornford puts it: "custom and nature were at one."<sup>15</sup> Even for the nature philosophers the conceptual boundaries appear quite different from our own, and later, thought. For instance, for Anaximander, the principle of disruption in human affairs--adike, often translated as "injustice"--is also the principle of change in the natural world.<sup>16</sup> Heraclitus likens a law of the universe to the law of the city, hence expressing both a commonality, but clearly also a conceptual distinctness. Moreover, he claims, "all human laws are nourished by one, which is divine," and thus envisions human laws as subordinate and derivative of a higher law which orders the universe.<sup>17</sup>

The Greek word here translated "law"--nomos--also has the sense "custom", and in the hands of sophists the relationship of subordination of human laws and customs to a divine and natural law is transformed into a relationship of antagonism and contradiction. For instance, Plato has Hippias say "law (nomos) the tyrant of men forces many things through against nature."<sup>18</sup> Antiphon himself says, "Most of the prescriptions of law are hostile to nature."<sup>19</sup> Even before the Hellenistic era, growing cosmopolitanism not only shook the faith in parochial customs, but brought into question the legitimacy of custom

itself. Similarly, the frequent alteration and repeal of laws during the classical era undermined the legitimacy of law as such; for this reason Aristotle considered it better for a state to maintain its laws, rather than constantly change them--even if the changes themselves were each improvements.<sup>20</sup>

In the Republic and the Gorgias, the one thing which Socrates and Thrasymachus or Callicles agree on is that what justice really is, has nothing to do with custom or human convention. Callicles, for instance, charges Socrates with entangling his interlocutors with the mere convention of justice. Only he himself is willing to say what others only think--shed the cultural hypocrisy and escape the grip of society, which keeps them from the truth, namely that, "both among all animals and in entire states and races of mankind it is plain that...right is recognized to be the sovereignty of the stronger over the weaker."<sup>21</sup>

But for Plato the truth is not to be found in the natural, any more than in the conventional. Plato appears to give his account of the discovery of truth in the "allegory of the cave." The allegory describes a scene in which a collection of men have been chained since childhood in a cave in such a way that they are unable to move their heads and look around. Their gaze is fixed straight ahead, opposite the entrance of the cave. Behind them burns a fire. Between them and the fire is a parapet, like that which puppeteers use to hide themselves while they manipulate the puppets sticking up over the top.

Socrates asks his audience to imagine "persons carrying along various artificial objects, including figures of men and animals in

wood or stone or other materials, which project over the parapet."<sup>22</sup> The inhabitants of the cave see nothing of these figures but the shadows on the cave wall in front of them, and hear only the echoes. Consequently, "men so chained would recognize nothing but the shadows of those artificial objects."<sup>23</sup>

Now one of the prisoners is set free, and made to face what had been behind him. He is unaccustomed to the light of the fire: his eyes hurt and he cannot see clearly. But eventually his sight adjusts and he comes to realize that what we had previously taken to be the truth were only shadows.

He is then forced up out of the cave--out of the faint light of the fire into the bright light of day. Again he is blinded, but again his eyes adjust. Now for the first time he is able to see the objects of the "real" world; then he turns his eyes to the sky, and finally he is able to view the sun itself.

Let us now interpret the allegory. Within the cave is to be found human society and its products; this is a world populated by men, and their creations--those "artificial objects" of wood and stone and such. But most men do not even see these things: the "misdirection" of their thinking chains them to a view of only the shadows of these things. Thus, for instance, Callicles does not even see what "human justice" is--that artifact of the cave; he sees only its shadow, and so misperceives even the world of merely human law and convention.

But the prisoner in the allegory is not allowed to stop at the point of gaining a true view of what is there in the cave. He is forced

to leave that realm of "artificial objects" and the light of the man-made fire. It is only upon leaving the human community of the cave that the philosopher sees real things--not mere representations--in the true light. Socrates is explicit that the naturalism of this realm of truth is only metaphorical. The truth is not to be found in physical nature, but in the invisible and purely intellectual world of ideas or "forms."

The picture of the philosophical enterprise given in the allegory of the cave is one in which the philosopher must cut himself loose from the thinking of his community and climb up out of society and custom, if he is to see the true nature of things. So, as it was for Callicles, here too the philosopher must free himself of his society's hold on him and its conventions and artifice. At least since Plato's time, this notion that philosophy must penetrate not only beyond conventional understandings, but beyond convention itself, has been a commonplace in Western intellectual history. Two results of this entrenched understanding appear to have been a tendency to reinforce philosophers' sense of alienation from their cultures, and a tendency to preclude inquiry into just what sort of truth conventions might be found to have.

---

The word which is commonly translated as "true", and is used in reference to the successive stages in the allegory of the cave--that of shadows, of firelight and artificial objects, and of daylight and real objects--is in the Greek alēthes. It appears in the normal attributive,

comparative, and superlative forms corresponding with the stages of the allegory. The word consists of a prefix indicating negation, and a stem related to a verb normally translated something like "to escape the notice of." Hence Heidegger suggests as a more appropriate translation "unhidden": he thus characterizes the stages as concerning "the unhidden", "more unhidden", and "most unhidden". And for Heidegger, what is most significant in the allegory of the cave is a shift in the meaning of alētheia--"unhiddenness".<sup>24</sup>

The allegory of the cave is the story of the philosopher coming in closer and closer contact with the unhidden, until finally he leaves the cave. Outside the cave he eventually traces back to the source of the light which makes possible his vision. As Socrates explains, the sun is meant to represent the "idea of the Good." The word here translated "good" (agathon), does not so much mean "morally upright", but rather "useful" or "fitting"--the "idea of the Good" is what gives things their meaning and use.<sup>25</sup> The idea of the Good is a standard by which the philosopher may judge the conduct and actions of those back in the world of the cave, for it is what "anyone who is going to act rationally either in public or private affairs must have sight of."<sup>26</sup> It gives "unhiddenness to what is known and the ability (to know) to him who knows,"<sup>27</sup> and is "itself master, dispensing both unhiddenness...and the ability to perceive."<sup>28</sup> According to Heidegger this represents a philosophical and ontological supplanting of the original notion and experience of alētheia: "truth no longer is, as unhiddenness, the basic feature of being itself."<sup>29</sup>

This should become more clear as we consider the last part of the allegory of the cave. After having been brought out of the cave, and after having viewed real objects and the sun, the former prisoner returns to the cave, where he may try to enlighten some of his fellows, as he was himself enlightened. Socrates argues that the knowledge of the "forms"--those real objects, outside of the cave--is innate within us, though we fail to see it. Thus the philosophical task is to get oneself and others not to be "either turned in the wrong direction or looking the wrong way."<sup>30</sup> If the former prisoner is to educate his fellows he must force them to turn their eyes from the wall, around to the fire, and ultimately, up out of the cave. Hence Heidegger says,

The transition from one situation into another consists in making one's glance more correct. Everything depends on the orthotes, the correctness of the glance. Through this correctness, seeing and recognizing become something right, so that it (this correctness) can eventually be directed straight ahead to the Highest Idea, and made fast in this "straightening-out." In this directing of itself, perceiving is compared to what is supposed to be sighted... In consequence...an omoiosis subsists, an agreement between recognizing and the thing itself.<sup>31</sup>

What is involved here, according to Heidegger, is a transformation in the philosophical significance of truth. The philosopher has ceased to orient himself by the pursuit of truth in the sense of what was "to the Greeks the self-evident and fundamental experience of alētheia, the unhiddenness of beings."<sup>32</sup> Instead he takes the primary sense of "truth"--alētheia--to be "correctness", demoting "unhiddenness" to a subordinate and derivative status. Thus, when alētheia is said, "orthotes is meant and set as a standard"<sup>33</sup> to rule and judge the thought and actions of men (back in the cave). Paradoxically, what the philosopher most seeks as truth in the sense of "unhiddenness"--

that which is "nearest to being", i.e., most real--he then construes as truth in the sense of correctness, agreement of word or perception and thing, as the idea of the Good.

While the specific understanding of the "unhiddenness of beings" is perhaps no longer a part of our modern experience, our present notion of truth does admit of a roughly similar sense, distinct from that of "correctness". When we speak of "a true friend", "true love", or "true grit", we do not mean "a correct friend", "correct love", or "correct grit"; here "true" means something like "real" or "genuine".

However, since Plato the understanding of truth as "correctness" has dominated Western philosophy: "from now on the mold of the essence of truth becomes, as the correctness of representing through an assertion, the standard for all of Western thinking."<sup>34</sup> Heidegger cites Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, and Nietzsche: all agree that "truth" is "the agreement of mental concept (or representation) with the thing."<sup>35</sup> For Heidegger the significance of the philosophical transformation of "truth" from "unhiddenness" to "correctness" lies in the alienation from the world it bespeaks, "as unhiddenness truth is still a basic feature of beings themselves."<sup>36</sup> But truth as "correctness" is not a feature of, nor does it refer to, beings; it only applies to consciousness and statements. Hence the truth which the philosopher now pursues is not a fundamental characteristic of the world, but is rather "the label of the human attitude towards beings."<sup>34</sup> And by posing the question of truth in terms of an "attitude"--the right direction of the mind's gaze--the philosopher does not by his



efforts reach anything which is a characteristic of beings themselves. That is, the conception of truth as "correctness" posits a duality of consciousness and the world, its object, but refers only to consciousness; truth construed as an orientation of consciousness towards things, is thus essentially about consciousness, not about things. Truth conceived exclusively as "correctness" implies a self-referring philosophical subjectivity, locked-out and estranged from what the things of the world are in and of themselves.

In a section of her essay "What is Authority", Arendt borrows from Heidegger's discussion of Plato's conception of truth. But Arendt's own contribution to this discussion consists largely of shedding a political light on some of the issues developed by Heidegger. According to Arendt, in a number of dialogues not treating of political subjects, such as the Symposium, Phaedrus, and even in the first books of the Republic, the philosopher is defined not as a pursuer of the idea of the Good, but rather of "the beautiful" (in classical Greek it seems that "the beautiful" would be understood as very close to truth in the sense of "unhiddenness").<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Arendt points out that Socrates only introduces "correctness" as the meaning of truth in the last portion of the allegory of the cave, when the former prisoner returns to his unenlightened society. The significance for Arendt of the transformation of the conception of truth is that truth becomes construed as a standard and measure for ruling the social world. It is when the philosopher is forced to confront his society as an immediate problem that he "resorts to what he has seen, the ideas, as standards and measures, and finally... uses

them as instruments of domination."<sup>39</sup>

The lives of the many in the cave over whom the philosopher envisions establishing a rule of reason "are characterized not by contemplation, but by lexis, speech, and praxis, action."<sup>40</sup> This fact is, however, contrary to the depiction in the allegory: here what is represented as fundamental is these men's seeing. And it is with respect to their sight that they are subject to the philosopher's "correction". Thus Arendt says, the philosopher's intrusion into human affairs is

justified not only by an absolute priority of seeing over doing, of contemplation over speaking and acting, but also by the assumption that what makes men human is the urge to see. Hence the interest of the philosopher and the interest of the man coincide; both demand that human affairs, the results of speech and action, must not acquire a dignity of their own but be subjected to the domination of something outside their realm.<sup>41</sup>

The authority of the philosopher as such to correct or govern the proceedings of his society presupposes the subordination of those aspects of life to philosophic knowledge and standards. As Arendt suggests this constitutes an imposition or projection of the philosopher upon the social world, thus entailing a systematic blindness to the independence and dignity which that world possesses of itself.

What can be seen as emerging from the discussions by Heidegger and Arendt is a network of mutually reinforcing or implying understandings and experiences. With the conception of truth as the accurate representation in word or thought of things, we see the isolation of the merely self-referring subjectivity, and consequently the failure to attain to "what things are in themselves"; the failure

to see beyond "subjective projection" to what things are in themselves ensures that the (cultural) world appears irrational and in need of correction; and as Arendt suggests, the prospect of confronting this cultural world may partially underlie the psychological impetus behind construing philosophical truth as a "correctness", as a standard.

Now add to this existential and intellectual network the notion that the meaning of a concept as sought in philosophy is a defining principle, and as such is prior to the responsible practical use of the concept in particular circumstances. Also add the notion that a society's conventions are necessarily "artificial", and to be escaped in the pursuit of truth and reality. Now we have a critical sketch of a predicament which has characterized much of Western intellectual thought.

## CHAPTER III

### DISCUSSION II

In the previous section we looked briefly at the disruption of what is believed to have been a pre-philosophical Greek experience of continuity and immediacy in the world. It has often been noted that the period of transition to our modern era manifests some similarities to that earlier time of transition; that there might be similarities should not be surprising given the cultural overlap, and the at least roughly parallel trends towards expanded trade and urbanization.

Michel Foucault describes the pre-modern medieval and renaissance world-view as comprising a unified complex hierarchy of resemblances and similitudes. He cites the renaissance thinker, Porta, as follows:

As with respect to its vegetation the plant stands convenient to the brute beast, so through feeling does the brutish animal to man, who is comfortable to the rest of the stars by his intelligence; these links proceed so strictly that they appear as a rope stretched from the first cause as far as the lowest and smallest of things....<sup>42</sup>

In this world the distinction between man and nature is only one of degree: for the overall pattern is one of continuity. In this world the behavior of natural entities and beings is reckoned in terms also used for human motivation and emotion. Human society represented both an integrated part of the cosmic whole, and a microcosm of it; divine law, natural law, and human law were linked in an ontological hierarchy. But this cosmic hierarchy of law was eventually to be replaced to an increasing extent by a vision of legal antagonism. The 16th century poet Greville laments the human condition in which we are

"Born to one law and to another bound, ... What meaneth nature by these diverse laws, Passion and Reason, self-division's cause."<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, from approximately this time on, human society ceased to seem continuous with, and founded upon, the cosmic order. As Wolin suggests, "men no longer felt that the community represented a natural unity."<sup>44</sup> Hobbes' observation that "by art is created that great Leviathan called a Commonwealth,"<sup>45</sup> merely expressed an understanding which other men had been acting upon for the better part of a century.

Besides positing the cosmos as a "Great Chain of Being," this pre-modern outlook also understood the universe to consist of signs and meanings hidden within its objects themselves; the concealed truth of these objects was to be read or interpreted from their appearance. Thus Crollius poses the rhetorical question, "Is it not true that all herbs, plants, trees and other things issuing from the bowels of the earth are so many magic books and signs?"<sup>46</sup> God had written the very nature and essence of his works upon their outward aspects. Hence, for instance, the appearance of the walnut meat indicated that it was medicine for ailments of the brain. Moreover, something's meaning and essence was not only given by the signs located in its physical appearance, but also by the pertinent language of other "texts". The entirety of recorded thought and experience of every aspect of an object or being was essential to the definition of what it was.

According to Foucault, learned exposition of the objects of the natural world took the form of what were known as "histories":

History was the inextricable and completely unitary fabric of all that was visible of things and of the signs that had been discovered or lodged in them: to write the history of a plant or an animal was as much a matter of describing the resemblances that could be found in it, the virtues that it was thought to possess, the legends and stories with which it had been involved, its place in heraldry, the medicaments that were concocted from its substance, the foods it provided, what the ancients recorded of it, and what travelers might have said of it. The history of a living being was that being itself, within the whole semantic network that connected it to the world.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, for instance one chapter of Aldrovandis' Historia serpentum et draconum contains the following headings: equivocation (which means the various meanings of the word "serpent"), synonyms and etymologies, differences, form and description, anatomy, nature and habits, temperament, coitus and generation, voice, movements, places, diet, physiognomy, antipathy, empathy, modes of capture, death and wounds caused by the serpent, fables, emblems and symbols, proverbs, simulacra and statues, dietary uses, medical uses,--to give only a partial list.<sup>48</sup> The specifics to be known comprised essentially all the various contexts in which "serpents" were encountered in experience and literature--from the dinner table to fables and dreams.

In attempting to account for the manifold categories for consideration appearing the in pre-modern writings on natural history, Foucault argues that this phenomenon can not be

explained by saying "science was hesitating between a rational vocation and the vast weight of naive tradition, but for the much more precise and constraining reason that signs were then part of things themselves, whereas in the seventeenth century they become modes of representation."<sup>51</sup>

This needs to be further explained. Foucault argues that by the early 17th century, Western thought had undergone a profound transformation with respect to the nature of the objects of the world and the language which had previously determined them. Words and signs are no longer inseparable from the essence of things themselves; now they merely report on, or represent, things. Foucault says:

Language is no longer one of the figurations of the world, or a signature stamped upon things since the beginning of time. The manifestation and sign of truth are to be found in evident and distinct perception. It is the task of words to translate that truth if they can; but they no longer have the right to be considered a mark of it. Language has withdrawn from the midst of beings themselves and entered a period of transparency and neutrality.<sup>52</sup>

This passage may conjure up the image of Descartes, whose "clear and distinct" perceptions were to serve him as the source of the truth of the world. But the understanding that correct perception is the basis of knowledge about things, and that language, at its best, transparently reproduces the perceptual mental representation of these

things, was not at this time unique to Descartes. In fact, Foucault's point is that the intellectual primacy of direct perception, and a conception of language consistent with this orientation, were central to the spirit of the age. For instance, Hobbes says,

Concerning the thoughts of man...they are every one a "representation" or "appearance", of some quality, or other accident of a body without us, which is commonly called an "object", which object worketh on the eyes, ears, and other parts of a man's body; and by diversity of working produceth diversity of appearances.<sup>53</sup>

The role of language is simply to "transfer our mental discourse into verbal."<sup>54</sup> For Hobbes, and his contemporaries, language simply serves to convey the thoughts given by perception: words are names designating objects and qualities--in sentences they reproduce the perceptual representations, and so take the form of propositions. Thus the primary structure of language is the statement of the general form, "This is that."

The intellectual orientation emerging in the 17th century in which men's experience of the world is mediated by representations--mental and verbal--represents some new problems. Foucault discusses one such problem: "from the seventeenth century, one began to ask how a sign could be linked to what it signified."<sup>55</sup> The connection between the posited duality of minds and bodies became a question. One was forced to ask, "how are these representations, in here, related to those things, out there?" Thus from the 17th century on, epistemology became the predominant philosophical area of inquiry, and skepticism the logical conclusion. Furthermore, when we consider Hobbes' claim that, "these words 'true', 'truth', and 'true proposition', are



equivalent to one another; for truth consists in speech, and not in the things spoken of,"<sup>56</sup> we may come to recognize in the intellectual orientation of the first centuries of the modern era something bearing a strong resemblance to that constellation of understandings and experiences earlier partially characterized by "truth as correctness."

Foucault attempts to illustrate what he takes to be the spirit of this age by means of the 17th century painting Las Meninas, by Velasquez (see illustration #1). In the foreground is an entourage surrounding the Infanta Margarita, who looks straight ahead of her. Off to the left of the Infanta is Velasquez himself; having stepped back momentarily, he surveys his work. In the background a man looks on from the steps behind an open door. But also in the background on the far wall hangs a mirror: in the mirror we see the reflection of two people standing in front of the depicted scene--King Philip IV and Queen Mariana. It is they whom the depicted artist is portraying. It is due to their presence that the Infanta and entourage are assembled. And it is for them and their gaze that the work is executed.

But there is something odd about this scene. When the royal couple view the representation of that world which they inhabit, they nowhere find themselves. All they see of themselves is a reflection, and this reflection is strangely isolated from all else that inhabits that world: for the mirror is located behind the other figures, yet their images are excluded from the reflection. In this representation of the world of the intended spectators, the spectators see a mere reflection of themselves--one which denies their relation to the other beings of their world.



ILLUSTRATION #1

Thus Foucault suggestively presents the situation of early modern subjectivity, a situation in many respects with us today. While Foucault does not himself explicitly raise the issue, one need not dig too deeply into the writings of 17th and 18th century philosophers to uncover evidence of the impulse to set straight non-philosophical thought and practices, which was previously here associated with "truth as correctness." Hume, for instance, seeks to put right not only "false philosophy", but also what the vulgar, in its "common and careless way of thinking"<sup>57</sup> imagines itself to perceive.

In fact the characteristic form of philosophical insight for many thinkers of the age was, "strictly speaking (really), things are not as they seem when loosely speaking--i.e., as we ordinarily speak. Thus, Hobbes "discovers" that "there is nothing without us (really) which we call an image of colour."<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the basis upon which Hobbes attempts to construct his syllogisms is the "definition": that which "gives an universal notion of the thing defined, representing a certain universal picture thereof...to the mind."<sup>59</sup> By means of exhaustive lists of such definitions, Hobbes sets out to correct the usages of others, and to put the speech and thought of his society on a more sure and stable footing. And neither is this corrective impulse particular to Hobbes, nor confined to purely philosophical speech and thought. For Hobbes, and for numerous other intellectuals the impulse to arrange and order social and political life is evident. It is the impulse of "reform"--i.e., change from the (intellectual) top down.

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According to Foucault, the philosophical predominance of the thought in which "representation" plays a central role comes to a close at the end of the 18th century. Clearly the transformation of a people's intellectual character or orientation does not come about all at once or absolutely. As Michael Oakeshott suggests, ways of thinking change like styles of architecture; undeniably, but often gradually and imperceptibly.<sup>60</sup> However, a function of philosophy is to give expression to thought and experience which otherwise remains inarticulate within the culture; thus when we view the works of great philosophers, we often see the transitions in intellectual orientation as if in bold relief. One important thinker who both conceived of this particular understanding of philosophy, and of himself as the intellectual expression of a new age to be contrasted with the earlier era characterized by "representation", is Hegel.

In one of Hegel's principal works, the Phenomenology of Spirit, he attempts to trace the progression of consciousness from what we might call "mere consciousness"--something like what a baby, or animal, might have--to a fully realized self-consciousness and self-awareness. In fact, the Phenomenology, which presents the path of this progression to the consciousness of its reader, itself thus constitutes "the end" and summation of this process of self-realization: consciousness, reflecting on its own historical development, finally arrives at the place it now occupies--that of reflecting upon its own reflecting. However, for our purposes here, it will be enough to excerpt a few stages from the phenomenological progression, and to outline certain tendencies in Hegel's thought.

Especially in the earlier stages, the progression appears essentially ambiguous, and can be interpreted on different levels. The description of primitive consciousness and its unfolding can be construed at times as referring to either the history of the individual beginning in infancy, or of the human species "acquiring culture." Moreover, aside from providing any sort of descriptive historical account, these episodes perhaps primarily constitute an expose of that way of thinking characterized by "representation".

The first book of the Phenomenology is entitled "Consciousness"; the first chapter, "Sense of Certainty". As Hegel describes sense certainty, it is the sensually given experience of a consciousness or mind, which experiences itself as generally continuous with, and undifferentiated from, its surroundings. A developmental psychologist might liken sense certainty to the experience of an infant who has not yet formed "ego boundaries". A general parallel with the ancient pre-philosophic world-orientation is perhaps obvious as well.

In sense certainty the sensually given impressions are not organized into "concepts" which could be used to perceive the world as consisting of distinct objects and entities. Sense certainty is the passive absorption of particulate sensations. For this reason one might say that this is the truest experience of the world, since in it the real contents of the world are presented to consciousness immediately--"unfiltered" by concepts. Thus, Hegel says,

Because of its concrete content, sense certainty immediately appears as the richest kind of knowledge, indeed a knowledge of infinite wealth for which no bounds can be found... Moreover, sense certainty appears to be the truest knowledge;

for it has not yet omitted anything from the object, but has the object before it in its perfect entirety.<sup>61</sup>

However, Hegel then imagines sense certainty asked to give an account of its "knowledge", to describe this truest experience of the world itself. But because this experience is completely particulate, sense certainty is unable to formulate its experience for itself or for others. For to do so would require the use of properties or "universals" to organize and subsume the sense impressions. All that sense certainly is able to manage is to utter the words "This", "Here", or "Now", as if pointing to its head and saying, "What is happening there, at this time,--that is what I know!"

In this way the experience which at first appeared to be the richest and most true, expresses itself as "mere being", as an undefined general existence. Furthermore, even by just using the words "This", "Here", "Now", sense certainly falsifies its experience. For according to Hegel, these words too are universals which subsume the particulars of sense certainty into the duration and extension which define the "mere being". Hegel explains,

Of course we do not envisage the universal This or Being in general, but we utter the universal; in other words we do not strictly say what in this sense certainty we mean to say. But language, as we see, is the more truthful; in it, we ourselves directly refute what we mean to say, and since the universal is the true [content] of sense certainty and language expresses this true [content] alone, it is just not possible for us ever to say, or express in words, a sensuous being that we mean.<sup>62</sup>

In the preface to his Philosophy of Right, Hegel makes the famous statement, "What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational."<sup>63</sup> In the above context this suggests that the sensual

experience which cannot be formulated or given expression must remain a private subjective certainty which cannot be tested, or brought to light and examined, and so rendered "rational" and "actual".

Thus, Hegel says, "What is called the unutterable is nothing else than the untrue, the irrational, what is merely meant [but is not actually expressed]." <sup>64</sup> On the other hand, for Hegel, what is rational and actually expressed is the universal--which then emerges as the truth of sense certainty. And because the truth of consciousness is now the universal, experience is no longer immediate and passive, but rather mediated by that movement of the mind which negates the particulars as such, subsuming them into universals.

The portrayal of sense certainty appears to allude to various aspects of ancient Greek thought. For instance, putting the demand to sense certainty to explicitly formulate and say that knowledge which it claims to possess, is reminiscent of what Socrates' philosophy was to Athens. In both cases self-consciousness is introduced by means of "the universal". However, if taken too literally, the historical parallels can be misleading. Pre-philosophic, and probably pre-Homeric, thought did not consist of some kind of "raw particulate sense-data": what Ionian and Socratic philosophy subsumed was not "sense-data", but other concepts in their language.

Even interpreted as a description of early child development, the account of sense certainty may be misleading. For even a newborn probably does not just passively and indifferently receive impressions which are then subsumed as the baby develops. But while the account of sense certainty may not correspond to anything ever experienced by

actual human beings, it may still be of heuristic value. Perhaps it is most useful to think of Hegel's beginning point as rather like that of some of the "social contract" theorists: not so much a historical description as a device for better understanding our present thought and experience.<sup>65</sup> Seen in this light "sense certainty" appears as a critique or expose of a theory of knowledge earlier discussed, according to which the mind is an instrument which reflects the objects of the world, and language functions as "a neutral and transparent" conveyance. Considered in this way, the unfolding of sense certainty can be taken as a demonstration of the bankruptcy of a theory of knowledge connected with "representation".

In the subsequent stage of the phenomenological progression, consciousness has shed the skin of sense certainty, and now takes on the form of a consciousness "perceiving things". At the stage of "perception", both consciousness and its object are defined by the act of subsuming in accordance with an ordering principle. By means of the universal, or defining principle, the demarcation between self and world first comes to consciousness, and thus for Hegel, becomes actual:

With the emergence of the principle, the two moments which in their appearing merely occur, also come into being: one being the movement of pointing-out or the act of perceiving, the other being the same movement as a simple event or the object perceived.<sup>66</sup>

Consciousness now does not passively receive sensory impulses, but actively subsumes them under a universal, according to a principle. As a result, the experience of perception is not the meaningless flurry of sense impressions as before: "perception is no longer



something which just happens to us like sense certainty; on the contrary it is logically necessitated."<sup>67</sup> Perception is organized according to the structure of concepts and language.

The logically necessitated movement of consciousness which replaces the "This" of sense certainty is now a "Thing". The Thing of perception is itself a universal, to which may be referred other universals as properties. Thus, for instance, we may describe a grain of salt by attributing to it whiteness, hardness, a cubical shape, a certain weight, etc.

However, when perceiving consciousness reflects upon the nature of its object, the Thing, it is beset with the following problem: is the Thing itself a unity, or a multiplicity--a collection of properties. Perception tries to make sense of this quandry; for instance at one point it thinks that the Thing itself must be a unity, and only appears multiple because of our own multiplicity. In other words, it considers the Thing as one, but as appearing multiple because we hear it, see it, feel it, etc. However, this reasoning does not hold up. For perception discovers that as long as a Thing is itself something determinate--can be distinguished from other things--it itself must consist of properties which differentiate it.<sup>68</sup>

And so perception struggles: looking first at its object, then at itself, and then back again, claiming unity at one moment, and multiplicity the next--never reconciling the two. Finally, as occurred in sense certainty, the object of consciousness ceases to be one of two "moments" from which consciousness moves back and forth, and becomes instead that very movement. The object is now "Force": the

relation or movement between universals. Consciousness is now constituted not as perception, but as "understanding".

As with the account of sense certainty, that of perception can be interpreted as a critique and expose of early modern thought. The oscillations of perception strongly resemble some of the philosophical problems of the 17th and 18th centuries. For example, in his 2nd Meditation Descartes contemplates the sensible qualities of a ball of wax, which all change when he melts the wax. Hence Descartes concludes, that in reality the wax is "neither that softness of honey, nor that pleasant scent of flowers, nor that whiteness, nor that shape, nor that sound,"<sup>69</sup> but rather an immaterial substance. On the other hand, Bishop Berkeley says that others

will have it that the word "die" denotes a subject or substance distinct from the hardness, extension, and figure which are predicated of it, and in which they exist. This I cannot comprehend; to me a die seems to be nothing distinct from those things which are termed its modes or accidents.<sup>70</sup>

Eventually the phenomenological progression arrives at the point which explicitly corresponds to the intellectual life of the early modern era. Here consciousness is constituted as "Observing Reason." Observing Reason begins in the era of Descartes, who discovers indubitable certainty in the existence of his self-referring thought: if he simply thinks he exists, he thereby guarantees the fact of his existence. Thus Hegel notes that Observing Reason differs from all previous phenomenological stages of consciousness. Earlier forms of individuality sought to wrest an independent existence from their formative surroundings: even in their resistance they were defined by their interaction with a world beyond themselves. However, with the

advent of Reason, consciousness defines itself as an unshakeably stable certainty without reference to a world in which it lives. In Hegelian language, Reason is "the first positivity in which self-consciousness is in its own self explicitly for itself."<sup>71</sup>

Consciousness which experiences and understands itself as existing detached from the world thus requires a different sort of education from that previously required. In this regard, Hegel contrasts what was needed of philosophy in antiquity,--distance from the immediacy of experience by means of the universal and reflection-- with what is needed of it in modernity:

The task nowadays consists not so much in purging the individual of an immediate, sensuous mode of apprehension, and making him into a substance that is an object of thought and that thinks, but rather in just the opposite, in freeing determinant thoughts from their fixity so as to give actuality to the universal and to impart to it spiritual life.<sup>72</sup>

In this regard Charles Taylor has attempted to explicate Hegel's discussion of perceiving consciousness. Taylor takes this discussion to be an expose of a "contemplative" theory of experience that is in its modern form derived from empiricism and cartesianism, and which conceives of experience "as consisting of the passive reception of sense data, so that the nature of experience itself is not bound up with the way we interact and deal with the world."<sup>73</sup> This "contemplative" understanding of experience essentially imposes or projects a particular experience of the thinker qua thinker upon the whole of learning and living in the world, and has consequently run up against a number of problems, historically, one of which has been the comprehension of a "Thing" and its properties.

As a number of modern intellectual movements have tried to show, our understanding and knowledge of something is generally not given by observation and contemplation, but by our embodied interaction with the stuff of the world. Thus, for instance, the concept of a thing integrating a number of properties may result from activity including scraping off some surface, and thus effecting an object's shape and size, and possibly the color, taste, smell, and texture as well.

However, this in itself does not really solve the question that perception was posing, i.e.: "What is the thing?--a multiplicity merely synthesized by consciousness, or a unity apprehended diversely, or something else?" Furthermore, the use of a "Thing" as an example of something to be known is itself misleading: for the basis of most of what we know is not the seeing, sniffing, and scratching of objects, but speaking and acting with other members of our cultural community. Some first steps towards understanding in what ways, and to what extent, what we know and who we are derive from our practices and membership in a culture, are shown in the stage which follows Observing Reason--"Active Reason".

At the stage of Active Reason, consciousness abandons trying to find meaning ready-made by means of observation, and instead seeks, so to speak, "to put its stamp on the world", by means of action. Most of the details of this stage need not concern us here, but the general upshot of the section is of the utmost importance. As Taylor notes, this section essentially divides the entire work in two parts. In a discussion clearly pointing a critical finger at Kant, the acting individual here discovers that his own "sound Reason and intelligent

insight"<sup>74</sup> are not sufficient to determine ethical conduct. According to Hegel any legislation which is merely the product of an individual's Reason is a "tyrannical insolence which makes caprice into a law and ethical behavior into obedience to such caprice."<sup>75</sup> Laws or principles of this sort entail no force of compulsion or obligation. These Hegel contrasts with what he calls "commandments"--laws issuing from the ethical principles of a community, which precede the individual, and are simply given by the culture. Concerning these laws Hegel says, "it is not a commandment, which only ought to be: it is and is valid."<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, Hegel argues that obedience to the existent law is

not the serving of a master whose commandments were arbitrary, and in which it [acting consciousness] would not recognize itself. On the contrary, laws are the thoughts of its own absolute consciousness, thoughts which are immediately its own.<sup>77</sup>

This is to say that, for instance, the members of our culture generally do not refrain from infanticide because of the vigilance of some external authority, but because of who they are, and what they think; and who they are, and what they think, are largely products of cultural membership. Thus what emerges from the stage of active Reason is an understanding of how fully the individual is wrapped up in, dependent upon, and determined by his place within a culture.

Indeed, Hegel's understanding that the philosopher like anyone else is fundamentally conditioned and bound by his cultural environment leads him to formulate a philosophical approach distant from that which sought to correct ordinary worldly experience and usage.

Hegel's philosophy is not meant to correct those experiences and

usages, but rather to make explicit and conscious, what in them is implicit and unconscious: his philosophy is that "owl of Minerva which flies only at dusk." As such, this philosophy recognizes a dependence on the worldly thought and activity within society and culture to provide its "material."

This understanding dictates the structure of the Phenomenology. The discussions of each stage of consciousness are not meant to be critiques of that stage, so much as exposes--what are now sometimes known as "imminent critiques." That is, the various stages of consciousness are not subjected to the criticisms which occur to us, who are presumably at some "higher " stage. Rather, each discussion is supposed to merely describe how this mode of consciousness becomes unworkable for itself. The criticisms evolve from within the given consciousness. Hegel says,

we do not need to import criteria, or make use of our own bright ideas and thoughts during the course of the inquiry; it is precisely when we leave these aside that we succeed in contemplating the matter in hand as it is in and for itself.<sup>78</sup>

That is, for example, only when philosophers cease "inventing", are they then able to discover the already existing criteria implicit and actually determinate for himself and others within the culture.

Kant described his insight that the truth of objects is to be found by consideration of our sensual intuition, as a sort of second Copernican revolution--the analogy being that in both cases events are explained by reconsideration of the vantage of the spectator.<sup>79</sup> It may not be stretching things too far to say that Hegel's thinking

represents a kind of third Copernican revolution. For here, in order to continue with fruitful philosophical inquiry, the philosopher is forced to intellectually resituate himself as a member of an historical community--sharing with others a non-philosophical existence involving, among other things, a common language and pattern of interactions, which fundamentally shape and govern his thought and being.

By introducing self-conscious consideration of the place of the philosopher in the way he did, Hegel opened a door for later thinkers.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION III

One modern philosopher often compared with Hegel is Wittgenstein. On the other hand, Erich Heller likens Wittgenstein to Nietzsche, on account of their shared conception of their thinking as representing a new and destructive force in the established world of thought. Just as Nietzsche described himself as dynamite for the world of his contemporaries, so Wittgenstein undertakes to initiate an intellectual revolution which will shake Western thought as its foundations. Heller relates that Wittgenstein "felt as though he were writing for people who would think in a quite different way, breathe a different air of life from that of present day men; for people of a different culture."<sup>80</sup>

Like Socrates, Hegel, and a number of other philosophers, Wittgenstein seeks not so much to instruct us, as to reveal us to ourselves. However, the way in which Wittgenstein envisions the task of self-consciousness differs greatly from his predecessors. For instance, for both Socrates and Hegel, knowledge which could not give a verbal account of itself did not deserve the name "knowledge". As Hegel puts it, such "knowledge" is not actual, but "merely meant".<sup>81</sup> In contrast, Wittgenstein asks us to compare knowing and saying the following:

how many feet high Mont Blanc is--  
how the word "game" is used--  
how a clarinet sounds.

He then remarks, "If you are surprised that someone can know something and not be able to say it, you are perhaps thinking of a case like the first. Certainly not one like the third."<sup>82</sup>



Again Wittgenstein differs from Socrates, Hegel, and much of the rest of the Western intellectual tradition, as to the form which philosophical knowledge is expected to take. Since Socrates it has become axiomatic that the answers to questions of the kind, "What is the nature of \_\_\_\_\_?" (or even to Wittgenstein's more "down to earth" suggested replacement, "how is the word '\_\_\_\_\_' used?") take the form of a principle which unites the concept's various instances. As Socrates insists, "I did not ask you to tell me one or two of all the many pious actions that there are; I want to know what is characteristic of piety which makes all pious actions pious."<sup>83</sup>

But let us turn, with Wittgenstein, to the second example he gave of knowing, and examine the nature of games:

Consider for example the proceedings that we call "games". I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all?--Don't say: "There must be something common, or they would not be called 'games'"--but look and see whether there is anything common to call.--For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look!--Look for example at board-games, with their multifarious relationships. Now pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ball-games, much that is common is retained, but much is lost.--Are they all 'amusing'? Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck; and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis. Think now of games like ring-a-ring-a-roses here is the element of amusement, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared! And we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way; can see how similarities crop up and disappear.<sup>83</sup>

Hence Wittgenstein describes concepts as functioning not by means of a common defining principle, but like a thread which holds together

not because there is one fiber which runs throughout the whole, but because there is an overlapping and twisting of one fiber upon another.<sup>84</sup> In this way the various occasions of a concept's use form a criss-crossing network constituting what Wittgenstein calls a "family resemblance." We learn concepts by having experience with these different instances of their use. And from the theoretical point of view, there is nothing else to be known. Thus, while we can of course criticize and reject inappropriate uses of a concept, philosophy does not have a leg to stand on in criticizing the established instances of use in general: it simply is the conscious expression of our more or less established behavior in these instances.

A number of recent philosophers are at one with Wittgenstein in holding that much of our knowledge is not entirely governed by rules and principles.<sup>86</sup> In fact, they argue practical knowledge or "know-how" could not even survive a translation into an explicit formulation or system of rules. It is precisely the unsystematic or "open-ended" character of such knowledge which allows us to project it into always differing circumstances, and thus makes it of use. A rule or system of rules could not accomplish what this "less defined", tacit, experiential knowledge allows us to do. Hence the Wittgensteinian philosopher must not only abandon instructing the ordinary cultural norms of speech and action, but also the Hegelian role of bestowing rationality and actuality on the as of yet incomplete, since merely implicit, cultural life of his community. Wittgenstein writes that philosophy, "leaves everything as it is"<sup>87</sup>--except, as his commentators have hastened to add, our understanding.

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Earlier in this essay we have spoken of an intellectual perspective which conceives of convention, or custom--that which defines and unites a community--as something to be escaped, if one is to reach the truth of things. However, Wittgenstein understands social conventions, and in particular, language, to be more than a set of constructs imposed upon our independently existing identities and world. He holds language to be in many cases fundamentally bound up with our selves, and our world.

We are used to thinking that the world is what it is, despite what we or anybody else call it. But on further examination, this is not always so clear. For instance, according to Benjamin Lee Whorf, there is in the Hopi language no word corresponding to our notion of time as a uniform continuous duration. "Time" for the Hopis varies from person to person, does not admit of simultaneity, nor of plurality: the Hopi do not say, "I stayed five days," but "I left on the fifth day." Hopi verbs have no tense, but always indicate what sort of certainty the speaker intends his statement to have: whether he is reporting an event, expecting an event, or making a generalization about events.<sup>88</sup>

Apparently the Hopi understanding of "time" is as consistent and coherent as our own, and they have no experience that something is lacking in it. So what is "time" independent of a language and culture? (If you are still tempted to suppose that there is something existing "out there" that Indo-European and Hopi "time" concepts each only capture an aspect of, perhaps you will be less so inclined after the final section of this paper.)

If language can be seen to be largely determinant in certain cases taken from the natural world, so much the more so with examples

involving the cultural world. For instance, Hanna Pitkin notes that because three different German words are translated by the single English word "representation", for the English speaker, unlike the German speaker, "the way a painting or a painter or an actor 'represents' is part of the same concept as the way an agent or a Congressman 'represents'."<sup>89</sup> What representation is depends on what role the word "representation" plays in a language.

Hence an investigation into language need not be "merely about words"--but about the world too. Wittgenstein says, "Grammar tells what kind of object anything is."<sup>90</sup> What grammar--the conditions for words' appropriate use--tells us is in many cases not all that is to be known about something. But when we do philosophy, and inquire concerning things' essence or nature, we are in fact asking questions about our language, whether we are aware of it or not.

The fact that what anything's essence is, is specified by "mere conventions" in a language does not mean that the world is "arbitrary": that we could change things' meanings if we just decided and agreed to. At one point Wittgenstein introduces the question whether human agreement determines what things are. He answers himself that what determines is "not agreement in opinions but in forms of life."<sup>91</sup> What Wittgenstein is saying is that the conventions which govern what our words mean are rooted in the matrix of our cultural practices--what we do, and hence, who we are (this will be further explained). To change one would be to change the others, and we are not entirely at liberty to change any of these (could you just "choose" to think and see the world like a Hopi?).

Just as we are not entirely at liberty to alter or reject what has been given to us in the common possession of a language, so too is a thinker or philosopher to a large extent bound by the everyday conventions of his culture. And unless he recognizes, and is attentive to, this fact, he will risk misunderstanding both himself and his subject matter. For instance, Pitkin cites and discusses Robert Dahl's essay, "The Concept of Power." In this essay Dahl seeks to uncover and explicate the underlying idea of a number of concepts including influence, control, and authority. According to Dahl, what underlies these concepts is "power": the ability to get others to do things they would not otherwise do--and Dahl suggests that he will use all these notions essentially interchangeably.<sup>92</sup>

However, Pitkin shows that words such as "power" and "influence" are not really interchangeable. As she demonstrates, we speak of "indirect power", but not "indirect influence"; one can have "the power of (attorney, the sword, the purse)", but not "the influence of (anything)," and so on. Moreover, Pitkin points out that in spite of himself, Dahl does not go on to use the terms interchangeably: his thought and speech continues to be guided by the distinctions given by his language. Thus he does not speak of Senators' "power" over the Senate, but of their "influence."<sup>93</sup>

Pitkin explains that in truth these terms are not even strictly comparable: they work in quite different ways, "move in different dimensions."<sup>94</sup> Pitkin notes that "[t]he social science literature is full of attempts either to distinguish them in simple ways, or to make one of them into a sub-category of the other."<sup>95</sup> However, all

such attempts fail to grasp the complex ways in which such concepts are actually determined and distinguished. Consequently, while these thinkers' conclusions point one way, they themselves continue in another--directed by the regularities and distinctions existing in the language and culture of which they are inescapably a part.

Hannah Arendt occupied a place in the forefront of modern philosophers who stress the thinker's need to understand his or her cultural membership. It is perhaps then a testament to the difficulty of escaping certain implications of our language and philosophical habits of thought, that this great theorist did not always see where and how to look, to do just this. In combating "reductionist" ways of understanding human conduct, Arendt describes "action" as a uniquely human phenomenon, requiring distinct intellectual treatment.<sup>96</sup> However, Pitkin suggests that this is not so; we use the word "action" not only with respect to humans, but also with respect to animals, and even inanimate matter, as when we speak of the action of water on sandstone cliffs. So action is not something "distinctively human", and Arendt was wrong in saying it is.<sup>97</sup>

What is startling about Pitkin's criticism is that it says little that anyone, including Arendt, did not already know. It would be clear to most any competent English speaker that Arendt is using "action" in a way different from ordinary speech. What might not be immediately obvious is that this matters: that in discussing the nature of action Arendt is bound by the ordinary uses of that term, and related words, as these uses are established in the language. But it is these uses which tell us what kind of thing action is. Or, in

the words (if not exactly the deeds) of Hegel, only when we leave aside our bright ideas do we "succeed in contemplating the matter as it is in and for itself."<sup>98</sup>

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Finally we return to an idea which Wittgenstein calls "one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment"<sup>99</sup>--the idea that the truth of a concept is its correspondence to a referent. According to his view words serve as labels for things, and when assembled into sequences form propositions which describe and assert. It was earlier here suggested that this view constitutes an imposition or projection of characteristically philosophic or scientific activity upon the manifold and varied practices of a culture. Thus Wittgenstein calls our attention to the variety of linguistic practices, or what he calls "language games", in our culture:

Reivew the multiplicity of language-games in the following examples, and in others:

- Giving orders, and obeying them--
- Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements--
- Constructing an object from a description (a drawing)--
- Reporting an event--
- Speculating about an event--
- Forming and testing a hypothesis--
- Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams--
- Making up a story; and reading it--
- Play-acting--
- Singing catches--
- Guessing riddles--
- Making a joke; telling it--
- Solving a problem in practical arithmetic--
- Translating from one language into another--
- Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying--<sup>100</sup>

Wittgenstein follows this list with the comment that it is interesting to compare the multiplicity of kinds of words and sentences, and their uses, with "what logicians have said about the structure of language."<sup>101</sup> Paul Ziff suggests that philosophers have traditionally failed to recognize the limited scope of the labelling or referring function of language because of their "unduly narrow focus."<sup>102</sup> For clearly "Hello" does not refer to anything. Or, more significantly, the sentence "George is coming for a visit" may refer to George (as a response to the question, "Will you be seeing George?"); but it may not refer at all, but identify George (as a response to the question, "Who is coming to visit?").<sup>103</sup> The point here is that it will be impossible to understand the nature of our concepts and language without a more perspicacious view of words' uses in the different contexts in which we actually learn and use them.

But doing this, and overcoming the generalized conception of the labelling function of language is not simply a matter of unlearning a mistake made by philosophers of antiquity and passed down from generation to generation within the discipline. For us, as for those ancient philosophers, the confusion here results from implications of our language which mislead us when we undertake reflection and philosophy. Wittgenstein says, "A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably."<sup>104</sup>

How then are we to escape this picture, inexorably given us by our language? For one thing, Wittgenstein suggests we replace our customary inquiry, "What is the meaning of \_\_\_\_\_?", which may



lead us to presuppose the general referring function of language ("a word's meaning is the thing it refers to"), with the question "How is the word ' \_\_\_\_\_ ' used?" Wittgenstein likens the words of our language to a collection of different tools in a toolbox:<sup>105</sup> we might say that there are labels in the box, but much more too.

He also compares words to handles in a locomotive cabin:

We see handles looking more or less alike. (Naturally, since they are all supposed to be handled.) But one is the handle of a crank which can be moved continuously (it regulates the opening of a valve); another is the handle of a switch, which has only two effective positions, it is either off or on; a third is the handle of a brake-level, the harder one pulls it the harder it breaks; a fourth, the handle of a pump: it has an effect only so long as it is moved to and fro.<sup>106</sup>

Wittgenstein attempts to illustrate how words can function by means of an example of what he asks us to imagine as a complete primitive language. The entire language consists of four words: "block", "slab", "pillar", and "beam"--and serves as a means of communication between a builder and an assistant. When the builder needs something, he calls out one of these words, and the assistant brings the appropriate object.<sup>107</sup> What, then, in this language can the call "slab!" be said to mean or refer to?

Perhaps we are inclined to think, as Wittgenstein once thought, that the call corresponds to a certain idea or image which somehow passes before the mind when spoken or understood. But for the builder or assistant, what passes before the mind may be "I hope this will fit", or "Where is that no good assistant?", or most anything else; in any case it would not necessarily tell us anything about the call "slab!". And supposing that the image or meaning must then be present

to the mind subconsciously is as Pitkin understates, "not very helpful."<sup>108</sup> Imagine Wittgenstein's language game except with the assistant replaced by a trained dog, and the calls replaced with claps: one, two, three, or four. What is the meaning or image which a single clap consciously, or subconsciously, presents to the dog's mind? Wouldn't we do better here to think of the clap, call, or similar command in our own language, as a kind of "signal" which people (usually people) learn to use and respond to as part of a certain activity?

Pitkin introduces the conception of language as "signals" and "tools" for doing things, not just labels for referring, by means of J.L. Austin's notion of "performatives". Austin observes that certain verbs in the first person are not used to describe or refer, but to perform the action which they name. Thus to say, "I promise" (under proper conditions) is not to describe a promise, but to make one. As Austin explored his notion of performatives, he came to find that such functions are quite widespread. For instance one need not say "I promise" to make a promise; one could say "OK", "you bet", or most anything under appropriate circumstances.<sup>109</sup> Thus while some words will more commonly occur in a performative linguistic environment--words such as "accusing", "honoring", "accepting", "toasting", etc.--most any words can be used to perform actions and so may be performative to greater or lesser extents.<sup>110</sup>

Once we have begun to grasp that words do more than label and describe, we will question whether substantives are always used to name things, and verbs to name activities. One particular confusion

which we may now avoid is the presupposition that verbs which do not name physical activities must then name "mental activities or states". It may seem to us almost beyond doubt that "thinking", "meaning", "reading", "remembering", etc., are mental activities. But this is rarely the case.

Consider an example Wittgenstein gives in order to demonstrate the grammar of "meaning". He describes a scene in which one person instructs another to write out the series +2, which the second person does up to 1000. But at this point he continues the series 1000, 1004, 1008, etc. Consequently, the first person corrects him, saying that he is not acting as he was meant to. Wittgenstein now asks the first person if when he instructed the other if he meant that 1002 should follow 1000, and also that 1868 follow 1866, and 100036 follow 100034, and "an infinite number of such propositions?"<sup>111</sup> Eventually the imaginary interlocutor responds, "But I already knew, at the time when I gave the order, that he ought to write 1002 after 1000."<sup>112</sup> To which Wittgenstein answers, "Certainly, and you can also say that you meant it then; only you should not let yourself be misled by the grammar of the words "know" and "mean".<sup>113</sup> For Wittgenstein argues that "meaning" is used here not to describe a particular mental experience, activity, or state, but rather to make the claim that "If I had been asked what number should be written after 1000, I should have replied '1002'."<sup>114</sup>

Similarly, Pitkin, again leaning on Austin, explains the grammar of "knowing":

When we claim to know we are not merely describing our state of mind; we are also making a certain kind of commitment. Saying we feel quite sure may describe our state of mind, but saying we know does more than that, does something different. It means issuing a certain kind of guarantee, taking a certain kind of responsibility for the truth of what we claim to know.... When I say, "I know", I give others my word; I give others my authority for saying that [the thing I have claimed to know is true.].115

Hence knowing is not something like a stronger version of believing. And if the word "knowing" were to disappear from our language, it might not mean that we would be any less able to describe our mental states; but it might indicate that we would have lost the cultural practice of giving our authority to others to act upon.

If we fail to understand Wittgenstein here, than knowing, meaning, etc. will appear as mysterious "inner processes", which others must perhaps only infer from our outer behavior. But a Wittgensteinian understanding may help to show us that with respect to these concepts we are not necessarily enigmas to each other. In fact, in many respects Wittgenstein's thinking implies a reformulation of problems of intellectual isolation from others and the world-- problems of philosophical skepticism, subjectivism and relativism. However, for the purposes of this essay, it will be enough to explore how Wittgensteinian philosophy can clarify one area of our language in this respect.

If we simply assumed that words are labels, and if we then witnessed occasions of their labeling, we might conclude that we had thus observed the words' meanings. Hence in certain social

conditions we might be led to say that "justice is the interest of the stronger" (Thrasymachus)",<sup>116</sup> or that tyranny is "monarchy disliked" (Hobbes).<sup>117</sup> In fact something like this perspective is entrenched in the positivistic common sense of the social sciences. According to this perspective, statements about the world can be exhaustively divided between those of "fact" and those of "value". The former are considered as descriptions or assertions in principle verifiable by observable evidence like any scientific claim. The latter, while sometimes appearing similar to the former, actually merely express subjective preferences; consequently, they cannot be verified, nor serve as the basis of any rational discussion or conclusions.

However, the category of words and statements "expressing value" is in fact a mixed bag, united only by their non-membership in the category of "facts". And such a categorization may obscure important differences among these "value words". For instance words such as "just" or "good" differ from words which actually are generally used to express preferences and tastes, such as "pleasant" or "delicious", in that the former can be used to invoke standards. It is the existence of more or less established standards within our language which allows us to make claims which are based not only on our likes and dislikes--allow us to speak, as Kant said, in the "universal voice."<sup>118</sup>

Thus while one can legitimately support the statement "Canary wine is pleasant" by saying, "Well, I like it," one cannot so defend a statement that it is "good". To follow a claim that a wine is good (a work of art is beautiful, an action is just, etc.) with the statement, "Well, I like it," is not a defense, but a retreat. Similarly,

while it makes sense in the first case to say, "Well, it is so to me," it does not in the latter case(s).<sup>119</sup>

The defense of claims implying standards requires knowledge of the subject and what will qualify as legitimate and relevant appeals to those standards. And not everyone has the knowledge, and thus the authority, to make any such claim. In order to authoritatively claim that, for instance, a dive was good--not just exciting, say--one has to know something about diving.<sup>120</sup> And while the knowledgeable and initiated will not always agree in their judgements, they generally do agree as to what are relevant concerns. Hence, in diving, the straightness of entry into the water is a relevant criteria; the speed of entry is not. What is to be a legitimate standard is sometimes itself a matter of debate, but as Pitkin says, "not just anything you do will be challenging standards, not just any challenge will be a proposal for new standards. We already have, as it were, some implicit notions of what will count as...a new application of a familiar concept."<sup>121</sup> For to appropriately invoke words implying standards, we must be able to reasonably connect our present application with the previously established and implicit standards.

In order to comprehend the logic and rationality of the various areas of human conduct and language, one must see how in fact they do operate--not simply judge according to criteria from other regions of our culture. Again, as Pitkin says:

The fact that we speak differently about art than about physical events is not proof that esthetic discourse is less objective than scientific discourse. On the contrary, we need to look and see how objectivity functions, what it

is like, in different realms. Only then will we understand what rationality in ethics looks like, and how it differs from rationality in science.<sup>122</sup>

What Pitkin and Wittgenstein show is that if our thought is really to grapple with the self and world it intends to reflect upon, we must recognize that we can only do so from a position not above or outside, but within a culture. Language, and the consequent notions we developed concerning reflection, directed us elsewhere. Our conception of meaning as a universal principle led us to hypostatize a theoretical knowledge which both transcended, and served to definitively "rule and measure", ordinary practical knowledge. Our understanding of convention led us to consider the cultural and the "real" as necessarily opposed. And our notion that words represent things led us to see our relationship to the world as perpetually contemplative, "intellectual", and one step removed, when in fact it is often immediate because actively engaged in the manifold practices of a culture. Furthermore, this particular perspective led us to disparage the sphere of action for then not conforming to the standards of the sphere of observation and analysis. For these and other reasons, the philosopher, who, as such, undertakes a particular and distinctive human practice, has need of finding his place amongst others participating in various different practices, many of which he shares with them. Philosophy is needing to teach itself how to see, in Wittgenstein's words, "from close to."<sup>123</sup>

Moreover, despite the fact that the human subject of this essay has been almost exclusively "the philosopher", the relevance of the understandings discussed here extends beyond the lives of professed

philosophers. Our culture is increasingly one of social isolation, reflection, and self-consciousness. Camus dramatically portrays this experience with a scene from the life of the modern individual: "A man is talking on the telephone behind a glass partition; you cannot hear him, but you see his incomprehensible dumb show: you wonder why he is alive."<sup>124</sup>

Clearly rethinking our concepts will not abolish modern self-estrangement and cultural alienation. But our concepts can distort our perception somewhat like Camus' glass partition: making the world seem foreign and nonsensical in ways it really is not. For either the philosopher or the reflective individual, what a rethinking of reflection may offer is a more clear understanding of how and what we share in a cultural community, and what in truth divides us.



## FOOTNOTES

1. Quoted in Hannah Arendt, "What is Authority," in Beyond Past and Future, NY: Penguin Books, 1954, p. 115.
2. Sheldon Wolin, Politics and Vision, Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co., 1960, p. 29.
3. Bruno Snell, The Discovery of the Mind, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1953, pp. 226-237.
4. Ibid., p. 229.
5. Ibid., p. 228.
6. See for instance Hugh Lloyd-Jones, The Justice of Zeus, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1971.
7. Op. cit., p. 232.
8. Plato, Phaedo, translated by Hugh Tredennick, NY: Penguin Books, 1954, p. 156.
9. Hegel, History of Philosophy, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1892, p. 388.
10. Ibid.
11. Plato, Euthyphro, translated by F.J. Church, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1948, p. 7.
12. Ibid., pp. 5-7.
13. Werner Jaeger, Paidein, Vol. 1, NY: Oxford University Press, 1939, p. 41.
14. Wolin, Politics and Vision, pp. 28-9.
15. F.M. Cornford, From Religion to Philosophy, NY: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912, p. 74.
16. Ibid., p. 8.
17. Wolin, Politics and Vision, p. 29.
18. Jaeger, Paidein, Vol. 1, p. 327.
19. Ibid., p. 328.

20. Ibid., p. 329.
21. Plato, Gorgias, translated by W.D. Woodhead, in The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961, p. 266.
22. Taken from Martin Heidegger's modified version of F.M. Cornford's translation of Plato's Republic in "Plato's Doctrine of Truth" in Philosophy in the Twentieth Century, Vol. III, William Barret, ed., NY: Random House, 1962, p. 252.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., pp. 259-261.
25. Ibid., p. 263.
26. Plato, The Republic, translated by D. Lee, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1955, p. 321.
27. Op. cit., p. 262.
28. Ibid., p. 265.
29. Ibid., p. 267.
30. Plato, The Republic, p. 322.
31. Op. cit., p. 265.
32. Ibid., p. 261.
33. Ibid., p. 266.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., p. 257.
36. Ibid., p. 265.
37. Ibid.
38. Arendt, "What is Authority," p. 112.
39. Ibid., p. 110.
40. Ibid., p. 114.
41. Ibid., p. 115.

42. Michel Foucault, The Order of Things, NY: Random House, 1970, p. 19.
43. Taken from Michael Oakeshott, Rationalism in Politics, NY: Methuen and Co., 1962, p. 252.
44. Wolin, Politics and Vision, p. 241.
45. Hobbes, Leviathan, in Hobbes Selections, F. Woodbridge, ed., NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930, p. 136.
46. Foucault, The Order of Things, p. 27.
47. Ibid., p. 129.
48. Ibid., p. 39.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., p. 141.
51. Ibid., p. 129.
52. Ibid., p. 54.
53. Hobbes, Hobbes Selections, p. 138.
54. Ibid., p. 165.
55. Foucault, The Order of Things, p. 42.
56. Hobbes, Hobbes Selections, p. 30.
57. Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 223.
58. Op. cit., p. 142.
59. Hobbes, Hobbes Selections, p. 60.
60. Oakeshott, Rationalism in Politics, p. 13.
61. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, translated by A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 58.
62. Ibid., p. 60.
63. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, translated by T.M. Knox, NY: Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 10.
64. Op. cit., p. 66.

65. That Hegel understands this progression from the start as more than just a pedagogic device, and to actually have some descriptive relevance seems clear. See p. 19, #33 in the Phenomenology.
66. Ibid., p. 67.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., p. 73.
69. Quoted in Jean Hyppolite, Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974, p. 100.
70. Ibid., p. 101.
71. Hegel, Phenomenology, p. 142.
72. Ibid., p. 19.
73. Charles Taylor, "The Opening Arguments of the Phenomenology," in Hegel, A. MacIntyre, editor, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972, p. 176.
74. Op. cit., p. 259.
75. Ibid., p. 260.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid., p. 261.
78. Ibid., p. 54.
79. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, translated N. Kemp Smith, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1929, p. 25.
80. Erich Heller, The Artist's Journey into the Interior, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959, p. 215.
81. See above, footnote #65.
82. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1958, p. 36.
83. See above, footnote #12.
84. Op. cit., pp. 31-2.

85. Hanna Pitkin cautions that Wittgenstein's examples here are somewhat deceptive. She points out that the real issue here is not the features of games, but of situations in which we talk about games. Hanna Pitkin, Wittgenstein and Justice, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972, p. 65.
86. For instance, see Oakeshott, "The Tower of Babel," in Rationalism in Politics.
87. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 49.
88. The above discussion is taken nearly in its entirety from Pitkin, Wittgenstein and Justice, pp. 104-5.
89. Ibid., p. 104.
90. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 373.
91. Ibid., p. 88.
92. The above discussion is taken nearly in its entirety from Pitkin, Wittgenstein and Justice, pp. 278-9.
93. Ibid., p. 279.
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. Taken from Pitkin, Wittgenstein and Justice, pp. 159-62.
97. Pitkin does not actually state her criticism in these terms. See pp. 159-62.
98. See above, footnote #79.
99. Wittgenstein is actually here referring to the specific case of substantives construed as things. Ludwig Wittgenstein, The Blue and Brown Books, NY: Harper and Row, 1958, p. 1.
100. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 12.
101. Ibid.
102. Quoted in Pitkin, Wittgenstein and Justice, p. 31.
103. Paul Ziff, Semantic Analysis, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960, p. 83.

104. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 48.
105. Ibid., p. 6.
106. Ibid., p. 6.
107. Ibid., p. 3.
108. Pitkin, Wittgenstein and Justice, p. 72.
109. The above discussion is taken nearly in its entirety from Pitkin, Wittgenstein and Justice, pp. 37-9.
110. As Ziff shows, not every sort of context in which a particular word appears will be semantically relevant. See Semantic Analysis, pp. 66-75.
111. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 75.
112. Ibid.
113. Ibid.
114. Ibid., p. 76.
115. Pitkin, Wittgenstein and Justice, p. 88.
116. Plato, Republic, p. 77.
117. Quoted in Pitkin, Wittgenstein and Justice, p. 172.
118. Ibid., p. 232.
119. The above discussion is taken nearly in its entirety from Pitkin, Wittgenstein and Justice, pp. 233-35.
120. Clearly not all areas of our language require either esoteric or technical knowledge for the performance of authoritative judgements, nor do all admit of "expertise".
121. Op. cit., p. 235.
122. Ibid., p. 236.
123. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 26.
124. Quoted in Pitkin, Wittgenstein and Justice, p. 321.

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