



Leaving the World Alone

Jonathan Lear

The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 79, No. 7 (Jul., 1982), 382-403.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-362X%28198207%2979%3A7%3C382%3ALTWA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-1>

The Journal of Philosophy is currently published by Journal of Philosophy, Inc..

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/jphil.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact jstor-info@umich.edu.

LEAVING THE WORLD ALONE*

Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. It cannot give it any foundation either; it leaves everything as it is, and no mathematical discovery can advance it.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* I.124

The task of philosophy, for Wittgenstein, is to understand the world, not to change it. A dominant theme of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is that philosophy should be non-revisionary. Whatever its value, philosophy should leave our linguistic practices and, in particular, our theory of the world as they are. The sheer force and pervasiveness of this thought in Wittgenstein's work should make one suspicious of any argument that purports to move from Wittgensteinian considerations about meaning to the conclusion that a law of logic ought to be revised. Of course, one might want to say that there are two conflicting strains in Wittgenstein, one revisionary, one nonrevisionary;¹ but I do not think that this can be so. The arguments about meaning and about the nature of philosophy are each pursued with such vigor and care that, if they are in conflict, they are in obvious conflict: one would expect Wittgenstein to have noticed and to have made some effort to resolve the tension. There is no evidence of such an effort; indeed, the *Investigations* reads as though he intended both themes to be taken together as forming a coherent whole. One might also be tempted to treat Wittgenstein's remarks about the nonrevisionary nature of philosophy as among the less fortunate dark utterances of the master. To dismiss so lightly thoughts which a great philosopher evidently regarded as important is, I think, to exercise bad judgment: I shall argue that it prevents a correct understanding of Wittgenstein's later philosophy.

*Throughout the writing of this paper I have been helped by Bernard Williams: both through his paper "Wittgenstein and Idealism" (cf. fn 10) and through many discussions of the issues raised here. I would also like to thank Jeremy Butterfield, Cynthia Farrar, and Timothy Smiley for valuable criticisms of a previous draft.

¹As G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker do; cf. "Critical Notice of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Grammar*," *Mind*, LXXXV, 338 (April 1976): 269-294. Crispin Wright thinks that understanding the role of Wittgenstein's anti-revisionist remarks, given the purportedly revisionist implications of his philosophy, is one of the outstanding problems in understanding the later Wittgenstein. See his *Wittgenstein on the Foundations of Mathematics* (London: Duckworth, 1980); cf. esp. p. 262.

In this paper I shall explain Wittgenstein's nonrevisionary approach to philosophy and discuss one consequence of it: Michael Dummett's general attack on the validity of the law of the excluded middle fails.

I

The roots of the later Wittgenstein's doctrine of noninterference are located in the transcendental conception of philosophy in the *Tractatus*. The point can be made briefly (and slightly misleadingly) by using Kantian terminology: in both the earlier and the later Wittgenstein the empirical world is left as it is. If philosophy can be done at all, it will provide insights that cannot be construed as empirical. To this extent there are affinities between Wittgenstein and Kant, and these affinities remain fairly constant throughout Wittgenstein's career. There are, of course, important differences between Wittgenstein and Kant. For instance, Wittgenstein eschews transcendental psychology, the concern with mental faculties. More importantly, Wittgenstein is profoundly pessimistic about the possibility of doing transcendental philosophy—and thus *philosophy*—at all. This is not a problem he ever solved, but one with which he coped with varying degrees of discomfort. Insofar as he failed to solve this problem of philosophy, then (if he is correct that there is a serious problem) it is only to be expected that his later philosophy will be misread. For if philosophy both must and cannot be conducted transcendently, it is not going to be easy to get the message across.

Wittgenstein is most explicit about the transcendental nature of philosophy and about the futility of such philosophy in the *Tractatus*. He is openly pessimistic about the possibility of his book's being of heuristic value to anyone: the book, he thinks, will be understood only by those who have already had the thoughts expressed in it.² Wittgenstein's dilemma is that he wants, as a philosopher, to communicate transcendental insights, but he recognizes that there is no language in which to communicate them. When the philosopher, in the hope of saying something philosophical, tries to stretch beyond the bounds of language, he lapses into nonsense. Thus the proper activity of the philosopher, according to the *Tractatus*, is to curb the impulse to say something metaphysical, and merely point out that one cannot succeed in saying what one wishes to say. Such a method is disappointing, dull, and proper.

²Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, trans. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 3.

But it is by no means characteristic of Wittgenstein's own philosophical activity in the *Tractatus*, as he is well aware. The *Tractatus* is devoted to talking about what we are supposed to pass over in silence: and so it is that anyone who understands the work is supposed to recognize it as nonsense (6.54; 7).

The possibility of Wittgenstein's doing philosophy thus depended on his violating his own taboo. Consider, for example, *Tractatus* 3.031:

It used to be said that God could create anything, except what would be contrary to laws of logic.—The truth is we could not *say* what an illogical world would look like.

What had looked like constraints upon God imposed by logic turn out, upon reflection, to be constraints imposed by us. The truth contained in this insight, of course, falls foul of the bounds of sense. In its literal sense, it is simply false that *we* have imposed constraints upon God. However, we have not thought through to a proper appreciation of our situation if we think of God as bound by Laws over which even He has no control. What makes itself manifest is that an "illogical" world is not, for us, a world at all. Thus the possibility of God creating a world according to different logical laws cannot be a genuine possibility.

Here one can see an illusion of possibility which will re-emerge significantly in the *Investigations*. The illusion is engendered by considering our world as one world among others, as only one of the various choices available to God. One then entertains the idea of God making other choices. One recognizes the illusion when one sees that all genuine possibilities must occur within the world. The world forms the context within which different possibilities make sense.

Wittgenstein did not abandon philosophy forever, as he intended to do when he finished the *Tractatus*. But his return to philosophy does not signal that he at last figured out a way to do philosophy coherently. The simplest explanation of his return is that he could not help it. He became disenchanted with many of the theses about meaning, indeed with the metaphysical picture, expressed in the *Tractatus*, and he continued to be troubled by philosophical problems. The shift in outlook from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations* has been much discussed,³ but one important theme remains con-

³ Cf., e.g., P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion* (New York: Oxford; 1972); Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (London: Allen Lane; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1972); David Pears, *Ludwig Wittgenstein* (London: Fontana, New York: Viking, 1971).

stant: the insight that philosophy provides will be nonempirical. What changes dramatically is the type of insight Wittgenstein thought to be available. In both the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* we are supposed to glean some insight into the way we think and the limits of thought by moving around self-consciously and determining what makes more and less sense. But whereas in the *Tractatus* it is hoped that we will thus recover the structure of thought, by the time the *Investigations* was written, Wittgenstein realized that there is no interesting structure worthy of recovery.

If the truths of philosophy cannot be said, then one cannot say that they cannot be said, for one cannot say what it is that cannot be said. This is the self-conscious incoherence of the *Tractatus*. In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein does not discuss how philosophy can, after all, be said: he passes over that subject in silence. The *Investigations* should, I think be seen as an act of pointing. As such, it is itself subject to all the foibles and possibilities of misinterpretation associated with any act of pointing which Wittgenstein discusses in the *Investigations*. Any act of pointing can fail or be misinterpreted. Its success depends upon its being made within a "form of life," that is, within a community of like-minded souls, a community that shares interests, perceptions of salience, feelings of naturalness, etc.

Why must philosophy be done by pointing? Because we cannot step outside our form of life and discuss it like some *objet trouvé*. Any attempt to say what our form of life is like will itself be part of the form of life; it can have no more than the meaning it gets within the context of its use. As we try to stretch ourselves to say something philosophical, we end up saying things that are, strictly speaking, false. Let us say that a person is *minded* in a certain way, if he has the perceptions of salience, routes of interest, feelings of naturalness in following a rule, etc. that constitute being part of a certain form of life. And consider, for example, the alternative answers to the following questions:

What does $7 + 5$ equal?

(a) 12.

(b) Anything at all, just as long as everyone is so minded.

What follows from P and *If P , then Q* ?

(a) Q .

(b) Anything at all, just as long as everyone is so minded.

To each of these questions, (a) gives the correct answer. $7 + 5$ equals 12, and anyone who tries to offer a different integer as an answer is in error. Q does follow by *modus ponens* from P and *If P , then Q* , and—though many other sentences also follow—anyone who, say, claimed to derive *not- Q* would be in error.

After studying the later Wittgenstein, one is tempted to say that (b) also expresses some sort of truth. But it is important to realize that (b) does not express an empirical truth. For if (b) were an empirical truth, then the following counterfactuals ought to express genuine possibilities:

7 + 5 would equal something other than 12, if everyone had been other-minded.

Q would not follow from P and *If P , then Q* , if everyone had been other-minded.

But these counterfactuals cannot for us express real possibilities; for the notion of people being "other-minded" is not something on which we can get any grasp. The possibility of there being persons who are minded in any way at all is the possibility of their being minded as we are.

Our problem is that being minded as we are is not one possibility we can explore among others. We explore what it is to be minded as we are by moving around self-consciously and determining what makes more and less sense. There is no getting a glimpse of what it might be like to be other-minded, for as we move toward the outer bounds of our mindedness we verge on incoherence and nonsense.

Here we encounter a modal form of the duck-rabbit: the fact of our being minded as we are appears alternately contingent and necessary. In one *gestalt*, one becomes aware that there is nothing to guarantee one's continued correct use of language beyond the fact that one happens to share with one's fellow man routes of interest, perceptions of salience, feelings of naturalness, etc. From this perspective, one's continued hold on the world appears the merest contingency.⁴ (Does anything help me keep my grasp on the world? What holds me back from the abyss?) As the *gestalt* shifts, one comes to see that there is no genuine possibility of having fundamentally different routes of interest and perceptions of salience, for that is the spurious possibility of becoming other-minded. The illusion of possibility is engendered by considering our form of life as one among others.

Therefore, it is a mistake to see Wittgenstein as propounding a radical conventionalist view of logical necessity.⁵ To see him as a

⁴ This perspective is well described by Stanley Cavell in "The Availability of the Later Wittgenstein," in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Scribner's, 1969).

⁵ As Dummett does in, e.g., "Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mathematics" and "The Justification of Deduction," in his *Truth and Other Enigmas* (London: Duckworth; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1978).

conventionalist is to assume that those things to which he is trying to awaken us are genuine empirical possibilities; it is to assume that he means no more by his claims than the falsehoods they express. For, given the premises *P* and *If P, then Q*, it is just not true that I am free to infer any conclusion at all. If I am to make a valid inference I must, for example, infer *Q* rather than *not-Q*. However, one can also see that the context of there being logical inference, the context in which one can use *modus ponens* correctly or incorrectly, depends upon the fact that we tend to agree in our judgments, our modes of thought, our perceptions of similarity and relevance: on the fact that we are like-minded. Logic itself does not "take us by the throat" and force us to a conclusion. That we feel we are being taken by the throat and forced to a conclusion depends upon the fact that we are minded as we are. But however tenuous a fact our being minded as we are may at time appear, it is not a fact that could genuinely have been otherwise. Of course, the context in which a certain inference can be said to be logically necessary must be a context in which we all tend to "agree." The difference between Wittgenstein and the conventionalists can be summed up as follows: the conventionalists state a falsehood; Wittgenstein tries to point beyond to a transcendental insight.

Philosophy, for the later Wittgenstein, takes up where empirical explanations peter out.⁶ Explanations must come to an end somewhere; and it is the job of philosophy to help us comprehend that which has no explanation and which, therefore, cannot be justified. For example, when someone learns English he will be able confidently to apply the world 'green' to new objects that he sees in the future. How does he know how to do this? "Well, how do I know?—If that means 'Have I reasons?' the answer is: my reasons will soon give out. And then I shall act without reasons."⁷ The reason that reasons give out lies in the fact that, in the end, we do act:⁸

⁶ Cf., e.g., Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, G. E. M. Anscombe trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), I.1, 109, 126, 211, 213, 217, 261, 325/6, 467/8, 471-474, 477, 480-485, 496/7, 516, 599; Zettel, Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, ed. & trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 267, 313-315, 608-611; *Philosophical Grammar*, R. Rhees, ed., & A. Kenny, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), IV.55, 61, V.67, VI.81, X.133; *On Certainty*, Anscombe & von Wright, eds., D. Paul & Anscombe, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 34, 110, 135, 168, 192, 204, 212, 287, 343-4, 359, 501, 559; *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, von Wright, Rhees, Anscombe, ed. & trans. (Oxford, Blackwell, 1967), I.34, II.74, 78; *Philosophical Remarks*, Rhees, ed., R. Hargreaves & R. White, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), X.110, XIII.150.

⁷ *Investigations* I.211. Cf. also I.472-485.

⁸ Cf. *On Certainty* 204: "Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence comes to an end:—but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting* which lies at the bottom of the language-game."

a person will, for example, go to a fruit store upon request and pick out five green apples (cf. *Investigations* I.1). The full empirical explanation of this action will not quell the sense of puzzlement we feel when, in a Wittgensteinian mood, we wonder why that person acted one way rather than another. Even if we know all the training that person has had in counting objects, associating the word 'green' with green things, 'apple' with apples, etc., we can still wonder why he does not, on the basis of that training, fulfill the request by picking out two brown pears.

"How can I obey a rule?"—if this is not a question about causes then it is about justification for my following the rule the way I do. If I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I do" (*Investigations* I.217).

The bedrock metaphor is not meant to suggest that we have reached firm foundations; it suggests only that there is nothing left to dig. Our reasons have been stated, we have already given the full empirical explanation, our justifications are spent. And still we want to know: how do we go on? Philosophy provides a means of coping with *empirical exhaustion*. We must first recognize that we are empirically exhausted: i.e., that our quest for understanding will not be satisfied by a more embracing explanation or justification.

Why do you demand explanations? If they are given to you you will once more be facing a terminus. They cannot get you any further than you are at present (*Zettel*, 315).

Having kicked away the ladder of empirical explanations, one can then become aware of how we go on. There are certain things we just do. Philosophy tries to make us feel comfortable with our inexplicable, unjustifiable activities. That is, it makes us aware of what it is to be minded as we are. That is not an explanation of our activities, and yet, strange as it may seem, it does provide insight into them.

But how can philosophy provide insight into our practices and *not* provide some sort of explanation of them? The claim that "we act in certain ways because we are minded as we are" does seem to do genuine work in making our behavior comprehensible to ourselves. So it is tempting to see the claim as providing an explanation, as showing why the possibility that constitutes our behavior was realized rather than some other possibility. We cannot, however, make anything of these "other possibilities."

If someone says 'If our language had not this grammar, it could not express *these facts*'—it should be asked what 'could' means here (*Investigations* I.497).

Once we develop a Wittgensteinian appreciation of our mindedness, we come to understand that there is no explanation of why we see the world the way we do rather than some other way. Imagine, for example, a tribe whose chief cannot be brought to see how *Q* follows from *P* and *If P, then Q*.⁹ It seems that there is nothing to say to the chief, for we have already presented him with whatever arguments we could muster. There is, according to Wittgenstein, only the nonexplanatory 'This is how *we* go on'. But this Wittgensteinian standoff is a far cry from the skeptical relativist's claim that there is no "fact of the matter" as to who is right, that the truth can be decided only by criteria internal to each theory. This becomes evident if one asks who the chief is. The answer is that he's nobody; and that he could not be anybody. We cannot begin to make sense of the possibility of someone whose beliefs were uninfluenced by *modus ponens*: we cannot get any hold on what his thoughts or actions would be like. The chief is a mere posit, a heuristic device to help us in our exploration of our mindedness. Wittgenstein occasionally postulates a tribe whose interests and activities differ from ours. Their function is to help us see how our activities are dependent upon the interests we have. But it is a mistake to think of these tribes as providing concrete examples of other-mindedness. Insofar as we can make sense of their activities and interests, that is, insofar as we can fill out the picture, they do not turn out to be other-minded. We are discovering more about what our form of life is like, not what another form of life would be like.¹⁰ Insofar as we cannot fill out the picture, as in the case of our chief, we have not reached a case of other-mindedness; we have simply passed beyond the outer bounds of our mindedness into incoherence.

The appearance of exhaustiveness in the above dilemma is misleading. For there is no sharp line that divides an example of our mindedness from incoherence. And in some of Wittgenstein's examples of other tribes' interests and practices, it is not clear whether we can fill out the picture or not. For certain systems of,

⁹ In a previous incarnation the chief was a tortoise. Cf. Lewis Carroll, "What the Tortoise Said to Achilles," *Mind*, iv (1895).

¹⁰ They are not, as Bernard Williams says, "alternatives to us, they are alternatives for us." Cf. his "Wittgenstein and Idealism" in *Moral Luck*, (New York: Cambridge, 1981).

say, magical beliefs, it may be unclear whether or not we can understand them. One task of philosophy is to explore this twilight that constitutes the outer bounds of our mindedness. Further, one need not, with Kant or the early Wittgenstein, assume that one is investigating a forever fixed, ahistorical framework of thought.

The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movement of waters on the river-bed and shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other (*On Certainty*, 97).

Perhaps as we explore the river bed shifts will occur: certain things will begin to make more sense, other things less. There is no reason to treat this as the discovery of a sense (or nonsense) that already existed before the exploration. It is here, I suspect, that Wittgenstein was confused about the implications of his nonrevisionism. There is one depressing strain in his thought: that the only task of philosophy is therapeutic, to prevent "language going on a holiday." The only job of the philosopher, on this strain, is to curb the philosopher from saying something philosophical. Civilization minus philosophy is seen as being in fine shape, and any philosophical questioning is seen as a type of social or intellectual deviancy that needs to be cured or at least curbed.

There is no need to embrace such a bleak view of philosophical activity, nor such a sanguine view of civilization. Wittgenstein himself also held a darker, a more Freudian, view of civilization. Philosophy can then be seen as part of the drive to become self-conscious. Of course, such an exploration may have an effect both on our beliefs and practices and on our conception of them.

A philosopher feels changes in the style of a derivation which a contemporary mathematician passes over calmly with a blank face. What will distinguish the mathematicians of the future from those of today will really be a greater sensitivity, and that will—as it were—prune mathematics; since people will then be more intent on absolute clarity than on the discovery of new games.

Philosophical clarity will have the same effect on the growth of mathematics as sunlight has on the growth of potato shoots. (In a dark cellar they grow yards long.)

A mathematician is bound to be horrified by my mathematical concepts, since he has always been trained to avoid indulging in thoughts and doubts of the kind I develop. He has learned to regard them as something contemptible and, to use an analogy from psycho-analysis (this paragraph is reminiscent of Freud) he has acquired a revulsion from them as infantile. That is to say, I trot out all the problems that a child learning arithmetic etc. finds difficult, the problems education

represses without solving. I say to those repressed doubts: you are quite correct, go on asking, demand clarification! (*Philosophical Grammar*, 381/2)

It is a shame that this strain in Wittgenstein's thought was not developed, for it is not incompatible with the significant thrust of his nonrevisionism. Insofar as philosophy makes us aware of our mindedness, it will awaken us to beliefs and practices that have no explanation or justification. There is no room to offer philosophical arguments for or against beliefs and practices for which there are no reasons. However, this does not imply that philosophical reflection will never have any effect upon any of our beliefs and practices. For perhaps we are so minded as to change certain of our beliefs under the stimulus of philosophical activity. From a Wittgensteinian perspective, the philosopher's primary concern should be not to change those beliefs, though that may be a by-product of philosophical activity, but to make us aware of our being so minded as to change them given a certain stimulus.

Moreover, this should not be the philosopher's sole concern. Whenever new ideas are thrown up in science, religion, or politics, stresses and strains are naturally created, and one task for the philosopher is to see how these ideas fit (or can be made to fit) with the rest of what we believe. The process of acquiring self-understanding breeds tension; for, as we try to form an encompassing vision of our disparate beliefs and practices, we might find that they do not all fit easily together. Philosophy should try both to encourage self-understanding and to resolve the inevitable tensions that arise. Not all our beliefs and practices need be left intact. Further, in the exploration of those beliefs and practices which have no viable alternatives, the philosopher will undoubtedly discover that certain beliefs and practices *do* have alternatives. If there is an indeterminacy in what constitutes alternatives for us, the philosopher may discover (or create) hitherto unrecognized possibilities. In trying to delimit the area where relativism cannot bite, we may discover areas where it can take hold. We can, for example, imagine Herodotus's readers shocked to discover the possibility of a people who eat their dead as a token of respect and who find the idea of cremating them disgusting.¹¹ And yet, with a certain amount of philosophical activity, we Westerners can stand back from our heartfelt practices and see this difference between West and East as one of taste.

But the appeal (or threat) of relativism stems not from such local examples, but from an extrapolation. We are encouraged to con-

¹¹ Cf. Herodotus, *The Histories*, III.38.

sider our entourage of beliefs, customs, and practices as forming a "world view" and to entertain the possibility of other world views "incommensurable" with ours. That is, relativism's appeal (threat) stems from taking the claim:

(*) Only because we are minded as we are do we see the world the way we do.

to express an empirical truth: as delimiting one possibility among others. Thus the relativist must make sense of the counterfactual:

If we were other-minded, we would see the world differently.

From a Wittgensteinian point of view, this counterfactual must be nonsense. To accept the claim (*), but deny that it delimits one possibility among others, is to accept a Wittgensteinian form of transcendental idealism. This transcendental idealism is Wittgensteinian, as opposed to Kantian, because it does not depend on a scheme/content distinction,¹² nor does it depend on the existence of a noumenal world.¹³

II

It is because philosophy provides insight into the inexplicable and unjustifiable that Wittgenstein thinks it must be nonrevisionary. A philosophical argument that tries to persuade us to revise our beliefs, linguistic practices, behavior, or logical laws must be designed to show us that the justification we have hitherto given for our practice is somehow faulty and that therefore the practice must be altered. One can argue for the revision only of a practice that admits of reasons for and against. But philosophy's concern, for

¹² Thus it avoids Donald Davidson's criticism of the distinction. Cf. Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, LXVII (1973/4): 5-20. One can read my argument as providing a Wittgensteinian argument for the Davidsonian position that the idea of an alternative conceptual scheme is incoherent. One can then, ironically, see Davidson as a type of transcendental idealist, even though he has done so much to oppose the scheme/content distinction.

¹³ Thus it avoids Richard Rorty's criticisms in "The World Well Lost," this JOURNAL, LXIX, 19 (Oct. 26, 1972): 649-665. It is, I think, a shame that in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, N.J.: University Press, 1979) Rorty so self-consciously distances himself from Kant. Although he attacks the Kantian scheme/content distinction, the noumenal world, and the project of providing an ahistorical framework for knowledge, Rorty's central thesis is that we are not portraying Nature ever better by Nature's own lights, we are portraying Nature ever better by our own lights. This thesis goes to the heart of the Kantian project and provides the basis for a form of transcendental idealism to which I think Rorty should be amenable. For a recent defense of transcendental idealism, see R. C. Walker, *Kant* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

Wittgenstein, is precisely with those practices which have no reasons for or against:

It is not our aim to refine or complete the system of rules in unheard-of ways. For the clarity we are aiming at is complete clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should completely disappear. The real discovery is one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to (*Investigations* I.133).

The real discovery enables me to stop doing philosophy because it is not a discovery that takes me further in my exploration of uncharted territory; it enables me to see that I *already* charted all the territory there is. This real discovery, Wittgenstein is certain, is a hard-won insight. For we must somehow overcome the nagging temptation to search further for explanations:

Here the temptation is overwhelming to say something further, when everything has already been described.—Whence the pressure? What analogy, what wrong interpretation produces it?

Here we come up against a remarkable and characteristic phenomenon in philosophical investigation: the difficulty—I might say—is not that of finding the solution but rather that of recognizing as the solution something that looks as if it were only a preliminary to it. “We have already said everything”—Not anything that follows from this; no, *this* itself is the solution. This is connected, I believe, with our wrongly expecting an explanation, whereas a solution of the difficulty is a description, if we give it the right place in our considerations. The difficulty here is: to stop (*Zettel*, 313/4).

One might say that Michael Dummett’s difficulty is that he just can’t stop. He asks for justification of practices that cannot be justified and then uses this lack of justification as grounds for the demand that these practices be revised. Dummett argues that our inability to justify our belief in the law of excluded middle is a failure on our part, a failure that must be remedied. I wish to argue that Dummett’s demand for a justification is a failure on his part; a failure to see that he is asking for something that cannot be given and should not be requested.

Dummett argues that Wittgensteinian considerations about meaning which cluster under the slogan ‘meaning is use’ should lead us to abandon the law of excluded middle as a valid logical law.¹⁴ He complains that we illicitly claim to derive from our expe-

¹⁴ Cf. Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas*, *op. cit.*; see especially “The Philosophical Basis of Intuitionistic Logic” and “Truth.” And see also Dummett, “What Is a Theory of Meaning? (II),” in Gareth Evans and John McDowell, eds. *Truth and Meaning* (New York: Oxford; 1976).

rience and training in language use more than could possibly be given to us. In learning to use a language, says Dummett, one learns on which occasions one is entitled to assert a sentence, or accept it as true. Since, roughly, one cannot get more out of one's training than is put in, understanding a sentence must be knowing under what conditions one is justified in asserting it. So, given a sentence *S*, whose truth we cannot effectively decide, we have, according to Dummett, no justification for the claim that either *S* or its negation must be true. Since he thinks that we should assert a disjunction only when we can put ourselves in a position to assert one of the disjuncts, Dummett concludes that we should refrain from asserting '*S* or *not-S*', for undecidable *S*.

It is odd that this argument should be thought of as Wittgensteinian. For one lesson of the *Investigations* seems to be that we *always* get more out of our training than is put in. No amount of pointing to green objects and saying 'green' will guarantee that our language learner acquires the concept of green and not *grue*. No explanation of what 'green' means will guarantee that he has not systematically misunderstood the explanation. That our learner does tend to acquire the concept *green* and not *grue*, on the basis of training that is compatible with acquiring either concept, is a matter of his sharing with us routes of interest, perceptions of salience: it is a matter of his being minded as we are. Thus the fact that we acquire the concept *green* rather than *grue* on the basis of our language training has no explanation or justification: it is simply something we do. In this sense we may be said to "get more out of our training than is given to us," though to put it like this is to invite the very error that Wittgenstein has been warning us against. For to say that we get more out of our training than is put in is to suggest that if we were other-minded we would respond to our training in different ways, and this is not a genuine possibility. There is no legitimate vantage point from which to compare the content of our training with what we get out of it; there is no place from which to measure our experience in independence of our beliefs and judge that there is slack between them.

In learning a language, one does learn the conditions in which one is entitled to assert the sentences of the language. However, it is undeniably evident that one learns to assert '*S* or *not-S*' in situations in which one does not know whether or not *S* is true; indeed, in situations in which one does not even know how to set about deciding *S*'s truth. Dummett asks: what justification can there be for this training? Should we not remain agnostic about an instance

of the law of excluded middle until we have decided one of the disjuncts? It is precisely here that Dummett misunderstands the significance of his own investigations. He rightly sees that certain of our practices have no justification, but he wrongly concludes that these practices must therefore be revised. He has hit bedrock, but he keeps trying to dig.

We can, of course, imagine beings who, on the basis of similar language training, tended to react to any instance of the law of excluded middle with fear, suspicion, and hostility. Why should we react to the law of excluded middle as we do rather than as those beings do? There is no reason; we just do it that way. We might be tempted to say that we are justified in reacting as we do because the world exists independently of us, and thus either *S* or *not-S* must be true, even if we do not know which it is. Dummett and Wittgenstein would in unison complain that we have not thereby justified our use of excluded middle; we have only filled out the picture. Our use of the law of excluded middle and our belief that the world exists independently of us are mutually constitutive of a stance we take to the world. Dummett parts company with Wittgenstein in his belief that something more needs to be said.

If Wittgenstein's account of the limits of justification and explanation of our practices is correct and if our belief in (inference in accordance with) the law of excluded middle is one of our unjustifiable beliefs (practices), then Dummett's arguments for abandoning it must be defective. Of course, it is not at all clear how to show that any of our beliefs is unjustifiable and, thus, not susceptible to argumentation for or against. So it is not obvious how my argument should proceed. For there is no reason to expect there to be any a priori or transcendental argument to the conclusion that we must believe in the law of excluded middle. So if anyone can devise arguments that plausibly call into question the validity of excluded middle, that itself seems to show that our belief in excluded middle is susceptible to argument. And if excluded middle can be justified, it ought to be justified (if we are to believe it at all). Thus Dummett's philosophical activity seems to be self-warranting: by the very fact that he can offer arguments casting doubt on excluded middle, it seems to follow that, even if his arguments are not successful, we cannot place our belief in excluded middle as beyond explanation or justification. Thus it looks as though I am in a weak dialectical position. Nevertheless, I would like to suggest that our belief in excluded middle, at least within certain areas of discourse, is one of our unjustifiable, inexplicable beliefs. I do not

think that Dummett's arguments cast doubt on this suggestion, because they can be divided into two broad categories: good arguments which support antirealist conclusions in certain limited areas but which do not impugn the law of excluded middle wholesale, and arguments which genuinely are directed against the law of excluded middle but which fail. Since Dummett's writings are voluminous, I shall limit myself to a paradigm of each.

Let us take a good argument first. One of Dummett's outstanding contributions to philosophy has been to make us sensitive to the fact that there are areas of discourse where our realist inclinations do not run very deep. Vague predicates provide an example where Dummett offers a good argument for a limited antirealist conclusion.¹⁵ Suppose that we, as individuals and as a linguistic community, cannot make up our minds whether a certain color patch is white or not. In fact this patch differs by relatively few angstrom units from another color patch that we all unreservedly say is white. Dummett urges us to resist the temptation to say of the first patch, "Either it is white or not." The reason he gives is that the sense of 'white' which we derive from our training in the use of English is such that we ought to be able to say whether a patch is white or not on the basis of relatively casual observation. This linguistic argument is reinforced by current scientific theory. We take color to be a secondary property: there is no question of the patch really being white even though we cannot perceive it to be so under ideal conditions. Part of what it is for the patch to be white is to appear to be white under certain conditions of lighting. Since shades of color can alter by minuscule amounts, it should not be surprising if there are shades about which we cannot decide whether they are white or not.

But our willingness to abandon this instance of the law of excluded middle flows directly from the conviction that white is not a determinate property of the object which either applies or fails to apply independently of our judgments. It does not flow from any more abstract considerations about meaning: e.g., that our understanding of the sentence can consist only of its assertion conditions and not its truth conditions. For in this instance it is not that there are truth conditions that transcend our ability to recognize them, it is that truth conditions and assertability conditions coincide.

Dummett may be able to persuade the realist to trim his sails. But he does this not by attacking the validity of excluded middle, but by restricting its areas of applicability. That is, we come to see

¹⁵ Cf. "Wang's Paradox," in *Truth and Other Enigmas*.

not that the classical schema ' $F(x) \vee \sim F(x)$ ' is invalid, but that there are areas of discourse where the predicates are not substitution instances of F , because they do not determinately apply or fail to apply to every object in the domain. Of course, Dummett would undermine the law of excluded middle if he could show that it is inapplicable for all or most areas of discourse. On the basis of the arguments he has offered so far, there are no grounds to think that he can do this. What he needs is a general argument aimed directly at the validity of excluded middle.

However, there is reason to doubt whether any general argument could succeed. For our belief that ' S or *not-S*' must be true even where S is undecidable is intimately linked to our belief that S describes an aspect of reality that exists independent of us or of our ability to verify it. Thus giving up the belief that ' S or *not-S*' is true, for each undecidable S , is tantamount to giving up the belief that there is any aspect of reality that exists independent of our ability to verify that it exists. *Prima facie* it is difficult to see how any argument could support or impugn such a position. Imagine a community who saw the world as coming into existence as they perceived it. A skeptic in their community asks them to envisage the possibility of a people who believe that the world continues to exist when they do not perceive it; indeed who believe that certain parts of the world exist even when they cannot perceive it. The community finds the skeptic's suggestion weird; indeed they find it almost impossible to envisage what experience for those people must be like. And yet they find they have no way to "refute" the skeptic, no way to show either that there could not be such people or that their view must be mistaken.

One reason that skepticism has had such a long-playing run in our culture is that we cannot prove that our way of looking at the world is correct. And the skeptic has a sharp nose for those beliefs which are both constitutive of our way of looking at the world and also unjustifiable: e.g., that the world exists when it is not being perceived or that certain parts of the world exist whether or not they can be perceived. The very success of skepticism should make one suspicious of any argument that purports to prove verificationism. For the skeptic's success depends on his zeroing in on those beliefs which we cannot prove or refute. His importance depends on those beliefs' being important to us. Any proof of verificationism, though it would vindicate the skeptic's challenge to our realist beliefs, would defeat the skeptic by depriving him of his role. Conversely, if one is confident that the skeptic has chosen his role with care, then one will expect any proof of verificationism to be flawed,

precisely because our belief that aspects of the world exist independently or our ability to verify it is neither justifiable nor refutable. Since any argument that one should refrain from asserting 'S or *not-S*' for undecidable S is essentially an argument for verificationism, one should expect it to fail.

Dummett does present arguments designed to cast doubt generally on the validity of the law of excluded middle. We have already seen how Wittgenstein would respond to the allegedly Wittgensteinian "meaning is use" argument (393/4 above), but Dummett also presents a self-consciously anti-Wittgensteinian argument. He argues that, if we are to provide a systematic theory of meaning, we must admit the possibility that certain aspects of our linguistic practice refuse to be systematized into a coherent whole and, thus, that we may have to revise our linguistic practices to make them coherent to ourselves. If we take seriously Wittgenstein's dictum that meaning is use, Dummett thinks, we will have to give up his nonrevisionism. This is because there are different aspects to our use of a sentence and there must, Dummett says, be a certain *harmony* between them. For example, in the case of observation sentences, we learn to assert them both on the basis of sensory experience and on the basis of deductions from theoretical premises.

If the linguistic system as a whole is to be coherent, there must be *harmony* between these two aspects: it must not be possible to deduce observation statements from which the perceptual stimuli require dissent. *Indeed, if the observation statements are to retain their status as observation statements, a stronger demand must be made: of an observation statement deduced by means of theory, it must hold that we can place ourselves in a situation in which stimuli occur which require assent to it.* This condition is thus a demand that, in a certain sense, the language as a whole be a conservative extension of that fragment of the language containing only observation statements ("Philosophical Basis of Intuitionist Logic," *Truth and Other Enigmas*, p. 221; my emphasis).

Thus Dummett sees two Wittgensteinian demands—that meaning should be construed in terms of use and that philosophy should be nonrevisionary—as coming apart. To satisfy one demand, we must disregard the other. The notion of a conservative extension is taken from proof theory, where one says that an extension T' of a theory T is *conservative* if, given that $T' \vdash S$, with S a sentence in the language of T , then $T \vdash S$. That is, T' cannot prove any more sentences in the language of T than T can; though it may be able to prove more sentences than T , since its language may be richer. In

the above quotation the language as a whole is said to be a conservative extension of the fragment that contains the observation sentences just in case it is not possible to deduce an observation sentence that one could not come to confirm directly on the basis of observation.

Now it is certainly true that a certain degree of harmony between various aspects of our linguistic practice and our observation is required. If, for example, I can now allegedly prove that I am holding a blue pen in my hand, though I can perfectly well see that I am holding a red pen, this indeed is an upsetting experience in the light of which I am going to have to revise some of my beliefs. Perhaps I will discover that I have unwittingly been sitting under an infra-red lamp that casts a red haze over my blue pen; perhaps I will discover that one of the premises is false. But, conceivably, I could discover that one of the inferences I had thus far uncritically accepted is, upon reflection, fallacious; e.g., the inference from 'I am holding an *x*' to 'I am holding a blue *x*'. Thus far there is of course no conflict with Wittgenstein. For he does not guarantee that our current beliefs will never change, nor does he pretend to protect us from nasty surprises in the future. His doctrine is that *philosophy* should be nonrevisionary, not that we should hold onto our current beliefs come what may.

However, Dummett demands a much stronger degree of harmony. He demands that, if we can prove an observation sentence *S*, then we must be able to put ourselves in a position in which we can verify *S* directly. At first sight it may look as though Dummett is simply begging the question by assuming the verificationism he hopes to establish. Why, one might ask, should one be able to verify *S* directly? The provisional answer is that *S* is an observation sentence, and, so, if it is true it ought to be verifiable directly. Thus Dummett is not assuming verificationism *tout court*; but he is assuming that certain sentences can usefully be characterized as observational. For Wittgenstein, no useful purpose can be served by separating a fragment of the language and treating it as observational. One lesson of Wittgenstein's study of language is that we cannot specify the meaning of an individual sentence determinately enough to say that the meaning of that sentence demands that the sentence be verifiable directly by sensory experience. Of course, one can go ahead and call certain sentences "observational" just so long as one does not put too much philosophical weight on it. This is just what Dummett does; for the allegedly questionable inferences will arise in precisely those cases where it is unclear whether the conclusion is "observational."

Suppose, for example, that by various theoretical principles of physics and geology we are able to deduce:

- (i) Any area of land that has properties *P* contains a diamond.

and by a study of the earth at a certain area we are able to conclude:

- (ii) The bottom of this mine has properties *P*.

We then deduce by universal instantiation and *modus ponens*:

- (iii) There is a diamond at the bottom of this mine.

Here, it seems, we have deduced by theoretical means a sentence that could, in principle, be verified directly by observation. On the doctrine of harmony, we must be able to put ourselves in a position in which we could verify it directly. But suppose it is also a consequence of physics and geology that

- (iv) Any diamond lying in a area of land that has the properties *P'* and is subjected to conditions *C* will be destroyed.

and that

- (v) The land around this mine has properties *P'*, and digging for the diamond constitutes subjecting the land to conditions *C*.

What are we to do, reject universal instantiation or *modus ponens* as valid rules of inference because they don't preserve harmony? Of course not. We will instead come to see that a sentence, (iii), which prima facie appeared to be an observation sentence is not in fact an observation sentence. This discussion suggests two lessons. First, one cannot in general tell by considering the meaning of a single sentence in isolation whether it is observational or not. The question of whether it is observational may depend on the truth of many other sentences, some of them highly theoretical. Second, there is no clear line to be drawn between observational and non-observational sentences and correspondingly little philosophical work that the distinction can perform.¹⁶

III

But was not Wittgenstein himself hostile to the law of excluded middle? The straightforward answer to this question is: no. Witt-

¹⁶ Dummett also thinks that language as a whole should be a conservative extension of that fragment which contains only atomic sentences ("The Justification of Deduction," *Truth and Other Enigmas*, pp. 316-318). However, he provides no argument as to why the distinction between atomic and nonatomic sentences is philosophically significant. Nor does he convincingly show why nonatomic sentences should not provide a useful nonconservative extension, enabling us to express realist beliefs that we have but could not express in an atomic language.

genstein's hostility is directed toward the idea that we can somehow justify or defend the law of excluded middle, e.g., by comparing our language use with the way the world really is. When we come to view our linguistic practices correctly, we will see that there is no defense of the law of excluded middle beyond the fact that we are minded as we are. And the fact of our being minded as we are is no *defense* at all. So Wittgenstein is not trying to impugn our belief in the law of excluded middle; his aim is to undermine the belief that we can provide explanation, justification, defense or foundation for our belief in it.

What, Wittgenstein asks, is the justification for saying that either seven consecutive sevens will occur in the decimal expansion of π or not?¹⁷ He tries to disabuse us of the idea that we can justify our belief in this instance of excluded middle by considering the expansion of π as already existing, stretching out (somewhere) infinitely far. This is no more than a picture, which is of a piece with our acceptance of excluded middle in mathematics. Had we not accepted excluded middle, we might find another picture natural: e.g., perhaps as the numbers in the decimal expansion stretch out, they would "flicker in the far distance" (*ibid.*, IV.11). Such pictures can in no way underwrite our use of excluded middle.

And what is in question here is of course not merely the case of the expansion of a real number, or in general the production of mathematical signs, but every analogous process, whether it is a game, a dance, etc. etc. (*ibid.*, IV.9).

The central task of philosophy, for Wittgenstein, is to make us aware of our mindedness. This will be obscured so long as we think that some of our key practices, e.g., inference in accordance with excluded middle, have any justification. When we are freed from the need to construct spurious justifications for our practices, we are at last able to say, "that's simply what we do." For Wittgenstein this is the beginning of self-consciousness about the way we see the world. It is thus of utmost importance for him to attack any purported justification of the law of excluded middle, but attacking the law itself is not his interest at all.

Indeed, Wittgenstein is openly hostile to the intuitionists:

I need hardly say that where the law of excluded middle doesn't apply no other law of logic applies either, because in that case we aren't dealing with propositions of mathematics. (Against Weyl and Brouwer). (*Philosophical Remarks*, XII.151).

¹⁷ Cf. Investigations I.352; *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, IV.9-12.

Mathematics, Wittgenstein seems to be saying, is constituted by certain practices, e.g., inference in accordance with excluded middle. That is what it is to do mathematics. If one is asked, "Why do you use those practices rather than some others?" there is, ultimately, no answer one can give beyond the nonexplanatory, nonjustificatory "Because that's the way we do mathematics."

But what are we to make of the intuitionists? Are they not an example of an other-minded tribe making inferences according to different logical laws? There is certainly no need to see them this way.¹⁸ For the law of excluded middle, as the classical mathematician understands it, is valid even when the quantifiers range over the intuitionist's domain of mental constructions: either there is a mental construction that is F or it is not the case that there is such a construction. The intuitionist introduces a stronger form of negation: "it is provably absurd that," and, if we let ' \neg ' stand for intuitionistic negation, it is certainly not valid that $(\forall x)[F(x) \vee \neg F(x)]$. But this is not an instance of the law of excluded middle: not even a classical mathematician would think this valid.

Of course, the intuitionist also goes on to say that classical negation is incoherent, and it is here that Wittgenstein would take issue with him. Wittgenstein's quarrel is not with anyone who simply wishes to practice intuitionistic mathematics for its own interest (he may also wish to practice classical mathematics). His quarrel is only with the intuitionist's quarrel with the classical mathematician. The intuitionists' two major mistakes, from a Wittgensteinian perspective, are, first, to think that certain classical inferences are illegitimate because they are unjustifiable and, second, to think that alternative inferences can be justified.

'Every existence proof must contain a construction of what it proves the existence of'. You can only say 'I won't call anything an 'existence proof' unless it contains such a construction'. The mistake lies in pretending to possess a clear *concept* of existence.

We think we can prove something, existence, in such a way that we are convinced of it *independently of the proof*. . . . Really, existence is what is proved by procedures we call 'existence proofs'. When the intuitionists and others talk about this they say: "This state of affairs

¹⁸ Here I am indebted to Saul Kripke for lectures given on the philosophy of logic at Princeton in 1974. Kripke represented himself, Gödel, and Kreisel as examples of people who wish to practice both intuitionistic and classical mathematics, and who do not think that the practice of the one should militate against the practice of the other. On this interpretation, classical mathematics and intuitionism differ primarily in their subject matter—one studying an ontology of abstract objects, the other studying mental constructions.

can be proved only thus and not thus'. And they don't see that by saying that they have simply defined what they call existence. . . . We have no concept of existence independent of our concepts of an existence proof. (*Philosophical Grammar*, p. 374).

Wittgenstein is equally hostile to those who think they can justify the law of excluded middle and to those who think they can justify some alternative to it.

JONATHAN LEAR

Clare College, Cambridge University

COMMENTS AND CRITICISM

WHY AGENTS MUST CLAIM RIGHTS: A REPLY

IS IT possible to prove that all persons equally have certain moral rights? In *Reason and Morality*,[†] having shown that the proof cannot be provided by any of the familiar assertoric arguments based on human needs, interests, dignity, contracts, and so forth, I worked out a proof using what I call a *dialectically necessary method*. The method is *dialectical* in that it begins from statements presented as being made or accepted by an agent and it examines what they logically imply. The method is *dialectically necessary* in that the statements logically must be made or accepted by every agent because they derive from the generic features of purposive action, including the conative standpoint common to all agents. Using this method, I argued first that each agent logically must claim or accept that he has rights to freedom and well-being as the necessary conditions of his action. I argued further that each agent must admit that all other agents have the same rights he claims for himself, so that in this way the existence of universal moral rights must be accepted within the whole context of action or practice.

Reduced to its barest essentials, my argument for the first main thesis is as follows. Since freedom and well-being are the necessary conditions of action and successful action in general, no agent can act to achieve any of his purposes without having these conditions. Hence, every agent has to accept (1) "I must have freedom and well-

[†] Chicago: University Press, 1978. Page references to my work in the text are to this book.