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The Blue Book

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# THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

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## THE BLUE BOOK

WHEN I first began thinking about writing this paper on The Blue Book, I thought it might be helpful and interesting to find out something about the history of this book. Accordingly I wrote to Miss Alice Ambrose with whose generous permission I am including the following note from her letter in response.

This is the note: "The history of The Blue Book is as follows: Wittgenstein was listed in the Cambridge Reporter as giving two courses of lectures in 1933-34, one being called 'Philosophy for Mathematicians.' To this, as I remember, 30 or 40 people turned up, which distressed him. After three or four weeks of lecturing he turned up at lecture and told the class he couldn't continue to lecture. I remember the occasion and remember how amazed I was that an announced course of lectures could be abandoned in this way. Of the people in that class he chose five of the rest of us to dictate The Blue Book to: H. M. S. Coxeter and R. L. Goodstein, mathematicians, also Francis Skinner (who might have been on a Trinity Grant to do math. though he actually left off doing math. in order to devote himself to Wittgenstein's work), Margaret Masterman Braithwaite and myself. About a month later, I see by a reference to my diary that the five of us had increased to seven, and I know one of them was Mrs. Helen Knight but for the life of me I can't remember the other one. Wittgenstein quarreled with Coxeter because Coxeter quite innocently ran off on a mimeograph the material of the first term's dictation and discussion. So Coxeter didn't continue in the second term. Mrs. Braithwaite also dropped out during the year in the third term. I've forgotten what the unpleasantness was in her case. She and I took down discussion that he wasn't including in The Blue Book and we called this The Yellow Book. He once flew at her for doing so, but as he was also distressed when something he thought good was not taken down because he wasn't dictating—and she pointed this out to him at the time—this practice on our part was allowed to continue. I believe I continued with it after she left. The Blue Book dictation and discussion went on during all three terms

along with the other set of lectures—which were evidently attended by quite a large group since I refer to them in my diary as ‘big’ (12 members I see from one entry). The small group met for *The Blue Book* each week as regularly as for a class. I can’t remember whether this was the year Moore attended his lectures, but I suspect it was. Can’t remember how many terms he attended. I have notes from these lectures. But *The Blue Book* was dictated. I believe I typed some of the dictated material and later on Wittgenstein had it mimeographed—but not a few pages at a time. When he had the material compiled into *The Blue Book* I don’t remember but I suppose after the year was over. Yes, there was discussion during the dictation but what he did at each meeting was not greatly determined by our comments, as I remember it. I believe that what he talked about in the lectures and what he gave us for *The Blue Book* was pretty different.

“*The Brown Book*, like *The Blue Book*, was dictated throughout the three terms along with his regular lecture course. For that Skinner and I were the only ones and we met him 2–4 hours per day, 4 days a week. That was in 1934–35. We sometimes went on beyond term for a few days of the vacation.”

In a later note she wrote: “As for your question about how *The Blue Book* was dictated, as far as I remember he never had even notes with him. I think I remember but once, and I think this was a lecture when he seemed to have a card with him to which he referred once or twice at the beginning of the lecture. It was in general unlike him to write out things ahead. His custom was to dictate, stop for discussion, and continue dictation.”

A reviewer is expected to have read and to understand the book he reviews. Accordingly, since I am about to review this book, or something of that sort, naturally I expect that I understand it. And if I understand it, and there are some readers who do not, perhaps I can help them to understand it, or at least help them not to misunderstand in certain ways or help them to misunderstand it in a certain preferred way. This is rather strange since it seems to involve that the author himself failed to help them to understand it or failed to help them enough, and so some reader comes forward to do what the author did not do. In some cases this seems to be how it is. Think of all the helps over hard places for boys and men in reading Kant, for instance, supplied by helpers. Kant couldn’t do it. So here are all Kant’s little helpers. Very well, then, I too am a little helper. But if I am such a little helper I am going to help myself generously to the helpmost helper, namely, the author himself. I will help the

reader to the help offered by the author, reminding the reader of those helps.

This book, notes, discussions, investigations, dictations, contains no introduction, no conclusion, no chapters, no chapter headings, no helpful title. So at the outset there is no guide, no warning, no preparation, no cautionary remark. Perhaps the students to whom these dictations were dictated were better prepared. I doubt it, however. The author may very well have considered and said that a bump is also education, a bump of the right sort, of course—bumping one's head, for instance, against such a question as "What is the meaning of a word?" If accordingly the reader has pretty well absorbed the shock of that question and has gone on reading, since all the words are familiar enough—there are scarcely any strange words,—he may nevertheless soon feel as though he were being turned round and round and then as though this world of words were whirling past him. There seems to be no increment, nothing upon which one can fix his grasp and tell his friends, "This I have found." And if now he tries again, reading more slowly, intent upon this paragraph and then upon the next one, then even though he may seem to understand this paragraph and the next one, he will not understand how they are connected. He may ask himself: And what about that question: What is the meaning of a word? And what have "toves" and the "red flower" of the field to do with it? What is the individuality of a number? How long is a piece of string? And as he pages through the book, the contents may strike him as more and more distressing. Such incoherence! "Bring me a red flower," "We observe certain actions of the amoeba," thinking "performed by the hand," "the visual image two inches behind the bridge of my nose," "Imagine a yellow patch," "Can a machine have tooth-ache?," "Bright's disease," "unconscious tooth-ache," "Do you know the ABC?," "How can we hang a thief who doesn't exist?," "Is your imagination so absolutely exact . . . ?" One may certainly wonder as to how those students learned anything from these dictations and may quit trying oneself. Madness, perhaps, but little method! Of course, one may still go on reading since these pages are studded with scenery, startling and sometimes amusing. So one may go along for the ride.

The impression of incoherence is, I suspect, common to nearly all readers. And there are reasons other than the formal ones I've noticed to account for this. This book is a book in philosophy. And it is read chiefly by readers of philosophy. And with what expectations would such readers read? Obviously they will expect what they are accustomed to getting when they read philosophy.

Their disappointment and the measure of incoherence will be determined in the same way. And what are they used to? They are used to proofs, to arguments, to theories, to evidences, refutations, to infallibles, to indubitables, to foundations, to definitions, to analyses, etc. And if in these terms any reader should, having read, seek to turn his reading to some profit and ask himself: What has the author proved, for what has he presented arguments, what is his theory, what has he refuted, and what are his infallibles?, he is certain to be disappointed. The author has neither proved nor refuted anything. And he has presented nothing as infallible, nor a theory. What is such an author doing in philosophy? A skeptic one might admit. He understands the questions and understands what ignorance and knowledge are. He has busied himself about the questions. He has said: "We do not and we cannot know," presumably a respectable answer. The skeptic has tried and failed and investigated the nature of his failure. Man cannot know as he cannot fly. He is not an angel. And this author? This author spends seventy and more pages lolling. He does not, of course, say that he is lolling, which seems anyway obvious enough, since he does it so strenuously, nor that he lolls evading. So he's no angel either. In any case it does strike some readers that this book is the work of a strangely articulate and irresponsible author. He doesn't say "Yes" and he doesn't say "No." The flexible man! Was Descartes right in his statement of the Cogito or not? What we want is an answer: Yes, or: No. And what do we get? Not even a weak answer such as "Probably" or "Not at all likely." Surely a straight-forward question deserves a straight-forward answer. No wonder that man stomped out and slammed the door.

I have been trying in these paragraphs to represent a certain source of misunderstanding, an obstacle to understanding. It may also be represented in this way: Philosophers are people who investigate what sorts of things there are in the universe. They are, of course, scrupulous in these investigations beyond the scrupulosity of any other investigator. They stand at the gate and wait, fearing to tread where angels rush in. And what do they ask? They ask such questions as: Are there angels, universals, pure possibilities, uncrusted possibilities, possibilities with a little mud on them, fairies, creatures made of beautiful smoke, relations, the Lost Atlantis, real equality among tooth-picks, sense-data, ghosts, selves in prison with two feet, everlasting shoe-makers, heaven, thinking horses, pure uncontaminated acts, absolutely independent tables, the minds of stars, the spirits of an age, perfect

circles, the geometrical point of a joke, the devil, floating impressions, categorical don'ts, one simple called Simon, perspectives waiting to take their places as the penny turns, gods, any ding-dong an sich with a bell so one can find it in the dark, trees, houses, and mountains in the mind, itches of necessary connection, two impossibilities before breakfast, blue ideas, enghosted pieces of furniture, etc.

And if now anyone comes to the reading of this book expecting the author, for instance, to say: "Yes, yes, God exists," and then to show him a new and knock-out proof that is guaranteed for a thousand years or to help him to an old one, long buried in a Kant heap, but now freshly washed and polished, well, the author is more likely to remind him that though Nietzsche some years ago read an obituary notice to the effect that God is dead, he, the author, had not even heard that God was sick. "The living God!" And as for inventing any new *apriori* synthetic, a new drug to cure this or that, or any and all, sorts of incertitude, though he seems at one time to have been interested in inventing a new type of airplane propeller and showed a keen interest in all sorts of gadgets, a milk bottle, for instance, from which, with the use of a spoon, one could pour off the cream—"Now, there's America for you!"—this particular form of invention he seems not to have been interested in. He was more inclined to recommend a few old home remedies and common herbs, garden variety simples which he was insistent one should not confuse. And as for those readers in general who want answers to their questions and who, if they already have answers, want better reasons, the author gives neither better reasons for the old answers nor any answers, and those readers who keep their questions may be considered either fortunate or unfortunate as the case may be.

I have tried to show how it is that this book should disappoint some readers, supposing that they had expectations in reading it. I have suggested that the reason why such readers have such expectations is that it is, or is read as, a book in philosophy. And it is a book in philosophy surely? Well, it is and it isn't. It is certainly obvious that the author is busy about philosophical problems. The first sentence in the book is the sentence: "What is the meaning of a word?" and that is a philosophical staple, a sort of thorn which all philosophers carry about with them. And there are others: What is thinking? What is locality? What is a rule? What is expectation? What is time? What is knowledge? So if one were to show someone that this is a book in philosophy and that those readers who were disappointed in it were justified

in expecting what they have been led to expect from it, one might point out to him the presence in the book of these questions. Of course, these readers might still be misled. For the question is: Are these questions treated philosophically in the book? and if this means: Are they treated in the way in which such questions are treated by Descartes or Hume or Plato? who either give answers to such questions or at least try to—they certainly are not men of whom one might be tempted to say that they once did good work and then said to themselves, “I have done enough, now I’ll rest; let George do it, while I fiddle with words,”—the answer is that they are not treated philosophically. So if some reader complains, “But I thought that the author was another Descartes,” we can understand what he was looking for and what led him to this.

And now it would be natural to say that since the author is manifestly aware of these questions, and must know that these questions cry out and have been crying out for centuries for answers, that he does not answer is a bad sign. For either he does not understand these questions and spends his words and his thoughts in evasions, or he understands but cannot answer these questions and now spends his words and thoughts in other evasions. In either case what we seem to have—modesty mercifully tempering judgment—is seventy and more pages of evasion, diversionary tactics, a whole school of red herrings. (Red herrings and straw men and a few dead ducks are most common among the fish, flesh, and fowl in these woods.) It seems in any case that in the midst of these pressing and worrying questions—and what questions could be more urgent?—the author skips about in what strikes some as a kind of philosophical surrealism, juxtaposing the most distantly related ideas such as machines and tooth-aches, and questions and cramps, and mental processes and fidgeting with tea-cups. There are realists, naive realists, sophisticated realists, neo-realists, critical realists, semi-critical realists, and now surrealists. “The cow jumped over the moon.”

I have certainly made it plain that the author has not altogether abandoned those questions with which we have been so much occupied. It isn’t as though he quite bluntly said that these are not questions, which on the face of it they obviously are—in fact it is precisely the face of it that leads us on. The questions look like questions, sound like questions, and are labored over as questions. There are, in fact, answers too, many answers, and it is said that that there are so many answers shows that the questions are difficult and if askers complain that answerers do not understand answerers this shows it all the more. And now it isn’t as though the author

said that someone first began trying to find the answers to exclamations and then others joined in and they asked and they answered and did not understand one another's answers and then all talked about what difficult questions the exclamations are. If someone in such a situation had said, "But these aren't questions, they're exclamations," one can imagine the hub-bub that would have ensued. They would have exclaimed and questioned and protested and held up each other's favorite exclamations to show that they were questions and they would have deferred to one another's questions, if not to one another's answers. But this is all foolishness. It isn't at all like that. Still, . . . .

Whatever these questions are they certainly aren't exclamations. Are they nothing? Well if so they are an especially interesting sort of nothing which can be heard, seen, worried about, respected, etc. We can be sure, too, that these questions are not rhetorical questions, nor pretended questions as though someone made them up to look like and sound like questions. Nor are they to be explained as slips of the tongue or pen, though someone might suggest, jokingly, of course, that when your thinking slips, questions like this might happen. And your thinking slipping is rather like your tongue slipping, an educated tongue, that is. And if, by the way, in this book the word "muddle" should come in it should not be understood that the author intends to *tell* you that these questions are muddles. In what follows I should like to try to explain what he does do.

And now I want to try to help myself to keep a certain perspective of what the author is doing. It may not be the only one nor the most profitable one but it suits me. I say what the author is *doing* rather than what the author is saying in order to prevent the misunderstanding that one could be told what he says and if one then remembered this, that would be what the author aimed at. This would be as though the author aimed to put something in the reader's pocket. But what he does is unlike that. What, then, is he doing? Remember to begin with that these are dictations. They are dictated to a few students. And now I want to say that these dictations are designed in connection with other oral discussions to help in teaching these students an art. Obviously these students must also exercise themselves in practicing this art. "Now you do it." This art has been described in a variety of ways. *It is the art of attacking those questions* we noticed earlier. Attacking is not answering. If this description should give a wrong impression let us say that it is the gentle art of attacking. *It is the art of disentangling.* Disentangling what? Meanings. If it



should come as a surprise that meanings can be entangled, be assured, then, that it is a part of the teaching to show how meanings can be entangled and disentangled. *It is the art of cure.* This is, perhaps, the description of the art which is best known. There is physical therapy. There is mental therapy. And here is a specialty. There are mental cramps. Perhaps it will be better to disassociate it from the expression "mental therapy." Let us call it intellectual therapy of a certain sort. *It is the art of finding one's way when lost.* And who is lost? Who isn't? And where? In the woods. In a labyrinth. Without Ariadne threads of discourse which one must learn to use—everyone has his head full of them—one cannot find his way. *It is the art of removal, of riddance.* And what does one get rid of? Of temptations. What temptations? Not bottles, except on occasion and then it is not the bottle which is the temptation, which any fly would like to be in a position to tell you. "I have been trying in all this to remove the temptation to think that there must be . . ." (p. 41). *It is the art of discussion.* For what purpose? To show differences. One might be inclined to say that whereas Socrates practiced and taught the art of discussion for the sake of seeking what is common, this author practiced and taught the art of discussion in order to restore the balance, to correct distortion, stressing differences. And what is the art of discussion? It is the art of presenting meaning. *It is the art of exposure.* Exposing what? Hidden analogies. As there are hidden motives, not hidden by but hidden even from those whose motives they are, and these are helpful in explaining what people do when they are themselves persuaded, so too there are hidden analogies which are not noticed by those on whose behalf they are appealed to to explain what they say. *It is the art of helpful reminders.* For what purpose? When your words seem to carry you along so that you seem to have lost the reins and you lose your head to the words, then, if you pause, reminding yourself of how words are harnessed together to do the speaker's work, then you regain control. Runaway language.

*It is the art of working puzzles.* Cross-word puzzles? No, not cross-word puzzles but word puzzles. The author's analogy is with jig-saw puzzles. "It's no use trying to apply force in fitting pieces together. All we should do is to look at them carefully and arrange them" (p. 46). Presumably there are sentences or rather arrangements of words which puzzle us because the words are jumbled, though not in such a way as immediately to strike us as jumbled. So we may ask: Are they jumbled? And then we rearrange them and get them in order. *It is the art of scrutinizing*

*the grammar of a word.* Naturally this is to serve a purpose. If we recall that it is in terms of the grammar of a word, some particularly relevant part of the context of a word, that we present to ourselves that aspect of the meaning of a word we need in order to bring to light some deviation from the grammar of the word, into which we may have drifted or fallen, we can understand the service of such scrutiny. *It is the art of freeing us from illusions.* Illusions? Yes, illusions of a special sort, illusions of sense where there is no sense. And how are we freed from illusions? By looking more closely. So in this case we look more closely at the sentence or sentences with respect to which we are deceived. And how, then, do we look more closely? Obviously it is not a matter of looking more closely at the words on the page. What we are to see looking more closely is that the words as they are put together here, perhaps not only in this sentence but in these surroundings, cease to have the meaning which they have in the surroundings in which they have meaning. And no other meaning has been given. *It is the art of the detective.* The author also describes what he does as "investigations." "In fact one may say that what in these investigations we were concerned with . . ." (p. 70). A detective is one who surveys the scene, notices details, picks up scraps, fragments, piecing them together in order to get some idea, a picture of what happened. With every new clue he gets a new picture or a completer picture. He abandons clues, and seizes upon new ones. He is frequently like a man groping in the dark. And the art of the investigator taught in these dictations also surveys the language scene, looking for clues, hitting on this, guessing here, in order to explain the deviation, the unwitting deviation, from sense. "So this is what misled me." But what he must hit upon is the explanation which will satisfy the thinker who was himself misled. Until he has done this he is not freed. This analogy is intended to stress that there is no straight line of investigation. Cases here may be as baffling and complicated as cases which the detective investigates. It would, however, be misleading to say that the investigator also tries to get a picture of what happened. He has nothing to investigate but the language. And that is not a happening. *It is the art of clarification, of relief from the toils of confusion.* What confusion? Grammatical confusion. There is strife among these words that will not lie down together and that keep up this turmoil in our heads. And there will be no rest until we put each word into its own bed.

That fly that was let out of the fly-bottle understands how he got in there, since the condition of his being let out is that he

should understand that. And now he can fly in and out as he likes. It is no longer a fly-bottle for him. He can now buzz in and out enjoying the structure of the bottle. A fun-bottle, then? Yes, until he finds himself in another bottle with a different opening. Eternal vigilance is the price of buzzing freely.

The variety among these descriptions may suggest to us something of the complexity of the art which the author set out to teach. It is, however, unlikely that, apart from the practice of it in the examination of particular cases which constitutes the main body of *The Blue Book*, these descriptions will be helpful. For it is the author himself who introduced these descriptions in order to help these students to get the point of what he was doing. So the presence of these descriptions for that purpose also suggests how difficult he must have found trying to teach this to others. Now, however, I should like to give an account, perhaps misleadingly simple, of what the author does in this book. On page 16 is the sentence: "I shall propose to you to look closely at particular cases . . . ," and what I want to give an account of is what the author does looking closely. If what I now go on to say is simple, this should not lead one to suppose that to do what he does is either simple or easy.

One may, as I think, distinguish in the art I have been describing three phases or moments. I hesitate to say that there are three things which he does. And I do not mean to say that in looking closely at any particular case all three phases can be distinguished or that there is this systematic arrangement, one, two, three, which he follows. There is not. I mean rather that whenever he is looking closely at some particular case he will be engaged in one of these three phases or moments. And I have intentionally used the words "phases" or "moments" to avoid the mistake of supposing that some exact line could be drawn between them. The three phases I have in mind are these: First, the author seeks to quicken the sense of the queer. Second, the author is concerned to present the meaning of those expressions which are involved in the particular case, and especially those which are relevant to exhibiting not the queerness but the sources, the roots of it. Third, the author seeks to uncover the "misleading analogy." These phases or objectives are not pursued in any such order, though they may be, but it may well be that one's sense of the queer is quickened by the presentation of the meaning and even more by the uncovering of "the misleading analogy."

I want to explain each of these.

It is quite obvious that, except for a few extraordinary cases,

philosophical questions do not strike us as queer. Perhaps to begin with a question like: Do I exist? or Do I alone exist? or Do forests murmur? may strike a young ear or an untutored ear as queer, but such questions as What is knowledge? or Does God exist? or How is science possible? are not likely to strike either a young ear or an old ear as queer. Accordingly if the beginning of intelligence lies here it is obvious that a great deal of work must be done with spoiled ears. They do not hear the queer. The queerness of the questions must be made to ring. And so the author must make it ring. There are presumably a number of ways. Sometimes it is sufficient or at least helpful to draw attention to the queerness. "Now, listen to the question: What is the meaning of a word? Can't you hear that's queer?" And then if someone strains to hear he will hear it queer like a shadow passing over the question. There are other ways. If there are questions which have already struck one as queer and these questions are heard now side by side with the other question, the queerness of these questions may, as it were, be communicated to the other question, like vibrations. And if there are no familiar questions which one may employ to bring out the queerness of the first one, then one may invent some questions in which the queerness is as loud as a bang. "What is the color of the number three?" Does unconscious tooth-ache hurt in the unconscious more, or less, than conscious tooth-ache hurts in consciousness? Of course, one must exercise a nice judgment here, inventing only what is adapted to the necessities of the case. It may be a mistake to invent a question whose queerness is loud as a bang. One may need queerness that whispers, barely audible, sufficient to provide the right nuance. There are other ways, such as giving an answer intended to echo the form of queerness in the question. "Thinking is a process which goes on invisibly in your feet while you are busy making words at the other end of the line." "Why in the feet?" "Well, why not?" But one may also accentuate the queerness by the contrast with the unqueer. You ask: What is the meaning of a word? and do not know what to say. But when I ask you: What is the meaning of the word "ogre"? you tell me. So you do know what the meaning of a word is, namely, the word "ogre." So what is it you do not know? It should be obvious that what is done in such cases is to play with the similarities and differences among whatever forms of sense and sentences may serve the purpose.

And now I want to go on to the second phase, the presentation of meaning. If we regard the queerness discussed in the preceding paragraph as an impression of a sometimes scarcely per-

ceptible deviation from sense, then we may appreciate the author's interest in presenting the sense. For in that case what is involved is a contrast between what is regarded as a deviation and some sense or other also of course heard or seen. Something is not quite right. Perhaps the word "difference" is a better word than "contrast." What accordingly we have is either sense in the guise of nonsense or nonsense in the guise of sense. It sounds like sense and it sounds like nonsense. It cannot in any particular case be both. If a question sounds queer then it will not be surprising if it turns out to be nonsensical. And if it turns out to make sense then some special explanation will be needed to show this sense. There may be some analogy one has missed. "The child is father of the man," "Go and catch a falling star." In any case if this is how the queerness is to be regarded, then in order to understand it, it will be necessary to exhibit the sense from which the sentence or sentences are a deviation. The principle involved is simple. Some words together in a certain order, taken together with other words, etc. make sense and the same words taken together with certain other words in a certain order do not make sense. So what we need is to remind ourselves of the sense of the words which make up the queer sentence in order to see precisely what the deviation, what the difference is.

And how now does one present the sense?

Presenting the sense must not be confused with giving the meaning. If someone does not know the meaning of a word then you explain the meaning to him. But presenting the sense is not like that. If you know the meaning then you can present the sense. And this consists in reminding oneself of what one says, the lay of the lingo in the surroundings of this or that word, what words, sentences, go together with the word or expression about which one is concerned. I consider it absolutely magnificent that a man should have conceived of the idea that you can present to yourself the meaning of a word. And yet, it turns out to be so simple. That one is able to do this provides the perspective which makes possible the comparisons and contrasts by means of which similarities and differences are discernible. For what holds of the delineation of sense holds also of the delineation of nonsense. The point in presenting the meaning is not to present the meaning complete—even in a dead language meaning is not complete—but to present so much of the meaning as is required for whatever the purpose may be.

The third phase is that of uncovering the "misleading analogy." If it is allowed that the queerness which the author is concerned

with is that of nonsense in the guise of sense, then we may conceive of the task involved as two-fold, namely, to exhibit the nonsense, the deviation from sense, and to explain the illusion of sense. How is it that one should have come to ask this or to say this in the first place, and that one should hold on so tenaciously? There are a number of analogies we may notice in the book: "We try to find a substance for a substantive" (p. 1); "The contradiction which here seems to arise could be called a conflict between two different usages of a word, in this case, the word 'measure'" (p. 26); "the existence of the words 'thinking' and 'thought' along side of the words denoting (bodily) activities, such as writing, speaking, etc. makes us look for an activity, different from these but analogous to them, corresponding to the word 'thinking,'" (p. 7) etc. Uncovering the misleading analogy helps one to explain the hold of these questions upon us. Hector was dragged around the city of Troy by a horse. But we are dragged around by hidden analogies and most of all if we think. This is how it comes about that sometimes the best advice is: "Don't think. Look." And it may be hard not to think.

The author has the following explanation of the misleading analogy: "The cases in which particularly we wish to say that someone is misled by a form of expression are those in which we would say: 'he wouldn't talk as he does if he were aware of this difference in the grammar of such-and-such words, or if he were aware of this other possibility of expression'" (p. 28). It may be helpful to add that if today he wouldn't then tomorrow when he is aware, he won't. The point is that the object is not a science of misleading expressions from which one can now figure out what is misleading some stranger. The object is to assist some individual, always an individual, to help him discover what misleads and has misled him. And what misled him is to be seen only when he is no longer misled. When he says: "Now, I see" and breathes a sigh of relief, even though it may be a bit sheepishly, that is the moment to which the art is directed.

Here we may take notice of the analogy with psychoanalysis. We might say in connection with psychoanalysis: "He wouldn't do as he does if he were aware of what it is in his past that he has forgotten that now drives him to do this." And the art in this case is devoted to refreshing his memory and to bringing him round to where he says, "That is it," and now he doesn't do it anymore. This is cure. In the case of both those who talk as they do and those who do as they do, the explanation is not to be sought in asking them. They find out only as by cure they

also cease to talk so and to do so. Beyond this the analogy does not go. In the case of psychoanalysis it is the past, the materials of memory, both lost but retrievable, and not lost, which one tries to bring back, to discover the moving cause, something hidden. But in the case of "he wouldn't talk as he does" one does not investigate anyone's past. One investigates the language and a particular area of that, and that is much more like investigating a familiar part of one's environment, which is also the environment of all of us. There is nothing sticky about this investigation, no private dirty linen shook and washed in private or in public.

There is one further point. The misleading analogy is hidden. It is present in the language and not hidden there. It is, however, hidden from the person who is misled by it. Hence it isn't as though he attended carefully to the analogy and went on from there with his eyes open. In that case he could tell us that he was following an analogy. But he knows nothing about it. All the same he keeps bumping his head against it. Relieving him consists in getting him to recognize the analogy that has misled him. And what are the clues? His question, and what he goes on to say in explaining and answering the question will bear the marks of the analogy. There are forms of bewilderment too.

I have now given an account of the art which, as I conceive it, the author of this book teaches in three phases. It is carried on by discussion, either in writing or orally. There is commonly a helper and helped, though obviously several people may help one another. The queer is seen to be queerer and queerer. Ideas mingled throw up a mist and when by way of discussion, catalytic agent, the ideas fall apart, the mist is cleared away.

I have already referred to the complexity and the difficulty of teaching this art. And how does one go about teaching an art? No doubt, by practicing it and in such a way that the learner can observe what the teacher is doing. In teaching someone to use his hands, in carpentry for instance, the learner observes how the teacher holds the tools and what he does with each. He learns by doing what the teacher does. The teacher also observes what the learner does and now and then corrects him. Of course the learner understands that he is building a house and why he does what he does. He did not have to be told what carpentry is. Didn't he come to the carpenter and say, "Teach me to be a carpenter"? How different it is with these students! They could have had no idea what the art was that he would teach them and perhaps had no idea that he was to teach them an art. They had more likely come to him expecting that he would answer their questions. Perhaps

they asked him: What is the meaning of a word? or What is thinking? So he, unlike the carpenter, had not simply to teach them an art with which they were well-acquainted, but he had to introduce them to an art of which they had not heard and for which they could have felt no need. Hence, even if he had stood before them and said: "Now, pay close attention to what I am doing" and had then gone on to practice his art as he does in those early pages, is it likely that they would have understood? He is, remember, teaching an art which is new. He is the author, the inventor, the first teacher. But why should an art which is new be so difficult to teach? It isn't like working with new materials, plastics, for instance, supposing that were difficult. Why cannot the teacher tell them plainly what he is going to teach and then teach it? The art is a language-art and there is nothing new about that. Nevertheless, anyone who reads this book can see with what diligence and patience the author tried to get these students to understand him. This explains his varied attempts by analogy to tell them. And it explains, too, his attempts to show them and to help them over the difficulties which he realized hindered them.

I want now to emphasize the difficulties, taking notice of them in each of the phases.

There are in the first phase two sorts of difficulties, those involved in following what the author does and those involved in doing what he does. Consider the case in which the author considers: "How can one think what is not the case?" He introduces for comparison the sentence: "How can we hang a thief who doesn't exist?" He does this to startle one into an appreciation of the queerness of the first question and to show, too, what sort of queerness is involved. There is a part of this which seems not difficult. The sentence which is introduced certainly is a queer one. Another one which is queer is: "Can a machine have tooth-ache?" And most readers are likely to be amused by such antics. But this, of course, is not the point. It isn't the queerness of those sentences which interests the author. The question is as to whether the queerness of these sentences helps to bring to light the queerness of the sentences considered. For those sentences are regarded as grammatically confused, and the sentences with which they are compared are intended to stress this confusion. The question: Can a machine have tooth-ache? is grammatically confused in the same way that: Can a machine think? is. And yet one might very well retort: Perhaps a machine cannot have tooth-ache, but it seems a machine can think. And this may be alarming. Who wants to be mechanical and to have tooth-ache? So, too, the



question: How can we hang a thief who doesn't exist? (It seems we can hang a thief who doesn't exist—in effigy, and that suits people, too, who figure out a way of thinking what is not the case. They think the effigies.) is intended to show the queerness of: How can we think what is not the case? But in order to get the full impact of this, one must have some nice sense of the grammar and of the confusions involved, which one may come by naturally, being meaning-keen, or may come by with special instruction. It is only with special instruction that one can understand what is being done. And that will involve those difficulties one meets in the other two phases.

As for the difficulties involved in doing what the author does, inventing such devices, I scarcely know what to say. If you are something of a poet you may certainly learn from the poets, though even this does not mean that writing poems will be easy. And if you are nothing of a poet then though you may love poems, you cannot do as the poets do with or without difficulties.

Consider difficulties involved in understanding what Wittgenstein does under the second phase. It would seem that anyone can do in this case what is required. For all that one needs to do is to remember what people as a matter of fact do say. You speak English. You understand English. You know what goes with what, the continuities of sense. Of course. But what at the outset is difficult is to take this, these words, these sentences, as the presentation of sense. For one has, as it were, for years been looking through the words, into the darkness, the *hinein*, where no man can follow, for the meaning. That is what stirs in the question: What is the meaning of a word? Hence, even though someone now emphasizes: "But this is the meaning," this may not help. It may all pass before one like a blur. Let us suppose, however, that one has finally overcome this difficulty, not that it does not return, but one does have one's moments. All this is done for a purpose. The presentation of meaning, of such aspects as are required, serves in at least two ways, to accentuate the queerness and to provide the area within which the misleading analogy is to be identified. None of this, remember, is a matter of rules, or of self-evidence, so beloved of many, foundations of security. No one proves that this question is queer, or that in the sentence "But you can look for a thief who isn't there" or "But you can be afraid of a little man who isn't there" meaning is presented, or that if it is presented it does serve in the ways described. Let us suppose, however, that when the author has now done this in some cases, that one also understands this, can follow what he has

done. Does this, however, involve that one can now on one's own do likewise? Obviously not. What do we lack?

And now the third phase, identifying "the misleading analogy." If the first ideas involved here are strange, new, and difficult, the third is too, and is unintelligible apart from them. For the misleading analogy explains the hold which the queer has upon us. And I think that this is fearfully difficult and from another point of view fantastically simple. Suppose I say that the meaning of a word is a sort of something, vegetable, animal, or mineral, no, but not a gas either, nor a liquid; but why should it not be something paraphysical, for instance, if you call a word physical, mineral or a gas, in which case you might say that it is either para-mineral or para-gas? This sentence makes it much too clear that I am thinking of meaning as a thing for even me to have the illusion of thinking it. Let us disregard that. Let us suppose further that someone is startled by this. He exclaims: "Why, he is thinking of meaning as a thing!" and now comes the question: "But what leads him to do this?" It is no answer to say: "Everybody does." For here is at least one person who for the moment does not. And now comes the answer: Naturally enough because the expression "the meaning of a word," is like the expression "the king of a country," and the king of a country is a thing, animal, has weight, lives on air, meat, vegetables, noise, etc. so the question arises: what sort of thing is the meaning of a word, no animal, imponderable, neither living nor dead? Now I do not know whether it is difficult to tumble to so simple an explanation of what seems, when one is involved in it, so fearfully intricate. It almost seems as though something like a change of heart is required for this. It is well nigh miraculous, like opening ten-ton doors with a feather. For isn't it ridiculously simple? You think of meaning in a certain way and you find yourself all fenced in ("Don't fence me in"), and how now did you come to do this? There was an expression which looked like another expression, and misled by this you went on as though their meanings, too, were analogous. How does one tumble in a case like this? Perhaps one can set oneself in readiness. "Relax. Don't resist." And is that so easy? Haven't we inherited the tensions of all those generations before us? Original (the inherited) knots and besides original knots, original knots. One's nature is knots. In any case it is that simple. If only there were some complicated explanation, ladders and ladders of explanation, an architectural mystery-piece of calculation, that would suit our natural bent.

Learning to do what the author teaches may in some respects

be compared to learning to walk. There are certain to be bumps and falls. One must want to learn. But there are no special resources required. Nearly everyone can and does learn to walk. So, too, in this case. One must try when one can't do. One must risk stupidities and clumsiness and misunderstandings. One must be patient and diligent. Above all one must want to do the doing of which is here taught. And no special resources are required. What is required is an acquaintance with the language, an eye and an ear for sense. This is a requirement and may be compared to the musical ear in the case of music. This man can scarcely make out differences in tone. He has never heard a melody. So he can't study music. And there does seem to be something comparable in the case of reading philosophy. To some readers everything makes sense. What the author of this book does may be described in this way. The students lend him their eyes and ears for sense and he tries to sharpen them, tries to make them keen. "I will show you how to see and hear sense." And are no special talents required? It seems that there are.

The one obvious and pervading difficulty in reading this book and one against which one must struggle continually as soon as he understands the danger is the temptation to misunderstanding the very book which is designed to help us to remove temptation to misunderstandings in other circumstances. I try to persuade you not to steal at the grocery store and in doing so tempt you to steal from me. The hankering for orderliness, for system, for summaries is a general aspect of this. (What is the man doing? He's putting three books together on the shelf (p. 44).) But it may also be remarked in the way in which certain sentences are widely misunderstood. The temptation here arises from one's coming upon a sentence the like of which one had perhaps met in some other context and one goes on to read it now in terms of that context, utterly oblivious of the immediate context in which it is found. There are two such sentences which I should like to point out.

The first of these sentences is the one at the bottom of page 4: "But if we had to name anything which is the life of the sign, we should have to say that it was its use." This sentence apart from the "if we had to" and "we should have to," looks like a definition. "The life of the sign" is, of course, the meaning. So, how convenient this is that the author, in spite of himself, should have yielded and given us what we so much want: The meaning of a word is its use. No sentence has more powerfully formed the jargon of contemporary discussion in philosophy. Nearly everyone these days speaks and writes in this new fashion.

And yet nothing has been changed. If before we were puzzled with: What is the meaning of a word? now we are puzzled with: What is the use of a word? (I think I paced up and down in this cage for years.) Having made a puzzle out of this we ask such further questions as how the author came upon such a definition. What English teacher would ever allow the interchange of the words "meaning" and "use"? As a definition the sentence is indefensible and if it is defensible, what good comes of it? Locke speaks of "use" but to what advantage? Some people have even been misled into identifying the statement with some old or new Pragmatism.

But what then?

The author on page 67 writes: "Think of words as instruments characterized by their use, and then think of the use of a hammer, the use of a chisel, the use of a square, of glue-pot, and of the glue." One can see from this how the sentence on page 4 is to be understood. It is intended not as a definition but as an analogy or if as a definition, then as a definition of a special sort. In the latter case it comes to something like this: If you will say "use" and write "use" instead of "meaning" in writing and speaking of words, and can manage to think accordingly, that will help. Help what? It will help you to rid yourself of the temptation to think of the meaning as something in the dark which you cannot see very well. The idea is that if your thinking is dominated in this case by one misleading analogy then you may be led right by another leading analogy. If, of course, that second analogy also misleads one, not much may be gained. But as long as one is well aware of the analogy and what it is for, it should do its work. And it should now help one to see what the role of a word is in the various circumstances of our lives in which we speak and write that word together, of course, with other words. And if we allow that we understand the word, are acquainted with the meaning, then this is where it is to be found, since this is all we know. So we may understand that sentence as one which is intended to help us to a change in perspective. Once that change has come about, the sentence, like the ladder, is of no further use.

The other sentence is the sentence on page 28, "But ordinary language is all right." The same temptation which gave rise to misunderstanding in the former case gives rise to misunderstanding in this case. The immediate context of the sentence is disregarded and the sentence is understood as stating some philosophical theory, perhaps naive. And in this way it, too, has affected current jargon. There are ordinary language philosophers. People now

go on with all sorts of difficult questions. They want to know just what ordinary language is and whether it really is a language and how one can decide that without first finding out what a language is. And then, of course, there's still the question as to whether it is all right. It seems that no one with any conscience could speak so carelessly. But what now is the situation? It comes to this. Some philosophers, particularly those who love mathematics more than poetry, are struck, when they read the newspaper or listen to the conversation at dinner, with the disorder of the language. The conversation at dinner is certainly not Euclidean. Perhaps one can imagine some lovers of poetry also who when reading the newspaper or listening to conversation at dinner remark that no verse should be that free. So the mathematicians, as a first step, propose some rules. Conversational deduction is to come later. And perhaps the lovers of poetry introduce measures and some rudiments of drill, marching, leaping, sprinting, waltzing, to make the news less pedestrian. In protection against this someone comes along and reads an excerpt from the newspaper. He asks: "What is the matter with that? So the man did catch the monkey in the subway." Again he asks: "And what is the matter with trying to get the little boy who says wove for love and wanded for landed to say love for wove and landed for wanded? He now says that the airpwane wanded. A little free verse here does no harm. And more doesn't either." The mathematicians frown. The poets frown too. Now, this is approximately what the author's sentence comes to. "Ordinary language is all right." The grocer understands the boy when the boy gives him the money and asks for five apples. The grocer's bawd understands what the grocer says when he says and pats her cheek. And the grocer's bawd's sister understands what the grocer's bawd says when she says: "And what are the neighbor's saying now?" And the neighbors understand one another. And so on. Ordinary language is all right? Of course, we understand one another. The question is: What are all those rules for? And the shackles on the verse? There is nothing mysterious about the author's sentence when seen against the background of prejudice which gives rise to it.

When Protagoras was consulted about what would happen to the young Hippocrates if he associated with Protagoras, Protagoras answered: "Young man, if you associate with me, on the very first day you will return home a better man than you came, and better on the second day than on the first and better every day than you were on the day before." And if now we were to ask concerning some young Hippocrates from Harvard or Yale what

would happen to him if he reads this book, we should certainly not with the courage of Protagoras' convictions say anything like what Protagoras said. Let us try a few answers. "Young man, if you read this book as you read most books nothing whatsoever will happen to you and it won't take long. On the very first day you will return home a no-better man than you came, on the second day the same, and so on." Or: "Young man, if you read this book diligently, digging as you are used to digging in the books you read, coming up with a shining truth here and a nice bristling idea there, the chances are that you will have got it all wrong. You will go home full of indigestibles, and oh, the pity of it! a worse man than you came, not much worse, but let us say, four or five misunderstandings worse." Or: "Young man, if you read this book with your mind wide open, and take time to stew in it or to let it stew in you; if with a little bit of luck, it should cling to you like a bramble and it should hurt and sting and all the while the agitations keep you alert, then inkling by inkling, glimpse by glimpse, chink by chink, on the very first day ten years later, you will return home a different man than you came."

And what now are intelligible reactions to this book? Since this book as here represented, at least, aims to teach its readers how to do a certain thing, one obvious reaction is this: "We don't want it done." I say that this is intelligible so long as no reasons are given. As a blind reaction it's fine. But how is one to give reasons? Is one to say: "Yes, yes, we admit the grammatical confusion and the misleading analogy, but what we ask and say makes sense anyhow"? Has anyone given such a reason? The other reaction is this: "We want it done. But we want it done better." It seems that it could be done better. This comment no doubt reflects the impression of incoherence referred to earlier. It may also reflect a failure to recognize the almost overwhelming obstacles involved. For one has not simply to present the particular cases, one has also to help the reader to understand the presentation and to clear away the obstacles to understanding. These different tasks, which are all necessary, make it impossible to proceed in a straight line. There is, however, something even more telling. The presentation of a case is nothing neatly defined. The grammars of different words are interwoven and the presentation of the particular case is bound to reflect the incoherence of the language. Perhaps one could express it in this way: The coherence of the language, the criss-crossing of the grammar of the words we are interested in, is quite different from the coherence of words in a certain language game, in a story or in an essay. (A good illustration of this is

the discussion beginning on page 6 to the bottom of page 15.) This is not to say that the coherence of this book is loose but rather that the orderliness of this book is determined by the variety of the tasks and by the particular sort of complexity of the materials. One might also take note here of what either are or seem to be obvious mistakes in the presentation of a case, and it might be a good test of one's reading of the book that he should be able to discover those mistakes. I do not think, however, that the presence of these mistakes affects the pedagogical efficacy of the book. It may actually enhance it.

Towards the end of Moore's notes on Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930-33, is the following paragraph:

He went on to say that, though philosophy had now been "reduced to a matter of skill," yet this skill, like other skills is very difficult to acquire. One difficulty was that it required a "sort of thinking" to which we are not accustomed and to which we have not been trained—a sort of thing very different from what is required in the sciences. And he said that the required skill could not be acquired merely by hearing lectures: discussion was essential. As regards his own work, he said it did not matter whether his results were true or not: what mattered was that "a method had been found."<sup>1</sup>

Though I came upon this passage only after I had written this piece, what I have written might be described as an elaboration of the contents of this paragraph.

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## COMMENTS AND CRITICISM

### COMMENTS ON DEWEY, RANDALL, AND PARKER CONCERNING EXPERIENCE AND SUBSTANCE

DEWEY'S description of experience stresses *transaction*, a continuity of coöperating processes not yet broken into analytic isolates, such as mind and nature, organism and environment. "Transaction," Dewey wrote, "assumes no preknowledge of either organism or environment alone as adequate, not even as respects the basic nature of the current conventional distinctions between them, but requires their primary acceptance in a common system, with full freedom reserved for their developing examination."<sup>1</sup> An example drawn from commerce illustrates the nature of trans-

<sup>1</sup> G. E. Moore, "Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930-33," *Mind*, Vol. LXIV, No. 253 (January, 1955), p. 26.

<sup>1</sup> John Dewey and Arthur Bentley, *Knowing and the Known* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1949), p. 123.