

bility of private language (*PI* 243ff.). For as we saw in Chapter 8, the *TLP* endorsement of 'solipsism' should not be seen as a commitment to solipsistic phenomenism. On the contrary, *TLP* is broadly realist, the simple objects which form the substance of the world existing necessarily, and independently of the human mind. Nor does the early Wittgenstein show any of the interest in epistemological questions which would be necessary to motivate his commitment to phenomenism. (This is one of those places where an unargued assumption that Wittgenstein was heavily influenced by Russell has led many commentators astray.)

Thirdly, it is a mistake to see the contrast between *TLP* and *PI* in terms of differing attitudes to the relationship between thought and language, as do Malcolm (1986) and McDonough (1986). Certainly *TLP* is not committed to the 'code-breaking conception' of language, according to which public signs get their life and significance from the private thoughts which accompany them. This was argued briefly in Chapter 1.³ Nor, as we have noted a number of times, is the *TLP* view that all the complexity of a fully analysed proposition – including reference to Simples – is added in thought by the person who understands the proposition. Rather, Wittgenstein's view throughout was that thinking on the one hand, and the use of public language on the other, are essentially similar activities, similarly related to reality. And to say that our ordinary propositions are truth-functions of elementary ones is just to say that, in being analytically equivalent to such truth-functions, they possess the same semantic contents, and say the very same thing.

Finally, it is wrong to characterise the debate between *TLP* and *PI* as a dispute between Platonism and anti-Platonism, as does Pears (1987) and (1988). On the contrary, the early Wittgenstein was equally opposed to Platonism, whether about propositions or universals (as we saw briefly in Chapter 1), or about numbers (as we saw in Chapter 2).⁴ It is true that *TLP* is committed to the existence of a class of necessarily existing objects, but this is not Platonism as it is usually understood – both because these objects are most plausibly thought of as planes of space and points of time (as we saw in Chapter 14), and because they do not constitute a realm of entities in contrast with the empirical world, but rather form its substance (2.021).

(B) Misplaced criticisms

Let us now briefly consider the various arguments in the early sections of *PI* which are generally taken to be criticisms of *TLP*. (I shall not attempt to judge whether Wittgenstein intended them as such. It is possible that he

16 Wittgenstein: early and late

Our task in this final chapter is to pull together some of the strands from our previous discussion, in order to locate and identify the real points of conflict between Wittgenstein's early and late philosophies.

(A) False contrasts

We can begin by noting how a number of recent commentators entirely misplace the nature of the contrast between *TLP* and *PI*. Firstly, and in emphatic denial of the position adopted by Baker & Hacker in their (1980), *TLP* should not be seen as exemplifying the 'Augustinian Picture of Language' which forms the target of attack of the opening sections of *PI*. That picture is, rather, their common enemy. Certainly *TLP* is not committed to the view that all words are names; quite the contrary, since the Picture Theory embodies a non-referential semantics for predicates, as we saw briefly in Chapter 1.¹ Nor is the *TLP* view that the logical grammar of a name has to be read off from our prior acquaintance with the necessities and possibilities in nature; quite the reverse: it holds that logic is epistemologically prior to metaphysics, as I argued in Chapters 2 and 3. Nor is *TLP* committed to a conception of thought as prior to language; on the contrary, it too holds that thought and language are closely intertwined, and essentially similar to one another, as I argued briefly in Chapter 1.² It would seem that, unless the later Wittgenstein wholly misunderstood *TLP*, the Augustinian Picture with which *PI* opens was used as a convenient focus to present (in his new idiom) points of agreement as well as disagreement with his earlier thought.

Secondly, it is quite wrong to see the contrast between *TLP* and *PI* as a dispute between phenomenism or solipsism on the one hand and metaphysical realism on the other, as does Hacker (1972) and (1986), and also Hintikka & Hintikka (1986). In particular, there is nothing in *TLP* which renders it vulnerable to the later celebrated argument against the possi-

did, and that he is thereby shown to have misunderstood his earlier work: see my Preface.⁵ Or it may be that his targets were somewhat different: perhaps Frege or Russell, or a general tendency of thought which he felt to be widespread.)

The points that Wittgenstein makes concerning ostensive definitions (*PI* 6, 9, 28–36), in particular that their success presupposes a background of language-mastery, altogether pass *TLP* by. For as we saw in Chapter 2, 3.263 should be seen as making an essentially similar point. Certainly the *TLP* view is not that there is any sort of simple hooking-up of language to the world. On the contrary, part of the significance of the *TLP* doctrine that logic is prior to metaphysics is that there can be no apprehension of the logical nature of an object in advance of acquiring some system of symbols in which it can be represented. And one of the consequences of the *TLP* endorsement of the Context Principle at 3.3 is that it must be some sort of training in the use of whole sentences which is foundational in language, not ostensive definition.

The point made at *PI* 40, alleging confusion between the meaning of a name and its bearer, is very naturally seen as directed at *TLP*, especially since *PI* 39 is a discussion of the idea that genuine proper names would have to be names of Simples. But the *TLP* semantics for names is not in fact vulnerable to such a charge. *TLP* does indeed hold that the distinctive semantic content of each particular name is its bearer,⁶ so that it is sufficient to understand someone's use of a name that you know to which thing that name refers. But *TLP* also maintains that the logical grammar of names belonging to each sortal category will form part of their semantic content. So someone who understands a name for an historical individual will know that it makes sense to continue to use that name when its bearer has ceased to exist. Moreover, names have, in addition, idiolectic senses which determine their reference. So there is no question of *TLP* being confused between meaning and bearer.

The discussion of Simples and of analysis through *PI* 39–64 fails to get to grips with the real motivations and arguments of *TLP*, if the accounts provided in Chapters 7 and 12 above are correct. For there is nothing in these passages to challenge the idea that since the truth-conditions of a proposition must be determined in advance in all their particularity, it must be possible to display the particularised content of the proposition in the form of an analysis (a sentence logically equivalent to the original). Nor is there any hint of an argument to Simples premised only on logical objectivism, together with the claim that singular propositions are logically

prior to general ones. So again, *TLP* has either been misunderstood or Wittgenstein is talking of something else.

We get closer to genuine conflict in the stress *PI* places on the multiplicity of language-games and the non-systematic nature of language (*PI* 21–7), as well as on the claim that our conceptions of language and propositions are non-unitary (family-resemblance) ones (*PI* 65, 92). For *TLP* does indeed take language to form a unity, both in its almost exclusive concentration upon factual discourse, and in its monolithic account of propositional content. But then these aspects of the philosophy of *PI* seem to me to be amongst its weakest. So if the fundamental point of conflict between *TLP* and *PI* were located here, then it is far from clear that *TLP* would not prove to be the outright victor. Let me briefly elaborate.

If the multiplicity of language-games is nothing more than the idea that there are a variety of uses (assertion, question, command and many others) to which a given propositional content can be put, then there is nothing here that need trouble *TLP*. It is true that the concentration of effort in *TLP* had been almost exclusively on the nature of propositional content, scant attention being paid to the various attitudes which one may take towards such content (belief, hope, desire, etc.), or to the various linguistic acts into which it may enter (assertion, question, command, etc.).⁷ But there is nothing to prevent the semantics of *TLP* from being extended to take account of such matters. Certainly *TLP* is not committed to the view that all discourse is factual, or to the view that all propositional attitudes and linguistic acts are somehow covert assertions,⁸ as *PI* 24 might be taken to suggest.

PI 23 claims (correctly) that there is no fixed limit to the number of different kinds of linguistic act, since new sorts of language-game are continually coming into existence. But there is nothing here to challenge the distinction between propositional content and linguistic act. We can still insist that in any language-game, including those that have not yet been invented, it will be possible to draw a distinction between the content of an utterance and the use to which that utterance is put. Indeed, there is nothing here to prevent us from providing a detailed theory of meaning for our language as it actually exists, giving an account of individual words in terms of their contribution to the semantic (propositional) content of sentences, and describing in detail the significance of the various forms of linguistic act currently in employment. All that follows is that we cannot provide a theory of meaning which will be complete, in the sense of covering every conceivable activity that we would be prepared to describe as

'language'. But then there is no reason to think that *TLP* is committed to giving the essence of language in *this* sense. Rather, what *TLP* attempts is to give the essence of propositional content; and this idea has not yet been undermined.

It does seem that *PI 22* is intended to challenge the very existence of a distinction between propositional content and linguistic act. Here Wittgenstein objects, against Frege's view that the content of an assertion may be expressed in the form 'that such-and-such is the case', that this is so far not a move in a language-game. But this is a misunderstanding. Of course 'that such-and-such is the case' is not a move in a language-game, and the utterance of it does not effect any linguistic act; this is just Frege's point. The idea is not that assertion consists of two kinds of linguistic act; it is not that making an assertion is really to perform two distinct actions: assertion and assumption. It is rather that the meaning of any linguistic utterance has two distinct *aspects*, its content and the linguistic act effected through the use of that content on a given occasion. For the same reason the objection made later in *PI 22*, that you could equally well say that every assertion contains a question, because we can imagine a convention according to which one makes an assertion by asking oneself a question and answering it, misses the point as well. For to repeat: to distinguish between content and linguistic act is not to claim that an assertion consists of two distinct actions.

As Dummett points out in his (1981a), it is in any case hard to see how we could do without the distinction between propositional content and linguistic act, and the compositional conception of language-mastery that goes with it. For children do after all succeed in learning their native language on the basis of limited exposure, and become capable of understanding an unlimited number of unfamiliar sentences as a result. We cannot even begin to see how this takes place, except through the child learning the content of a limited vocabulary and the significance of various modes of combining that vocabulary, as well as the significance of the various things that can be done with the contents that result. Nor, so far as I can see, is there anything in the discussion of rule-following later in *PI* which need challenge this picture. For the compositional conception does not require us to believe that the rules governing the language fit together of themselves to determine the content of each possible sentence (that is, it does not commit us to logical objectivism). Rather, we can think of it in terms of the interaction of the various underlying capacities of the speaker, those capacities being exercised in any number of different possible combinations.⁹

Wittgenstein would appear to be on stronger ground in claiming that our concept of a proposition is a family-resemblance one (*PI 65, 92*). For as I argued in Chapter 1, the semantic contents of propositions in fact vary from one region of discourse to another.¹⁰ This is because, our purposes being different within different contexts, the constraints placed upon successful communication (that is, the identity-conditions for semantic content) will vary also. But this need not mean that our concept of a proposition is a fragmentary one. For as I suggested, we can provide for unity in diversity by introducing a concept whose conditions of application are purpose-relative. And note, most importantly, there is nothing in the philosophy of *TLP* which need rule out such a move.¹¹

(C) Retrospect

At this point let us review the manner in which the distinctive metaphysical theses of *TLP*, together with the *TLP* programme of analysis, depend upon a commitment to logical objectivism. I have tried to show that in each case the *TLP* view can be powerfully supported by argument, and that in only one of the cases is the conclusion of the argument obviously false (the rejection of vagueness); in all other respects a rational rejection of the *TLP* position has to wait upon an explicit attack upon logical objectivism itself, of the type outlined in Chapter 15.

As we saw in Chapter 6, the commitment to show the fuzziness of ordinary concepts to be illusory, while not explicitly stated in *TLP* itself, does seem to be imposed upon Wittgenstein by his programme of analysis, which in turn is motivated by the requirement of determinacy-in-advance (itself a form of logical objectivism). It is also arguably imposed upon him even more directly by his logical objectivism, in that only the sort of anti-logical-objectivist view which allows our understanding of vague terms to be equated with a simple recognitional capacity can provide an acceptable solution to the Sorites paradoxes. Yet the commitment in question is of course absurd: it is obvious that many of our ordinary thoughts and statements are indeed vague. The most charitable interpretation would be that by the time of writing *TLP* Wittgenstein was no longer explicitly considering the matter of vagueness at all.

The remaining consequences of logical objectivism were by no means so obviously false. First there was the belief in a set of objective metaphysical truths about the world, reflecting the determinate relations between concepts which are part-and-parcel of logical objectivism (see Chapter 3). Then second there was the programme of analysis itself, designed to reveal

how language reaches right up to the world, the truth-conditions of ordinary propositions being determined in advance by their sense alone (logical objectivism) in all their possibly infinite particularity (see Chapter 7). Third was the commitment to Simples – necessarily existing individuals serving as possible objects of genuinely singular reference. This was entailed by a combination of logical objectivism with the very plausible thesis that there is a logical asymmetry between singular and general propositions (see Chapter 12). Even this strange claim was not obviously false, given that it is not being asserted that children have actually been referring to Simples in their private thoughts, prior to learning to designate ordinary contingent objects. Then finally there was the belief that analysis must terminate with a class of elementary propositions which will be logically independent of one another, at least one of the arguments for which was premised upon logical objectivism (see Chapter 13). Although it was by no means obvious that this demand could in fact be met, neither was it clear that it cannot (see Chapter 14).

The metaphysical system of *TLP* is, in general, both powerful and consistent. It can plausibly be held that we have no right to reject it, in the absence of a direct attack upon logical objectivism itself. In any case it emerges that those contemporary philosophers who remain tempted by a version of logical objectivism, or who think that they can hold on to the objectivity of conceptual necessity without it, are presented with a challenge: namely to show how they can consistently maintain their position without being committed to those of the early Wittgenstein's doctrines which would generally be regarded today as extraordinary.

(D) The true contrast

Since the metaphysics of *TLP* is ultimately premised upon logical objectivism, and since it is the latter which is the direct target of attack of the *PI* discussion of rule-following (as we argued in Chapter 15), it is here that the fundamental conflict between the two works is located. If, as I believe, the *PI* critique of logical objectivism is successful, then all of the above aspects of *TLP* must be swept away as a result. (We have already noted in Chapter 3 that the most plausible explanation of the later Wittgenstein's changed attitude towards the possibility of metaphysics lies in his rejection of the logical objectivism which had grounded his earlier view.) But the damage need not extend to the basic semantic system of *TLP*, sketched in Chapter 1 above and defended at length in *TS*. For this is in fact independent of any commitment to logical objectivism, and can stand largely unscathed by

Wittgenstein's later philosophy.¹² There is therefore no reason for us to reject Tractarian semantics – indeed, it is at least a distinct improvement on Fregean semantics, and is, in my view anyway, mostly correct – even though we may accept the consequences of the later Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following.

Whether yet further damage must be inflicted upon the system of thought of *TLP* by the rejection of logical objectivism may be left as a matter for controversy. Here belong the questions whether anti-logical-objectivists can remain committed to Bivalence, and to two-valued logic generally, and whether they can continue to construct their semantic theory around the notion of truth-conditions, as opposed to assertability-conditions or criteria or some other substitute. Indeed, here belongs the question whether an anti-logical-objectivist can remain committed to the objectivity of truth. I am inclined to think that these questions can be answered affirmatively, as I indicated in the last chapter. But the issues are much in dispute, and go well beyond the scope of our investigation of the strengths and weaknesses of Wittgenstein's early philosophy.¹³ Indeed, it is arguable that these issues even go beyond what would be required for consideration of Wittgenstein's *later* philosophy. For as I noted in the last chapter, there is little evidence that he himself saw the rejection of logical objectivism as having consequences outside of the *a priori* domains of philosophy and mathematics.

Conclusion

The metaphysics and associated programme of analysis of *TLP* is for the most part far from foolish, if ultimately unacceptable, resulting as it does from an endorsement of logical objectivism. The attack upon logical objectivism which Wittgenstein mounts in his *PI* discussion of rule-following constitutes the crux of the conflict between his earlier and later philosophies.