

Wittgenstein and Common-Sense Philosophy

Kristóf Nyíri

1. Introduction

Wittgenstein is known to have been a visual thinker. But he was also, as I will briefly indicate below, a thinker who in his later years in fact came close to developing a philosophy of visual thinking. The position he was groping for corresponds, one might say, to the common-sense view: we think in images no less than in words, and both mental and physical images signify by resembling. More broadly, too, it can be maintained that the later Wittgenstein tended to be a philosopher of common sense, indeed a common-sense realist, while being very much aware of the intricacies of the notion of common-sense philosophy. The notes published as *On Certainty*, notes he wrote during the last one and a half years of his life, are an extended critical discussion of G. E. Moore's "defence of common sense"; but already in the *Blue Book*, dictated to his class in Cambridge in 1933–34, we find some revealing passages not just on how the typical common-sense philosopher's approach differs (to his detriment) from that of "the common-sense man", but indeed on how a suitably conceived common-sense, and realist, philosophy should proceed. Fittingly, the first set of these passages is separated by a mere few pages from some important *Blue Book* passages on mental images, pictorial meaning, and visual similarity as constitutive of pictures. – Still, as this paper will point out, there are writings by Wittgenstein where his grasp of the proper mission of philosophy serving common sense, and hence realism, does not seem to be entirely firm. Such is the typescript no. 227, completed by 1946, posthumously published as Part I of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Here one cannot but sense a contradiction between Wittgenstein's excessive claim as to the primordial literalness (non-metaphorical nature) of everyday language, and his stress on the felicitous multiplicity and flexibility of language-games.

2. Wittgenstein as a Visual Thinker

It is the so-called linguistic turn in philosophy Wittgenstein's name is generally, and not without reason, associated with. He was, however, also a precursor of the iconic turn beginning in the late-twentieth century. He definitely had a visual mind. Recall his picture theory of meaning in the *Tractatus*, summed up by his dictum, "The proposition is a picture of reality", with the telling addition, "In order to understand the essence of the proposition, consider hieroglyphic writing, which pictures the facts it describes".¹ Or recall the innumerable drawings accompanying his manuscripts. These drawings were, for Wittgenstein, spontaneous vehicles of his thinking, but often also served as illustrations to help him explain what thinking with images amounts to – to help him come closer to a possible philosophy of pictures.

In a number of earlier papers I have attempted to show in detail that Wittgenstein's later work clearly contains the seeds of a theory of pictures as natural carriers of meaning.² Here I must

¹ *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.01 and 4.016, Ogden transl.

² See Kristóf Nyíri, "The Picture Theory of Reason" (2000), in *Rationality and Irrationality*, edited by Berit Brogaard and Barry Smith (Wien: öbv-hpt, 2001), pp. 242–266; Kristóf Nyíri, "Pictures as Instruments in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein" (2001), in *Wittgenstein and the Future of Philosophy: A Reassessment after 50 Years*, edited by Rudolf Haller

restrict myself to three references. First, a reference to the *Blue Book*, where Wittgenstein speaks of “pictures of which we should say that we understand them immediately, without any further interpretation”.³ Secondly, a reference to a crucial passage in the *Brown Book*, where Wittgenstein, touching on the issue of facial expressions, asks us to “contemplate the expression of a face primitively drawn in this way” (see Figure 1)⁴. One has an experience here, Wittgenstein implies, which cannot be conveyed by *words*; although it *can* be conveyed by pointing to a drawing. It appears our system of communication is incomplete, unless *pictures* play a part in it.

Figure 1



Thirdly, a reference to the so-called “Part II” of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Here, in section xi, Wittgenstein introduces the idea of a “picture-object”, stressing that our responses to such an object can be entirely unmediated. He gives the example of a “picture-face” (see Figure 2), writing: “In some respects I stand towards it as I do towards a human face. I can study its expression, can react to it as to the expression of the human face. A child can talk to picture-men or picture-animals, can treat them as it treats dolls.”⁵

Figure 2



3. Some Remarks on the Wittgenstein Corpus

Although the typescript listed as TS 227 in the von Wright catalogue – the typescript that was eventually printed as “Part I” of the *Philosophical Investigations* – is definitely a major compilation of notes by the later Wittgenstein, it is not a piece he in this form would have published. By

and Klaus Puhl (Wien: öbv&hpt, 2002), pp. 328–336; Kristóf Nyíri, “Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Pictures” (2001), in *Wittgenstein: The Philosopher and his Works*, edited by Alois Pichler and Simo Säätelä (Working Papers from the Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen, no. 17, 2005), pp. 281–312 (reprinted: Frankfurt/M.: ontos verlag 2006, pp. 322–353); Kristóf Nyíri, “Image and Metaphor in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein” (2010), in R. Heinrich et al., eds., *Image and Imaging in Philosophy, Science and the Arts* (Proceedings of the 33rd International Ludwig Wittgenstein Symposium, vol. 1, Heusenstamm bei Frankfurt: ontos verlag, 2011, pp. 109–129), repr. in Kristóf Nyíri, *Meaning and Motoricity: Essays on Image and Time*, Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 2014, pp. 73–91.

³ *Preliminary Studies for the “Philosophical Investigations”*. Generally Known as the *Blue and Brown Books*. By Ludwig Wittgenstein. Preface by Rush Rhees. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958, repr. 1964, p. 36.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963, transl. by G. E. M. Anscombe, p. 194e.

contrast, his lectures and dictations he tended to regard as actually a form of publication.⁶ The *Blue Book*, as also the *Brown Book* he dictated during 1934–35, should be seen as endeavours in their own right, rather than as intermediary steps leading to a supposedly ultimate, accomplished work. The title *Preliminary Studies for the “Philosophical Investigations”*, devised by the editor Rush Rhees, is entirely misguided and misleading.

Also, the manuscript listed as MS 144, published as “Part II” of the *Philosophical Investigations*, was never intended by Wittgenstein to form a sequel to TS 227. The designation “Part II” has been in fact dropped in the Schulte–Hacker edition.⁷ This of course does not make the text any less important. Already in its appearance, MS 144, written in 1949, is quite special, a “fair manuscript copy”, as von Wright puts it⁸ (cf. Figure 3). A fair manuscript indeed – just compare it to any other manuscript in Wittgenstein’s *Nachlaß* (see e.g. Figure 4, showing a page from MS 174, written in 1950).

Figure 3: “Es ist hier nützlich, den Begriff des Bildgegenstandes einzuführen” (“Here it is useful to introduce the idea of a picture-object”, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1968 edition, p. 194e)

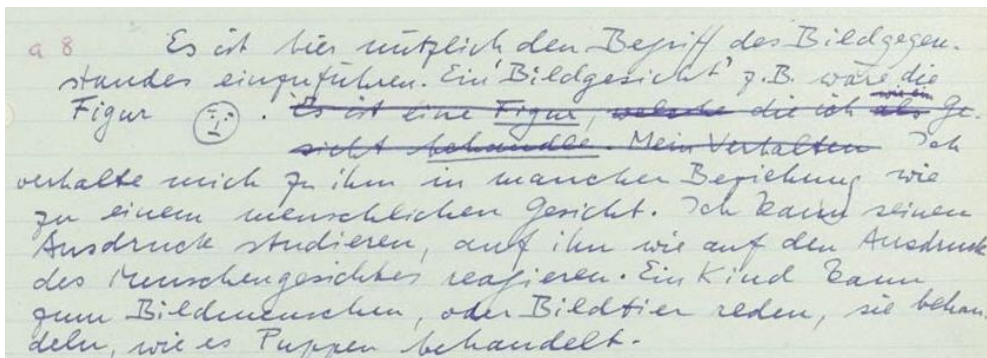
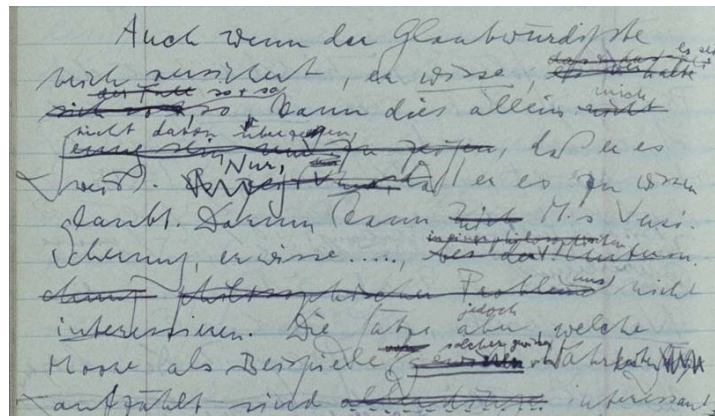


Figure 4: “Auch wenn der Glaubwürdigste mir versichert, er wisse, es sei so und so, so kann dies allein mich nicht davon überzeugen, daß er es weiß” (“Even if the most trustworthy of men assures me that he knows things are thus and so, this by itself cannot satisfy me that he does know”, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 137, cf. note 21 below)



⁶ Cf. Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, London: Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 56. See also the “Introduction” to *Wittgenstein: Lectures, Cambridge 1930–1933 – From the Notes of G. E. Moore*, edited by David G. Stern, Brian Rogers and Gabriel Citron, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016 (available from December 2015); the main author of the “Introduction” is David Stern.

⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. The German text, with an English translation by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte. Revised 4th edition by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. In this edition, MS 144 is published under the title “Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment”. I take the opportunity to thank Joachim Schulte for his unfailing support, over many decades, in helping me to better know and understand Wittgenstein’s work.

⁸ Georg Henrik von Wright, “The Wittgenstein Papers” (1969), rev. repr. in G. H. von Wright, *Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982, p. 45. On MS 144 (and the typescript based on it) see also G. H. von Wright, “The Troubled History of Part II of the *Investigations*”, *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, vol. 42 (1992), pp. 181–192.

Consisting of “carefully selected excerpts”⁹ from other notebooks of Wittgenstein, MS 144 seems to have been composed for a particular purpose. In 1949 Wittgenstein visited his friend and former student Norman Malcolm at Cornell University (Ithaca, NY). The material gathered in MS 144 was apparently meant to serve as readings for Malcolm and his students. It is essential not to interpret MS 144 from the perspective of the *Philosophical Investigations*, “Part I”, but to regard it, on the contrary, as an independent essay in which Wittgenstein, returning to ideas he had put forward in the *Blue Book* and the *Brown Book*, so to speak once more made public his strategy aiming at the elaboration of a common-sense philosophy of pictures.

4. What Is Common-Sense Philosophy?

The term “common sense” has a rich and varied philosophical pre-history, beginning with Aristotle, continuing with the Romans, then taken up by Descartes and others¹⁰ in early-modern Europe. In the overlapping senses allotted to this term in the 18th century by Thomas Reid – certainly the central figure in the history of common-sense philosophy – it means both the healthy judgment of the common man, and the views commonly shared by all mankind. Wittgenstein uses the expression “gesunder Menschenverstand” (healthy human understanding) as the German equivalent to the English term “common sense”.¹¹ Wittgenstein does not seem to have read Reid, but when one thinks of his decades-long working relationship with G. E. Moore¹² it is difficult to imagine that he was entirely unfamiliar with Reid’s ideas. Be that as it may, the later Wittgenstein’s formulations and arguments often display striking, and enlightening, parallels with those of Reid. Indeed some years ago Wolterstorff could go as far as suggesting that on the topic of common sense “it was impossible to understand what Reid was trying to say until *On Certainty* was published”.¹³

Reid as well as Moore tended to hold that common-sense truths were so to speak timeless, not open to revision by science.¹⁴ Wittgenstein, it can be argued, had a rather more differentiated view.¹⁵ And there is a crucial issue where according to the generally accepted view the position of the later Wittgenstein is definitely different from that of Reid and Moore: the issue of realism. Reid and Moore were common-sense realists, as common-sense philosophers can obviously be expected to be. The later Wittgenstein however is almost universally interpreted as a relativist, in recent years indeed as a social constructivist. I suggest that is a false interpretation.

⁹ David G. Stern, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 167.

¹⁰ Giambattista Vico among them. Vico is discussed in vol. 3 of the present VISUAL LEARNING series by Petra Aczél, see her essay “Visionary Rhetoric: Teaching Imagistic Communication”, in András Benedek and Kristóf Nyíri (eds.), *How to Do Things with Pictures: Skill, Practice, Performance*, Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 2013, pp. 87–100. I myself have touched on the issue of the common-sense world view in vol. 2 of the same series, see my “Visualization and the Horizons of Scientific Explanation”, in András Benedek and Kristóf Nyíri (eds.), *The Iconic Turn in Education*, Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 2012, pp. 127–150.

¹¹ David G. Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 28.

¹² Importantly from our present point of view, Moore attended Wittgenstein’s Cambridge lectures between 1930 and 1933. For a full account, see *Wittgenstein: Lectures, Cambridge 1930–1933* (cf. note 6 above).

¹³ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 232.

¹⁴ See John King-Farlow, “‘Common Sense’ and ‘Certainty’: Earlier Moore, Later Moore, and Later Wittgenstein”, *Philosophical Investigations*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1980), p. 80; Avrum Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 15; and John Coates, *The Claims of Common Sense: Moore, Wittgenstein, Keynes and the Social Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 53.

¹⁵ See e.g. Annalisa Coliva, *Moore and Wittgenstein: Scepticism, Certainty, and Common Sense*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 190 ff. That Wittgenstein might have thought common sense to be revisable by philosophy is the challenging thesis of Renia Gasparatou, in her “Moore and Wittgenstein on Common Sense”, *Philosophical Inquiry*, vol. 31, nos. 3–4 (2009), pp. 65–75.

5. Wittgenstein a Social Constructivist?

In his wonderful book *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism*, Paul Boghossian contests the postmodern relativist doctrine of “equal validity”, that is the thesis that “[t]here are many radically different, yet ‘equally valid’ ways of knowing the world, with science being just one of them”¹⁶. In the background of this thesis Boghossian detects the “social dependence conception of knowledge”, the most influential version of which today is the idea of “social construction”. As Boghossian puts it: “All knowledge, it is said, is socially dependent because all knowledge is socially constructed.” Also, as Boghossian later adds: “The social construction theorist ... wants to emphasize the contingency of the facts we have constructed, to show that they needn’t have obtained had we chosen otherwise.”¹⁷

Boghossian notes that social constructivist ideas have received support even from analytic philosophers: “one could cite a sizeable proportion of that tradition’s most prominent philosophers in their defense – Ludwig Wittgenstein, Rudolf Carnap, Richard Rorty, Thomas Kuhn, Hilary Putnam and Nelson Goodman, just for example”.¹⁸ It is here I beg to differ. As I will attempt to show in this paper, Wittgenstein does not believe that it is in our power to choose what facts should there obtain in the world.

6. Common-Sense Realism in *The Blue Book*

Any analysis of Wittgenstein’s discussion of Moore in the notes posthumously published as *On Certainty* must remain incomplete if not conducted before the background of the *Blue Book* passages on common-sense philosophy.¹⁹ Wittgenstein’s extended and ramified argument there begins on p. 43, with the reminder: “The scrutiny of the grammar of a word weakens the position of certain fixed standards of our expression which had prevented us from seeing facts with unbiased eyes. Our investigation tried to remove this bias, which forces us to think that the facts *must* conform to certain pictures embedded in our language.”²⁰ On pp. 44–45 Wittgenstein adds that there are “a host of philosophical difficulties which threaten to break up all our commonsense notions about what we should commonly call the objects of our experience. ... We are tempted to think that in order to clear up such matters philosophically our ordinary language is too coarse, that we need a more subtle one.” The adjective “philosophical” here refers to the traditional way of doing philosophy, a way of thinking misled by the surface grammar of ordinary language. On the other hand, philosophy – the right kind of philosophy, the philosophical therapy Wittgenstein wishes to pursue – aims to dissolve the puzzles philosophers were hitherto confused by. Note that while Wittgenstein apparently wants to vindicate our “commonsense notions”, he sees the very language in which those notions are at home, namely ordinary language, to be a source of philosophical puzzlement: our language is, again and again, tempting us to draw some misleading analogies (cf. p. 48).

On p. 45 Wittgenstein arrives at a crucial point in his argument. He provides “a kind of parable illustrating the difficulty we are in, and also showing the way out of this sort of difficulty: We have been told by popular scientists that the floor on which we stand is not solid, as it appears to common sense, as it has been discovered that the wood consists of particles filling space so thinly that it can almost be called empty. This is liable to perplex us”, but it should not, since “[t]o say ... that the floor is not solid is to misuse language”. Wittgenstein returns to this point on p. 48, explain-

¹⁶ Paul A. Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 6 f. and 18.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁹ Coliva (cf. note 15 above) manages not even to mention the *Blue Book*.

²⁰ Page number references in the main text of the present section are to the 1958 edition of *The Blue and Brown Books* (cf. note 3 above).

ing that just as the popular scientist tends to misuse language, so does, say, the philosophical idealist or solipsist as well. But so does, too, ultimately, the *common-sense philosopher* – we can assume it was Moore Wittgenstein had in mind here. The “common-sense man”, continues Wittgenstein, “is as far from realism as from idealism”. By contrast, the common-sense philosopher is a realist, but “the trouble with the realist is always that he does not solve but skip the difficulties which his adversaries see, though they too don’t succeed in solving them”. The common-sense realist philosopher, too, is misled by the surface grammar of ordinary language. And so this is how Wittgenstein will, on pp. 58–59, sum up his argument: “There is no common sense answer to a philosophical problem. One can defend common sense against the attacks of philosophers only by solving their puzzles, i.e., by curing them of the temptation to attack common sense; not by restating the views of common sense. A philosopher is not a man out of his senses, a man who doesn’t see what everybody sees; nor on the other hand is his disagreement with common sense that of the scientist disagreeing with the coarse views of the man in the street.”

7. Common-Sense Realism in *On Certainty*

The only place the term “common sense” (and the corresponding German “gesunder Menschenverstand”) occurs in *On Certainty*, is in the editors’ “Preface”.²¹ Wittgenstein in his notes uses the expressions “vernünftiger Mensch” (“reasonable man”, “reasonable person”) and – just once – “gewöhnlicher Mensch” (“ordinary man”, rendered by the translators as “normal person”). As the “Preface” puts it, Malcolm, in 1949, in Ithaca, “acted as a goad to [Wittgenstein’s] interest in Moore’s ‘defence of common sense’, that is to say his claim to know a number of propositions for sure, such as ‘Here is one hand, and here is another’, and ‘The earth existed for a long time before my birth’, and ‘I have never been far from the earth’s surface’. The first of these comes in Moore’s ‘Proof of the External World’. The two others are in his ‘Defence of Common Sense’; Wittgenstein had long been interested in these and had said to Moore that this was his best article. Moore had agreed.” Personally, I find the 1939 “Proof of an External World” essay more sophisticated than the 1925 “A Defence of Common Sense” one, with this crucial passage particularly penetrating from a visual point of view: “I can prove now, for instance, that two human hands exist. How? By holding up my two hands, and saying, as I make a certain gesture with the right hand, ‘Here is one hand’, and adding, as I make a certain gesture with the left, ‘and here is another’. ... the proof which I gave was a perfectly rigorous one... ... the premiss ... I expressed by showing you my hands, making certain gestures, and saying the words ‘here is one hand, and here is another’.”²²

7.1. Wittgenstein on Moore

Towards the end of his life, Wittgenstein jotted down: “Haven’t I gone wrong and isn’t Moore perfectly right? Haven’t I made the elementary mistake of confusing one’s thoughts with one’s knowledge? Of course I do not think to myself ‘The earth already existed for some time before my birth’, but do I *know* it any the less? Don’t I show that I know it by always drawing its consequences?”²³ The doubts here voiced by Wittgenstein refer to one of the main points he raises in criticising Moore: the latter misuses language when he says he “knows” certain basic facts. Another main line of criticism formulated by Wittgenstein is that Moore is wrong to single out particular propositions when looking for the foundations of our knowledge. It is, stresses Wittgenstein, a *system* of propositions we adhere to, though some of these propositions do play a central role (are the hinges on

²¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Über Gewißheit / On Certainty*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, Engl. transl. by Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969.

²² G. E. Moore, “Proof of an External World” (1939), repr. in G. E. Moore, *Philosophical Papers*, New York: Collier Books, 1962, pp. 144 f.

²³ *On Certainty*, § 397, entered on March 18, 1951.

which the system turns: “The *truth* of certain empirical propositions belongs to our frame of reference”, *On Certainty*, § 83); the system is rooted in our *practice*, our form of life.

Still, even if using arguments very different from those of Moore, Wittgenstein arrived at similar conclusions. He agreed with Moore that doubt must have its limits: “Doubting and non-doubting behaviour. There is the first only if there is the second” (§ 354). And: “absence of doubt belongs to the essence of the language-game” (§ 370). Also: “If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either” (§ 114). There are statements of doubt which one just cannot make significantly (cf. § 76).

7.2. Boghossian on *On Certainty*

In his *Fear of Knowledge*, Boghossian quotes Richard Rorty quoting Wittgenstein. Rorty, writes Boghossian, “echoes Wittgenstein who says in his *On Certainty*: ‘611. Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and a heretic.’ He insists, however, that all this rhetorical heat simply covers up the fact that there is no system-independent fact in virtue of which one epistemic system could be said to be more correct than any other.”²⁴ Rorty insists, that is, that relativism is the correct position to hold, and that Wittgenstein was a relativist. Boghossian, who then goes on to discuss *On Certainty*,²⁵ apparently agrees with this characterization of Wittgenstein; indeed, as we saw, he takes him to be a social constructivist. Now Wittgenstein might have had bouts of relativism, especially in some of the passages that have found their way into Part I of the *Philosophical Investigations*, but he was at no stage a constructivist. As Boghossian sees the matter, the social constructivist essentially maintains that the facts we have constructed “needn’t have obtained had we chosen otherwise”.²⁶ Let me say that this is not what Wittgenstein has basically maintained. His position is succinctly summed up in one of his last notes: “Certain events would put me into a position in which I could not go on with the old language-game any further. In which I was torn away from the sureness of the game. – Indeed, doesn’t it seem obvious that the possibility of a language-game is conditioned by certain facts?”²⁷

8. Common-Sense Philosophy in the *Philosophical Investigations*

Passages parallel to the one just quoted from *On Certainty* do occasionally occur in Part I of the *Philosophical Investigations*. For instance in § 142: “if things were quite different from what they actually are ...; if rule became exception, and exception rule ... our normal language-games would thereby lose their point”²⁸, with the insertion: “What we have to mention in order to explain the significance, I mean the importance, of a concept are often extremely general facts of nature: such facts as are hardly ever mentioned because of their great generality”.²⁹ Surely a remark suggesting realism, rather than relativism. Or take the similar reference to “measuring” in § 242: “It is not only agreement in definitions, but also (odd as it may sound) agreement in judgements that is required for communication by means of language. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so. – It is one thing to describe methods of measurement, and another to obtain and state results of measurement. But what we call ‘measuring’ is in part determined by a certain constancy in results of measurement”.³⁰ However, there might indeed be an inkling of relativism in the foregoing para-

²⁴ Boghossian, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 78, 80.

²⁶ Cf. note 17 above.

²⁷ *On Certainty*, § 617.

²⁸ § 142 – source: TS 227a, 1944–45. Here and in the following I rely on the Hacker–Schulte edition.

²⁹ Proximate source: TS 228, 1945 or 46.

³⁰ Manuscript source: MS 129, p. 128, 1944. – Wittgenstein’s reference to “agreement in judgements” might easily call to mind Thomas Reid: “Common sense is that degree of judgment which is common to men with whom we can converse and transact business. ... common sense should mean common judgment”, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*

graph: “‘So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?’ – What is true or false is what human beings *say*; and it is in their *language* that human beings agree. This is agreement not in opinions, but rather in form of life.”³¹ Two other, comparable, passages: “What people accept as a justification shows how they think and live.”³² And: “Justification by experience comes to an end.”³³

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, it is direct and indirect references to “ordinary language” (“gewöhnliche Sprache”) that take the role of references to common sense. I am here citing some of the most oft-quoted passages from the later Wittgenstein’s most often quoted work: “philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*” (§ 38 – manuscript source: MS 142, p. 33, Nov.–Dec. 1936) – “It was correct that our considerations must not be scientific ones. ... Philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language” (§ 109 – manuscript source: MS 142, p. 102, Nov.–Dec. 1936). – “A simile that has been absorbed into the forms of our language produces a false appearance which disquiets us” (§ 112 – manuscript source: MS 142, p. 106, Nov.–Dec. 1936). – “[T]he language of every day. So is this language too coarse, too material, for what we want to say? *Well then, how is another one to be constructed?*” (§ 120 – final source: TS 227b, p. 86a, 1944–45) – “Philosophy must not interfere in any way with the actual use of language, so it can in the end only describe it” (§ 124 – manuscript source: MS 110, p. 188, 1931). – “The philosopher treats a question; like an illness” (§ 255 – manuscript source: MS 116, p. 323, 1945). – “What looks like an explanation here ... in truth just exchanges one way of talking for another which, while we are doing philosophy, seems to us the more apt” (§ 303 – manuscript source: MS 227a, p. 188, 1944–45). Throughout, Wittgenstein continues to use the word “philosophy” in two different, contrasting senses: in the sense of systematically confused thinking misled by the grammar of language; and in the sense of philosophical therapy redeeming us from our linguistic confusions – common-sense philosophy in a tenable sense of the word.

As I suggested above by way of introduction, and alluded to again in section 6, the later Wittgenstein did not succeed in overcoming a manifest tension in his thought: on the one hand he clearly took it for granted that ordinary language is primordially literal, lacking metaphorical extensions; on the other hand he saw that our language indeed abounds in similes, images, expressions with transposed meanings. What Wittgenstein did not succeed coming to terms with in the context either of the *Blue Book* or of TS 227 was the problem of metaphor.³⁴ And the ultimate reason for his not being able to come to grips with the problem of metaphor was that in these contexts he did not succeed in making a proper connection between the visual – the image – and the verbal – the text. In a string of intriguing passages in the *Philosophical Investigations* (§§ 422–24), Wittgenstein discusses the “picture” – the simile – of the human soul: “What do I believe in when I believe that man has a soul? ... there is a picture in the foreground, but the sense lies far in the background; that is, the application of the picture is not easy to survey. ... The picture is there; and I do not dispute its *correctness*. But *what* is its application? Think of the picture of blindness as a darkness in the mind or in the head of a blind person.” In one of the manuscript sources of the last passage here (MS 116, p. 325, May 1944) Wittgenstein actually adds a drawing to illustrate this picture (see Figure 5). A telling move, one however ultimately not influencing the results achieved – or rather not achieved – in TS 227.

of *Man* (1785), here quoted from the 2002 critical edition, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, pp. 424 and 427.

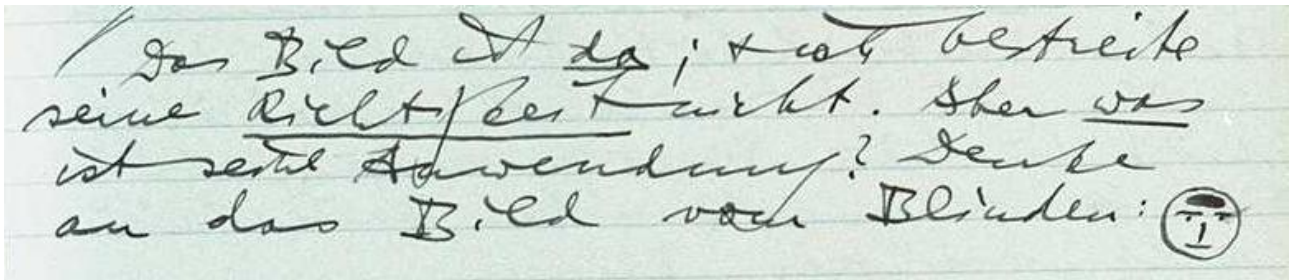
³¹ *Philosophical Investigations*, § 241 – manuscript source: MS 129, p. 35, 1944.

³² *Ibid.*, § 325 – manuscript source: MS 130, p. 9, 1946.

³³ *Ibid.*, § 485 – manuscript source: MS 115, p. 100, 1933.

³⁴ See my essay “Image and Metaphor in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein”, cf. note 2 above.

Figure 5: “Das Bild ist da; ich bestreite seine Richtigkeit nicht. Aber was ist seine Anwendung? Denke an das Bild vom Blinden...”



9. Conclusion: Wittgenstein's Common-Sense Realism Weakened by His Insufficient Grasp of the Visual

On p. 64 in his *Fear of Knowledge*, Boghossian arrives at a momentous formulation. “For any observational proposition p ”, he writes, “if it visually seems to S that p and circumstantial conditions D obtain, then S is prima facie justified in believing p .” The crucial word here, one Boghossian does not emphasize but I want to stress, is “visually”. Wittgenstein, as we saw, recoiled from allotting weight to single observations. Instead, he insisted that it is always a *system* of propositions that we believe in, or reject. I suggest that it was his insufficient grasp of the visual that prevented him from assigning a basic epistemic function to observation statements. Common-sense visualism implies realism; and conversely, no realism worthy of the name is feasible without a commitment to the essential cognitive role of the visual.