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Was Wittgenstein a Common-Sense Realist?

Wittgenstein was not only a visual thinker, but also a thinker who in his later years 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 the planned talk 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.

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