

You can't step into the same Argument twice: Wittgenstein on philosophical arguments¹

No puedes tropezarte con el mismo argumento dos veces: Wittgenstein y los argumentos filosóficos

Daniel H. Cohen

Department of Philosophy, Colby College, Maine, United States
dhcohen@colby.edu

George H. Miller

Division of Humanities, The University of Maine at Farmington, Maine, United States
george.miller@maine.edu

Received: 25-3-2010 **Accepted:** 27-10-2010

Abstract: Arguments are everywhere in philosophy, but almost nowhere do they actually succeed in demonstrating conclusions, resolving differences, or any of the other things arguments are supposed to do. For Wittgenstein, arguing about philosophical matters was pointless. This conclusion follows immediately from his views on the nature of argument, the nature of philosophy, and argument's place in philosophy. Even as his views on those subjects changed significantly, the conclusion appeared unchanged. However, since arguments partially define their conclusions, seemingly identical conclusions from different arguments may differ greatly, especially when the arguments are of entirely different kinds. The arguments in the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* are rarely explicit, and sometimes hard even to recognize as arguments. Both works attempt in different ways to help the reader to a deeper understanding of language by way of "more perspicuous representations." We argue that in both works, these "more perspicuous representations" imply that arguing about philosophical matters is pointless. However, given the significant differences in style and strategy manifested in the two texts, it means very different things to say that a representation is "more perspicuous". As a consequence, to say that philosophical argumentation is pointless means one thing when said in the context of the *Tractatus*, and something

¹ The authors wish to thank Ralph Johnson for very helpful comments on an earlier draft.

different when placed in the context of the *Philosophical Investigations*. In this paper, we will support this view.

Keywords: argument, argumentation, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein.

Resumen: En la filosofía en todas partes hay argumentos, pero casi en ninguna parte ellos realmente tienen éxito en demostrar conclusiones, resolver diferencias, o cualquiera de las otras cosas que supuestamente los argumentos hacen. Para Wittgenstein, discutir sobre materias filosóficas fue un desperdicio. Esta conclusión se sigue inmediatamente desde sus perspectivas sobre la naturaleza de un argumento, la naturaleza de la filosofía, y el lugar de los argumentos en la filosofía. Aunque que sus ángulos en estos temas cambiaron significativamente, la conclusión aparece de la misma forma. Sin embargo, dado que los argumentos parcialmente definen sus conclusiones, conclusiones aparentemente idénticas de argumentos diferentes pueden diferir bastante especialmente cuando los argumentos son de distintos tipos. Los argumentos en el *Tractatus* y las *Investigaciones* están raramente explícitos y a veces es incluso difícil reconocerlos como argumentos. Ambos trabajos, de diferentes maneras, intentan ayudar al lector a profundizar su entendimiento del lenguaje a través de una “representación más perspicua”. Nosotros señalamos que ambos trabajos estas “representaciones más perspicuas” implican que argüir sobre materias filosóficas no tiene sentido. No obstante, dadas las diferencias significativas en estilo y estrategias manifestadas en estos dos textos, resulta en que se dicen diferentes cosas con la idea de que una representación es “más perspicua”. Como consecuencia, decir que una argumentación filosófica es un desperdicio significa una cosa cuando se dice en el contexto del *Tractatus*, y algo totalmente diferente cuando aparece en el contexto de las *Investigaciones Filosóficas*. En este trabajo fundamentaremos esta posición.

Palabras clave: argumento, argumentación, *Tractatus Lógico Filosófico*, *Investigaciones filosóficas*, Wittgenstein.

1. Introduction

When it comes to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations*, the only things more important than their differences are their similarities. The differences are obvious and striking; their similarities are often subtle, coming into focus only after repeated inspection. In this paper, we would like to bring one of those similarities – a thesis about the nature of specifically philosophical argumentation – out of the shadows cast by the looming differences.

The thesis is this: arguing about philosophical matters is fundamentally

incoherent.² This is an immediate consequence of Wittgenstein's views on the nature of argument, the nature of philosophy, and the place for argument in philosophy. Moreover, even as his views on each of those three subjects were undergoing significant changes, the thesis and the reasoning leading to it remained substantially the same. But not exactly the same.

There is something very puzzling about arguments in philosophy. They are almost everywhere, but almost nowhere do they actually succeed in demonstrating a conclusion, resolving a difference, or any of the other things we like to claim arguments are supposed to do. Philosophical argumentation appears to be especially futile. Moreover, unlike arguments in personal matters, politics, or theology, the motivation for arguing about metaphysical differences is not at all obvious: Why, for example, should a "reliabilist" virtue epistemologist care whether her colleague virtue epistemologist is a "responsibilist" theorist? What motivates us to argue about philosophical differences? Philosophical arguments can appear pointless, too, given what difference they make. For all that, they can also be serious and passionate, as well as productive and satisfying. Wittgenstein's writings bring these oddities of philosophical argumentation into focus.

Briefly, the practice of the *Tractatus* identifies argumentation with inference: he simply presents us with inferences rather than engages us with dialectical arguments. Specifically philosophical argumentation, if at all possible, would have to be an *a priori* matter. Thus, it would be a matter for deduction and logical analysis. Consequently, it would be sterile and pointless as a knowledge-generating process. Philosophy qua argumentation disappears. Therefore, "the proper method in [post-Tractarian] philosophy" should be simply the artful selection and assertion of scientific facts, without any supporting or subsequent argumentation (*Tractatus* 6.53).³

Setting aside the question of whether its own propositions (or pseudo-propositions) actually have any sense, Wittgenstein's practice in the *Tractatus* is actually largely consonant with that description: the text is a sequence of

² We are siding with Kenny 2004 against Hacker 1990 on whether Wittgenstein recognizes a legitimate place for argumentation in philosophy, but we regard that apparent constant in Wittgensteinian thought as a moving target.

³ There are, of course, many other ways of reading the *Tractatus*. We are following the interpretation of *Tractarian* semantics elaborated in Cohen 1990.

abstract and even disembodied propositions. Any conceptual connections needed to make them coherent have to be supplied by the reader. It is as if we are given a series of conclusions without the arguments. Wittgenstein does not make it easy for the reader!

In the *Investigations*, the situation is partly mirrored and partly reversed: we find many arguments, but not many conclusions. Befitting the move to a more dialogically-oriented conception of philosophy, the arguments in the *Investigations* are themselves less logical and more dialogical insofar as they include all the moves of ordinary conversation rather than just inferences. They are also more specifically dialectical insofar as they proceed through objections and replies. They do not follow a beeline to a well-marked terminus. However, their place in philosophy is no less tenuous in the *Investigations* than in the *Tractatus*. The arguments that appear in the *Investigations* are made up of questions and assertions that apparently come from different voices in genuine engagement, albeit without the closure provided by definite conclusions, but also without the normal clues available to readers to identify and distinguish the protagonists and antagonists. It appears almost as if Wittgenstein were trying *not* to get his point across. Once again, Wittgenstein does not make it easy for the reader! And yet the arguments he puts before us are strangely effective. They are presented as arguments Wittgenstein is having with himself or colleagues, rather than with the reader, which is to say they are presented less as arguments to persuade, convince, or engage us, and more as “spectacles” to affect us.

In the discussion that follows, we will first, identify the nature and role of argumentation in philosophy *according to* the *Tractatus*, followed by a case study of an argument *from* the *Tractatus*. We will then turn to Wittgenstein’s transitional and later works, paying particular attention to the interpretive challenge posed by his provocative *and deliberate* evolution away from definite assertions in philosophical matters and towards creating interpretive tensions in his readers in order to achieve greater clarity in the long run – albeit with less dogmatic confidence. We think this challenge can be met only after achieving the perspective that comes from having worked through the *Tractatus*. While our conclusions are largely negative concerning the place for arguments in Wittgenstein’s philosophy, conceptual space is created for a more positive account of argument both in philosophy and in general.

2. Arguments in the *Tractatus*

The first difficulty in extracting a *Tractarian* position about the interplay between philosophy and argumentation is that while Wittgenstein is bold and unequivocal when it comes to the nature of philosophy, he is entirely silent about the nature of the non-inferential aspects of argumentation. Of course, when it comes to the *Tractatus*, silence speaks volumes.

Wittgenstein ends the *Tractatus* with his infamous counsel to pass over those areas about which we cannot speak in silence. Those areas include such non-factual discourse as ethics and aesthetics (6.42-6.421), God and theology (6.4312-6.432), the soul (5.62), the limits of the world (6.4), and the meaning of life (6.52-6.521).⁴ However, to say that there are no ethical propositions is as much a comment on proposition as it is on ethics. These are all areas of great importance, but they are not areas in which we can picture or describe, i.e., we cannot actually say anything literally true. The most important "truth" in the *Tractatus* is that truth *per se* is not all that important: "How things are in the world is of complete indifference for what is higher" (*Tractatus* 6.4321)

Any attempt at saying something sensible in any of these areas will fail miserably. The result is always something nonsensical (*unsinnig*): a confused pseudo-proposition.

However, there is another family of areas in which we also cannot say anything sensible or truthful, including everything that can be *shown* (4.1212). This covers much of logic (6.12), mathematics (6.22), logical and pictorial form (2.172, 4.126), and the formal properties of objects and the world (4.126, 6.22). The problem here is different. The theorems of logic and the equations of mathematics have a curious status. Because the technical Tractarian sense of *saying* that is operative here identifies sense with presenting a picture of the world, i.e., something that can be true or false, neither tautologies, which cannot be false, nor contradictions, which cannot be true, make any *sense*. They do not *say* anything; they do not present us with a picture of the world; they are, therefore, literally without sense: senseless (*sinnlos*).

⁴ All references to Wittgenstein's works will be to the proposition numbering in the *Tractatus*, the paragraphs and sections in the *Investigations*, and page numbers in the *Blue and Brown Books* and *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*.

The assertion that it is either raining or not, tells us nothing about the weather. However, tautologies are *not* nonsensical (*unsinnig*) because they show us the logic of the world. They make manifest what cannot be *said* about logical form and the pictorial relation (4.461-4.462, 6.12).

Our thesis with respect to the Tractarian view of specifically philosophical argumentation is that nothing can be said about it (in the technical sense of *saying*). First, there is nothing to argue about. There are no genuine philosophical propositions, so there is no subject matter for philosophy. Second, even if there were something for philosophers to argue about, the “correct method” in philosophy would not include arguing about it. Finally, even if there were a subject matter to philosophy and a role for arguments in philosophy, there would still be nothing philosophical that could be said about the general nature of arguments.

The claim that philosophy does not result in philosophical propositions (4.112) is an immediate consequence of the picture theory of meaning and the contrastive accounts of science and philosophy. Propositions are symbols with sense (3.3), propositions are true or false (4.1, 4.123), the totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science (4.11), but philosophy is not a science (4.111). Philosophy, therefore, does not traffic in truths. Consequently, the only subjects left for possible philosophical scrutiny would be those about which there are no genuine propositions: philosophy would be the discourse of ineffable subjects. However, in contrast to those alleged beetles sealed inside *Investigations*’ boxes, an ineffable subject may indeed be better than no subject at all, at least for interpretive, explanatory purposes, if not for factual, scientific purposes. Since the ineffable includes ethics, metaphysics, logic, and other important and traditional areas of philosophy, what has to change is what philosophers *do* with their subject. The goal can no longer be the production or discovery of truths, so it has to involve something else. What Wittgenstein offers us instead is making things clear: clarifications (4.112) and elucidations (6.54).

The second part of the thesis concerns the “correct method” in philosophy. Wittgenstein tells us at 6.53 that this would involve nothing more than the simple assertions of scientific (non-philosophical) truths about the world in order to disabuse others of their tendencies towards meaningless metaphysical pseudo-propositions. Engaging them in argument about metaphysics is precisely what must be avoided because it would only serve to rein-

force their confusion in regards to what can and cannot be meaningfully said. In the same way that arguing with others implicitly dignifies them by acknowledging their status as reasons-responsive beings, so too arguing about something implicitly dignifies that topic as something that is arguable and worthy of argument. The subjects of arguments need to be both sufficiently *meaningful*, in the sense of having literal sense, to sustain sensible discourse, as well as sufficiently *meaningful*, in the sense of having some importance, to deserve argument. We cannot argue about nonsense and we do not argue about trivial truisms. We can ask whether the good is more or less identical than the beautiful or whether $2 + 3$ is really 5, but none of those makes for a good argument. One is nonsense, the other is senseless, but those and their ilk are largely what philosophers have been arguing about (3.324, 4.003), which goes a long way towards explaining why Wittgenstein would think that arguments have no place in philosophy proper.

What does this semantics entail and how does it work? Take the case of logic and logical form. Logic does not fall under the purview of any of the sciences, so if it qualified as a subject, it would be a philosophical one. The logic of the world is shown in each sensible proposition – as well in every senseless tautology. That is all a philosopher (or anyone else with respect for the boundaries of sense) has to work with. Wittgenstein admits that we can talk about these things “in a certain sense” because even though there can be no propositions about them directly, there are propositions that “make manifest” how these things work (4.122). The key here is that to we can clear up confusion about, say, the logic and status of internal and external relations not by talking about those relations themselves, but by talking about the objects that are in those logical relations. We do not have to talk *about* these ineffable topics to clear up confusions; we can deploy them deftly. Put another way, we have no problem talking sensibly about things or, more narrowly, *objects*, despite the fact that we cannot say anything intelligible about what it is to be an *object* or about the formal, pseudo-concept of an *object*. Wittgenstein's claim is that as long as we manage to do the former well, there is no need for the latter.⁵

⁵ The very striking similarities that this account of *things* has with what Wittgenstein says, in a very different context, about *games*, is no mere coincidence.

There is one very conspicuous omission from Wittgenstein's characterization of the "correct method" in philosophy as the artful assertion of sensible, scientific propositions (6.53): tautologies. Shouldn't they have a role in philosophy? Earlier in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein had declared that the propositions of science are completely irrelevant for philosophy (4.1121-4.1122) and he repeats that point here. If what factual propositions *say* does not matter, it must be what they *show* that matters, but that implies that tautologies, which also show, should serve just as well.

This brings us to the third part of our thesis about Tractarian argumentation, viz., that there is nothing to say about argumentation generally. There are three pieces to be put together in order to reach this conclusion. First, the arguments of the *Tractatus* are presented as essentially sequences of propositions with a certain sort of logical-inferential structure; second, that logical structure is deductive; and third, deductively valid inferences are expressible as tautological conditionals (5.132ff). In combination with the earlier thesis that tautologies are senseless, these preclude any interesting, i.e., meaningful and informative, arguments, as well as any interesting, i.e., meaningful and informative, commentary on arguments.

Nonetheless, the *Tractatus* does indeed include some interesting arguments, despite its denial that there can be such, just as it includes some very interesting propositions about logic, ethics, and metaphysics, despite their "official" impossibility, too.⁶

Our characterization of the *Tractatus* can be summed up, in what is admittedly a bit of a caricature as follows: Wittgenstein describes philosophy as consisting of sensible but irrelevant propositions and patent but pointless arguments, while the philosophy that he himself practices uses nonsense pseudo-propositions and unvoiced arguments – which somehow manages to be successfully enlightening anyway. How can nonsense and senselessness combine with irrelevance, pointlessness, and silence to produce such great effect?

⁶ The argument beginning at 2.02 is used as a case study below, but among our favorites are the wonderfully intriguing arguments regarding the independence of philosophy from facts (4.1-4.1122), the groundlessness of causality and induction (5.135-5.1363), and the nonexistence of the soul (5.54ff).

3. A Case Study

The sequence of propositions from 2.02 through 2.0212 in the *Tractatus* is characteristic of Tractarian argumentation. It consists of bold assertions that are obviously related, although it is not immediately apparent how they are related. For that matter, it is not clear that these propositions even constitute an argument. They might be read as an explanation or a clarification or an articulation “for someone who has himself already had [these] thoughts” (*Preface*, p. 3). Here is the passage:

2.02 Objects are simple.⁷

2.0201 Every statement about complexes can be resolved into a statement about their constituents and into the propositions that describe the complexes completely.

2.021 Objects make up the substance of the world. That is why they cannot be composite.

2.0211 If the world had no substance, then whether a proposition had sense would depend on whether another proposition was true.

2.0212 In that case we could not sketch any picture of the world (true or false).

The conclusion is stated clearly and unequivocally right at the beginning, 2.02. There are some indicators that it should be read as argumentation, including a reasons-indicator (“*That is why...*” in 2.021) and inference-indicators (the conditional subjunctive in 2.0211 followed by a categorical subjunctive). The structure of the supporting reasoning is relatively unproblematic, so an argument can be easily extracted. The inferential core is naturally reconstructed as a *reductio ad absurdum* line of reasoning or a series of *modus tollens* inferences:

(1) If there were no simples, there would be no substance to the world.

⁷ Only later, at 4.1272, is the concept of an object revealed as a pseudo-concept.

- (2) If there were no substance, it would be impossible to say anything sensible (true-or-false).
 - (3) It is possible to make sense (to say things about the world).
- \\ Therefore, there must be ultimate simples.

The third premise is assumed rather than explicitly stated, but since it is pragmatically impossible to argue with, we will pass over it in silence. The other two premises can be challenged so they need support. We need a connection between simples and substance for the first premise and a connection between substance and sense for the second. Propositions 2.0201 and 2.021 are apparently meant to provide the former; propositions 2.0211 and 2.0212 are apparently meant to provide the latter.

While the logical structure of the argument is straightforward, the conceptual architecture is not. The lines connecting simples to substance, and substance to sense are dotted lines at best. Connecting the dots takes effort.

Wittgenstein *explains* what simples are (the end-products of complete analyses of complexes) and then *states* that they are the substance of the world. The second part of 2.021 is the grounds: complexes cannot be substances. The missing warrant has to be something to the effect that substances must exist independently of one another while complexes are dependent on their constituents. Wittgenstein's discussion of (atomic) facts provides the context: they have independent existence, relative to one another (1.21). However, facts have an internal complexity, so they are also dependent, relative to their constituents (2, 2.01). At this stage, it would be possible that those constituents could also be complex (2.0201 does not rule that out). Genuine objects cannot have any kind of complexity that would entail dependence and still be the "substance" of the world. One immediate consequence is that an object's own logical form cannot be conceived as an internal structure determining its range of combinatorial possibilities (2.0141). There cannot be any internal *complexity*. Rather, logical form must be an unanalyzable given (and 2.0233 does suggest a sort of brute-fact aspect to the *thisness* of objects). Analysis of a complex into its constituents must be possible (2.0201) and it must come to an end (3.25). The final miss-

ing piece is a link between a regress and sense, and that is exactly what 2.0211 provides: an infinite analytic regress would make sense impossible, contradicting the third premise. Propositions involving complexes (e.g., "The present king of France is bald") either presuppose the existence of those complexes for sense (the Meinongian analysis) or else must be analyzable into propositions about simples (Russell's tack taken to its atomist conclusion). The possibility of an infinite regress is the possibility that it would be *impossible* for language to connect to the world, i.e., to make sense.

The point we want to take from this exercise concerns neither the metaphysics of substances and objects nor the semantics of names, reference, and truth-conditions. Rather, it is about philosophical argumentation. Even our quick sketch of Wittgenstein's argument contradicts the claim that philosophical argumentation is merely analytic, and as rough as our reconstruction may be, the result, i.e., the effect on the reader, is neither senseless nor pointless. The inferences are non-trivial, and the premises and conclusions are "substantial" whose meanings can be recovered only with appreciable interpretive efforts. Even if the reconstructions were to eventuate in a fully rigorous and deductive presentation, the analogies (e.g., between atomic facts and simple objects as substances, and between facts and propositions as complexes for analysis) are more than explanations and clarifications of meanings: they are *constitutive* of those meanings. Put bluntly: what *object*, *substance*, and *simple* mean in proposition 2.02 is determined by the propositions that follow within the parameters and context established by the preceding propositions.

Any reader who has successfully negotiated her way through the sentences in this argument has taken a big step towards the ultimate Tractarian goal: "seeing them as nonsensical." The sentences do not picture the world. They invoke such pseudo-concepts as *substance*, *object* and *fact*, so they cannot express genuine propositions. That is the real point of the argument. There is, in John Wisdom's memorable phrase, a "divergence of point and content."

4. Philosophical Investigations

The form of argumentation in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*

is diametrically opposed to the form of argumentation in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, but there is the same divergence of point and content, even as the respective points and contents remain in complete agreement.

In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein famously tells us, “If one tried to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them” (§128). It is the business of philosophy, he says, to establish a “perspicuous representation,” *to get a clear view of things as they were prior to our getting tangled up in our own rules*. True philosophy does not try to imitate the natural sciences by appealing to evidence and argument to uncover new truths. (This much is consonant with the *Tractatus*, especially *Tractatus* 6.53 and 4.112.) Nor does it begin with the truths of science and work from them: “In philosophy we do not draw conclusions” (599). Once again, the content of the propositions and arguments that philosophers have offered is not the point.

In other words, Wittgenstein does not particularly care whether he has convinced his readers that some proposition is true or false. In the *Investigations*, he wants instead to help his readers disengage from the linguistic confusion – the “bewitchment of the intelligence by means of language” (109) – that is the source of philosophical discourse. All of this also applies, more or less, to the *Tractatus*. The difference is that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein believed he could eliminate confusion by presenting a perspicuous representation of the pure forms underlying ordinary discourse. In the *Investigations*, he has come to believe that no such pure form is privileged, and the perspicuous representation he would like us to achieve is of ordinary discourse itself. Tractarian proposition 5.5563, the claim that the propositions of everyday language are in perfect logical order just as they are, which seemed a bit out of place in the *Tractatus*, is fully realized in the *Investigations*.

This change in Wittgenstein’s understanding of the logic of language affects both what he says about philosophical method and how he actually practices philosophy in the *Investigations*. On the theoretical side, he introduces some imaginary “language games” as thought-experiments to reveal certain features of language and to locate the sources of our confusion. This represents a radical departure from thinking of language as essentially a pictorial-representational system. The artist’s palette is replaced by an eclectically stocked tool-box.

The change in his own practice is no less dramatic. He refrains from the

sort of categorical assertions that abound in the *Tractatus* for more *indirect* styles of writing; and he abandons the conclusions-without-proofs presentation for more dialectical arguments, complete with multiple voices articulating distinct standpoints that evolve in response to one another. These new arguments present his readers with a very different set of interpretive challenges, forced them to engage with the text in entirely new ways.

The contrasting styles of writing in the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein's later works make for one of those obvious and striking differences referred to above. As noted, his writing is much more dialectical in the *Investigations*, but to appreciate the full extent and significance of this change, it is important not to lose sight of its continuities with the *Tractatus* and to see it as resulting from a series of evolutionary changes, rather than a single revolutionary paradigm shift. The evolution is evident in all aspects of Wittgenstein's writing, everything from the metaphors and tropes he uses to the kinds of arguments he offers, and even to such matters as sentence length, paragraphing, section breaks, and even punctuation – especially with regards to dashes (and parenthetical remarks).

One telling measure of the development of Wittgenstein's dialectical style of writing from the *Blue Book* and *Brown Book* to the *Investigations* is in his increasing use of questions. There were virtually no questions in the *Tractatus* – less than two dozen all told – all of which are either rhetorical questions that the reader naturally answers (e.g., 5.555), questions to which Wittgenstein himself provides the answers (e.g., 5.511), or questions that are mentioned rather than asked (e.g., 6.211). In contrast, the very first sentence in the *Blue Book* is a question, and it is followed by some remarks on questions. Wittgenstein occasionally adopts the form of an internal dialogue, with passages of external dialogue, including questions, serving a variety of heuristic, explanatory, and argumentative purposes. The *Brown Book* follows suit, with more of the same. Wittgenstein raises questions, puzzles about them, proposes answers, raises objections to the answers, responds to the objections, and raises more questions, usually in his own voice, although on occasion he will use quotation marks as clear markers that there is a different voice behind asking the questions. The use of questions explodes in the *Investigations*.

Wittgenstein's use of questions and dialogue in the *Investigations* are noteworthy in several ways. First, there are simply a lot more questions than

ever before. Rather than being an occasional device, questions are a staple of the text's literary style. As in the *Blue and Brown Books*, Wittgenstein introduces other voices that are distinct but generally unidentified. However, sometimes there appear to be several different voices in a dialogue at once, turning it into a conversation. Most intriguing, however, is the fact that Wittgenstein goes out of his way to blur the identities and standpoints of his interlocutors in these multi-voice discussions. The editorial changes from earlier versions provide unmistakable evidence that these are deliberate modifications for a purpose. Were it not anachronistic, it would be tempting to read these as conscious attempts at Austinian perlocutionary acts or Gricean implicatures; instead, it seems more advisable to interpret them in something like Kierkegaardian terms (and we know that Kierkegaard is one of the select group of philosophers that Wittgenstein read and appreciated), and say that Wittgenstein was engaging in his own version of "indirect" communication: an attempt to communicate something to the reader by saying things which have a certain kind of effect, rather than just telling things to the reader.

Wittgenstein's heavy reliance on questions in the *Investigations* is justified by his goal: helping his readers free themselves from their own linguistic-conceptual confusion. Unlike the Socratic Method, which is a *pedagogical tactic* designed to elicit knowledge from its target, Wittgenstein's rhetoric is a *therapeutic strategy* for bringing about a different sort of cognitive change in his readers. When Socrates asks questions, they are directed at his interlocutor; the questions in the *Investigations* are directed at Wittgenstein himself – but it is not always Wittgenstein who is asking them, and that makes all the difference. The ambiguity of not knowing whose voice is asking a question may be unsettling to the reader, but it is a large part of what makes them effective. A question without a speaker seems to hang in midair, without the mooring provided by an agent with an agenda or by the context of a standpoint. When it is unclear who is asking it, a question has to be taken on its own terms rather than as a move in a larger scheme of things. A question without an identifiable speaker is more likely to be taken as the reader's own question, since it is less likely to be read as merely rhetorical, as part of the defense of some position, or as an attack on some other position. When the question is part of an inconclusive, multi-party argument, all of the above points are exacerbated!

Because the *Investigations* is more concerned with unsettling accepted philosophical positions than establishing one of its own, it snipes at them from a number of different standpoints rather than arguing from or for a single standpoint. Consequently, it would be a mistake to take a single passage out of the larger context and read it as a self-contained argument to serve as a case study as we did above for the *Tractatus*. Nevertheless, the *Investigations'* questions and critiques can have a cumulative effect comparable to a successful argument, viz., rationally persuading the reader to reconsider her standpoint. Instead of trying to isolate a discrete argument, we will look at how Wittgenstein's use of the "Slab!" language example evolves across several texts in order to trace the development of his philosophical methodology.

Wittgenstein opens both the *Brown Book* and the *Investigations* by considering a passage on language from Augustine in which learning a language is described as learning names for things. He then introduces the simple "slab language" as one for which Augustine's description initially appears to be correct (but appearances can be deceiving!). There are several conclusions that can be drawn from his discussion, including a complete rejection of the Tractarian argument we just analyzed that there must be ultimate simples and that there is one and only one complete analysis of a proposition (*Tractatus* 2.02, 3.25). Wittgenstein no longer thinks that it is a matter to be decided by a logical grammar whether "Brick!" is to be translated by one word or four. There is no "fact of the matter" when it comes to that kind of analysis. This is a complete reversal of the earlier position, but the larger point we are trying to make concerns the point, not the content, of the argument, and that becomes visible on inspection of its form (admittedly a painstaking and perhaps overly pedantic exercise, but justified, we believe, by the interpretive insights it yields).

The presentation of the slab language in the *Brown Book* is followed by a page-long parenthetical note in the form of an internal dialogue beginning with these words:

Note. Objection: The word "brick" in language 1) has not the meaning which it has in *our* language.—This is true if it means that in our language there are uses of the word "brick" different from our usages of this word in language 1). But don't we sometimes use the word "brick!" in

just this way? Or should we say that when we use it, it is an elliptical sentence, a shorthand for “Bring me a brick”?

Wittgenstein introduces the question of the meaning of the expression “Brick!” as it occurs in the simplified language and as it occurs in our own language, but it is not Wittgenstein’s voice that raises the question of meaning. The last two questions in this excerpt are just the beginning of a run of 8 consecutive questions, peppering the voice articulating the Augustinian model from many different directions. There may be different voices asking questions, but there is a single voice that is expected to answer them. Augustine, or Wittgenstein as his stand-in, is being *interrogated*.

The *Investigations* also begins with Augustine’s account of language as essentially a system of names and language-acquisition as beginning with (if not consisting entirely of) learning names. Two simple languages and situations are then considered, the builders’ slab language from the *Brown Book* and a shopper’s language, elements from which are later merged. The builders’ example is again introduced right away, in §2, and it is the focus of sections 6-10, and particularly 19-20, where the interrogation in the *Brown Book* undergoes a metamorphosis into a critical discussion.

The stage is set for this transformation in the very first section when Wittgenstein bids us think of the way a shopkeeper uses language in order to fill a customer’s shopping list. A labeled drawer locates the kind of items that are on the list, a color-chart provides the information as which instances of that kind are satisfactory, and reciting the memorized sequence of counting numbers tells the shopkeeper when enough of the indicated items have been selected. This story is immediately followed by a dialogue:

–It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words.–“But how does he know where and how he is to look up the word ‘red’ and what he is to do with the word ‘five’?”–Well, I assume that he acts as I have described. Explanations have to come to an end somewhere.–But what is the meaning of the word “five”?”–No such thing was in question here, only how the word “five” is used. (§1)

Notice that in the *Investigations* passage, quotation marks are used to indicate the new voice when it initially appears (“*But how do you know...?*”),

but there are no quotation marks for the second question (*But what is the meaning of the word "five"?*), so even though the question sounds like it should be coming from the same voice's standpoint there is some uncertainty about it. It could well be the same interlocutor but it could also be a new speaker, or Wittgenstein himself raising the question, or a question that a reader might – or perhaps even should – ask. There is something dissonant about the second question. It does not address the shopkeeper's behavior at all, turning instead to meanings and the words themselves. It is, in a word, *philosophical*, and that makes it stand apart as much as if it were written in a different color or font. But the question also stands out because its ownership is ambiguous. It could even be the reader's question – but only because the reader has not yet been freed from asking questions like that!

In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein often uses quotation marks for things said by imaginary or arbitrary people who present ideas which are then critiqued or used as springboards for internal dialogue. For example "It is as if someone were to say: 'A game consists in moving objects...'" (§3) or "Imagine someone's saying: 'All tools serve to modify something...'" (§14). But his internal dialogue is often as not carried out without those quotation marks, and there are often sentences which seem to belong to a different voice, or where the voicing is unclear. This passage from *Investigations* §6 is typical:

This ostensive teaching of words can be said to establish an association between the word and the thing. But what does this mean? Well, it may mean various things; but one very likely thinks first of all that a picture of the object comes before the child's mind when it hears the word. But now, if this does happen—is it the purpose of the word? –Yes, it *may* be the purpose.—I can imagine such a use of words (or series of sounds). (Uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination.

In this passage, the words "Yes, it *may* be the purpose" can be read as coming from a different voice but it does not have to be read that way, nor does any other passage in the text. Some passages stretch the limits of single voice narration more than others. Consider this passage:

–And now at some point he continues the series independently–or he does not.–But why do you say that? *so* much is obvious!–Of course; I only wished to say: the effect of any further *explanation* depends on his *reaction*. (§145)

We can imagine Wittgenstein putting on a funny hat in order to speak to himself in this way, or we can imagine that there are several voices, or we can accept the voicing as irreducibly ambiguous.

The ambiguity seems deliberate because there are also passages in the *Investigations* where Wittgenstein uses quotation marks carefully and clearly to mark a second voice, as in §186 and subsequent passages: in that passage, the interlocutor says “What you are saying then, comes to this: a new insight–intuition–is needed at every step...” There are parts of the text where the voicing is unequivocal, as well as places where things are blurred. In the *Blue Book* and *Brown Book*, by contrast, there does not appear to be any of this blurring. In the internal dialogues in the earlier texts, it is never that unclear who is speaking. It is either Wittgenstein or a challenger, and if it is a challenger, the challenge is in quotation marks. Wittgenstein also challenges himself in his own voice, but when he does so he explicitly introduces the challenge with a phrase like “Now one may be tempted to say...” (*Blue Book* 22) or even with both explicit framing in addition to quotation marks, e.g., “you may be inclined to say, “But why...”” (*Brown Book* 17).

We have mentioned one reason why Wittgenstein blurs the speakers’ identities in *Investigations* – because it is easier for the reader to take ownership of ambiguously voiced questions. This would be useful in many contexts, but it is especially important in the context of Wittgenstein’s project and absolutely crucial for Wittgenstein’s target audience: philosophers.

Philosophers who read the *Investigations* can hardly resist trying to discern Wittgenstein’s own position on what they take to be the key issues, like the nature of linguistic meaning, puzzles about reference, the metaphysical status of propositions, what truth is, and so on. Those sections of the text with discussions bearing on these issues will prompt philosophical readers to extract a theory that can then be attributed to Wittgenstein. Theorists will then seek – and, therefore, find – arguments in support of their favored interpretations. This is an effective interpretive approach for many texts.

To the extent that a text is open to it and the resulting interpretation is fruitful for the reader, all is well. However, it is a particularly dangerous trap for reading this text by this author. That sort of overly theoretical – over-intellectualized – reading may succeed putting Wittgenstein into more or less appropriate theoretical pigeonholes, but is almost guaranteed to miss the forest for the trees, i.e., the point for the content.

Wittgenstein repeatedly claims in his post-Tractarian texts that there need be no constants of any sort on the use of a word or sentence. He warns us in the *Blue Book* about being misled by our “craving for generality”, and in *Investigations* 133 he says that “The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.–The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question.” Wittgenstein’s goal in the *Investigations* is to help his readers stop philosophizing when they want to by helping them to see that there does not need to be one single, true, and all-encompassing system of categories. To achieve this objective, he needs to get his readers to engage with his questions and arguments in a way that will let words affect how they think, *as causes* rather than as the *premises* behind Wittgenstein’s own positions. Of course, there is no single essence to the many different language games that philosophers play, so perhaps it would be better to say that in showing us the way out of our particular fly bottle, he is primarily freeing us from philosophizing in an argumentative key.

The blurring of identities in the *Investigations* makes it difficult to read the text in a purely intellectual way. It is one way that Wittgenstein tries to get us to pay attention to how he uses his words rather than exclusively at what they say. We are put in the position of having to decide for ourselves what to think – and *how* to think – about the issue at hand, rather than simply figuring out Wittgenstein’s take.

Wittgenstein’s philosophy uses words not for argumentation, but as part of a strategy to reject argumentation as an adequate mode of engagement with the issues he wants us to confront. Chief among those issues is how language leads us – *misleads us* – into thinking that things are more precise than they really are, simpler than they really are, and less ambiguous than they really are.

5. Conclusion

Despite the revolutionary changes that distinguish Wittgenstein's early philosophy from his later philosophy, and for all the evolutionary changes from the *Tractatus* through the transitional works to the *Investigations* in his style of argument (and also despite his own reputation for being personally argumentative), there is one constant in Wittgenstein's metaphilosophy: argumentation is *not* an essential part of philosophy. Depending on the context, argumentation may even be antithetical to the goals of philosophy. Even so, argumentation can be a valuable tool for philosophers because its real value is sometimes found in its point rather than its content, its consequences rather than its conclusions. This is especially true of philosophical argumentation precisely because philosophy is not a body of knowledge. It is not a *discipline*.

Arguments can be conceptualized in many ways, but most of the prominent models for argumentation do not fit into the Wittgensteinian understanding of philosophy. Arguments can be understood as proofs, demonstrations of knowledge, but there is no philosophical knowledge, so that kind of argumentation has no place in philosophy. Alternatively, arguments can be seen as attempts at rational persuasion, but even if there were something in philosophy to persuade others of, there would be no reason for doing so, so once again argumentation seems out of place in philosophy. And if we prefer to think of argumentation as a procedure for dispute resolution, the situation is the same: philosophical differences are not *genuine* differences, so consensus and agreement are beside the point. What we need to eliminate is confusion, not difference of opinions or beliefs – and for that philosophical goal, argumentation is still an inappropriate tool.

In sum, there is nothing in the standard logical, rhetorical, and dialectical conceptions of argumentation to recommend it to a Wittgensteinian philosopher.

What emerges is an altogether different appreciation for what arguments can do. In his *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Wittgenstein connects the sense of a proposition in mathematics with its proof. Proofs establish the connections which serve to define the concepts involved. Otherwise, there would be no point in offering different proofs for established theorems. As a corollary, any formula that we end up proving always has a

different sense than the typographically identical formula that we set out to prove! Regardless of how well this characterization fits proofs and propositions in mathematics, it certainly captures an important feature of arguments and their conclusions very well. For example, we learn a lot about a person's social and political positions when we hear her say that she is against the death penalty, but we learn all that and a good deal more when we hear what her arguments are for that stance. And that is exactly what has happened here: the author of the *Tractatus* and the author of the *Investigations* offer the same conclusion – argumentation *per se* is not the right tool for philosophers – but they reach that conclusion by different arguments, which mean that it is not exactly the same conclusion after all.

Works Cited

- Cohen, D. "The Word as Will and Idea." *Philosophical Studies* Vol. XXXII (1990): 126-140.
- Hacker, P.M.S. *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Mind*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.
- Kenny, A. "Philosophy States Only What everyone Admits." In A. Kenny, *Wittgenstein at Work: Method in the Philosophical Investigations* (pp. 173-182). London: Routledge, (2004).
- Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961.
- Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translate by G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953.
- Wittgenstein, L. *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe; G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees, and G.E.M. Ancombe (Eds.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956.
- Wittgenstein, L. *The Blue and Brown Books*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958.