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"A misleading parallel": Wittgenstein on Conceptual Confusion in Psychology and the Semantics of Psychological Concepts

Stefan Majetschak

After 1945, when the *Philosophical Investigations* were largely finished, Wittgenstein spent his final years undertaking an intensive study of the grammar of our psychological concepts and the philosophical misinterpretations we often assign to them.

In the article at hand I do not claim to fathom the full range of Wittgenstein's thoughts on the philosophy of psychology even in the most general way. Rather it is my intention to shed some light on a diagnosis which he made for the psychology of his time. In Section 2 of this paper I would like to provide a brief sketch of what Wittgenstein considered to be the conceptual confusion prevalent in psychology and to suggest why he did not expect the methods of an experimental (natural) science to be successful in solving the problems that concern us in psychology. In Section 3 I'll attempt to analyze how psychological concepts, according to Wittgenstein, might be construed in order to avoid any type of conceptual confusion.

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"A misleading parallel": Wittgenstein on Conceptual Confusion in Psychology and the Semantics of Psychological Concepts

Stefan Majetschak

1. Wittgenstein's Latest Writings: Diversity of Topics, the Aim of this Paper

After the *Philosophical Investigations*, except for details, were largely finished in 1945, Wittgenstein, in his final years, undertook an intensive study of the grammar of our psychological concepts and the philosophical misinterpretations we often assign to them. In the late autumn of 1947 and the early autumn of 1948 he created the extensive typescripts 229 and 232, published as volumes I and II of his *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*. Between October 1948 and March 1949, he wrote the manuscripts 137 and 138, which were published as the *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology I*. "In the spring of 1949" he also "made a handwritten clean copy of a selection of all his remarks written between 1946 and 1949 concerning topics in the philosophy of psychology (MS 144), and then prepared a typescript on the basis of this new manuscript".[1] Although this typescript has unfortunately been lost, it was the textual basis for the formerly so-called Part II of the *Philosophical Investigations*.[2] From 1949 to shortly before his death in 1951, in addition to his work on those manuscripts that have been published as *On Certainty*, he continued to work on problems of the philosophy of psychology. These notes (manuscripts 169, 170, 171, 173, 176) have been preserved for us in the *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology II*.

Anyone looking through these extensive collections of philosophical remarks are likely to find it difficult to understand which questions Wittgenstein is addressing with individual remarks or groups of remarks, and where the philosophical problems lay for which he is trying to find a solution, whether therapeutic or in another appropriate way. There is no doubt that many trains of thought in these collections sometimes run parallel to each other, but they also occasionally cross over and merge. The remarks in these collections touch on many subjects, but remarks on questions of "aspect seeing" as well as on the logic of the use of psychological concepts such as "believing", "understanding", "knowing", and "intending" are the most dominant, numerically speaking.

In the following I do not claim to fathom the full range of Wittgenstein's thoughts on the philosophy of psychology, even in the most general way. Rather, it is my intention in this paper to shed some light on a diagnosis which Wittgenstein makes in a well-known remark about the psychology of his time. It comes at the end of what used to be called Part II of the *Philosophical Investigations* and expresses his basic dissatisfaction with the state of the current field of psychology. In "The confusion and barrenness of psychology"/"Die Verwirrung und Öde der Psychologie", Wittgenstein wrote,

> is not to be explained by its being a "young science"; its state is not comparable with that of physics, for instance, in its beginnings. . . For in psychology, there are experimental methods and conceptual confusion.. . .
> The existence of the experimental method makes us think that we have the means of getting rid of the problems which trouble us; but problem and method skew-whiff pass one another by.

[1] Georg Henrik von Wright and Heikki Nyman in the Editor's Preface on Wittgenstein ([1948-49]/1990) (hereinafter cited as LW I).

[2] From a current philological point of view it is certainly questionable whether Wittgenstein ever wanted to include MS 144 or the lost typescript based on it in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Compare Hacker and Schulte (2009, xxi).

> ist nicht damit zu erklären, daß sie eine "junge Wissenschaft" sei; ihr Zustand ist mit dem der Physik z. B. in ihrer Frühzeit nicht zu vergleichen. . . Es bestehen nämlich, in der Psychologie, experimentelle Methoden und Begriffsverwirrung. . .
> Das Bestehen der experimentellen Methode lässt uns glauben, wir hätten das Mittel, die Probleme, die uns beunruhigen, loszuwerden; obgleich Problem und Methode windschief aneinander vorbei laufen (PPF §371).[3]

In this passage, Wittgenstein calls the scientific psychology of his period "confused" and "barren", and not just because it was still a recent discipline. With respect to being a "recent" discipline, psychology was established only in the 19th century as an independent discipline methodologically aligned with the natural sciences. The first Institute of Experimental Psychology (*Institut für experimentelle Psychologie*) was founded in 1879 by Wilhelm Wundt and Gustav Theodor Fechner at the University of Leipzig. But it was not simply the fact that the discipline of psychology was only 70 years old that, in Wittgenstein's view, explains the lamentable state of the discipline. Rather, he regarded this state as due to the fact that in psychology experimental methods *and* conceptual confusion prevailed. This makes it, in Wittgenstein's opinion, impossible to remove the problems that concern us in psychology by means of the experimental method. Indeed, the method makes us believe that it might be appropriate to resolve psychological problems, but this is an illusion since the problems and the method stand "skewed"—or "skew-whiff"[4]—to one another: this seems to mean that the method is, in principle, unsuitable to approach the problems with which psychology is confronted.

In Section 2 of what follows, I will provide a brief sketch of what Wittgenstein considered to be the conceptual confusion prevalent in psychology, and to suggest why he did not expect the methods of an experimental (natural) science to be successful in solving the problems that concern us in psychology. In the process, we will see that Wittgenstein rejects a particular type and manner of speaking about mental phenomena but does not dispute the phenomena's existence and ontological self-reliance. However, in his late remarks—if I see this correctly—he at no point says what a suitable way to approach mental phenomena might look like. If this is the case, one can only speculate about his reasons for not doing so, granting that he does *not* intend to deny the existence and the ontological self-reliance of mental phenomena. But I do not wish to speculate about such reasons within the framework of this paper. Rather, in the third part of this paper I will attempt to explain how "psychological concepts", which seem to refer to mental phenomena, can be regarded in such a way that the conceptual confusion Wittgenstein targets with his critique does not arise. Accordingly, I will show that they refer, in Wittgenstein's view, not primarily to mental entities but rather to patterns and forms of our lives. Whether my arguments highlight such motifs of Wittgenstein's remarks on the philosophy of psychology that he himself would regard as central to his thoughts, I cannot say.

2. Conceptual Confusion in Psychology

Let us begin with the question of the source of the conceptual confusion that, according to Wittgenstein, confronts us in psychology—but by no means only there. Wittgenstein locates this source in our mistaken interpretation of the grammar of our psychological concepts, which we are inclined to express in philosophical arguments. Wittgenstein's thoughts about the principles, according to which we allow ourselves to be misled, evolved long before his late remarks on psychology. Indeed, one of his most important observations was made in the early 1930s, when he pointed out that we constantly allow ourselves to be led

[3] The formerly so-called part II of the *Investigations* is nowdays published as *Philosophie der Psychologie—Ein Fragment / Philosophy of Psychology—A Fragment* in Wittgenstein ([1953]/2009). Herein cited as PPF.

[4] As Wittgenstein's translators translate the German word "windschief" with a British colloquialism.

in philosophy by "misleading analogies" (Wittgenstein in the so-called *Big Typescript* ([1933]/2005, 408); hereinafter cited as BT), which force their way into our thinking as a result of superficial but confusing similarities within the grammatical structures of our language. As he already claimed in manuscript 110[5] from 1930/31, such misleading and, as he also says, "false" analogies represent the real "morbus philosophicus" (Ms 110: 86–87)—the "philosophical disease" as such—from which both our everyday and philosophical thinking so often suffers. According to Wittgenstein's diagnosis, these misleading analogies originate from the fact that "our grammar is lacking in *surveyability*" (BT 417),[6] indeed in such a way that our thinking is misled into interpreting physical and mental phenomena as similarly structured phenomena merely because of superficial similarities in the way we talk about both. Thereby we are misguided to treat both groups of phenomena as the same when, in and of themselves, they can hardly be compared as phenomena of the same ontological type.

Propositions such as "I believe in freedom of will" and "I beat the stone" do indeed look very similar with respect to their grammatical surface form. In this way the impression is easily created that a sentence such as "I believe in freedom of will" speaks about an inner process located within the mind in the same way as the sentence "I beat the stone" speaks of a process located in the external reality of space and time. If we get this impression, we evidently interpret the grammar of the word "believe" by analogy with the grammar of the verb "to beat".

In philosophy, not least in the philosophy of psychology, Wittgenstein is convinced that such false analogies lead to considerable conceptual confusion. One thinks, simply because in our examples "the verb 'believe' is conjugated like the verb 'beat' " (Wittgenstein [1948]/1988, §635; hereinafter cited as RPP II), that the type of reference in both cases must also be similar. One is then tempted to say that the expression "I believe something" refers to an inner process in the same way as "I beat something" refers to a process in space and time. But is our belief in freedom of will really something like an "inner process"? When does it start? And when does it end? And can it, for example, be located in space and time? Or is a "belief" something like a *permanent* "inner state" within the mind? Questions such as these usually do not even occur to us. According to Wittgenstein, we simply lack an overview of the semantic differences in the use of verbs such as "believe" and "beat", which we do not even notice because of the surface grammatical similarities of their use. And so we are not even aware that, in most instances, when we use a psychological concept such as "belief" we are *not* at all referring to "processes" or "states" within our mind. For it is merely a "*grammatical* fiction" (Wittgenstein [1953]/2009, §307; hereinafter cited as PI).

If we now—deceived by this grammatical fiction—move on to the field of psychology, we are all too easily seduced by this grammatical fiction into seeing a "misleading parallel" (PI §571) between psychology and physics, which Wittgenstein already stigmatized in *Philosophical Investigations*. For one thinks then, "psychology treats of processes in the mental sphere, as does physics in the physical" (PI §571) and one believes—*a priori*, before any empirical investigation of the phenomena—that one is able to explore "processes" and "states" in the mental sphere by using experimental methods just as one can in physics. One makes this possibility a precondition of scientific psychology, without even thinking about whether mental phenomena are ontologically of the "process-state" type we are acquainted with from physics, or if they are *merely treated as such* by the forms of our language.

It is scarcely doubted in psychology that mental phenomena exist ontologically as they are treated by our language, as be-

[5] I follow von Wright's cataloguing of the manuscripts (Ms) and typescripts (Ts) in Wittgenstein's Nachlass as published in von Wright (1982). Major parts of the Nachlass are accessible at www.wittgensteinsource.org.

[6] For more detailed deliberations on this point see Majetschak (2016).

comes evident by terms such as "thought acts", "states of consciousness", "inner processes" and so on. Wittgenstein, however, allows us to understand how *through* this way of talking about the phenomena "the philosophical problem[s] about mental processes and states. . . arise" (PI §308). For they arise primarily *through* our expressions that *objectify* the phenomena of the mental. As Wittgenstein states, the "first step is the one that altogether escapes notice [when w]e talk of processes and states", because our language treats the phenomena like this "and leave[s] their nature undecided. Sometime perhaps we'll know more about them—we think. But that's just what commits us to a particular way of looking at the matter" (PI §308). Thus, the "decisive moment in the conjuring trick has been made, and it was the very one that seemed to us quite innocent" (PI §308).

We no longer question whether mental phenomena are rightly to be considered as "processes" or "states" based on the model of processes and states in the physical world, *even though* we are scarcely able to say anything about the nature of these nebulous entities. But indeed—and this completely disconcerts us philosophically—we rack our brains about the incomprehensible nature of these supposed "inner processes" and "states". However, when we take an untrammelled look at these phenomena, what is it about we call "seeing", "thinking", or "intending" that is even remotely comparable with the properties and structures of an external process or state known to us from the physical world? If one—as Wittgenstein does in the *Philosophical Investigations* and the late *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*—considers the factual use of psychological terms in the language games of our everyday language in concrete examples, one is forced to admit: actually, nothing. And this is an insight that Wittgenstein summarizes—unusual for him in his later work—in something that must be designated as a "philosophical thesis":

> Seeing, hearing, thinking, feeling, willing, are not the subject matter of psychology in the same sense as that in which the movements of bodies, the phenomena of electricity, and so forth are the subject matter of physics.
>
> Sehen, Hören, Denken, Fühlen, Wollen sind nicht im gleichen Sinne die Gegenstände der Psychologie, wie die Bewegungen der Körper, die elektrischen Erscheinungen, etc., Gegenstände der Physik (PI §571).

Seeing, hearing, thinking etc. "is, grammatically, a state" (PI §572) or a process. It is "*what* gets treated grammatically" (PI §573) by the forms of our language. The supposed parallel between the outer and the inner does not, in fact, exist in reality.

This is also the reason why in psychology the mental phenomena cannot be studied using experimental methods in the same way as the phenomena of physics. In Wittgenstein's opinion, this already becomes evident in the fact "that the physicist sees, hears, thinks about and informs us of these phenomena, and the psychologist observes the *utterances* (the behaviour) of the subject" (PI §571). Therefore, "problem and method" in psychology "pass one another by" in a "skew-whiff" way. In psychology, the phenomena cannot be grasped using experimental methods in the same direct unmediated way as the phenomena of physics, but they are always given to us *only* in the guise of a specific form of expression. The question, however, of what they positively are in an ontological sense, and how they can be studied suitably, remains unanswered in Wittgenstein's remarks. It would appear that this question, for reasons that are obscure—at least to me—is of no interest to him.

In his late manuscripts and typescripts on the philosophy of psychology, by constantly using new examples, Wittgenstein works out how we, in the thrall of the false and misleading analogy described, are mistakenly tempted to interpret mental phenomena as having an ontological structure analogous to physical phenomena. Our urge to see things in this way was something that Wittgenstein, in these volumes, therefore tried to combat using precise studies and descriptions of language games that we play with psychological terms such as believing, understanding, knowing, intending, and others. On two occasions (RPP II §§ 63 and 148) he even proposes plans for a treatment and classifica-

tion of psychological terms that are meant to clarify how they are used in our language games and demonstrate that when we say things such as "Now I understand the joke" or "I meant to say. . . ", we are not referring to anything like a sort of process or state. This would get rid of our tendency to interpret what these psychological terms refer to as a "still uncomprehended process in the still unexplored medium" (PI §308) of the mind. For these phenomena appear this way only when we force them into the ontological straitjacket of our forms for representing physical facts, but at the same feel that they do not really fit.

In many passages of his *Philosophical Investigations* (compare PI §154 etc.), as well as in his late remarks on the philosophy of psychology, Wittgenstein denies that it is reasonable to understand mental phenomena as "processes" or "'states", and as a "still uncomprehended process in the still unexplored medium" of the mind. As he himself notices, this might easily look to a reader that he wants to deny the existence and ontological self-reliance of mental phenomena as such, "[a]nd naturally we don't want to deny them" (PI §308).

He does not intend to deny the mental as such or its ontological self-reliance, and this becomes clear from his position on a prominent theory widespread among natural scientists and in many branches of "philosophy of mind": the so-called "psycho-physical parallelism", which endeavours to base all facts in the mental sphere on physical events in the brain correlated with them. According to Wittgenstein, "[t]he prejudice in favour of psycho-physical parallelism" arises because those scientists and philosophers are of the opinion that otherwise they would be "making an admission of the existence of a soul *alongside* the body, a ghostly mental nature" (Wittgenstein [1947]/1980, §906; hereinafter cited as RPP I), something they wish to avoid in theory. To Wittgenstein, however, "[n]o supposition seems. . . more natural than that there is no process in the brain correlated with associating and thinking" (RPP I, §903). Therefore, he considers it "perfectly possible that certain psychological phenomena *cannot* be investigated physiologically, because physiologically nothing corresponds to them" (RPP I, §904). "Indeed, I confess", he wrote in his latest writings,

> nothing seems more possible to me than that people some day will come to the definite opinion that there is no copy in either the physiological or the nervous systems which corresponds to a particular thought, or a particular idea, or memory.
>
> nichts scheint mir möglicher, als daß die Menschen einmal zur bestimmten Ansicht kommen werden, dem einzelnen Gedanken, der einzelnen Vorstellung, Erinnerung, entspreche keinerlei Abbild im Physiologischen, im Nervensystem (LW I, §504).

Remarks like this show that he was not interested in denying the mental as such, or its ontological self-reliance, but much more in rejecting the following two philosophical ideas: *first*, that the grammar of psychological concepts we use to refer to mental phenomena is analogous to those referring to the physical world; and *second*, that one has a suitable understanding of our psychological concepts, if one construes psychological concept words as *names* for inner processes or states. "What we deny", he therefore wrote, "is that the picture of an inner process gives us the correct idea of the use of psychological concepts" (PI §305).

3. The Objects of Reference: Forms and Patterns of Life

Although, in my opinion, Wittgenstein successfully shows that mental phenomena are only *treated* as "processes" and "states" analogous to the "states" and "processes" of physics by the means of our language, the ontology of mental phenomena in his considerations remains obscure. Wittgenstein was aware, however, that we nevertheless ascribe mental "processes" and "states" to persons within many language games of our everyday life. What rules govern these ascriptions? According to which criteria do we ascribe them to persons? If one were to construe

psychological concepts as *names* for specific inner processes or states, the speaker of a language would be able to know what they meant, only by means of a private reference to those mental phenomena within his or her own self. As, of course, Wittgenstein's so-called "private language argument" shows, whenever this person uses a psychological concept, he or she might not know whether it always refers to the same thing or to something different each time. For that person in private self-reference simply lacks a criterion in order to make this decision. Accordingly, one has to explain the meaning of psychological concepts, the criteria that governs their respective uses in any attribution to ourselves or to others in some way other than through the erroneous idea that they are names for specific mental entities.

Wittgenstein suggests the direction such an explanation has to take with the laconic remark 580 of the *Philosophical Investigations:* "An 'inner process' stands in need of outward criteria" (PI §580). This is immediately obvious in the case of attributions from a third person perspective. For example, if we speak of the "sadness", "hope", or "belief" of a person as his or her "inner state" or "inner process", we do so, not because we know something of the person's "inner self", but because he or she exhibits linguistic and non-linguistic characteristics as criteria to motivate our use of the psychological concepts. The person behaves in a certain way, makes certain statements etc., and such linguistic and non-linguistic behaviours serve as criteria to ascribe to the person certain mental states or processes, i.e., to say that someone is "hopeful" or "sad", that he "believes" in freedom of will or things of that sort. If we attribute similar things to ourselves in the first-person perspective and claim to be in a specific mental state, we are also using words which uses are determined by external non-private criteria. Of course, in the first-person perspective, we do not identify what mental state we happen to find ourselves in by means of criteria, but we are able to state about ourselves only that for which we have the words of a non-private language at our disposal.

Does this mean that, for example, only those who can speak can "hope", "think" or "believe" something? (compare LW I, §365)[7] Wittgenstein answered his question on his own: "Only those who have mastered the application of a language" (LW I, §365)[8] For the language that we have learned provides us with the conceptual patterns necessary for our life, according to which we are able to describe the mental conditions of others as well as of ourselves.[9] Our psychological concepts are embedded in our life, and each one of them, according to Wittgenstein, "refers to a phenomenon of human life" (PI §583). The "bustle of life" is the "background. . . And our concept points to something within *this* bustle" (RPP II, §625). In place of the "background" of a psychological concept, Wittgenstein also speaks of the "surroundings" (PI §583 f.) or the "connexions" (RPP II, §150) in which its use is "embedded" (RPP II, §16; §150 etc.) and emphasizes that such embedding in life is what gives a concept its meaning. As he himself stressed:

> I have used the term 'embedded', have said that hope, belief, etc. were embedded in human life, in all of the situations and reactions which constitute human life. The crocodile doesn't hope, man does. Or: one can't say of a crocodile that it hopes, but of man one can.

[7] Compare also the almost identical, but slightly modified remark PPF §1.

[8] In the parallel passage of PPF §1 the phrase "use of a language" ("Verwendung einer Sprache") is used in place of "application of a language".

[9] Eike von Savigny decribed this as a fundamental idea of the *Philosophical Investigations* in the following formulation: "The fact that someone presents, expects, wants, feels, thinks of or intends something does not concern him alone. This fact rather consists in the patterns of his individual behaviour in a certain way being embedded in patterns of social behaviour in the community of which he is member." (Die Tatsache, daß jemand etwas vorstellt, etwas erwartet, etwas wünscht, etwas fühlt, an etwas denkt oder etwas beabsichtigt usw. betrifft ihn nicht isoliert. Diese Tatsache besteht vielmehr darin, daß die Muster seines individuellen Verhaltens in bestimmter Weise in Muster des sozialen Verhaltens in der Gemeinschaft, zu der er gerechnet wird, eingebettet sind.) (von Savigny 1988, vol. 1,7).

> Ich habe. . . den Ausdruck ‚eingebettet' gebraucht, gesagt, die Hoffnung, der Glaube, etc. sei im menschlichen Leben, in allen Situationen und Reaktionen, die das menschliche Leben ausmachen, eingebettet. Das Krokodil hofft nicht, der Mensch hofft. Oder: Vom Krokodil kann man nicht sagen, es hofft; aber vom Menschen (RPP II, §16).

It was so important to Wittgenstein to explicitly emphasize this embedding of psychological concepts in life because these concepts primarily refer to significant patterns in our life. This is something he goes on to elaborate, particularly in his post-1945 observations. Each of these embedded psychological concepts refer to "a pattern which recurs, with different variations, in the tapestry of life" (PPF § 2). As Wittgenstein puts it using terminological variations: each of them refers to a "pattern of life" ("Lebensmuster") (RPP II, §652), "a specific stencil of life" ("Lebensschablone") (LW I, §206)[10] or—as he called it earlier—a specific "form of life" ("Lebensform") (PPF § 1).[11]

As Wittgenstein's examples suggest, he seems to hold the view that not only our psychological concepts but also those concepts with which we characterize facts of our social and cultural world refer to patterns of life. Such a "pattern of life"—or "a form of life"—might be defined as a recurring and recognizable order of action, situation, and linguistic utterance features which the speakers of a language apprehend as structuring regularities within their life and thus designate by using a word. For when we position ourselves in our social world, we assemble, as Wittgenstein says, "diverse elements into a 'Gestalt' (pattern), for example, into one of deceit" (RPP II, §651), which we encounter repeatedly in the form of a conjunction of typical features. For what people call "deceit" is not an ontologically self-reliant fact, but rather—like every so-called social "fact"—it is a human construct. For Wittgenstein, "grief"—a psychological concept—also "describes" a recurring "pattern. . . of our life" (PPF §2). Another relatively complicated pattern is "hope", which is embedded in human life in the same way. Just as we do not ascribe "grief" to someone merely on the basis of his inner condition, but also because he exhibits particular behaviour and makes certain statements etc., so we also say that someone "is hopeful" when his linguistic and non-linguistic action displays that specific pattern that motivates us to speak of "hope". These complex patterns, which also underlie concepts such as "thinking" or "understanding", can be considered in part to be very complex interlocking systems of action, situation and language characteristics that can be "recognized" (RPP II, §624) against the background, but normally not exactly described, and certainly not defined.

> If a pattern of life is the basis for the use of a word then the word must contain some amount of indefiniteness. The pattern of life, after all, is not one of exact regularity.
>
> Wenn ein Lebensmuster die Grundlage für eine Wortverwendung ist, so muß in ihr eine Unbestimmtheit liegen. Das Lebensmuster ist ja nicht genaue Regelmäßigkeit. (LW I, §211)

It is rather, to remain with the metaphors used by Wittgenstein, "in the tapestry"[12] of life "interwoven with many others" (RPP II, §673), so that it is not always clear, especially in borderline cases, whether something is to be designated as "this" or "that". Furthermore, a pattern of life in the tapestry is "not always complete" but

[10] The English translation of Luckhardt renders "Lebensschablone" correctly as "pattern of life", but the latter is unable to express the terminological distinction between "Lebensschablone" und "Lebensmuster" made by Wittgenstein.

[11] The concept of "Lebensform" (Form of Life) belongs to the most frequently misunderstood concepts in Wittgenstein's late philosophy. It is understood mostly in the sense of a cultural system that embeds the use of our words. It can, however, be shown in those passsages where Wittgenstein in his Nachlass gives examples of life-forms that a "form of life" is nothing other than a "pattern of life". Compare Majetschak (2010).

[12] Luckardt and Aue translate "Teppich" as "weave". In order to preserve terminological uniformity in this context, however, I use the word "tapestry" employed by Hacker and Schulte in the *Philosophical Investigations*.

> varied in a multiplicity of ways. But we, in our conceptual world, keep on seeing the same, recurring with variations. That is how our concepts construe it. For concepts are not for one-time use.
>
> vielfach variiert. Aber wir, in unserer Begriffswelt, sehen immer wieder das Gleiche mit Variationen wiederkehren. So fassen's unsere Begriffe auf. Die Begriffe sind ja nicht für den einmaligen Gebrauch (RPP II, §672).

Rather they establish a constant practice of language and non-language action.

"We could say", as Wittgenstein mentioned in a different context, that "people's concepts show what matters to them and what doesn't" (Wittgenstein [1950]/1977, §293; hereinafter cited as ROC). Concepts show what people perceived and singled out as recurring patterns in *their* lives, "[b]ut it's not as if this *explained* the particular concepts they have" (ROC III, §293). Wittgenstein was not concerned with explaining conceptual patterns within a particular culture, but rather "to rule out the view that we have the right concepts and other people the wrong ones" (ROC III, §293). This means: He ultimately wants to say that "an education quite different from ours might also be the foundation for quite different concepts" (ROC §707). *Which* patterns are fixed by words of a certain language *always* depends on culture-related points of view. In general, nothing can be said about this. This becomes evident when considering further concepts that refer to patterns of life. "Must people", for instance, "be acquainted with the concept of modesty or of swaggering"—according to *our* concepts—"wherever there are modest and swaggering men?" (Wittgenstein [1929-48]/1967, §378; hereinafter cited as Z). Hardly, for which criteria would allow one to decide which patterns of life each language community has to consider important? Such criteria do not exist. Thus, it can be stated merely that "[w]here e.g. a certain type is only seldom to be found, no concept of this type will be formed. People do not feel *this* as a unity, as a particular physiognomy" (Z §376). They may perhaps have no interest in *our* distinction between modesty and swaggering. Perhaps "nothing hangs on this difference. For us, too, many differences are unimportant, which we might find important" (Z §378).

"Would it be correct", Wittgenstein therefore asked, "to say our concepts reflect our life?" (ROC III §302) And he answered this question himself: "They stand in the middle of it" (ROC III, §302). "The regularity of our language", becoming manifest in the conceptual patterns we recurrently use, "permeates our life"[13] (ROC III, §303), as it were, and thus constitutes the "fixed rails along which all our thinking runs" (RPP II, §679). Hence we are "used to a particular classification of things. With language, or languages, it has become second nature to us" (RPP II, §678).

Admittedly, with respect to certain classifications—classifications which seem to be less relative to a culture than most of our psychological concepts—it appears to be hardly conceivable that they are language dependent. On the contrary, sometimes we are inclined to think that certain systems of concepts just depict the structure of nature itself. "We have", for instance, "a colour system as we have a number system. Do the systems reside in *our* nature or in the nature of things? How are we to put it?" (Z §357) In his latest writings, Wittgenstein—who was by no means completely certain about this question and, in spite of his conviction that the grammar of our concepts owes nothing to any reality—was perfectly prepared to concede to "the correspondence between concepts and very general facts of nature" (PPF §365). Nonetheless, he thought that such vague correspondences were not enough to justify the adequacy of any conceptual system. "I am not saying", he wrote,

> if such-and-such facts of nature were different, people would have different concepts (in the sense of a hypothesis). Rather, if anyone

[13] The German original of the sentence quoted reads: "Die Regelmäßigkeit unserer Sprache durchdringt unser Leben." McAlister and Schättle tranlsate "Regelmäßigkeit" with the somewhat misleading expression "rule-governed nature".

> believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones and that having different ones meant not realizing something that we realize—then let him imagine certain general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him.
>
> Wären die und die Naturtatsachen anders, so hätten die Menschen andere Begriffe (im Sinne einer Hypothese). Sondern: Wer glaubt, gewisse Begriffe seien schlechtweg die richtigen, wer andere hätte, sähe eben etwas nicht ein, was wir einsehen,—der möge sich gewissen Naturtatsachen anders vorstellen, als wir sie gewohnt sind, und andere Begriffsbildungen als die gewohnten werden ihm verständlich werden (PI II, 366).

Wittgenstein therefore does not wish to formulate any "hypothesis" of the type: "if the facts were different, we should have different concepts" (RPP I, §48), but rather wishes to urge us, by means of a thought experiment, to reflect the dependence of all concept formation and all use of concepts of both physical as well as cultural context conditions. In this way, he hopes to remove from us the temptation of regarding our own conceptual systems as the only right ones, as one might be included to claim that they are the obvious, indeed the natural ones.

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