

## IV\*—THROWING AWAY ‘THE BEDROCK’

by Rupert Read

ABSTRACT If one is impressed with Wittgenstein’s philosophizing, then it is a deep mistake to think that the terms that he made famous—philosophical terms like ‘form of life’, ‘language-game’, ‘everyday’, ‘bedrock’—are the key to his philosophy. On the contrary, they are in the end an obstacle to be overcome. The last temptation of the Wittgensteinian philosopher is to treat these terms as providing a kind of *ersatz* foundation. They are rather a ladder that takes one... to where one already is, only now undeluded. Provided, that is, that one throws them away, at the first sign that one feels oneself to be securely grounded by—or holding onto—them.

### I

*Are Technical Terms Elimlatable from Philosophical and Social Scientific Enquiries?* I am going to suggest that there is a sense in which they are and ought to be eliminated, or rather, to use terms drawn from Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*—because the term ‘eliminate’, with its Carnapian echoes, carries all the wrong connotations here—overcome, or ‘thrown away’.

This may seem surprising. Technical terms: terms being used in specified ways, in particular constricted or extended ways. Who could object to this? Isn’t the use of technical terms absolutely essential to the pursuit of rational enquiry? (Indeed we have been taught so, taught that philosophy (and ‘social science’) will proceed well if it proceeds rather like science, in this regard.)

This is a question that Wittgenstein asks himself in *Culture and Value*:<sup>1</sup> ‘Why shouldn’t I apply words in ways that conflict with their original usage? Doesn’t Freud, for example, do this when he calls even an anxiety dream a wish-fulfilment dream? Where is the difference?’ Now of course, we should immediately be on our guard here: for Wittgenstein does *not* in fact consider the Freudian move here an unproblematic one, as we know for instance from his explicit treatment of the extension of the term

1. G. H. von Wright (with H. Nyman) (ed.), trans. P. Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980); p. 44.

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‘wish-fulfilment’ in the *Conversations... on Psychology*.<sup>2</sup> Freud does use words in ways that conflict with their original usage, and this for Wittgenstein is a sign that what we have in Freud is a mythology, a persuasive and dangerous effort to get one to think in a different way about something, about important aspects of our lives and minds and words.

The point must be that Freud *takes himself* to be a scientist, and thus thinks he is licensed in using technical terms, in using terms in (in this case) a ‘bloated’ manner. Thus the problem with Freud is not the extended use, it is that the extended use is not scientifically justified, but (moreover) that there is then a systematic unclarity, in that Freud continues to act as if it is a scientific claim that is in question, in his work.

If there is to be extended use of terms beyond what we are used to, then it had better either be scientifically justified, or at least clear about its own groundlessness.

Wittgenstein is asking, in effect, why a human scientist or a philosopher shouldn’t do simply what natural scientists do: where is the difference between himself or Freud on the one hand and a (natural) scientist, with whom there can be no quarrel in principle concerning her use of technical terms,<sup>3</sup> on the other?

This is his answer:

In a scientific perspective a new use is justified by a theory. And if the theory is false, the new extended use has to be given up.  
*But in philosophy the extended use does not rest on true or false beliefs about natural processes. No fact justifies it. None can give it any support.*

This quotation makes quite clear the vital difference that Wittgenstein sees between the use of technical language in the natural sciences and in philosophy. And, if we are impressed by the arguments of Wittgenstein and Winch, we will tend to place the human sciences more on the side of philosophy here than on that of natural science. The kinds of extended or signally altered uses of terms which Thomas Kuhn has placed at the centre of our understanding of important shifts in scientific theorizing

2. *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, C. Barrett (ed.), (Berkeley: U. Cal. Press, 1970).

3. For amplification, see the brief discussion of Chomsky, below.

and practice do not, Wittgenstein claims, have a decent analogy in philosophy and in disciplines akin to it. Science is everyday language that uses technical terms, that for instance 'bloats' terms relative to their standard usage, on the grounds of the theoretic efficacy of so doing. Whereas a philosopher cannot similarly undergird such a 'bloated' use. An extended use made by a philosopher needs to be justified, if at all, *in some other way*.

'But how can it possibly be the case that Wittgenstein's idea here is applicable to philosophy *in general*, let alone to salient and central cases across the human sciences? . . . And what about Wittgenstein's own work: Can his remarks not be turned against his own practice? Surely, the technical terms which Wittgenstein himself employed give the lie to these remarks from 'Culture and Value'. And so, again: *Are technical terms truly eliminatable, even in principle, from philosophical and allied enquiries?* Doesn't Wittgenstein's own practice show that they are not?'

This is the question of my paper.<sup>4</sup>

## II

*Is Wittgenstein Hoist on his own Petard?* For *doesn't* Wittgenstein himself use various terms in extended, 'bloated' fashions? When we see Freud saying 'All dreams are wish-fulfilment dreams', and start to worry, shouldn't we worry even more when we see Wittgenstein(-ians) saying things along the lines of 'Humans are essentially rule-following creatures', or 'All language-use is the playing of language-games'? What about 'form of life', and other of Wittgenstein's 'technical terms'—is nothing *excluded* by such terms? If they do not feature in a genuine theory—like, say, the terms 'force' or 'atom'—then can their heavily-extended use be justified?

Let us recall the wording of the quotation we started with once again: '[I]n philosophy . . . extended use does not rest on true or false beliefs about natural processes. No fact justifies it. None can give it any support.' If Wittgenstein himself uses terms thus, 'technically', then it would appear that he has no coherent basis

4. Here are *some examples to have in mind during the course of our investigation*: language-game, form of life, family resemblance, depth grammar, (philosophical) grammar, bedrock, ordinary, everyday, hinge, nonsense, agreement, criterion, description, internal relation.

for criticizing philosophy, metaphysics, no coherent place from which to make such criticism. Because he would be guilty of exactly the same crimes as they—he would indeed be hoist on his own petard.

Now it is worth noting, a first cautionary note, that *most*, at least of the candidates for ‘technical term’ status in Wittgenstein are rarely used by him. For example, ‘form of life’ occurs only five times in *PI*, and less often than that in the entire remainder of his published works. The volume of the secondary literature on ‘forms of life’ is out of all proportion to what would appear to be its importance in Wittgenstein’s actual work.<sup>5</sup>

But still, if Wittgenstein even *sometimes* used terms bloatedly, ‘technically’, as part of a theory, this would still pose a problem for our understanding of what his philosophy is.

Let us look then at another term Wittgenstein hardly ever uses, but which has been seized on by many of his admirers (and by some of his critics): ‘bedrock’. *PI* 217,<sup>6</sup> in the heart of the rule-following considerations, features a key use of this term not unrelated to the famous uses shortly afterwards of the concept of ‘form of life’:

‘How am I to obey a rule?’—if this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following the rule in the way I do.

If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: ‘This is simply what I do.’

(Remember that we sometimes demand definitions not for the sake of their content, but of their form. Our requirement is an architectural one; the definition a kind of ornamental coping that supports nothing.)

That idea of supporting nothing is important, and directly relevant to what we are about here. ‘Bedrock’, and Wittgenstein’s account of it, is not a new foundation.

5. See the consideration of the term ‘form of life’ in my ‘Meaningful Consequences’ (jointly written with James Guetti), *The Philosophical Forum* XXX:4 (1999), 289–314., for instance.

6. *Philosophical Investigations* R. Rhees and G. E. M. Anscombe (eds.), trans G. E. M. Anscombe (revised edition) (New York: Macmillan, 1958 (1953)).

But nevertheless, there is a kind of psychological reassurance that 217 can give us. We Wittgensteinians may be satisfied, thinking thus about explanations coming to an end. And this reassuring satisfaction may, unless we are very vigilant, lead us in practice to treat a term like 'bedrock' as a term that solves a problem, a philosophical problem. And thus we come close to literalising the metaphor of 'bedrock', and treating it as a foundation—the foundation for *our* 'philosophical theory'—after all.

This, it seems to me, is what happens over and over again to commentators on and followers of Wittgenstein. Under pressure from mainstream Anglo-American philosophy ('What is Wittgenstein saying? Where's the *argument*? What's your *position*?' *etc.*), trying to explain and justify what one is doing to oneself and others, one seeks recourse to a new system, one seeks refuge in Wittgenstein's 'magic words'. Much as Heidegger has his magic words, and Derrida has his ('hymen', 'dissemination', 'différance', *etc.*), so Wittgenstein apparently has his—and they are quickly gone to town on.

### III

Wittgenstein once remarked that his greatest fear was that he would foster only a new jargon. I think that his fear has been to a substantial degree realized. The profligate use of the term 'language-game', the vast efforts expended on 'figuring out' what exactly 'objects' (in *TL-P*<sup>7</sup>) and 'forms of life' (in *PI*) are, even the practice of what Crispin Wright has sometimes called the 'official' Wittgensteinians (Peter Hacker *et al.*); all these have, I think, involved the technicalisation and jargonisation of what Wittgenstein himself was and must above all be an activity, a set of methods without any controversial theses, without an assertoric content.

But our problem remains: did the secondary literature have any alternative? In his use of terms such as 'bedrock', or 'ordinary', or 'form of life', *does Wittgenstein himself* (and do we/I) guard successfully against the not unreasonable fear that

7. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (with F. Ramsey) (New York: Routledge, 1922).

all that is happening is the fomenting of a jargon? In short, does Wittgenstein practice what he preaches? Or do his terms slip continually into being a pseudo-scientific jargon? And *could* they do otherwise?

I think that there is a CONTINUAL use of a 'Wittgensteinian' jargon in conversation-stopping tactics of an unsatisfactory nature, with philosophical discussants and opponents. I think it is bound usually to be unhelpful, and even insulting, to wheel out *PI* 217, for example, and expect that a rational co-conversationalist must be impressed by it, must see the logic of the alternative 'programme' (in this case, to that of scientific explanation of rule-following behaviour) that Wittgenstein apparently lays out for us. We Wittgensteinians shouldn't expect our opponents to magically be reassured by the mantras or architectonics which 217 *etc.* offer us. For, as Wittgenstein himself says, what we are talking about here are our *inclinations*: and these may differ, are highly individual. And if and when we do say '*This* is simply what I do', we must be aware that the whole point is that there is no spelling out of the '*This*'. Any further spelling out would indicate that we had in fact not yet reached bedrock. Further, our 'claims' and definitions support nothing, claim nothing: they are only a way of trying to get us to think... what we already think. If we have not had these thoughts already, there is no strictly rational process of being got to think them.<sup>8</sup> Check out *PI* 217 again:

If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: '*This* is simply what I do.'

(Remember that we sometimes demand definitions not for the sake of their content, but of their form. Our requirement is an architectural one; the definition a kind of ornamental coping that supports nothing.)

No, we cannot expect someone not already in sympathy with the Wittgensteinian take on philosophical matters to be instantaneously impressed by any of this. They must be persuaded, rather, that there just isn't anything of the kind that

8. See *TL-P*, Preface. (p. 27, *ibid.*)

they imagine they want to do/say that they do in fact want to do/say. In this case; they must be *persuaded* that they can be satisfied with not asking more questions, when (as we see it) 'at bedrock'.<sup>9</sup>

Persuasion is crucial—because you can't *prove* the opposite of nonsense. Why? Because to assert the opposite of nonsense is to utter nonsense. Negating 'Then, the cat sat on the square circular mat' (*viz.* producing 'The cat did not then sit on the square circular mat', or even 'It is not the case that the cat then sat on the square circular mat' or 'It is not true that the cat then sat on the square circular mat') produces something bizarre. It does not, I would submit, produce something sensical.

What we do, then, is to try to bring words back to their everyday uses by means of trying to get others (and ourselves) to think that they (we) don't need anything other than those everyday uses in order to do all that one really can do with language. (And to think that the idea of it being possible or necessary to do anything other than what these words are after is in fact only the fantasy of an idea. Again: 'the everyday' is *not* counterposed to science. It is counterposed only to metaphysics, to myth—to nothing.)

#### IV

Now we are getting closer to establishing whether it can really be that that Wittgenstein does in and with his *own* words.

We can imagine someone saying now, 'But what's the big deal? So what if 'form of life' (or what-have-you) is a term of art? A way of expressing some particular abstract way of understanding culture, or something. Just define your terms, and all will be well. And after all, isn't that how Analytic Philosophy has made so much progress. And in part how sociology and psychology have progressed in solving problems bequeathed to them by philosophy.' But I am deeply sceptical, for just the reasons given in and around our opening quote from '*Culture and Value*', as to the rigour and groundedness of the sets of binary

9. My use of the term 'persuasion' here echoes Winch's superb and difficult essay of that title, in *MidWest Studies in Philosophy* 17 (1992), 123–137. Winch draws it, of course, from Wittgenstein himself.

oppositions which structure Analytic Philosophy and the human sciences: such as necessary *versus* contingent, mental *vs.* physical, structure *vs.* agency, holism *vs.* individualism, culture *vs.* nature.

A more satisfactory option might appear to be the coining of new terms, the use of technical terms which don't contain baggage from the old terms which reach or echo back to debates with over-long histories.<sup>10</sup> But with new terms, there is a great danger of thinking that we've escaped entirely from the ordinary terms/roots which arguably must be at the basis of anything that we understand. There cannot *be*, I want to say, a whole new vocabulary—if we are dealing with anything that has to do with people and with language, as the human sciences and philosophy do.

Again, I would follow Winch and the ethnomethodological sociologists<sup>11</sup>—what one is doing in understanding human beings is only elaborating what they already know.

Now it may seem as though I am on the verge of ascribing a sociological-cum-philosophical theory to Wittgenstein. For it may seem now that, in order to avoid treating terms such as 'form of life' theoreticistically, as committing one to a metaphysical system depending on the meaningful employment of terms such as 'form of life' or 'bedrock', in order to avoid hoisting Wittgenstein on his own petard, I am committed to turning Wittgenstein's uses of such terms into a culturalist thesis, or a sociologicistic thesis. As if that would help. 'But is there any other option?' Well, one can treat the term 'form of life' as encoding a quasi-biological thesis for instance. Is that any better? Perhaps the problem is in the question which offers various answers as options.

The above-mentioned are indeed the various main options in the massive war over how to interpret 'forms of life', so often an alleged 'keystone' to Wittgenstein's later thought. But how can we avoid interpreting Wittgenstein's (few) remarks involving this term as controversial theses *at all*?

Well, we can interpret them 'ineffabilistically'. We can read them as *some* of Wittgenstein's—relatively sophisticated—commentators do, and as those do who wish to find a mysticism

10. Compare Chomsky's (in-)famous introduction of the term 'cognize'.

11. Such as Harold Garfinkel, Jeff Coulter, Wes Sharrock, Rod Watson, Mike Lynch.

in Wittgenstein: as hints at the kind of thing which we get in far more detail at points in Heidegger, for example. We can read 'forms of life' as part of a gnomic gesture toward the aspects of human life which, strictly speaking, cannot be said, as part of a background which we can foreground only by violating the limits of language.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps that helps?

Leave aside that if Wittgenstein had wanted to do what Heidegger does, he could have done it. Why didn't he write a book of 'Unsayable remarks on the human form of life'? Leave aside the fact that Wittgenstein was extremely reticent about these matters, and always very cautious in his phrasing of these rare moments in his text—for example, he hesitantly writes on p. 226 of *PI* that, 'What has to be accepted, the given, is—so one could say—*forms of life*.' (And leave aside that Wittgenstein is at least talking here of *accepting* something, an important difference of emphasis from proclaiming a philosophical thesis). The real problem with the ineffabilist interpretation of the later Wittgenstein—and this rarely gets brought out, because it is so uncomfortable to acknowledge—is of course a philosophical problem. The problem that confronted Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, just as it had confronted, besides many lesser minds, those of Hume and Kant and Schopenhauer before him, and as it would go on to confront Heidegger and Foucault and Derrida after him. The difference being that, manfully though Hume and Kant and Heidegger and Foucault, especially, have wrestled with the problem, Wittgenstein, according to Diamond *et al.*, mastered it—and in the *Tractatus*. This is what Diamond explains in her 'Throwing Away the Ladder', and Conant in his 'Throwing Away the Top of the Ladder' and 'Elucidation and Nonsense in Frege and Wittgenstein.'<sup>13</sup> It is the Diamond/Conant reading of Wittgenstein, obviously, which I wish to take forward into some of the detail of Wittgenstein's later work, under the heading of throwing away the ladder that (most or all) of that work is. Of overcoming the tendency

12. For detail, see my 'Meaningful Consequences', *op. cit.*

13. Cora Diamond, 'Throwing Away the Ladder: How to Read the *Tractatus*', in her *The Realistic Spirit* (Cambridge: MIT, 1991); James Conant, 'Throwing Away the Top of the Ladder', *Yale Review* 79 (1991), 328–364; and 'Elucidation and Nonsense in Frege and Wittgenstein', in my and A. Crary's *The New Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 2000).

to think that in concepts such as ‘bedrock’ we have at least found something that we can rely on, that we can rest some weight on.

If we think of the term ‘form of life’, or similarly terms such as ‘attunement in basic concepts’, or ‘the conditions for the use of concepts’, the kinds of terms often and understandable reached for by Wittgenstein’s commentators, as gestures at the ineffable, then we not finding a new foundation. Rather, we are hopelessly reaching for one, and meanwhile more or less self-admittedly saying the unsayable.

To illustrate how we can understand later Wittgenstein as beyond ineffabilism, and yet not as committed to any kind of quasi-social-scientific anti-Realism, I have attempted what may be a helpful exercise in ‘transliteration’. I have taken some of the crucial closing portions of Diamond’s ‘Throwing Away the Ladder: How to Read the *Tractatus*’, and just slightly re-written them. I have replaced elements of the *Tractatus* discussions with roughly symmetrical elements of the *Investigations* discussions. It seems to me that the result stands up pretty well, and is illuminating:

Wittgenstein, I claim, says, roughly, that we cannot say ‘There are forms of life—they are fundamental to everything.’ How so? Well, he indicates that there could be no such things as philosophical theses. Everyone would agree with them, as trivialities—and that is not what one wants a thesis to be. One wants it to be something troubling, controversial—something that says something. But his remarks do not say anything. He makes no claims. He has no opinions.<sup>14</sup> So, when he says that we cannot assert philosophical theses, that we cannot have philosophical opinions, when he says that we cannot assert ‘There are forms of life’, he does not mean ‘There are, all right, only *that there are* has to get expressed another way.’ That the sentence means nothing at all and is not illegitimate for any other reason, we do not see. We are so convinced that we understand what we

14. See the remark cited in Ray Monk’s *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), during Wittgenstein’s debates with Turing: ‘Obviously... the whole point is that I must not have an opinion’ (p. 420; see also p. 418). I disagree with Monk’s comments on this remark in his text: Monk’s view of the later Wittgenstein’s ‘views’ is in the end positivistic. He takes Wittgenstein to have quasi-verificationist, finitist ‘views’ in the philosophy of maths.

are trying to say that we see only the two possibilities: *it* is sayable [positivism / anti-Realism], *it* is not sayable ['ineffabilism']. But Wittgenstein's aim is to allow us to see that there is no 'it'.<sup>15</sup>

It's not that one cannot assign a meaning to 'There are forms of life.' Of course one can. It is that one has strong grounds for thinking that no assignment of meaning will be lastingly satisfying to one. No assignment of meaning which stops us 'hovering', which rids us of a systematic unclarity about what we are trying to do with these words, will seem to have expressed what we took ourselves to be aiming to express. No assignment of meaning will do for us what we want a philosophical thesis to do.

## V

To continue my 'transliteration' of Diamond: '[A]nd so you see that there is no coherent understanding to be reached of what you wanted to say. It dissolves: you are left with the sentence-structure 'There are forms of life', (or 'What has to be accepted, the given, is . . . forms of life' [*PI* p. 226], or 'Meaning is use', or what-have-you) standing there, as it were, innocently meaning nothing at all, not any longer thought of as illegitimate because of a violation of the principles of what can be put into words and what goes beyond them. Really to grasp that what you were trying to say shows itself in language is to cease to think of it as an inexpressible content: that which you were trying to say.

Take Wittgenstein's remark that 'I must speak the language of every day. Is this language somehow too coarse and material for what we want to say? *Then how is another one to be constructed?*—And how strange that we should be able to do anything at all with the one we have!'*[PI* 120]. Clearly, there is a sense in which Wittgenstein here is denying the intelligibility of anything which would justly be called a non-everyday-language.

But then this remark is itself ironically self-destructive. It has the form, the syntactic form, of 'There is only this sort of thing', i.e. it uses the linguistic forms in which we say that there are

15. 'Throwing Away the Ladder', pp. 197–8. See also Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* (New York: Blackwell, 1969, para. 35f; and *compare Hume's critique of the notion of 'object'* (contrast 'the New Hume's' defence of the metaphysical idea of objects). See e.g. my 'The New Antagonists of "the New Hume"', in my *The New Hume Debate* (co-edited with Ken Richman; London: Routledge, 2000).

only thises rather than thises and thats.<sup>16</sup> It belongs to its syntax that it itself says something the other side of which can be represented too. If there is only squiggledly wiggle, the language allows wiggles that are not squiggledly as well. But whatever Wittgenstein's remark aims to do for us, it is not to place the necessity and centrality of everyday language as opposed to an intelligible opposite. It is not that this opposite has a sense that is nonsensical. It does not convey to us the philosophical but unsayable fact that there is only everyday language not genuinely supra-everyday language. In so far as we grasp what Wittgenstein aims at, we see that the sentence-forms he uses comes apart from his philosophical aim. If he succeeds, we shall not imagine everyday language or forms of life as things, as entities, as- at all. And we shall not imagine the sentence that 'what has to be accepted, the given, is forms of life' as informing us of anything, or instructing us to do something rather than an intelligible other thing. We throw away the sentences about 'forms of life', and even about 'language-games'; they really are, at the end, entirely empty. But we shall be aware at the end that when we go in for philosophical thinking, the characteristic form of such thought is precisely that the sentence-forms we use come apart from what we have taken to be our aims. Not because we have chosen the wrong forms.<sup>17</sup>

This is what I mean by throwing away (e.g.) 'the bedrock'.

## VI

What Wittgenstein is inclined to say in *PI* 217 is a perfectly fine thing to say—in certain very particular circumstances. But it would be a mistake to think that anything can be hung or built on it. As it would be a mistake to think that it can or even should *force* someone to change their ways, to roll over and acquiesce in a 'practice-based account' of social life, or whatever. No. *PI* 217 is itself no more than a move in a dialectic,

16. It is worth noting parenthetically one important implication: that it is an appalling caricature of the 'resolute' reading of Wittgenstein's philosophy to take Diamond *et al.* literally to be claiming that 'there is only one kind of nonsense.' Just look at the form of such a remark!

17. I.e. Not because the real/the right forms are available somewhere, only not speakable. This is a transfiguration of 'Throwing Away the Ladder', pp. 197–9. (Emphasis mine)

an effort to persuade a reader to give up *absurd* ambitions—e.g. for a foundation to practice. Justifications come to an end somewhere, we will say to such a person. And there are probably many more things to say before they are persuaded. (And we are not in possession of truths which make it essential or rationally necessary that they be persuaded. This implies: That part of the responsibility of the philosopher, including (and in fact above all) the therapeutic philosopher, is to engage in a genuine dialogue with someone whom one is trying to persuade. The criterion of the dialogue being genuine is in part this: that one is ready oneself to be persuaded away from one's preconceptions. Wittgensteinian therapy is not like most forms of psychotherapy or psychoanalysis. It is non-hierarchical, a conversation between equals. It is corrupted the moment one is convinced of one's own rectitude, and (therefore) single-mindedly trying to cure the other. Such cures can go both ways; a Wittgensteinian who has ceased to practice therapy on herself, and who is certain of her prescriptions for others, is no Wittgensteinian.)

Unless and until *I* am persuaded otherwise, then, I shall go on saying things like this: that terms such as 'bedrock', 'forms of life' and so on need to be 'thrown away', endlessly, in truly Wittgensteinian philosophy.

Why the scare quotes around 'thrown away', in the previous paragraph? Because there is of course nothing whatsoever wrong with these terms, or with any terms. This is one of the key morals of my '*New Wittgenstein*' collection. It is, I think, particularly deftly expressed in the closing sentences of Ed Witherspoon's essay, 'Conceptions of Nonsense in Carnap and Wittgenstein': 'Applying Wittgenstein's conception of nonsense... requires an intense engagement with the target of criticism; an examination of the words alone is not enough. When Wittgenstein criticizes an utterance as nonsensical, he aims to expose, *not a defect in the words themselves*, but a confusion in the speaker's relation to her words—a confusion that is manifested in the speaker's failure to specify a meaning for them.'<sup>18</sup> There is nothing wrong with words like 'bedrock' or terms like 'form of life'; but if, as the Buddhists would put it, we *attach* to them, we will be lost. We need thoroughgoingly *to overcome our attachment* to them.

18. *Op. cit.*, p. 345.

To put the point just slightly ‘poetically’: we *need* to throw away these words, if we feel like holding onto them, having thrown away all metaphysics by means of them. *We need to overcome these words*, if we are to truly follow Wittgenstein. Most of Wittgenstein’s ‘followers’, regrettably, *hold onto* his words, and in effect turn them into technical terms that they are attached to in just the sense I have just criticized.

## VII

True followers of Wittgenstein, then, will actively work not to do what he most feared—accurately—would be done with his work: namely, to turn it into a kind of jargon. Nor will they do what is very similar, and indeed usually still worse in its effects: to ‘translate’ his thinking into a new or an old jargon. An example would be the following, from Dan Hutto’s recent book: ‘The process [of doing Wittgensteinian philosophy right] requires not just removing the source of our puzzlement but being reminded—normally, by means of examples—of the conditions in which we deploy the concepts in question.’<sup>19</sup> The trouble with this remark (and it is very easy to find similar examples, and much worse, in thoroughly-competent philosophers such as Pears, Hacker, Meredith Williams, and many more) is that it gives the strong impression that there really are conditions for the deployment of concepts. Only unfortunately these conditions cannot be directly stated. This is a sophisticated form of ‘chickening out’, of irresolution. So is *any* ‘elucidatory’ reading of Wittgenstein, early or late, any reading of him that insists that Wittgenstein had a positive task in his work. Elucidatory readings remain aligned with the meta-philosophies of world-revealing metaphysics, or of concept-creating recent Continental philosophy, just insofar as they insist on such a positive task.

Am I being too hard on Hutto? In a way, I certainly am. For it is possible to find reasonably similar examples in everyone’s work, including mine, and, for that matter, Wittgenstein’s. There is no such thing as a formulation which is invulnerable to being rendered as (including) a technical term. Our problem is at bottom one of will and lived attitude, not one of carrying

19. *Wittgenstein and the End of Philosophy: Neither Theory nor Therapy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), p. 126.

out a once-and-for-all intellectual achievement or discovery. Our problem is one of finding a way of responding to good efforts at philosophical therapy which does not turn such efforts, as one always can turn them if one is so minded,<sup>20</sup> into the statement of a position or view or opinion, into a reified philosophical object, and yet which does not, in the course of being impressed or persuaded by the attempt at aspect-switching involved in the therapeutic manoeuvre, attach to the manoeuvre itself. There are deep lessons to learn, I think, from mystical spiritualities and philosophies, perhaps especially from Zen, on the question of *how in practical terms to do what Wittgenstein urges*. Buddhist traditions such as Zen<sup>21</sup> have a long tradition of providing practical means of attaining insight without becoming attached to the means. A challenge for those impressed with Wittgenstein's philosophising is to find ways of doing the same, without being committed to the insights attained being ineffable truths. As the Buddhists might put it: If you see a Wittgensteinian on the road to enlightenment, kill him. Our task, let us not forget, is one

20. This, for example, is what Derrida is expert at. Derrida takes for instance the attempt at a non-metaphysical philosophising in J. L. Austin, and, after acknowledging its wonderfully 'Nietzschean' aspects, takes it to task for failing to overcome the urge to metaphysics allegedly implicit in the Austinian concept of 'context'. Derrida's vigilance is similar to Wittgenstein's, but it is in the end excessive. Derrida leaves one hopeless, condemned to metaphysics, whereas Wittgenstein (and, in my view, Austin too) gives one hope, as one experiences actual instances of curing oneself of illusions. Derrida always finds those he reads to contain a hidden metaphysics. If one is determined to find a metaphysics in others' words (or indeed in one's own), one can always find one; the more interesting task is to try to practice in a way that searches for the elusive moments in which one actually does escape from one or another metaphysical catch or temptation. That is Wittgensteinian philosophy. The question is begged against it, if for instance one insists, as Derrida, like all post-modernists and nearly all 'Analytic' philosophers, does, that 'You must and so do have a theory, at least implicitly.'

21. These remarks are relevant to the disparaging attribution by Peter Hacker of a close kinship with 'dialectic', with post-modernism, with Zen, and with Kierkegaardian irony, to the New Wittgenstein. The kinship with post-modernism has been greatly exaggerated; there are several published texts showing this, including of course Martin Stone's 'Wittgenstein and Deconstruction', which argues powerfully for the differentiation of the two, in *The New Wittgenstein* itself. But it seems to me that the concept of 'dialectic' can be an extremely helpful one in understanding Wittgenstein's method; I think that Conant is quite right to emphasize the deep parallels between Kierkegaard's method and Wittgenstein's; and in future work I will develop myself a detailed account of the powerful and underestimated commonalities in method and 'substance' between Wittgenstein and Buddhism, especially Zen. I suspect that part of the problem is that Hacker has an inadequate understanding of the philosophical sophistication of Kierkegaard, and indeed of Zen.

of leaving everything as it is. The true insight is the ‘returning’ to the ordinary. An ordinary which includes, of course, all the strivings for the extraordinary without which life might well be tedious or inhuman . . .

It would be absurd then for me to claim that Hutto is wrong or mistaken in what he says, as quoted above. If I give the impression that it is a matter of fact that philosophy truly is purely negative, I have of course fallen into the trap of seeming to have a doctrine of my own. Similarly, if I give the impression that I am (*contra* Quine) asserting the independence of grammar from fact, that I am as it were stating that as a matter of fact philosophy is not a matter of matters of fact, a similar trap and a similar defeat beckons.<sup>22</sup> The implication is, I take it, that at some point we must simply accept therapeutic interventions as what they are, and must take some words at face value.

What words *can* be absolutely relied on here, unproblematically taken at face value, in philosophy? None. We are always in process, in philosophy. In fact (*sic!*), we always are in all of life, but we can safely abstract away from our boat-rebuilding-at-sea-ness, usually, and take some frame for granted. True philosophy is never taking any frame indefinitely or absolutely for granted. So, the ‘must’ in the previous paragraph is misleading. (What isn’t? All philosophical interventions are equal[ly misleading], but some are less equal than others, I hear you cry . . .) There is no compulsion to accept Wittgenstein’s method. This point again has tended to be sadly absent from Wittgenstein’s exegetes, and indeed from his readers more generally. They have looked to be *compelled* by Wittgenstein’s ‘arguments’ (as if by [their fantasy of] a rule . . .), and have been disappointed when they have not been. But (an attempt at saying something helpful; what else can one do?), Wittgenstein’s task is to uncover the compulsions we labour under in philosophy, not to impose new ones. If one is shown one’s intellectual compulsions, and yet does not want to give them up, there is little or nothing more to say.

To return then to the quote from *Culture and Value* with which I began this paper: One can of course use a word in an extended sense, in the course of one’s philosophising, when

22. The mythological error that beckons here is identical to that in Anti-Realism that I identify in my recent debate with Dummett, in the pages of *Philosophy*.

using our method. The point is that so doing is not using a technical term, but 'simply' enacting a particular, person-relative therapeutic manoeuvre. (The contrast implied here is, of course, itself almost inevitably misleading... It makes it sound as if I am (say) differentiating ordinary water from heavy water, whereas a better metaphor is perhaps differentiating *that* activity from alchemy. That metaphor in turn is no doubt misleading, for basically the same reason...) For example, one might use a term, such as 'ordinary' or 'everyday', in a bloated way, precisely to facilitate the understanding in one's interlocutor that there is (there 'is'?) no contrast-class intended here. Understanding what a Wittgensteinian is doing with a term like 'everyday' is letting go of the wish to turn philosophy into a quasi-science with technical terms, terms with more or less fixed meanings differing from ordinary usage, *and* is overcoming in particular the wish for 'everyday' to be such a term (a would-be 'meta'-technical term, in philosophy). (This is all implicit in my play with the long quote from Diamond's 'Throwing Away the Ladder', earlier.) When Wittgensteinian philosophy really works, the cure is expelled with the disease. One doesn't keep holding onto 'everyday' or 'bedrock' or whatever. One overcomes these terms, too. That is, just insofar as these terms risk continuing to mislead one, they need to be 'thrown away'. (Of course, if no-one is misled by some particular use of them, in that sense they are just fine.) The work of a concept like 'form of life' or 'the bedrock' in Wittgenstein is probably only done *when* one throws it away.

One of Wittgenstein's readers who has understood all this extremely well and deeply is the later Gordon Baker.<sup>23</sup> Baker, following Waismann, emphasized that 'our method' is not compulsory, and, paradoxically, loses its power if one tries to make it so, if one tries to turn it into *the* method.<sup>24</sup>

23. My argument above is for instance quite consonant with his powerful paper, 'Wittgenstein on Metaphysical/Everyday use', *Philosophical Quarterly* 52: 208 (2002), 289–302, reprinted in *Wittgenstein's Method: Neglected Aspects*, edited by K. Morris (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

24. In a forthcoming paper, 'Anchoring Therapy', Phil Hutchinson and I address the understandable charge that such an admission seems to commit one to a form of relativism. If there are other methods, and if there is no rational way of choosing between them, then why should we adopt Wittgenstein's method? It may already be clear to readers of this paper that part of our answer is roughly this: the problem lies in the word 'should'. It is indeed not at all clear that there is a 'should'

So, it is with that in mind—with my reader understanding, I hope, that, here as throughout, I am not asserting something that I insist must stand, nor that I claim to have or even want to have an ungainsayable warrant for, nor even (in an important sense) *anything* at all—that I say this: It is time to overcome ‘the bedrock’. Indeed, it is now *always* time to overcome such terms, and whatever replaces them. It is a task we are called to, over and over again. The search for liberating words is probably endless. For it needs to be continually remade, re-undertaken, as cultural conditions change, as personal life-trajectories and philosophical educations proceed and change, and so on. And in any case, even very well-chosen words will tend to ‘ossify’, over time; the process of purifying oneself of attachments to particular terms is one which a wise philosopher will continually pursue *vis à vis* their own work, as Wittgenstein himself did, as we ‘New Wittgensteinians’ need to do. The words in my edited collection, the words in this essay, these very words, are no exception. Even if they are well-chosen, and well-placed, there can be no such thing as a guarantee against their being misunderstood, against their seeming to state a position, or seeming to be *the* liberating words. As soon as one thinks one has found *the* liberating words, at least for oneself, one is probably again in delusion.

The process of philosophy as Wittgenstein (but in reality few of his ‘followers’) understood it is in crucial part a probably endless therapeutic task of the overcoming of the nonsense that is implicit in taking Wittgenstein to have decisively overcome nonsense, through the terms and the ‘ideas’ of his writing. But then, of course, in the unlikely event that I have thoroughly and decisively convinced you even of this, I have failed.<sup>25</sup>

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that quasi-compels one to be a Wittgensteinian philosopher, even according to us Wittgensteinians. It really is up to you. (Unless *perhaps* that ‘should’ is in part a full-bloodedly moral ‘should’: i.e. one should perhaps adopt Wittgenstein’s method, we say, because it is part of a broader world-changing political/therapeutic/spiritual re-orientation that we consider to be right, even necessary. But to argue this is obviously the task for another occasion.)

25. Thanks to several audiences over the years—including at ‘Mind and Society’ in Manchester, at the Phil-Pol-Sociol seminar in Exeter, at St. Andrew’s, and at the University of North Florida—for help with the ideas of this paper.