

4 Scepticism and psychotherapy: A Wittgensteinian approach

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A true story: Peter, aged 5, who was due to start school the next day, was running around excitedly telling his mother about how much he was going to learn at school, suddenly stopped and said: 'Mummy, what if when I go to school all my blood goes to my head and I don't have enough blood in my heart to love you?' His brother, two years older, then said: 'Don't talk like that Peter, nobody talks like that at my school and it's not even in the books'.

I will juxtapose this with a remark from Wittgenstein:

One of the most dangerous of ideas for a philosopher is, oddly enough, that we think with our heads or in our heads. The idea of thinking as a process in the head, in a completely enclosed space, gives him something occult.

(Wittgenstein 1967: §§605-6)

I want to understand Peter's remark and show the relevance of it. I will argue that Wittgenstein's thought and Pyrrhonian scepticism make far more sense of it than any psychoanalytic explanation. Sceptical therapy is concerned to refind the heart – in Peter's sense – whereas psychological explanations send 'blood to the head' and are deeply implicated in thinking with the head.

SCEPTICAL THERAPY

I will first make a few general remarks on sceptical therapy, a large subject which has been recently discussed (Hankinson 1995, Heaton 1993:106 and 1997:80). It is a way of life and thought that leads to human well being. It is informal and discontinuous because its practitioners question dogma and have never depended on institutional

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trappings for their status. Its effectiveness is shown more on the example of their lives and through conversation and debate. So it is not a school with well defined boundaries and it is not doctrinaire. Sceptical insights can be found in the work of many different therapists.

There is a long tradition in philosophy and medicine which argues that practice is more fundamental to therapy than knowledge or theory. The roots of this tradition lie in Pyrrhonian scepticism which is named after Pyrrho, a Greek, who died in 270 BC. He wrote nothing but taught through discussion and example. His teaching eventually took over Plato's Academy and became one of the main schools of philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. It was particularly popular with physicians because of its emphasis on practice. The tradition has waxed and waned in Europe; Erasmus, Montaigne and Gassendi are amongst the famous teachers of it. In this century Wittgenstein can be understood as being in this tradition (Fogelin 1987:226). He gave a linguistic turn to scepticism emphasizing the lack of sense or meaning in perplexity arising from mental conflict.

The word 'sceptic' derives from the Greek *skeptikos* meaning 'thoughtful', 'paying attention to'. So one learns sceptical therapy by thinking on one's feet – attentiveness in acting, speaking, listening and reading – rather than sitting in one's study learning theories and how to apply them.

There is a paradox about my attempt to understand Peter. Here am I, writing an article which, if it is read at all, will be read by people who are academics or learned therapy in a training institute, well schooled, almost certainly with lots of 'blood in their head'. Furthermore I will be using academic language which would certainly not be understood by Peter when he was 5.

Sextus Empiricus, the main source of our knowledge of the Pyrrhonian sceptics, wrote books with titles which are translated as *Against the Logicians*, *Against the Physicists*, *Against the Ethicists*, and *Against the Professors* yet few others than professors, logicians and academic philosophers read or are even aware of him! Wittgenstein, our other source was, for a time, a professor of philosophy but he considered it an 'absurd job' and 'a kind of living death' (Monk 1990:483) and resigned long before he had to; he was notoriously rude about professional philosophers and said he found more philosophy in Street and Smith's *Detective Story Magazine* than in *Mind*!

So what is going on here? When we go to school we go to learn. At elementary school we learn how to behave socially and elementary skills like reading, writing and arithmetic. As we become more advanced we learn more and more difficult skills like how to write an essay, how to

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solve a differential equation and so on. At the same time we increase our knowledge; in the modern world the rate of increase of knowledge is rapidly expanding year by year so that it is impossible to keep up with it except in one's own special field which gets narrower as knowledge increases.

But philosophy, according to the thinkers I am concerned with, is very different from all this. It is not concerned with increasing knowledge; of course this does not mean a philosopher is an ignoramus. If he/she wants to clarify the confusions of quantum theory then obviously he/she must be familiar with it, but the learning of quantum theory is not a philosophical activity as such. So philosophy is not one of the sciences, it does not increase our knowledge of the world or of the mind or of ultimate reality – whatever that is; it does not seek to explain any-thing or to construct theories or to make hypotheses; in philosophy there is nothing hypothetical. Philosophy is not progressive, it is not concerned to increase anything or to prove anything. There are not even any philosophical propositions for if there were theses in philosophy they would be trivial as everyone would agree with them (Wittgenstein 1958:§128).

As many philosophers have noted, the source of philosophy is wonder, as Wittgenstein put it 'It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical but *that* it exists' (Wittgenstein 1961:6.44). And by 'mystical' he is not referring to any sort of religious or emotional experience but to wonder at the commonplace and familiar. Philosophy is an activity which involves inquiry but also a suspension of feeling (Sextus Empiricus 1994: Bk 1 §7) or as Wittgenstein wrote: 'a resignation, but one of feeling and not of intellect' and he continues: 'that is what makes it so difficult for many' (Wittgenstein 1993:161). It is enormously difficult to stand back and suspend judgement as we are all conditioned to pursue questions and give answers, to take hold of and increase our knowledge and to make immediate judgements. Learned beliefs, inward compulsions and urges drive us on.

The Pyrrhonian sceptics describe their philosophy as a way of life leading to *ataraxia*, freedom from mental conflict. It was a therapy involving suspension of judgement over conflicting accounts of affairs and was particularly attractive to physicians, Sextus Empiricus was himself a practising physician. Their aim was tranquillity, but they realised that if it is seen as an aim then it becomes a good, an object of desire, and so something to be striven for and compulsively thought about; this of course leads to conflict. I try to reach what my conditioning makes me think is the goal but fail, so I am thrown into conflict. They used this story to illustrate the sceptical way:

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The painter Apelles was painting a horse and wanted to represent in his picture the lather on the horse's mouth; but he was so unsuccessful that he gave up, took the sponge on which he had been wiping off the colours from his brush, and flung it at the picture. And when it hit the picture, it produced a representation of the horse's lather.

(Sextus Empiricus 1994: Bk 1 §27)

Tranquillity follows suspension of judgement as it were fortuitously, it is not the result of ambition. In other words, it is in the very activity of thinking clearly, reasoning critically and sanely that one discovers for oneself the limits of thought and language.

Wittgenstein too thought that his philosophical activity was a therapy whose aim was peace of mind. 'The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness' (Wittgenstein 1958: §133). He recognised the similarity between his philosophy and psychoanalysis but with the huge difference that psychoanalysis rests on theories about mental mechanisms which rest on assumptions about the nature of the mind. Wittgenstein thought this is a sign that the psychoanalyst is in the grip of a false picture created by illusions leading to the misuse of language. So structures are imposed on mental concepts without the necessary grounding in the ordinary use of these concepts.

Psychotherapists are known by the theory they adhere to, there are some three hundred theories of psychotherapy at present and no doubt by the time this essay is published there will be some more as psychotherapy 'advances'. To the sceptic these three hundred theories are the names of three hundred pairs of blinkers hiding certain differences and complexities of human life that the therapist has been persuaded to ignore. 'Our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the "possibilities" of phenomena' (Wittgenstein 1958: §90). Every theory hides certain possibilities.

Wittgenstein thought that the job of therapeutic philosophy is simply to put everything before us and not try to explain anything, for the real foundations of the enquiry are the aspects of things that are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. We need to be 'reminded' of what we have overlooked in our anxiety to find answers to our troubles. We are so busy looking for answers and explanations that we stare into the distance and create theories instead of seeing what is under our noses. We fail to be *struck* by what, once seen, is most striking and powerful, (Wittgenstein 1958: §126-9).

He depicts his general strategy thus:

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You want to straighten out a knot by pulling at the ends of the string. And as long as you pull, the knot can't come undone. You feel there is still a knot, so you pull. And the knot becomes smaller and harder. One way of solving a philosophical problem is to tell yourself: *it is insoluble*. It isn't answerable or it would have been answered, you would have answered long ago. It's not a kink, it's a knot. Don't look for an answer, look for a cure. Don't try to pull it straight, try to unravel it.

(Baker and Hacker 1980:486)

To unravel a knot we do not need new knowledge or clever theories but patience and attention, two prime qualities in the practice of therapy.

The philosophy I am discussing is particularly concerned with language as that is the medium in which it acts. The philosopher strives to find the liberating word that allows us to grasp what intangibly weighs down our consciousness. He/she seeks to express all false thoughts so characteristically that we can acknowledge that this really is the correct expression of the thought or feeling. He/she seeks to make a tracing of the physiognomy of every error and this is an interminable task as nearly every advance or cultural change contains the potentiality for confusion and every person has his/her unique way of expressing it (Wittgenstein 1993: 165).

There is no particular method in philosophy for it seeks to convert error into truth. This involves finding the source of error, as merely hearing the truth is no good. For truth cannot force its way in when falsehood is occupying its place. To see the truth it is not enough to state it, but rather one must find the *path* from error to truth (Wittgenstein 1993: 119). Of course this adds to the enormous difficulty of philosophy, as it is not easy to find the path, for it is not only the confusion that needs clarifying but the person in the sway of the confusion. So the therapeutic philosopher must not be ignorant of the current psychological theories, he/she must be so familiar with them that he/she is able to uncover what the theory hides. Sextus Empiricus is a good example as his writing is the chief source of our knowledge of the Stoic and other theories around in his time but he viewed them critically and eschewed all theory himself.

UNDERSTANDING

Our task is "to *understand*" something that is already in plain view. For *this* is what we seem in some sense not to understand' (Wittgenstein

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1958: §89). The temptation is to seek to penetrate phenomena, to seek explanations and causes which lie below or above phenomena. Instead we need to be reminded of the kinds of statement that we make about phenomena as misunderstandings about the use of words caused by the analogies and pictures embedded in language confuse us.

For example we are told that 'analysis of direct inner perception' is the source of psychological knowledge (Ferenczi 1926: 18). This goes along with Freud's belief that

consciousness makes each of us aware only of his own states of mind; that other people, too, possess a consciousness is an inference which we draw by analogy from their observable utterances and actions, in order to make this behaviour of theirs intelligible to us.

(Freud 1984: 170)

The individual mind is taken as basic, other people and society are secondary. Fulfilment is sought on an individual level, society is necessary but tends to get in the way of fulfilment. This cluster of beliefs are amongst the fundamental assumptions of psychoanalysis. It characterises the dualism of the mental and physical which is taken for granted by most people in our culture. The physical world is public, whereas the human mind is a private world hidden behind our behaviour. Each individual has a privileged access to his own mind, while only inference or identification gives us access to other minds. Fulfilment and happiness are essentially private affairs and other people merely means to this end.

Now this hypnotic picture of the nature of the mind has been criticised by Wittgenstein (1958: §§243–397) and his critique has been commented on and simplified by numerous commentators (Bouveresse 1995, McGinn 1997). Briefly he shows that we have a picture of the inner world of mental processes and the outer world of public things. This division is empty in practice because it is grounded in the grammatical distinctions between concepts which describe our world. A friendly smile, a depressed look are neither inner nor outer events but expressions whose meaning lies in the context in which they occur. 'What determines our judgement, our concepts and reactions, is not what one man is doing now, an individual action, but the whole hurly-burly of human actions, the background against which we see any action' (Wittgenstein 1981: §567). 'What goes on inwardly, too, only has meaning in the river of life' (Wittgenstein 1992: 30).

The interesting point is that these criticisms have had little or no effect on psychoanalysis although they have been generally known for

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some fifty years. This is not because any psychoanalyst or anyone else has given a reasoned rebuttal of Wittgenstein. The same popular beliefs soldier on. Why is this? Part of the answer lies in the narrow intellectual horizon of psychoanalysis and that most specialists will only read within their own speciality. But a more interesting answer lies in the very different approach of Wittgenstein to self-knowledge from that of most people in our culture.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

One of the most prevalent beliefs in our culture is that the way to wisdom, mental health, relief of mental conflict and mental pain is through self-knowledge. This belief goes back at least as far as Socrates. Thus in a famous passage in the *Phaedrus* Socrates criticises those who try to explain myths and legends (Freud and Jung would be modern examples), suggesting that their explanations are labourious and over-clever and, in any case, never more than probable. Then he adds:

In no way do I have leisure for these things. The reason, my friend, is this. I am not yet able to 'know myself' in accordance with the Delphic inscription. It seems to me to be absurd to study alien things so long as that ignorance remains.

(Plato, *Phaedrus*: §229e, author's translation)

Plato only wrote dialogues because he was more interested in the way of inquiry than of demonstration. His method was not to derive consequences from postulates and so build up theories but to ask fertile questions which can lead to the formulation of the real issues which can lead to self-confirming answers. All answers are discounted except those given by the person being questioned so that he genuinely consents to the evidence; this makes sure that the question belongs to him and no one else. It is a method in which a person is thrust into being both inquisitor and witness and so can learn to know himself.

Freud too thought that self-knowledge was the way to the cure of neurosis but he had a very different notion of what that meant. He thought of himself as a scientist and so had a scientist's notion of knowledge. Thus he starts his 'Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis' (Freud 1973:39) with these words: 'I cannot tell how much knowledge about psychoanalysis each one of you has already acquired from what you have read or from hearsay'. He continues to tell us about his observations and discoveries regarding the contents and mechanisms of the

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mind in much the same way as a neurophysiologist would lecture us about the brain. Our troubles, he claims, are because we do not know our minds in the way a psychoanalyst does. Our instinctual impulses have been repressed so that their representatives lie in the unconscious where they are governed by mechanisms such as condensation and displacement. The mechanism of cure is to free the libido from its attachments which are withdrawn from the ego and so making it once more serviceable to the ego. Freud claimed to have discovered these mechanisms and the unconscious itself and psychoanalysts have been working out the details ever since. The assumptions about the nature of the mind, of consciousness, of language, which undergird this theory are never mentioned, let alone questioned. Inquisitor and witness have been torn apart so now it is the analyst alone who is the inquisitor.

Wittgenstein's notion of self-knowledge is very different. He wrote: 'I ought to be no more than a mirror, in which my reader can see his own thinking with all its deformities so that, helped in this way, he can put it right' (Wittgenstein 1980: 18).

So self-knowledge is obtained, not by telling someone what is in their minds or what their minds are like, but by enabling them to see what is confusing them and see their own temptations and so recognise them as temptations to be avoided. The problem of the self and our knowledge of it is not resolved by advancing theories but like the problem of life, it finds its solution in the dissolving of the problem. That is when we no longer concern ourselves with ourselves but live in the world appropriately.

Wittgenstein reflected on the notion of the self, the I, the soul and the subject throughout his philosophical life. In his 1914-16 notebooks he was writing: 'The I, the I is what is deeply mysterious'; 'As the subject is not a part of the world but a presupposition of its existence, so good and evil which are predicates of the subject, are not properties in the world'; 'The I is not an object'; and so on (Wittgenstein 1979:80).

In the *Tractatus* he developed very sophisticated notions about the confusions surrounding the notion of the self. He made a crucial distinction between the philosophical and the psychological meaning of the self (Wittgenstein 1961: §5.641). The philosophical meaning of the self is that it is the limit of the world and not a part of it and happiness depends on the understanding of this. Thus 'the world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man' (Wittgenstein 1961: §6.43).

In vulgar psychological thinking we tend to think of the self as some sort of a mental substance, a ghost in the machine. The first person

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pronoun, I, is thought to name a self which is assumed to be something essential inside one's mind or in the inner world, so it forms a nucleus for the formation of images and so phantasy. Suppose I believe I am a failure. Now objectively I may have failed in many things; I failed my school exams so I am only a road sweeper, I have had several 'failed' marriages and I drink too much and so on. But if I am confused about the meaning of 'I' I will believe that I, this named 'substance' inside me is a failure and will feel and act accordingly; this will manifest perhaps in chronic depression and my always placing myself in a situation so that I fail, confirming to me that I am a failure.

When we come to see that all this is a nonsense and that the pronoun I does not name any object then we can be a 'failure' but be happy. Our failures are real enough, they are facts and can be stated as such, but sentences state facts and do not name mythical substances. But Wittgenstein goes much further than this. In the penultimate words of the *Tractatus* he states:

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.

(Wittgenstein 1961: §6.54)

The point is that if we argue that the self is not an object we are putting forward a philosophical proposition and so people may be led to believe that with no self there is an emptiness inside them which they feel compelled to fill. So Wittgenstein and the sceptics insist that they are not putting forward philosophical doctrines or theses, for they are therapists (Diamond 1991: 179–204). If they put forward any thesis about the self it would simply lead to arguments as to whether 'I' is a referring expression or not and would not be returning words home to the ordinary from the non-places to which they had been dragged by people hypnotised by crude notions of language. Clinically it would lead to the nonsense of telling a depressed person a thesis about the self and expecting this would be helpful!

This applies to putting forward any thesis about a neurosis. It simply leads to a hysteric hysterically trying to cure his hysteria; an obsessional obsessionally trying to cure his obsessions and so on. The ancient sceptics put it thus: 'People who hold beliefs posit as real the things they hold beliefs about, while Sceptics utter their own phrases in such a way

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that they are implicitly cancelled by themselves, then they cannot be said to hold beliefs in uttering them' (Sextus Empiricus: Bk 1 §15). The field of psychotherapy is full of beliefs about the nature and causes of neurosis, whereas neuroses are due to people holding false beliefs positing as real what is not a fact. Theories of neurosis therefore simply reproduce on a meta-level the very disease they seek to cure.

A person deeply embroiled in confusions about the self may take many years or a life time to get a clear view of his confusions; stating philosophical propositions will be of little help as eventually he must recognise them as nonsensical as they try to say of reality what cannot be said. The Pyrrhonian sceptics suspended judgement about all dogmatic assertions about reality and so they could listen without the intervening screen of theories and conclusions at the same time being aware that speakers do not say what they seem to say. As Sextus (1994: Bk 1 §14) put it, therapists: 'say what is apparent to themselves and report their own feelings without holding opinions, affirming nothing about external objects'. Or we must say as clearly as we can what can be said and 'it will mean the unspeakable (*das Unsagbare*) by clearly displaying (*darstellen*) the speakable' (Wittgenstein 1961: §4.115).

Self-knowledge implies that we need to know ourselves; but knowledge here is easily taken to mean that we know our own psychological states by observing ourselves in much the same way as we know what we perceive by observing it. Thus it makes sense to say that we know someone is in pain if we observe particular behaviour – he looks ill, he is holding himself tensely, he groans from time to time and so on. But of course it is possible to speak of doubt here, he may be a very good actor. But do we know our own experience in the same way? Can we doubt it? Do we report or describe on our own experience by observing our inner experience as an analysand is supposed to do in psychoanalysis?

Supposing someone has just heard that a person he dearly loves is gravely ill and will probably die. He may feel sad. Does he observe himself and then report the presence of sadness? Of course if someone else were sad one may observe them and report that they are sad but does one observe one's own sadness? Does it make sense that he can doubt whether he is sad or not? Does it make sense for him to say: 'I know I am sad' as if that is a report of some observed mental process? He may say: 'I am sad' but this is an expression of sadness, not a report of a process. Of course he may keep his sadness to himself, perhaps with a stiff upper lip, but that does not mean that he does not feel sad, although it may mean that others do not know he is sad. In short it makes no sense to say that we know our own experiences or that we

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do not know them. Rather sadness is better understood as an instinctive expression, a natural response to a particular situation.

We may deceive ourselves and pretend that we are sad when we are not or pretend that we do not care and perhaps become manic but self-deception only makes sense if at root there are natural responses. Self-deception does not depend on reporting an inner event falsely, but is a capacity to mislead for some purpose or other.

Let me give some examples of self-deception in therapy. A lot of psychotherapeutic talk concerns motives. But these are very tricky to handle and easily lead to self-deception. Thus a patient who is English and a Christian, and whom I had seen for two years or so, sends me a Christmas card at Christmas. What should I do? What is her motive? Perhaps it is an expression of an infantile wish and so I should respond in the classical manner and refuse the gift and interpret her act. But perhaps this would be mean on my part and be a manifestation of my anal-retentive wish for control of the patient. But on the other hand if I 'gave in' and accepted the card perhaps I would be acting out of a maternal countertransference and surrendering to the patient's controlling projective identification.

There is no end to the motives one can impute to the therapist and patient. But perhaps sending a card is a natural response to the particular situation for this patient and we do not seek motives for these. It would be absurd to ask what is my motive for putting on my trousers when I get up in the morning, but it might be worth enquiring why I took them off at a public meeting. Here again there is endless room for dispute. I say I took them off as a protest against bourgeois respectability; someone else might say it was because I am very narcissistic. How do we assess these claims? If I said I took them off because the man in the moon told me to then this would be unintelligible.

People who have seen several therapists have told me how each one takes exception to different aspects of the person's life and so will interpret accordingly. Some do not like signs of aggression, others have a fine eye for obsessional features, others concentrate on sexual deviations, others on breaks in therapy and so on. Thus one woman was married to a sexually inhibited man and during analysis started an affair. The analyst took exception to this and interpreted it as an acting out of transference fantasies. Her second analyst on the other hand thought analysis had strengthened her ego's capacity for decision which had accompanied the liberation of her sexuality and so did not interpret her motives as acting out.

The sceptical question is, why does this patient go from one therapist to another to have his actions interpreted in terms of one theoretical

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system or another. These systems hide an implicit moral stance under the guise of objective science. Self-knowledge is to be discovered in the action of relationship, not by cutting oneself off from the flow of life and then seeking an answer to one's problems which is conditioned by a theoretical system. That is one type of self-deception.

One particular move in sceptical therapy which causes bemusement and anger is questioning 'the good'. Therapists are full of what is good for people; to them 'obviously' therapy is good; but it is also good to be Kleinian, or person-centered, or lesbian, or heterosexual, etc. All this may be questioned at appropriate times by the sceptic. Sextus Empiricus produces many arguments on this (1994: Bk 3 §§21-3). This stance towards 'the good', in my experience, produces apoplexy in many therapists and one is labelled homophobic, anti-psychoanalysis, etc. Sceptics, on the whole, have to bear the burden of being seen as particularly wicked by most people. My impression is that patients who have seen a number of therapists do best with a sceptical approach to therapy.

So self-knowledge is not at all what it seems to be; for there is no self to know and the concept of knowledge cannot be applied in a straightforward way to one's own experience. So what was Peter expressing when he said that he feared going to school might threaten his love for his mother?

PRIMITIVE REACTION

A Freudian explanation comes to mind. Peter is in the throes of the Oedipus Complex. His head symbolises his penis and blood going to it is an erection so Peter is fearful of his mother's sexual envy. But this is an argument from analogy; we have to see the analogy between the head and penis and between blood going to the head and an erection for it to make sense. An analogy is a way of looking at things, but it does not give us any proof that that is the actual way that Peter understood what he was saying, let alone that it is the final truth of the matter, as analogies are endless. How do we know that is the true reason for his statement and not an explanation imposed by people who see certain phenomena through the spectacles of sexual analogies?

I want to show that Peter's response to the situation of starting school can best be understood as expressing a fear that he would lose touch with the primitive language game of expressing his love for his mother which requires no justification or evidence. At school he would learn to reason, argue, doubt, and absorb and justify knowledge. These are secondary activities which are built on primitive language games but can

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easily take over so that we forget the primitive on which the rest depends to make sense.

How does one learn one's mother tongue?

When a child learns language it learns at the same time what is to be investigated and what not. When it learns that there is a cupboard in the room, it isn't taught to doubt whether what it sees later on is still a cupboard or only a kind of stage set.

(Wittgenstein 1969: §172)

Learning one's native language is a kind of training depending on man's primitive, that is, prelinguistic, innate ability to recognise regularities in the world and in the actions of human beings. Infants are surrounded by speakers much of the time and they respond to the rhythm of language and attune themselves to its harmony. Their behaviour is responded to by the people around them in appropriate ways, so they are brought to act as other competent members of their family. 'The origin and the primitive form of the language game is a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop. Language – I want to say – is a refinement. "In the beginning was the deed"' (Wittgenstein 1993: 395). Children do not learn first that books exist rather they learn to fetch and look at books, sit in chairs, sit on the potty etc. (Wittgenstein 1969: §476). So children gradually get the point and follow the rules of the respective practices just as others do. 'Does a child believe that milk exists? Or does it know that milk exists? Does a cat know that a mouse exists?' (Wittgenstein 1969: §478). Knowledge, belief, justification come much later than the natural associations and significations that are primitive; children simply have to trust the adults first of all, otherwise they could not learn to speak. 'The primitive form of the language game is certainty, not uncertainty. For uncertainty could never lead to action' (Wittgenstein 1993: 397). 'A child learns there are reliable and unreliable informants much later than it learns facts which are told it' (Wittgenstein 1969: §143). 'What is essential for us is, after all, spontaneous agreement, spontaneous sympathy' (Wittgenstein 1980(a): §699). "'Knowledge" and "certainty" belong to different categories. They are not two "mental states" like, say "surmising" and "being sure"' (Wittgenstein 1969: §308).

So the certainties of primitive language games like: 'this is a hand' or 'this is red' or 'Mummy loves me' cannot be justified, for they are basic to our human form of life. The more elaborate language games that one learns at school need more than the simple training and spontaneous agreement on which primitive language games depend. Facts

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like 'the earth is round', 'William the Conqueror came in 1066', 'mammals are warm blooded' require reflection to make sense and the more sophisticated the game, the more it depends on reflection, quietening doubts and questioning. Such facts require a rational foundation, in contrast to primitive language games which have no rational foundation (which does not mean they are irrational).

Primitive language games, such as the expression of a child's love for its mother are independent, in the sense that the language and the ways of acting with which it is connected is independent of the ways we speak about and act in relation to physical objects and processes. So there cannot be a single principle which accounts for both. Also, the meaningfulness of the form of language cannot be separated from an understanding of the activities connected with it – playing with the mother, kissing her and so on; an insight made use of in play therapy.

Primitive language games are independent as they are not grounded in beliefs and cannot be justified (Hertzberg 1992: 24–39). Thus in adult love we may love a person because they are pretty, or wealthy, or dependable, or because the parents approve etc. and of course we may doubt our love or the other person's love for us. So instead of encountering another's love and allowing it to be sustaining we may seek evidence for it; this is deeply destructive as when basic trust is destroyed it will not be restored by a sufficiency of evidence. We may then be led to worry about something hidden – in the unconscious perhaps. None of this applies to the primitive language game of a child's love for its mother which is open and this is why it used to be called innocent. But this innocence has a double edge. For if the mother actually hates the child – tries to smother it etc. – then the child will understand this as love. People brought up in this way, in which hate masquerades as love, tend to have deep confusions which take a long time to clarify.

When we see the rich variety of primitive reactions in human life we are less inclined to impose theoretical models on them and this enables us to escape from the impoverished view of human existence that ensues when the variety of human relations are forced into a single mould. The innocence of a child's love for its mother is perverted when it is explained through theory which can never be more than possibly true.

So Peter understood himself and his situation quite well. Going to school would mean he would learn to doubt, he would learn information that would be far removed from his heart – the seat of spontaneous response – and could go to his head – the seat of reflection. He could easily lose touch with the forms of life fundamental to being human

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that escape our notice because they are so ordinary and are right in front of our eyes. They are a requirement for our understanding anything at all and so are exempt from explanation. Our hopes and fears, science and mathematics, religions and therapies, in the end focus on what is distinctively human, our form of life; when this is forgotten we will create therapeutic theories and so lose ourselves in one or other of the three hundred or so current intellectual castles in the air.

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