

VI

Grammar and Forms of Life

THE PROBLEM about the relationship between words and the world arises, in a way, out of our concepts; yet it is not a “merely verbal” problem, and the nature of our concepts itself depends on our lives as animate creatures in the world. In this chapter we shall explore the way in which Wittgenstein tries to hold a dialectical balance between these two truths. In the process we shall examine his notions of “grammar,” the unwritten rules governing our language and regulating our language games; “criteria,” a constituent of grammar specifically intended to show how words are related to the world; and “forms of life,” which underlie language games and grammatical regularities. “The relation between mind (language) and the world *überhaupt* is,” Cavell suggests, “the central question” which these Wittgensteinian notions are meant to answer.¹

Sometimes Wittgenstein seems to say that grammar concerns only relationships among words, the internal consistency of our language. This is often the case when he talks of two expressions being “grammatically related,” or exposes false analogies between expressions as “grammatically misleading.” Sometimes he even seems to stress the purely linguistic, non-empirical character of grammar, particularly when he is diagnosing conceptual puzzlement. He says that conceptual questions often strike us as being empirical but are really grammatical instead. He tells the person who is conceptually puzzled: “You interpret a grammatical movement made by yourself as a quasi-physical phenomenon which you are observing.”² And he says that such puzzlement arises because “we predicate of the thing what lies in the method of representing it,” which surely implies that language is a method of representation, and distinct from the world represented.³

¹ Stanley Cavell, “The Claim to Rationality” (unpublished dissertation, Harvard University), p. 129.

² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. by G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1968), par. 401; compare par. 251.

³ *Ibid.*, par. 104.

But Wittgenstein also insists that his concern with grammar “does *not* mean that I want to talk only about words.”⁴ Wittgenstein does not really reject our desire, when we are conceptually puzzled, to get beyond mere words to the essence of the thing itself—to investigate knowledge, not merely the word “knowledge”; he redirects that desire. He says that he, too, is interested in essence, only, “*essence is expressed by grammar.*”⁵ We find out the answer to our questions about the essence of knowledge by studying the grammar of “knowledge.” Wittgenstein also says “grammar tells what kind of object anything is.”⁶ And that certainly suggests that grammar is not merely about language but can be informative about objects in the world, can answer certain kinds of questions concerning objects in the world.

Conceptual puzzlement, Wittgenstein says, arises when we are confused about the grammar of an expression, entangled in the rules we see governing its use. The puzzlement ceases to be paradoxical and becomes amenable to investigation when we achieve a perspicuous overview of the grammar. Thus, if we are puzzled over whether knowledge must be true, infallible, Wittgenstein recommends that we proceed by investigating expressions in which that word, and related words, are used; for instance, by asking “what is the process of ‘getting to know’ like in this case?” Such a question may seem “only vaguely relevant, if relevant at all,” to the essence of knowledge itself, but it is really “a question concerning the grammar of the word ‘to know,’ and this becomes clearer if we put it in the form: ‘What do we *call* “getting to know”?’ It is part of the grammar of the word ‘chair’ that *this* is what we call ‘to sit on a chair’, and it is part of the grammar of the word ‘meaning’ that *this* is what we call ‘explanation of a meaning’.”⁷

The grammar of a word, then, includes all the various verbal expressions in which that word is characteristically used. The grammar of “chair” includes not merely “to sit on a chair,” but also “to mend a chair,” “to lend a chair,” “to match a chair,” “to save someone a chair,” “to chair a meeting,” and so on. That much should be familiar from earlier chapters. But this passage tells us more than that; it begins to suggest the relationship between grammar and the world. We need to note carefully the words Wittgenstein italicizes in it. Grammar, he says, tells us what we would call anything in a particular case; for instance, what in a particular case we would *call* “getting to know.” It tells us what would *count* as “getting to know.” The italicized “*call*” is already a hint, but it might still conceivably be construed as concerning the relations among words: that grammar tells us what verbal account of phenomena would be called “getting to know,” what groups of words would mean the same as the expres-

⁴ *Ibid.*, par. 370; my italics.

⁵ *Ibid.*, par. 371.

⁶ *Ibid.*, par. 372.

⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 23–24.

sion "getting to know." But the italicized demonstrative "*this*" should preclude such an interpretation. Grammar tells us that *this*, a set of phenomena in the world, is what we call "getting to know." Thus Wittgensteinian grammar, as Cavell says, is very much a matter of "determining the relation between an expression and what in the world that expression is used *for*."⁸ It specifies not merely the expressions in which a word is characteristically used, but also, crucially, "what counts as an application of" those expressions.⁹

Thus, the grammar of "chair" tells us not merely that a chair is the kind of thing one can "sit on," but what sort of worldly phenomena count as "sitting on a chair." It tells us not merely *that* one "sits on" a "chair," but *how* one sits on a chair. What makes it a chair is the *way* we use the object, that we sit on it in that characteristic way. As Cavell says, "You *can* sit on a cigarette, or on a thumb tack, or on a flag pole, but not in *that way*. Can you sit on a table or a tree stump in that (the 'grammatical') way? Almost; especially if they are placed against a wall. I.e., you can *use* a table or a stump *as* a chair (= a place to sit, a seat) in a way you cannot use a tack as a chair. But so can you use a screw-driver as a dagger; that won't make a screw-driver a dagger. What can *serve as a chair* is not a chair, and nothing would (be said to) serve as a chair if there were no (were nothing we called) (orthodox) chairs. We could say: It is part of the grammar of the word 'chair' that *this* is what we call 'to serve as a chair.'"¹⁰

But grammar does not tell us explicitly, in words, how one sits on a chair as distinct from a pin. It is crucial to Wittgenstein's position that the italicized "*this*" points not to a verbal description of circumstances, but to the (real or remembered or imagined) circumstances themselves. For it points to the kind of paradigmatic case of a word's use which we discussed in connection with "learning from cases"; it relies on connections already made between words and the world. The kinds of words whose grammar Wittgenstein investigates are not specialized, technical terms, like the names of species of songbirds, in connection with which there can be technical problems of identification. He investigates terms like "knowledge" and "meaning" and "pain," whose instances are not recognized by any characteristic markings, whose recognition is not a problem for special expertise or training. "There are no marks or characteristic features of sitting in a chair which could be listed or sketched on a page; that could be done for goldfinches, or for illustrating how West Point cadets are to sit. . . . There are technical handbooks on bird-recognition, but none which teach us the special marks for recognizing when someone is sitting, or intending to sit, or sitting uncomfortably," on a chair.¹¹

⁸ Cavell, "Claim to Rationality," p. 46.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

Cavell says that when he italicizes the demonstrative "*this*," Wittgenstein means to "remind us of those very general facts of nature we all—all who can talk and act together—do (must) in fact be using as criteria; facts we *only* need reminding of, for we cannot fail to know them in the sense of having never *learned* them."¹² It is not that we know nothing about human sitting, but that we know too much; we cannot say what we know, cannot do justice to it. But then, we do not need to, either. If one persists in feeling that it should be easy to say how human beings sit on chairs, what counts as "sitting on a chair," perhaps that is because one is so easily captured by the first picture of sitting on a chair that comes to mind. But Wittgenstein might have said, as he did about "intending," that "there are a great many combinations of actions and circumstances that we should call 'sitting on a chair.'" Consider, with Cavell, the example of circumstances "in which someone was not now *on* the chair, but was (as we say, doing what we call) 'getting up for a moment to turn off the coffee,' *but she's sitting in that chair*."¹³

Wittgensteinian grammar, then, does not relate a name to an object by teaching us the distinguishing features of that kind of object; it relates, "we might say, various concepts to the concept of that object. Here the test of your possession of a concept (e.g. of a chair, or a bird; of the meaning of a word; of what it is to know something) would be your ability to use the concept in conjunction with other concepts, your knowledge of which concepts are relevant to the one in question and which are not; your knowledge of how various relevant concepts, used in conjunction with the concepts of different kinds of objects, require different kinds of contexts for their competent employment."¹⁴

Grammar, one can say, establishes the place of a concept in our system of concepts, and thereby in our world. It controls what other concepts, what questions and observations, are *relevant* to a particular concept. That is the sense, I believe, in which "grammar tells us what kind of object anything is." Grammar relates the concept of "chair" to concepts like "sitting" and "mending" and "lending"; which is to say that for something to be a chair, it must be such that a human being can sit on it, and sit on it in *that* way. Unless, of course, it is "broken," which is something that can happen to chairs, but not in the same way that it can happen to clocks or homes or promises. And if it is broken then perhaps one can mend it, but mend it in *that* way, not as one mends a dress or one's ways. All this becomes easier to accept the more one moves away from nouns

¹² *Ibid.*; compare Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, tr. by Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe, ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1969), pars. 27–28: "We recognize normal circumstances but cannot precisely describe them. At most, we can describe a range of abnormal ones. What is 'learning a rule'?—*This*. What is 'making a mistake in applying it'?—*This*. And what is pointed to here is something indeterminate."

¹³ Cavell, "Claim to Rationality," p. 86.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 90; compare p. 93.

that tempt us to think of them as labels for simple physical objects. No one will be surprised to learn that knowing what "a mistake" is depends not on having mastered its distinguishing features or characteristics, but on having mastered what sorts of circumstances count as "making a mistake," "preventing a mistake," "excusing a mistake," and so on. And we will make no empirical discoveries about mistakes which our grammatical categories do not allow.

Grammar is learned, we have said, from cases, from the experiencing of words in certain verbal and worldly contexts. In that sense, it is dependent on experienced reality; in that sense, our experience of reality is prior to language, prior to grammar. (It is, one might say, roughly one and a half to two years prior. The child has a backlog of preverbal experience by the time it begins to talk.) But because in learning grammar we learn what will count as various circumstances, grammar is also prior to experience. Though not chronologically prior in learning, it is logically prior, once learned. It is prior not so much to what we can experience, but to what we can *say* (and therefore what we can think discursively) about our experience. That is why grammar can tell us what a thing is, and why Wittgenstein sometimes sounds like a philosophical Idealist who regards reality as a product of our conventions. In fact, the closest correct parallel is probably not Idealism, but Kant. Wittgenstein teaches what might be considered a sort of linguistic Kantianism; what Wittgenstein calls "grammatical knowledge" very much resembles Kant's "transcendental knowledge"; and the validity of grammar might well be said to be synthetic a priori.¹⁵ It is useful to recall, also, that Austin said his approach might be called "linguistic phenomenology," only that is rather a mouthful.¹⁶

The Idealist theme, the insistence that our language controls what can possibly occur in the world, seems to me one of the few deep threads of continuity between the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein's later work. In the *Tractatus*, as we have seen, language is taken to picture reality, and certain aspects of our experience (religion, esthetics, ethics) are taken to transcend the reach of language altogether. So there would seem to be a reality independent of language. Yet there is a continuing stress at the same time on language as providing a framework which governs the possibilities of anything we can say about reality. "Logic is *prior* to every experience—that something *is so*."¹⁷ The facts of reality can be formulated only in accord with that logic, for "to understand a proposition means to know what is the case if it is true. (One can understand it, therefore, without knowing whether it is true.)"¹⁸ Consequently, "if I know an object I also know all its possible occurrences in states of affairs. (Every one of these possibilities must be part of the nature of the object.) A new possibility

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

¹⁶ J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), p. 130.

¹⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, tr. by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (New York: Humanities Press, 1961), par. 5.552.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, par. 4.024.

cannot be discovered later. . . . A speck in the visual field, though it need not be red, must have *some* colour: it is, so to speak, surrounded by colour-space. Tones must have *some* pitch, objects of the sense of touch *some* degree of hardness, and so on. Objects contain the possibilities of all situations."¹⁹ In short, for each individual speaker of a language, "*the limits of my language* mean the limits of my world. Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits."²⁰

In the later philosophy, Wittgenstein no longer says that "objects" contain or govern the "possibilities of all situations," but that "grammar" does so. Knowing the grammar of a word, we know what kinds of things are—can be—said with it, what would count as appropriate occasions for saying them. A "tone" is the sort of thing that has a "pitch"—which is to say that our concepts of "tone" and "pitch" are grammatically related in certain ways. An "object" is the sort of thing that has some degree of "hardness" if we "touch" it—which is to say that these expressions are grammatically related in certain ways. Grammar governs "the '*possibilities*' of phenomena," by regulating "the *kind of statement* that we make about phenomena."²¹

In the later philosophy, Wittgenstein no longer says that "a new possibility cannot be discovered later"; for language is an open system, and even what is governed by rules need not be "everywhere circumscribed by rules." But the ways in which new instances can occur, what will count as a new instance, the avenues for conceptual growth and change, remain deeply controlled by grammar.

In his later writings, Wittgenstein no longer talks about the troublesome concept of "the world," but examines various particular ways in which our concepts and their grammar determine the possibilities of phenomena, by determining what would count as instances of various phenomena. For example, he asks "Can a machine have toothache?" If we say that it cannot, Wittgenstein asks what sort of a "cannot" that is: "Did you mean to say that all our past experience has shown that a machine never had toothache?"²² No doubt our experience is consistent with this conclusion, but we do not arrive at the conclusion from experience; it is not an empirical generalization. It has to do with the meaning of terms like "machine" and "toothache," with their grammar. Grammar tells us that a "machine" is not the kind of thing that can "feel pain"; a "toothache" is not the kind of thing by which "machines" are afflicted. Nothing that we could experience or observe in connection with a machine would *be*, would count as, the machine's "having a toothache." When you say a machine cannot have a toothache, "the impossibility of which you speak is a logical one."²³

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pars. 2.0123, 2.0131, 2.014.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, par. 5.6, 5.61; compare pars. 5.62, 6.43, 6.431.

²¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, par. 90; compare par. 97.

²² Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books*, p. 16.

²³ *Ibid.*

Or again, "We say a dog is afraid his master will beat him; but not, he is afraid his master will beat him to-morrow. Why not?"²⁴ Clearly, "being afraid that his master will beat him to-morrow" is an expression which makes sense only against a certain background, in a certain context, like "point to the color." And in the instance of a dog, "the surroundings which are necessary for this behaviour to be" fear about tomorrow "are missing."²⁵ A dog cannot—logically, grammatically cannot—be afraid about something happening tomorrow. We are not willing, our language does not allow us, to ascribe that predicate to an animal. (Of course, we can do so, for instance, in the context of fiction; but then we also anthropomorphize the dog in other ways. For example, we imagine him as thinking in words.)

All this certainly sounds as though Wittgenstein were saying that the world's being the way it is, is determined simply by human convention. Because we attribute "fear about tomorrow" only to human beings, dogs cannot do it; nothing a dog could do would qualify. Grammar governs the possibilities of intelligible experience, and therefore it limits what the world could possibly turn out to contain. We can make only those empirical discoveries permitted by the concepts we already have. It is grammatically impossible to discover through empirical research a married bachelor, a four-sided triangle, a machine with a toothache.

But Wittgenstein also teaches a very different, conflicting theme about the relationship between concepts and world, a theme that sounds more like pragmatism or Nietzsche or even Marx than like ordinary-language philosophy. Wittgenstein's special genius lies in being able to hold these conflicting themes in balance, and teaching us ways of doing so for ourselves. This second theme concerns the way in which our concepts are dependent on the world, are the products not so much of the world directly, but of our lives conducted in that world. In crude summary, what Wittgenstein argues is that a concept is determined not by the "object" for which it is a "label" (since there may be none), but by the language games in which it is used; in that sense it is conventional. But our playing those language games rather than others is the result neither of accident nor of arbitrary free choice. It is the result of what the world in which we live is like, and what we are like, what we naturally feel and do. The "formation of concepts can be explained by . . . very general facts of nature. (Such facts as mostly do not strike us because of their generality.) . . . If anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize—then let him imagine certain very 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."²⁶

²⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, par. 650.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, par. 250.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

At one point Wittgenstein asks how it is that an arrow in a diagram *points*.²⁷ On the surface, this question is merely intended to remind us that the “pointing” of an arrow in a certain direction is a matter of human convention, that it has to be learned, that every rule still needs to be applied and can be misapplied. But there is also a deeper significance. For, where does our convention come from, that arrows in diagrams and on signposts “point” in the direction of the arrow tip? Arrows are something that human beings once used as instruments for hunting. They were made with a sharp tip at one end for this purpose, and to function they must be shot tip-first. So the convention about how an arrow points is not an arbitrary one. To be sure, if this planet’s physics were very different, if what we call hunting had a totally different purpose than it now has, one might need very different “arrows” or might shoot arrows in some radically different way. So arrows that point are conventional; but that convention is not based on an arbitrary agreement that might just as well have been arranged some other way.

The argument is most easily apprehended where the conventionality of our concepts is obvious, and their foundation in nature therefore most surprising. Consider Wittgenstein’s treatment of our systems for measuring, or for distinguishing colors. We have, for example, the convention that twelve inches equals one foot. “No one,” Wittgenstein says, will ordinarily see it “as an empirical proposition. It expresses a convention. But measuring would entirely lose *its ordinary character* if, for example, putting twelve bits each one inch long end to end didn’t ordinarily yield a length which can in its turn be preserved in a special way.”²⁸ The conventional proposition has point only against the background of a certain constancy in the shape of what we call “objects,” the human capacity to remember numbers of a certain size, the various uses the measuring of lengths has in our lives, and so on. The proposition “twelve inches equals one foot” presupposes all this background, but it does not, itself, assert or express the background truths that give measuring its present point. “The proposition *is grounded in* a technique. And, if you like, also in the physical and psychological facts that make the technique *possible*. But it doesn’t follow that its sense is to express these conditions.”²⁹ The proposition “twelve inches equals one foot” doesn’t *mean* “objects do not generally change shape rapidly, human beings can remember numbers, etc.”

“What we call ‘measuring,’ ” Wittgenstein says, “is partly determined by a certain constancy in results of measurement.”³⁰ Nothing that does not produce results with that kind of constancy would *be* (what we call) “measuring.” The convention precludes our “suddenly discovering” a

²⁷ *Ibid.*, par. 454.

²⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, tr. by G. E. M. Anscombe, ed. by G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees, and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), p. 159.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, par. 242.

kind of measuring whose results are random. The convention about feet and inches is arbitrary. But our notion of measurement, which underlies it, is not arbitrary; it arises from the natural fact that, given our world and ourselves, when we *do* what is called "measuring" we *get* a certain constancy of results. "The procedure of putting a lump of cheese on a balance and fixing the price by the turn of the scale would lose its point if it frequently happened for such lumps suddenly to grow or shrink for no obvious reason."³¹ If such a basic change took place in our world, the reading of the scale would not be "false," in our present sense of "true weight" and "false weight." Rather, the whole idea of weighing would have to be revised at least for "such lumps" of cheese, and our practices with cheese and scales would have to be changed as well. "No yardstick, it might be said, would be correct, if in general they did not agree. —But when I say that, I do not mean that then they would all be *false*."³²

Much the same could be said about our system of colors. It, too, is an arbitrary convention we impose, different in different cultures.³³ But the kind of language games that are played with color words, the concept of a color, rests on a deeper convention not of our choosing, and presupposes those aspects of our nature and our world without which such language games would be impossible. What would it be like if men did not "generally agree in" their judgments of color? "One man would say a flower was red which another called blue, and so on. —But what right should we have to call these people's words 'red' and 'blue' *our* 'colour-words'? —How would they learn to use these words? And is the language-game which they learn still such as we call the use of 'names of colour'? There are evidently differences of degree here."³⁴ Wittgenstein summarizes: "We have 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? —*Not* in the nature of numbers or colours."³⁵ For, of course, the language games played with color words are the *source* of our concept of what a "color" is; they define "the nature of colors." And yet, if some fundamental aspects of the world and of ourselves *related to* what we call "colors" were different, our concept of color would have to be different as well.

"You say '*That* is red,' but how is it decided if you are right? Doesn't human agreement decide? —But do I appeal to this agreement in my judgments of colour? . . . Is it decided by appeal to the majority? Were

³¹ *Ibid.*, par. 142.

³² Wittgenstein, *Foundations of Mathematics*, p. 98.

³³ But the differences are often exaggerated. See Brent Berlin and Paul Kay, *Basic Color Terms* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969).

³⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 226.

³⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, tr. by G. E. M. Anscombe, ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), par. 357.

we taught to determine colour in *that way*?"³⁶ One could imagine such a language game: "I get a number of people to look at an object; to each of them there occurs one of a certain group of words . . . ; if the word 'red' occurred to the majority of spectators . . . the predicate 'red' belongs to the object by rights." One can imagine such a game, and "such a technique might have its importance"; but it is *not* how we now, in fact, decide what color something is, or teach colors, or justify what we say about the colors of objects. Our present language game with color words "only works, of course, when a certain agreement prevails, but the concept of agreement does not *enter into* the language-game."³⁷ It is presupposed by, but it is not itself part of, the game or part of the *meaning* of "color."

But though Wittgenstein's point is most easily accessible through such examples, its real complexity and significance emerge only when he turns to concepts where the dividing line between arbitrary convention and underlying natural preconditions is unclear—concepts, therefore, which really raise problems about the relationship of thought to the world. The examples he discusses most extensively here are, again, foci of traditional philosophical speculation: the concepts of pain and anger. In particular, these concepts are associated with a tradition of speculation about our relations to other people's feelings. There is a striking difference between what we feel when we are angry or in pain, and how we find out that others are angry or in pain. So it is often said that we know of the feelings of others only indirectly, or that we cannot really know their feelings at all. Their behavior and their words seem like outward signs which do not give us access to the feelings themselves; about the feelings of others we can at best conjecture.

One might attempt to refute such arguments with evidence from our ordinary language. After all, we learned expressions like "my pain" or "I am in pain" in connection with certain inner feelings, but we learned expressions like "his pain" or "he is in pain" in connection with certain behavior displayed by others—wincing, moaning, complaining, and so on. Since that is how we learned those expressions, that must be what they mean. So his pain is whatever we learned to call "his pain," namely, such pain behavior. It is simply mistaken or perverse to demand that the phenomena defining "my pain" should show up in cases where "his pain" is at issue. But such an attempt at refutation, we have argued before, is a vulgarization of ordinary-language philosophy and cannot succeed. No one who is conceptually troubled about pain will find such a refutation satisfactory; he will respond that it misses the point. The point, he will say, is that there is something wholly arbitrary about combining such different phenomena as what I feel when I hurt and what he does after he hits his thumb with a hammer into a single concept called "pain."

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pars. 429, 431.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, par. 430; my italics.

Wittgenstein investigates the concepts of pain and anger with the aid of the notion of "criteria," explicitly defined only in the *Blue and Brown Books*, but used also in the later works. In my judgment, the notion of criteria never succeeds in resolving the problem about pain and anger, but only restates it, along the lines just sketched. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein is so much occupied with it, and it has received so much critical attention, that we must examine it briefly. Afterward, we shall see that Wittgenstein's more general ideas allow us to deal with the conceptual problem about pain without recourse to the notion of criteria.

Criteria are one part, or aspect, of grammar; and they come into play in the investigation or explanation of the grammar of an expression. For instance, "to understand the grammar" of various "states," like the state of expecting something, being of an opinion, knowing something, but also physical states like hardness, weight, fitting, "it is necessary to ask: 'What counts as a criterion for anyone's [or any thing's] being in such a state?'"³⁸ So Wittgenstein recommends as exercises for studying the grammar of "to fit," "to be able," and "to understand," questions such as these: "(1) When is a cylinder C said to fit into a hollow cylinder H? Only while C is stuck into H? (2) Sometimes we say that C ceases to fit into H at such-and-such a time. What criteria are used in such a case for its having happened at that time? (3) What does one regard as criteria for a body's having changed its weight at a particular time if it was not actually on the balance at that time? (4) Yesterday I knew the poem by heart; today I no longer know it. In what kind of case does it make sense to ask: 'When did I stop knowing it?' (5) Someone asks me 'Can you lift this weight?' I answer 'Yes'. Now he says 'Do it!' —and I can't. In what kind of circumstances would it count as a justification to say 'When I answered "yes" I *could* do it, only now I can't?"³⁹ Or again, one investigates the grammar of "having an opinion" by asking what counts as being in that sort of state. "What, in particular cases, do we regard as criteria for someone's being of such-and-such an opinion? When do we say: he reached this opinion at that time? When: he altered his opinion? And so on. The picture which the answers to these questions give us shews *what* gets treated grammatically as a *state* here."⁴⁰

Criteria, then, are the things by which we tell whether or not something is the case, which give us occasion to say that something is so, which justify us in what we say. They are, as it were, potential answers to potential questions like "how do you know?" "how can you tell?" "what makes

³⁸ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, par. 572.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, par. 182.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, par. 573.

you think so?" "why do you say that?" But Wittgenstein also says two other things about criteria, which unfortunately seem to have contradictory implications for the concept of pain. On the one hand, criteria are supposed to be analytic; they *define* the thing that they are criteria of. Yet, on the other hand, criteria come into play only in certain cases, not all. And the only appropriate characterization of those cases seems to be: cases where the thing itself is not perceived directly, but only by means of criteria.

First, criteria are supposed to be definitive. Wittgenstein explicitly distinguishes them from what he calls "symptoms," which are merely empirically correlated with a concept. He says that if, for example, "angina" is medically defined by the presence of a particular bacillus, then we might justify the claim that someone has angina by saying that we have found the bacillus in his blood. That would be giving criteria. But we might instead justify the claim by citing his inflamed throat, which would be giving symptoms. A symptom is "a phenomenon of which experience has taught us that it coincided, in some way or other, with the phenomenon which is our defining criterion." The link between a concept and its symptoms is a "hypothesis," but the link between a concept and its criteria is a "tautology" or (part of) a definition.⁴¹

With respect to pain, Wittgenstein argues that the characteristic behavior and demeanor of someone who is hurt serve as criteria for his being in pain. They are not merely symptoms experientially correlated with something else, which is his pain itself. From these criteria we learned what "his pain" means, what his pain is. Thus, "when we learnt the use of the phrase 'so-and-so has toothache' we were pointed out certain kinds of behaviour of those who were said to have toothache," for instance, holding one's cheek.⁴² We may correlate other phenomena with this criterion, for instance, the appearance of a red patch on his cheek; these are related to his having a toothache only by hypothesis. But his holding his cheek is not just empirically correlated with something else, which is his toothache; it defines his toothache. Wittgenstein might have said, it is part of the grammar of "toothache" that *this* is what we call "his having a toothache."

Since criteria define a concept, empirical evidence cannot violate the link between them and the concept. This sounds as though Wittgenstein were saying that a man's pain behavior *is* his pain, a position we have characterized as a vulgarization. Moreover, Wittgenstein says explicitly that the traditional conceptual puzzlement about pain is merely an objection against our grammatical convention: we "rebel" against using "*this* expression in connection with *these* criteria."⁴³ Wittgenstein says that

⁴¹ Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books*, pp. 24–25.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

"the proposition 'Sensations are private' is comparable to 'One plays patience by oneself'."⁴⁴ That is to say, it is a tautological proposition about our grammar, an arbitrary convention like those of games.

But Wittgenstein also says that criteria play a role only in certain cases, not all. And when one tries to specify in what cases criteria enter, the only possible conclusion seems to be: cases where something is not perceived or known directly, itself, but *only* by way of criteria.⁴⁵ Thus, in the passage quoted earlier, one asks for the criteria of a body's having changed its weight at a certain time "if it was not actually on the balance at that time." Or one asks for the criteria of my having been able to lift a weight when I said I could, if I did not try to lift it at that moment. About concepts like "pain," in particular, Wittgenstein has what may seem a most peculiar doctrine: with respect to my own pain, no criteria are normally involved at all. When we speak of our own pain, normally we proceed without the observation or knowledge of the presence of criteria. We do not identify our own sensations by criteria, for there *are* no criteria for our own being in pain or having a certain sensation.⁴⁶ We both look at a red object; can I be sure that you have the same mental image of it as I do, that we both see the same color? "What is the criterion for the redness of an image? For me, when it is someone else's image: what he says and does. For myself, *when it is my image: nothing.*"⁴⁷ But if I do not use or need criteria to tell when I am in pain, then surely (one feels) it must be because I perceive my own pain *directly*. By contrast it then seems clear that I have only indirect signs of someone else's pain, and that those signs can sometimes go wrong. Thus, those signs, his behavior, cannot be, or define, his pain itself. And, indeed, Wittgenstein explicitly denies that he is saying that pain behavior is pain, "that the word 'pain' really means crying."⁴⁸

But then the whole notion of criteria has not improved our understanding of the problem of pain at all; at most it has restated the same dilemma in an equally insoluble way. Another man's pain behavior is all we ever experience of his pain; we never *have his* pain ourselves.⁴⁹ So that behavior must have been how we learned to use the expression "his pain," and it is not a mere symptom, correlated with *something else* we learned to call "his pain." Yet his behavior is not his pain itself; and

⁴⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, par. 248.

⁴⁵ We have spoken of grammar as linking a word to expressions in which it is characteristically used, and to occasions when those expressions are characteristically used. But of course it also links a word with other, "related" words which need not appear with it in characteristic expressions. The latter links, I think, are what criteria are meant to provide. They link "knowledge" and "getting to know," for instance, to "finding out," "verifying," "forgetting"; they link "pain" to "wincing," "suffering," "comforting."

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, par. 290; compare Cavell, "Claim to Rationality," p. 127.

⁴⁷ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, par. 377; my italics.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, par. 244; compare par. 304.

⁴⁹ Compare Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, p. 83; and Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1949), p. 209.

when we say of someone else that he is in pain, we are liable to be wrong in some ways in which we cannot be wrong about whether we ourselves are in pain. Fortunately, Wittgenstein's broader analysis of language and meaning supplies the perspective from which to untangle these difficulties.

Like our other concepts, "pain" is a conglomerate of cases, of various expressions in which these words are characteristically used, and various worldly occasions in which those expressions are characteristically used. Such a concept, as Austin points out about "anger," is a complex of diverse parts like "having mumps." It comprehends "a whole pattern of events, including occasions, symptoms, feeling and manifestation, and possibly other factors besides."⁵⁰ Yet together these make up our concept of anger, and we are right to want to call all of this diversity "anger." Austin argues that it is just "silly" to ask which of these elements really is the anger itself; and, in particular, that there is "no call to say that" what I characteristically feel when I am angry is the anger itself. I would suggest that Austin is wrong to consider conceptual puzzlement "silly," and that there is good reason why we want to say that what we feel when we are angry is the anger itself; there is also good reason for not saying so. The reason Wittgenstein has difficulties here, and the reason such concepts present a continuing problem in traditional philosophy, and the reason we ourselves are at a loss, is because the grammar of such concepts itself seems to have contradictory implications.

In the first place, that grammar displays a characteristic asymmetry between "first-," and "second-," and "third-person" expressions. If someone says about another man that he is in pain, it sometimes makes sense to ask him questions like "how do you know?" "how can you tell?" "how did you find out?" And it sometimes makes sense to say that one man "knows another is in pain," "has found out another is in pain," and so on. These questions and statements do *not* make sense concerning a man's saying of himself "I am in pain." The context of a conceptual discussion often gravely misleads us in this respect. For it invites the pursuit of analogies like this: "How do you know he is in pain?" "From his behavior." "Well, then how do you know you are in pain?" In a conceptual discussion, one gives an answer to the latter question as best one can, because it seems to make sense on analogy with the other. Perhaps one says "from my sensations." But if a man actually, in normal life, tells us that he has a toothache, we would never have occasion to respond "How do you know?" or "How can you tell?" What would such questions be designed to find out?

Thus, I never *know* that I myself am in pain, not because I am *ignorant* of my feelings, but because it makes no sense to say "I know I am in pain" (except as a forced answer to odd questions like "Are you sure you are in pain?"). "If we are using the word 'to know' as it is normally used (and how else are we to use it?), then other people very often know when

⁵⁰ Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, p. 77.

I am in pain. . . . It can't be said of me at all (except perhaps as a joke) that I *know* I am in pain. What is it supposed to mean—except perhaps that I *am* in pain? Other people cannot be said to learn of my sensations *only* from my behaviour, —for *I* cannot be said to learn of them. I *have* them. The truth is: it makes sense to say about other people that they doubt whether I am in pain; but not to say it about myself."⁵¹ With respect to my own pain, the "expression of doubt has no place in the language-game."⁵² That is one basis for explaining why Wittgenstein says I do not need and cannot have criteria for my own pain. Criteria are potential answers to potential questions like "how can you tell?" But such questions do not make sense after just any utterance whatever; they make no sense after utterances like "I am in pain."

But though the grammar of such concepts contains this characteristic asymmetry, the asymmetry is not nearly as simple as we are inclined to suppose, or as our earlier argument suggested. Our discussion suggested that we learn to call this (feeling) "my pain," and that (behavior) "his pain." But thereby it singled out one aspect of an extremely complex set of language games, ignoring all the rest. We have "definitely learned a different and much more complicated use" of the word "pain."⁵³ We not only learn to speak of "my pain" when we hurt, but also that other people will utter words like "my pain" when they behave in certain ways in certain circumstances. We not only learn to speak of "his pain" when another person behaves that way, but also that he will use words like "his pain" when we experience hurt. So the feeling, the behavior, and the circumstances are interwoven in grammar in very complex ways to make up a single concept, and pain behavior and pain circumstances are as much a part of our concept of "pain" as pain feeling is. What, then, insistently makes us want to say otherwise? Well, still other aspects of the grammar of "pain." For example, that grammatically pain is something somebody "feels" or "has" or "suffers from" or "is in." And we do not "feel" or "have" or "suffer (from)," nor "are" we "in" pain behavior—wincing, groaning, screaming. Grammatically, one can "feign" or "pretend (to be in)" pain *by*, for instance, wincing, groaning, and the like. But one cannot "feign" or "pretend (to be in)" wincing or groaning.

Most of our difficulties here, as usual, arise from the label-and-object view of language, in this case unfortunately encouraged by Wittgenstein's treatment of criteria and his way of talking about "what we *call*" things. The question, "Is *that* what we *call* 'his pain'?" cannot be answered consistently; it is bound to lead to paradox. We do not learn to *call* this "his anger" and that "my anger." We learn when, under what linguistic and worldly circumstances, it is appropriate to *say* various things, to *speak of*

⁵¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, par. 246.

⁵² *Ibid.*, par. 288.

⁵³ Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books*, p. 60.

various things.⁵⁴ It is sometimes appropriate for me to say "I am in pain" when I suffer, to say "he is in pain" when I see him behave in certain ways in certain circumstances, to say "he wasn't in pain after all" in other circumstances, and "I wasn't in pain after all" in still other, very different, circumstances. Only much later can we even ask ourselves such questions as whether pain is a "thing" and, if so, whether *that* (his behavior) is his pain. And when we say "I am in pain," it is often not as an assertion of empirical fact that may be true or false, but as a signal, like saying "Ouch!" We are trained (or anyway, we learn) as children to supplement and even replace our natural expressions of pain with verbal expressions of pain; and the latter need not function as empirical descriptions of our condition any more than the former do. As we grow up, "The verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it."⁵⁵ That is why questions like "how can you tell?" make no sense when asked after utterances like "I am in pain," just as they would make no sense after the utterance "Ouch!"

Yet there is such a thing as falsely claiming to be in pain; such expressions are not true performatives, whose mere uttering makes them so. Moreover, there are occasions when we really do learn of our own feelings from our behavior—particularly when we suddenly become aware of feelings of which we were not fully conscious. "I guess I must have been very angry," we say, "I've bitten my pipe stem completely in two!" In such contexts, a question like "how can you tell you were angry?" would make sense, and we do learn of our own anger from criteria. But such occasions are rare.⁵⁶ Indeed, while we can imagine them about anger, I am not sure that we can imagine them at all about pain. The best I can do is to recall a couple I know. The husband was present while his wife gave birth to their child. Afterward, he asked her, "Did it hurt a lot?" And she said, "No. It really didn't hurt at all; just hard work." And he asked, "So why did you scream like that?" She had no recollection of having screamed. Here it is not clear whether we should say that she was in pain but has forgotten, or that she was not in pain but nevertheless screamed (for some psychological or physiological reason).

So although there is a characteristic asymmetry between first and third person in the grammar of utterances about both pain and anger, and although both concepts have traditionally been used interchangeably in discussing our knowledge of the feelings of others, their grammar is also significantly different. Nor can one apply to them directly the conclusions we drew earlier concerning understanding and expecting. We concluded

⁵⁴ I believe that Wittgenstein uses this locution in connection with criteria only once, in par. 573 of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, par. 244.

⁵⁶ Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, par. 539: "I infer that he needs to go to the doctor from observation of his behaviour; but I do *not* make this inference in my own case from observation of my behaviour. Or rather, I do this sometimes, but *not* in parallel cases."

that even the characteristic feeling of expecting will be expecting only in appropriate circumstances; otherwise it might be a "peculiar feeling that something is about to explode." But one cannot imagine a comparable case about pain, a situation in which we would be moved to say, "I have this peculiar painlike feeling even though there is no occasion for pain." And that is one reason why with pain we are particularly inclined to insist that what I feel when I am in pain is "the pain itself." As always, it is dangerous to generalize from any one example; we need to look and see in detail how our grammar functions.

But the basic initial puzzlement about pain still seems to remain. Even if "my pain" and "his pain" do not sort out neatly, the one corresponding to pain feeling and the other to pain behavior, still there seems to be something wholly arbitrary about blending such diverse phenomena into a single concept. A concept like pain, we have said, is a compound of diverse cases; it rests not on a single defining feature but on a multitude of props—feelings, circumstances, actions. Why should these be grouped together; what has our own suffering in common with someone else's holding his cheek? They seem to be linked by nothing beyond the arbitrary convention of our language. But Wittgenstein responds, "Is it arbitrary?—It is not every sentence-like formation that we know how to do something with, not every technique has application in our life."⁵⁷ That cryptic observation is meant, I believe, to suggest that the power of grammatical regularities is not arbitrary, because grammar itself is ultimately the product of our lives and thus of the nature of our selves and our world.

FORMS OF LIFE

In the *Blue and Brown Books*, Wittgenstein calls the regularities of our grammar which bind diverse phenomena together into a single concept, "conventions." In the later writings, though he still considers grammar conventional, he has largely replaced this term with the expression "forms of life." That notion is never explicitly defined, and we should not try to force more precision from it than its rich suggestiveness will bear. But its general significance is clear enough: human life as we live and observe it is not just a random, continuous flow, but displays recurrent patterns, regularities, characteristic ways of doing and being, of feeling and acting, of speaking and interacting. Because they are patterns, regularities, configurations, Wittgenstein calls them *forms*; and because they are patterns in the fabric of human existence and activity on earth, he calls them *forms of life*. The idea is clearly related to the idea of a language game, and more generally to Wittgenstein's action-oriented view of language. "The *speaking* of language," he says, "is part of an activity, or of a form of life."⁵⁸ How we talk is just a part of, is imbedded in, what we do. "Commanding,

⁵⁷ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, par. 520.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, par. 23.

questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing."⁵⁹ We all know our shared forms of life, these basic, general, human ways of being and doing, though they have never been taught to us and we could not begin to be able to put into words what we know about them. Wittgenstein says that they are part of our "natural history," regularities "which no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes."⁶⁰

The notion of forms of life should help us to understand the sense in which language may be said to be conventional. For calling it conventional is likely to make us feel that the foundations of language are extremely shaky, that at any time other people might abrogate the conventions which alone assure communication, coherence, and sanity. But that may be, as Cavell suggests, because as part of our liberal tradition we tend to "look upon our shared commitments and responses . . . as more like *agreements* than they are," to interpret convention as equivalent to contract, as if "whether our words will go on meaning what they do" depended on "whether other people find it worth their while to continue to understand us."⁶¹

Language might be said to be conventional in a number of different ways; not all of them are what Wittgenstein means by "forms of life." Sometimes we speak of conventions as contrived agreements, consciously and deliberately entered into by men. This kind of conventionality plays only a peripheral and occasional role in shaping language, as when specific language changes are imposed by legislation. Sometimes we speak of things as conventional which are not products of deliberate agreement or conscious choice, but have evolved as the indirect, inadvertent result of the continuing activity of many men. The great bulk of language, all the aspects which differ from one language to another, may be called conventional in this sense. But there is still a further sense in which one might speak of the conventionality of language—a sense which comes closest to the idea of "forms of life." We might speak here of "natural conventions," features of our lives and world which logically might well have been otherwise but which just happen to be this way among all men in all times and places. These conventions, as Cavell says, are "fixed" neither by custom nor by agreement but rather "by the nature of human life itself, the human fix itself. . . . That *that* should express understanding or boredom or anger . . . is not *necessary*: someone *may* have to be said to 'understand suddenly' and then always fail to manifest the understanding five minutes later, just as someone *may* be bored by an earthquake or by the death of his child or the declaration of martial law, or *may* be angry at a pin or a cloud or a fish, just as someone may quietly (but comfortably?) sit on a chair of nails. That human beings on the whole do not respond in these

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, par. 25.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, par. 415.

⁶¹ Cavell, "Claim to Rationality," p. 217.

ways is, therefore, seriously referred to as *conventional*; but now we are thinking of convention not as the arrangements a particular culture has found convenient. . . . Here the array of 'conventions' are not patterns of life which differentiate men from one another, but those exigencies of conduct which all men share."⁶²

What the idea of "forms of life" implies about a concept like "pain" is, first of all, as with concepts of color and measurement, that the language games we play are only possible on the basis of underlying natural regularities. A concept linking pain behavior, pain feelings, and the occasions for pain is functional in our lives only because these phenomena really do occur together. Austin makes this point about the concept of anger: the feeling of being angry, he says "is related in a unique sort of way" to its characteristic behavioral expression. "When we are angry, we have an impulse, felt and/or acted on, to do actions of particular kinds, and, unless we suppress the anger, we do actually proceed to do them. There is a peculiar and intimate relationship between the emotion and the natural manner of venting it, with which, having been angry ourselves, we are acquainted. The ways in which anger is normally manifested are *natural* to anger just as there are tones *naturally* expressive of various emotions (indignation, etc.). There is not normally taken to be such a thing as 'being angry' apart from any impulse, however vague, to vent the anger in the natural way. Moreover, besides the natural expressions of anger, there are also the natural *occasions* of anger, of which we have also had experience, which are similarly connected in an intimate way with the 'being angry'."⁶³ It is possible to feign anger (or pain), and it is possible to suppress any expression of anger (or pain). But if there were no characteristic expressions of and situations for pain or anger, we could never be taught to use those words. We could not be taught what counts as our own pain, because no one would have any way of telling when we were in pain. And we could not be taught what counts as someone else's pain because there would be no way of telling when he is in pain. Without some characteristic expressions of pain, indeed, we could not have the concept of pain.

Of course, the fact that these phenomena normally and naturally occur together is proof neither against exceptions nor against miracles. The fact that we tend to express felt pain in pain behavior does not mean that a man's pain behavior is always and necessarily a guarantee that he is actually in pain. It is possible to feign pain, and it is possible to suppress all signs of pain. That is part of the point of the conceptual puzzlement about pain from which we began. But we treat such exceptional cases as they arise *within* our conceptual system. We sometimes conclude that someone was feigning or suppressing his pain, or was not in pain after all; but always on the basis of further information which is in principle no

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

⁶³ Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, pp. 76-77.

different from our initial information. Such situations do not call the concept of pain itself into question. What is not possible is that it should turn out on the basis of that kind of evidence that all people are always feigning when they display pain behavior, or suppressing pain when they do not display pain behavior (“What sometimes happens might always happen. . .”).

Nevertheless, the concept is not proof against miracles, either.⁶⁴ “I say, ‘There is a chair’. What if I go up to it, meaning to fetch it, and it suddenly disappears from sight?—‘So it wasn’t a chair, but some kind of illusion’. —But in a few moments we see it again and are able to touch it and so on. —‘So the chair was there after all and its disappearance was some kind of illusion’. —But suppose that after a time it disappears again—or seems to disappear. What are we to say now? Have you rules ready for such cases—rules saying whether one may use the word ‘chair’ to include this kind of thing?”⁶⁵ Our concepts of chairs, of material objects, of seeing and touching, are such that this kind of thing is not supposed to happen. Yet of course it could conceivably happen; our conceptual system cannot prevent it from happening. Here is not just a normal sort of deviation, like feigning, for which explanations are ready within our conceptual system, “a mistake for which, as it were, a place is prepared in the game.” Here is “a complete irregularity,” and if it occurs at all frequently our existing concepts will no longer be functional.⁶⁶

Wittgenstein says, “We have here a *normal* case, and abnormal cases. It is only in normal cases that the use of a word is clearly prescribed; we know, are in no doubt, what to say in this or that case. The more abnormal the case, the more doubtful it becomes what we are to say.”⁶⁷ At the extreme, as Austin puts it, “we don’t know what to say. Words literally fail us.”⁶⁸ But that is not an ordinary failure of perception or knowledge but a breakdown of the entire concept (as in Wittgenstein’s example of cheese beginning to change weight arbitrarily, which makes scales not inaccurate but pointless). “If things were quite different from what they actually are—if there were for instance no characteristic expression of pain, of fear, of joy; if rule became exception and exception rule; or if both became phenomena of roughly equal frequency—this would make our normal language-games lose their point.”⁶⁹ We would need new concepts, or would need to extend and project and modify our old ones, perhaps to the point of unrecognizability. The ordinary use of a concept “is what one might call a composite use suitable under the ordinary circumstances.” If we assume circumstances different in fundamental ways, the

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁶⁵ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, par. 80.

⁶⁶ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, par. 647.

⁶⁷ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, pars. 141–142; compare par. 385; *Blue and Brown Books*, pp. 150–151.

⁶⁸ Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, p. 56.

⁶⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, par. 142.

old concept would have to be replaced, though we might be able to give the new concept a use analogous with the old. But there would be no fixed rule about this; we would have our choice among a number of possible projections or analogies. "One might say in such a case" that the old concept has more than one "legitimate heir."⁷⁰

There is no general, fixed dividing line between what we mean by "chair" (or "pain") and the great welter of largely inarticulate knowledge we have about chairs (or pain). Normally we do not need to choose which elements of what we know are essential and definitive, for the accustomed features cluster together. When we need a decision, a definition, we can make one. No proposition is intrinsically a definition; what makes it one is the way we use it. "The same proposition may get treated at one time as something to test by experience, at another as a rule of testing."⁷¹ Thus, for Wittgenstein the only difference between analytic and synthetic propositions is how we use them, and we may use them differently on different occasions. Even while he is explicating the distinction between criteria and symptoms, he immediately comments that "in practice, if you were asked which phenomenon is the defining criterion and which is a symptom, you would in most cases be unable to answer this question except by making an arbitrary decision *ad hoc*."⁷² Nor should this surprise us, once we have understood how language is learned from and shaped by cases of its use. And this is another way of articulating why grammar is not merely about words but equally about the world, the one by way of the other.

Thus, if the world were different in fundamental ways, we might play different language games about the occasions for pain. Suppose that "the surfaces of the things around us (stones, plants, etc.) have patches and regions which produce pain in our skin when we touch them. (Perhaps through the chemical composition of these surfaces. But we need not know that.) In this case we should speak of pain-patches on the leaf of a particular plant just as at present we speak of red patches."⁷³ Or, as Strawson points out, if the world were such that all people in a given region or time felt pain at once, we might have expressions such as we now do for temperature, like "it's painful in here" or "it's painful today."⁷⁴

So, when we talk of the way linguistic conventions limit the possibilities of what can happen in the world, what we will accept as instances of various phenomena, we must also recognize that those conventions are not merely arbitrary; they are part of a conceptual network which works,

⁷⁰ Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books*, p. 62.

⁷¹ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, par. 98; compare *Philosophical Investigations*, par. 79.

⁷² Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books*, p. 25.

⁷³ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, par. 312.

⁷⁴ P. F. Strawson, "Review of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*," in George Pitcher, ed., *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 47-48.

which functions for us. "Machines cannot feel pain." That is a part of grammar and a convention; nothing a machine could do would be, would count as, "feeling pain." And that convention seems arbitrary. Yet the matter is not so simple. For although "pain" is something one "feels," it can be recognized by, occurs in connection with, characteristic human and animal pain behavior in characteristic pain situations. That, we learn, is what pain *is like*, and subsequently we will attribute pain only to such creatures as behave that way in such situations. If an inanimate object behaved that way, we would (at least be tempted to) attribute pain to it; but we would also simultaneously be cast into doubt as to whether it really was an inanimate object. The convention is not flatly that only animate creatures feel pain, but that certain behavior is in certain circumstances a sign of someone's being in pain. And that convention is not arbitrary, but based on the natural human and animal expressions of and occasions for pain.

Wittgenstein asks himself whether this conception of criteria doesn't simply amount to the declaration that "there is no pain without *pain-behavior*." But instead of answering directly, he says, "It comes to this: only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious. . . . Only of what behaves like a human being can one say that it *has* pains. . . . Look at a stone and imagine it having sensations. —One says to oneself: How could one so much as get the idea of ascribing a *sensation* to a *thing*? One might as well ascribe it to a number! —And now look at a wriggling fly and at once these difficulties vanish and pain seems able to get a foothold here, where before everything was, so to speak, too smooth for it."⁷⁵

But why does Wittgenstein say we attribute pain only "to human beings and what resembles them," rather than "to animate creatures"? Clearly the latter is the truth, and his own first example is of a fly. But his reference to human beings here has a point, which shows still another sense in which grammatical conventions are not arbitrary. What it suggests is that the concept of pain did not originate in our detached observation of animal behavior, as a label for referring to what animate creatures sometimes are observed to do, but in our human need to communicate about our own pain or that of the person to whom we speak. It suggests that we don't talk about pain primarily out of scientific curiosity, just commenting on the passing scene, but in order to get someone to take some action. Talk about pain occurs *among* human beings who experience and express pain and respond to it, in contexts involving such activities as comforting, helping, apologizing, but also warning, threatening, punishing, gloating. Part of what we learn in learning what pain is, is that those in pain are (to be) comforted, gloated over, and the like, and that we ourselves can expect such responses to indications of our pain.

⁷⁵ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, pars. 281, 283, 284.

Both naturally and by cultural training, we respond to someone displaying pain behavior in a pain situation in appropriate ways (i.e., as if he were in pain), and we expect others to respond that way to our pain. If the link among occasion, feeling, and behavior here is conventional, that is not a convention subject to renegotiation at will. To change our conventions here, we would have to change what we do, how we live; we would have to change the links between pain and comforting, pain and threatening, pain and fear, pain and pity—not just between these words but between these ways of being and acting together. These patterns of action and response, too, are part of what Wittgenstein means by “forms of life.”

At one point Wittgenstein asks whether all this means, in sum, “that human agreement decides what is true and what is false.” But he responds: “It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in forms of life.”⁷⁶ The conventionality of language is not contractual; and if it limits the empirical possibilities we can discover in our world, that limitation is not arbitrary. Thus, “the limit of the empirical—is concept-formation,” but our concepts “are not assumptions unguaranteed, or intuitively known to be correct: they are ways in which we make comparisons and in which we act.”⁷⁷ Our concepts rest ultimately not on “a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting* which lies at the bottom of the language-game.”⁷⁸

To the extent that our concepts and our language are shaped by human nature and the natural human condition, they cannot be justified, and must simply be accepted as given. We can explain the “essential nature” of freedom or knowledge by referring to the grammar of the words “freedom” or “knowledge”; we can explain their grammar by referring to the language games in which they are used; we can imagine a changed world or human beings changed so that those language games would lose their point or become unplayable, and thereby we can become aware of some of our human forms of life. But beyond that we cannot *explain* those forms of life, cannot give *reasons* for them. Wittgenstein says that explanations must have an end somewhere: “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.’”⁷⁹ Ultimately something has to be accepted as given—not the “truths” we predicate of the world, not the concepts in which we express them, but the language games that shape the grammar of those concepts and the conditions that produce those language games. “What has to be accepted, the given, is—so one could say—*forms of life*.”⁸⁰ These views of Wittgenstein’s have often been taken to indicate his cultural and political conservatism. In a later chapter

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, par. 241.

⁷⁷ Wittgenstein, *Foundations of Mathematics*, pp. 121, 176.

⁷⁸ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, par. 204.

⁷⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, par. 217.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

I shall try to show how this is a fundamental misunderstanding. But for now it is enough if the dual relationship between words and the world has been explored: on the one hand, the grammatical limitations on empirical discovery; on the other hand, the foundations of grammar in the reality of our language activity.