

CRITICAL NOTICE

Wittgenstein's Private Language
Grammar, Nonsense, and Imagination
in *Philosophical Investigations* §§ 243-315

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One might say: the invocation of the manometer looked like a functioning part of the mechanism of an argument, but in fact it is a mere ornament; so Wittgenstein's apparently central claim that the supposition of misrecognition is purely ornamental in relation to the mechanism of our language-games with sensations cannot engage with our reason (our mental machinery) on that basis. Two things follow. First, insofar as we unquestioningly invoke Wittgenstein's imaginary tale as an authoritative basis upon which to accuse his interlocutor of failing properly to distinguish between mere ornament and genuine functionality in our everyday ways with sensation-words, we thereby implicate ourselves in the very same error (with respect to § 270's way with sensation-words). The terms of our criticism indict us; in our eagerness to identify motes of confusion in other's eyes, we miss the beam in our own. (1)

Whether one believes there is a beam to be missed here is going to depend very much on what one takes the role of § 270 to be in the exposition of what used to be referred to - though perhaps less often now - as *The Private Language Argument*. Stephen Mulhall is surely correct to identify at least one of the salient points of § 270 to be - though he does not express it in exactly this way - that because of the significance of the criterionless aspect of first person sensation ascription, in which we manifestly do not attribute sensations to

ourselves - as we do in attributing them to others - according to the application of criteria, then it is correct to say that we do not *identify* or *recognise* them in any proper sense. Someone who persistently calls a current *pain* a *tingle*, when it is obvious to those around him that he is not making a slip of the tongue, would be accused, not of exhibiting a deficiency in his powers of inner observation, but of having an inadequate command of the English language. Mulhall asks whether § 270 can be said to advance upon § 258, in which the sign 'S' is deemed to have no use whatsoever, when the mere discovery of a correlation between the occurrence of a particular sensation and a rise in blood pressure gives, in his view, no *further* support to the conclusion already sufficiently well attested to in earlier parts of the book, *viz.*, that *mistakes* in identifying sensations are mere show. The manometer in § 270 is, in *this* respect, doing no *useful* work at all:

In short, if 'S' really is the name of a sensation, Wittgenstein's conclusion about misrecognition simply begs the question against his opponent ; and if it is not, his conclusion is valid but irrelevant to his purported subject-matter. (2)

But those philosophers who have persistently argued that we *identify* our sensations are not normally in the business of claiming that we are therefore capable of identifying them *wrongly*. Their point would rather be that our sensations present themselves to us as the *kinds* of sensations that they are with such an obvious transparency, that the merely theoretical threat of misrecognition pales into insignificance when the *certainty* with which they reveal themselves constitutes the very paradigm of what philosophers can justifyingly claim to *know*. Wittgenstein can then be understood to be reminding us that insofar as these philosophers are misconstruing for their own ends the significance of the criterionless aspect of first person sensation ascription, they are not only making an unjustified claim to *knowledge*, but they are also doing so from a standpoint in which the significance that they grant to the *representational content* provided by the distinctly *qualitative feel* of these sensations gains what sense it has purely because of their prior acquaintance with a public language. We are then entitled to

conclude that even if Mulhall is correct in his assumption that § 270 is more than a reminder that we do not recognise or identify our sensations - yet there is no obvious reason to think that it is - he is clearly wrong to claim that there is any begging of the question taking place here at all.

The onus is rather on Wittgenstein's opponent to answer the charge that whatever philosophical claims he is attempting to make result solely from mistakenly viewing the criterionless aspect of first person sensation ascription in isolation from its normal surroundings of application.

Mulhall indirectly confirms this when mentioning what has become a common response to § 270 in the secondary literature, one made primarily by those critics who assert that the *real* correlation here is with the *writing* of 'S' viz., that '...misrecognition would be an irrelevance if we took it that the pertinent correlation is actually between my being inclined to write "S" in my diary and my blood pressure rising'. (3) But the real reason these critics are inclined to claim that the correlation established here cannot be with the *sensation* itself, is that because they take Wittgenstein's denial in § 270 that we recognise or identify our sensations to be a denial that we really have *private* sensations at all, they take it that the *correlation* he is establishing must be with something *other* than the sensation; and the obvious candidate is the writing of 'S' in a diary by someone who merely *thinks* that he is having the sensation. But as Mulhall correctly points out, merely *thinking* one is having a sensation would effectively be a denial by Wittgenstein that the *particular* sensation to which he refers is playing any role in the correlation. Yet his sole point is that it is only because of the adoption of a certain model of 'object and designation' (§ 293) that the idea of merely *thinking* that one could have a certain sensation makes sense; and in denying that this model has any application, he is in effect turning back on itself the apparent implications of the argument his critics are using to show, contrary in their eyes to § 270, that we really do with certainty identify our private sensations.

It may indeed be argued that this still does not prove that § 270 makes any advance on § 258 over and above its being an illustration of a consistent methodological strategy. But

insofar as Wittgenstein is not in the business of proving anything, these passages confirm his normal procedure of making the same point from different directions: because it does not make sense to talk of *recognising* or *identifying* our sensations, the real consequence of adopting a model in which it would seem that they would have to be identified correctly if they were to be talked about at all, is that there is nothing that could count as a case of *regularly identifying it wrongly* and its making no *difference* in the example in which checking the manometer on its occurrence confirms a predicted rise in blood pressure (§ 270). This passage mirrors the famous *seems right is right* conclusion of § 258 because, on this inapplicable model, identifying *wrongly* and its making no intelligible *difference* in § 270 is equivalent to saying that the achievement of getting it *either right or wrong* (§ 258) has no genuine application. In short, if every time I have a sharp pain in my knee my blood pressure rises, and if every time I have a dull pain in my foot my blood pressure falls, the reason for the *indifference* in correct or incorrect *identification* in the course of establishing correlations in these kinds of cases is clearly not that it does not matter to a correct prediction whether the pain is either in my foot or in my knee, but that my correctly stating it to be one or the other is not a matter of *identification* according to criteria.

This may still leave us wondering why there should be motes of confusion in our eyes when finding this out, and here we may gain a little more evidence from the second major point Mulhall wishes to make in the continuation of the passage already discussed :

And, second, an essential part of our error lies in failing properly to categorize Wittgenstein's concluding parenthetical image with respect to the very distinction it embodies. For it should not be seen as itself a mere ornament, a purely decorative figure unrelated to the functioning heart of his investigation. Rather, its content and location, and hence its belated, unsistent, but retrospectively obvious invitation to reconsider our initial categorization of the elements of the preceding paragraph (and hence our own relation to that paragraph) in the terms

it articulates, are an essential component of the textual mechanism for sequentially arousing self-confidence, self-subversion and self-criticism in his readers - call it the educational engendering of personal shame - that manifests Wittgenstein's complex philosophical designs on us. (4)

But need these designs be as complex as Mulhall makes out? He provides an answer when he goes on to argue - what we had surmised all along - that what Wittgenstein is really talking about in § 270, unlike in § 258, is a particular *kind* of sensation that, in a perfectly normal way, is correlated with a manometer reading. In § 258, on the other hand, the subject of his investigation is a *private* linguist whose sensations cannot be *intended* to be sensations of particular kinds because the *private* linguist must have the *incoherent* task of conferring meaning on his own *private* world. Consequently, if his sensations really were intrinsically meaningful, then their status as sensations of particular *kinds* would be presupposed, and they could no longer be *private* in Wittgenstein's radical sense. So, when Wittgenstein talks about a sensation of a *particular* kind at the beginning of § 270, goes on to indicate that a question of recognition does not arise in these circumstances, before continuing by asking why a *particular* sensation, he is already emphasising that the context is from the beginning one in which a *public* language is being used to talk about a sensation.

Mulhall, on the other hand, wishes to play down the straightforward role that § 270 can be understood to play in Wittgenstein's strategy, in order to highlight what he takes - for want of a better term - to be a matter of significant *cultural* relevance, which for him constitutes the *real* motivation behind the example, revealing Wittgenstein's complex designs on us :

The sheer ease and completeness with which we lose ourselves in the apparently extensive ramifications of using 'S' as an indicator of blood pressure changes - treating that matter as if it alone determined the meaningfulness of the sign - strongly suggests that, for us, it is only if

we make our diary keeping subserve a medical purpose, only if we (in effect) transform ourselves into human manometers, that we can think of our utterances as worth making, for others and even for ourselves. (5)

Mulhall certainly does have a point here, to which attention has already been drawn in stressing how often Wittgenstein's critics have taken him to be *denying* that it is the *sensation* in § 270 that is correlated with a manometer reading:

.....what instead occupies centre stage, and has preoccupied so much existing commentary on the section as a whole, is rather the possibility of turning an essentially psychological utterance to essentially physiological purposes. (6)

It is unfortunate that Mulhall does not provide any examples of this commentary, but here is one that adequately fulfils his purpose:

It seems to me that an alternative reading of PI 270 is possible. Identifying the sensation right does not matter, as a guide to the state of my blood-pressure, because the manometer-reading always, or almost always, takes precedence. (7)

But the sole reason that Brendan Wilson is forced into saying this is not (hopefully) that he has a wish to turn himself into a human manometer, but that he finds it difficult to rid himself of the idea that we *identify* and *re-identify* our sensations. If he had abandoned that idea earlier, it is quite clear from what he correctly says about correlating the occurrence of his sensations with manometer readings, that he would see the various elements of the puzzle he identifies in § 270 falling neatly into place. From this perspective, Wilson's difficulty is really terminological. Mulhall's reading, on the other hand, incorporates a cultural dimension that leads us to wonder whether it has not been too easily superimposed upon the text. Accepting that it has, the beams in our own eyes are then prone to quickly disperse.

As a matter of fact, this chapter on the manometer in § 270 is probably the only one in which Mulhall can be directly charged with disregarding a fairly straightforward reading of Wittgenstein's text in favour of a somewhat esoteric claim which can be regarded, insofar as it trades on seeing ourselves as mechanisms, as having a distinctly *cultural* resonance. When this kind of resonance does surface in Mulhall's account, it gains its inspiration, if not its content, from the work of Stanley Cavell ; and on the face of it, there is surely nothing wrong with that. But this does mean that when Mulhall interprets one of the well-known sections of the *Investigations* relating to the idea of a *private language* or of a *private object*, he has the burden, where applicable, of not only showing the relevance of Cavell's reading of the relevant passage, but also of satisfying his main objective: to additionally capture the distinctive features of both a *substantial* and a *resolute* reading as these terms are commonly understood *via* the well-known Diamond-Conant interpretation of the *Tractatus*.

This means that Stephen Mulhall has set himself a complex and rather daunting task, one of providing three readings where possible of any particular passage, a task which is not made easier when one recognises that although he would appear to have reasonable *ad hoc* grounds for applying the *substantial v resolute* reading in any particular case, it would be a mistake to introduce this distinction into the *Investigations* without considering the quite particular methodology which Wittgenstein employs throughout those sections ; but if we do that, then not only does the distinction begin to crumble, but it becomes less certain whether by employing it in the *Investigations* one has not tried to force it to apply to sections in which it could not possibly be doing the same work that Diamond-Conant intend for it in the *Tractatus*.

In order to show this, one should consider how important it is for Wittgenstein's methodology to treat so many of the things a philosopher might want to say about his sensations as gaining their sense from quite ordinary applications based on an existing mastery of a *public* language, a point reflected in how easy it is to misconstrue his procedure of constantly providing his *private object model* with its own pictorial representation in a form

revealing that the model can have no application. This is what lies behind his important methodological strategy of presenting the *private object model* as an *apparently* viable picture of how our sensation language functions, yet one which is undermined in the presentation of the examples themselves: the indifference shown to correct or incorrect identification where the question of *identification* cannot arise (§ 270) ; the inability to remember *what* the word 'pain' means when this is quite irrelevant to the public use of the term (§ 271) ; the supposition that different people might have different sensations of red when their public use of colour words perfectly agrees (§ 272); the use of a timetable in the imagination which is used to confirm itself (§ 265); the creation of a diary to record the occurrence of a sensation when the sensation term can never be meaningfully applied (§ 258); and the regularly *different* or even *absent* items in their 'boxes' which have no bearing on the proper use of the terms speakers use to talk about the regularly recurring sensations they enjoy (§ 293). For those who are attracted to a wholly therapeutic conception of Wittgenstein's philosophy, strategies of this kind undoubtedly *appear* to confirm his intention to teach his readers to pass from a piece of disguised *nonsense* to something that is patent *nonsense* (§ 464).

But Wittgenstein invites us to see that the private object model has no *application* to our ordinary sensation talk, by asking us to consider a *picture* which has no genuine use : this would seem to imply that we must grasp what it would be like for it to *be* applicable in order to understand its inapplicability. Yet by rights this is to grant to the *picture* a *sense* commensurate with a role in *philosophy* that Wittgenstein's *methodology* is actually denying to it. The tension is an inevitable concomitant of the *resolute* reading ; and it is captured in the thought that there is no sharp dividing line between saying that a picture has no *application*, and saying that we have no clear idea - in a Diamond-like fashion - of what we are trying to say in imagining what it might be, for example, to speak a *private* language. It is for this reason that Diamond can speak of 'sheer gibberish' in contexts in which it seems - applying

this claim to the *Investigations* passages which are Mulhall's concern - that it cannot be sheer gibberish if we are genuinely to know what we are rejecting in denying that there can be any *sense* to the idea of a private language. The point is captured in §§ 499-500. It is integral to the methodology, which determines the role, the *application* and the *sense* to be allocated to *philosophical* propositions like those pertaining, say, to a private language. Certainly, one could drop the *methodology* altogether, but only at the cost of abandoning what is so distinctive about Wittgenstein's work: it would lose its unique approach to the problems of *philosophy*, to become in turn one more *philosophical* outlook to be argued over amongst many others.

Stephen Mulhall captures some of these concerns in his own way in his final Coda on Wittgenstein's famous *Beetle in the Box* passage, § 293, where a *substantial* reading for him finds its expression in a form of transcendental argument setting out the conditions of the possibility of what it is to count as using a name as the name of an object. Here Mulhall points indirectly towards the overwhelming significance that a *picture* can have for a philosopher who is held captive by it (§ 115), an importance which is essential to the notion that we have a sure grasp of what it would be like for our sensation language to conform to this model in order that we can decisively reject it as a proper account of our sensation talk, a point Mulhall describes in terms of our grasping a *limitation* rather than a limit. (8)

But, presented in this way, it looks as if Wittgenstein is providing one philosophical account of sensation language amongst others, to be assessed by purely philosophical criteria. Yet on a *resolute* account of the *Beetle* story, which Mulhall describes as a form of *reductio* of the very idea that a private *object* could be what we refer to in our ordinary sensation talk, there is in effect nothing that could *count* as an example of a word like 'beetle' that had a proper use in the language to talk about an ordinary sensation which might yet be *different*, or even *absent* from its individual 'box' whenever a speaker could properly be said to be experiencing it. On this reading, it becomes ever more questionable whether we can have any grasp of what it is that we are supposedly rejecting in showing that the *Beetle* tale is an

inadequate account of how sensation language functions, *if* we are to avoid granting to the *picture* the very *philosophical* status that Wittgenstein's methodology is denying to it.

This, however, as I have indicated, is not so much a way of presenting a distinction between a *substantial* and a *resolute* account of sensation language which mirrors the way this distinction is used to talk about *nonsense* in the *Tractatus*, as a pointer towards how the notion of the *application* of a *picture* is used in the *Investigations*: there is no sharp dividing line between saying that a picture has no *application* and saying that we can have no clear grasp of what it would be for it to have one. Mulhall, however, sees a clear parallel with the *Tractatus* even in his acknowledgement that his *resolute* account has led him to the conclusion that he has no real grasp of what he has been talking about in rejecting the *Beetle* story:

.....how could any *reductio* argument deliver a genuine conclusion, by revealing the sheer nonsensicality of its starting point? And if *reductio* arguments really are legitimate means for gaining intellectual insight, then the position in which they leave us is surely no more uncomfortable than that offered to us by the *Tractatus*, with its concluding claim that a criterion for understanding its author is the realization that every elucidatory word of his must be recognized as simply nonsensical - as simply to be thrown away. (9)

The parallel with the *Tractatus* holds insofar as the *pictures* to which we become captive in the *Investigations* do beckon us to claim that there is a *reality* that *underlies* our practices, to be compared in the *Tractatus* to its ineffable insights into the relationship between language and reality. Yet it breaks down insofar as *Tractatus* nonsense relates to the internal structure of the work, whilst *nonsense* in the *Investigations* relates to the inability to *apply* a *picture* that *misleads* us in *philosophy*. Yet in order to understand those respects in which pictures do lead us astray, it appears that we have to grant them with a status in *philosophy* quite incompatible with Wittgenstein's methodology. Yet if we see the tension as integral to the very nature of

his methodology, we can understand why it tends to threaten even its most distinctive feature, its claim to renounce *philosophical* standpoints altogether, in the very act - when successful - of appearing to turn into yet another *philosophical* standpoint amongst others. This tension, of course, will have no relevance for those who see Wittgenstein as *already* adopting theoretical standpoints of a distinctly *philosophical* kind. Indeed, the tendency amongst philosophers who adopt this perspective will be to treat the *substantial* / *resolute* distinction as applied to the *Tractatus* as a misleading attempt to foist upon the earlier philosophy what is only, if at all, a characteristic of the later. (10)

An interesting feature of Mulhall's treatment of § 293 is that towards its end he turns to a consideration of two connotations he finds in the *Beetle* story. One relates to the animate nature of the constituents of these boxes, where he concludes that 'It is as if, in order to deny the body's capacity for expression.....we find ourselves having to put a living being, animate body and all, inside the box.' (11) The other relates to Franz Kafka's story about the metamorphosis of Gregor Samsa, where Mulhall's ruminations over whether we should cancel out the soul or the body conclude with the speculation that 'Perhaps we should rather aim to cancel our sense of the unbridgeable difference or division between them - that is, between the inner and the outer ranges of reference of Wittgenstein's imagery, and so between the person and her expressive, flesh-and-blood embodiment'. (12) Some readers will find these literary references illuminating, and others will find them at too far a remove from Wittgenstein's texts to have any strictly philosophical relevance. But this for many is the question they are also inclined to raise when they find themselves puzzled over the relevance to those passages of at least some of the work of Stanley Cavell.

The chapter in which Mulhall is most explicitly concerned to provide three readings, discusses the notorious § 258, where his *substantial* account is captured in the thought that the diarist attempts to create a standard of meaning by remembering correctly a sample of 'S', but can do that only if he knows what 'S' means, with the consequence that the attempt to

endow a sign with meaning using 'private ostensive definition' fails. This is effectively the traditional reading provided by Sir Anthony Kenny (13), which is not affected by memory scepticism in the way that some critics have supposed. (14) There are, however, a number of ways of presenting the point, not using the idea of memory, and perhaps the clearest rests in the claim that the private linguist cannot apply his sign to a sensation unless the sensation is *already* a sensation of a particular kind; but if it is, then he does *not* have the incoherent task of trying to confer meaning on his own private world after all, and must be using a language which at least *in principle* is capable of public application. Certainly, this still leaves open the question how these sensation terms acquire meaning, and a great deal of the secondary literature has actually been preoccupied with a presupposition which is not really at the heart of what is of *immediate* concern to Wittgenstein in § 258, *viz.*, that an ordinary sensation presents itself to us, independently of the acquisition of a public language, with its individual *representational content* telling us *via* its distinctive *qualitative feel* just what *kind* of sensation it is.

That Wittgenstein would have agreed that this is indeed how it can *appear* to us, is another example of how a *picture* can mislead in a philosophical context; for the kinds of claims that a philosopher might want to make about his sensations only make sense for Wittgenstein, no matter how strongly the philosopher might wish to object, against the background of his *prior* acquisition of a public language. Indeed, the very notion of *privacy* with which philosophers often make play when they claim that a language can be invented to talk about their immediate private sensations gains its sense for Wittgenstein from this prior public application. This is why Mulhall stresses § 261 in his *resolute* reading, a passage from which it can be inferred that it is only by staring at a *picture* in isolation from the normal background against which our sensation language functions, that what the philosopher wishes to say gains what sense it actually has.

Viewed from this methodological perspective, § 258 ceases to have the characteristics of a *logical* argument. It can be taken to show Wittgenstein in the act of proposing, *not* that there

is something that for the private linguist will forever remain beyond his powers, *viz.*, an ability to identify and reidentify a sensation again *correctly* - raising the traditional yet misconceived queries in the secondary literature about Wittgenstein's use of 'public criteria' accompanied by accusations of 'verificationism' - but rather that, judged by how our sensation language functions in a *public* context, there is nothing that *identification* and *re-identification* can even in this context be taken to *mean*. Regarded from this angle, § 258 is a further illustration of the methodological strategy Wittgenstein employs to effectively collapse the distinction between *substantial* and *resolute* approaches to the text.

In his discussion of Cavell's reading of § 258, Mulhall bypasses earlier paragraphs in Stanley Cavell's presentation where he explicitly says that there is little in the famous surroundings of § 258 that is not more clearly expressed elsewhere in the *Investigations*, suggesting that for him the very fame of the 'argument' against private language has been miscast: 'The dependence of reference upon expression in naming our states of consciousness is, I believe, the specific moral of Wittgenstein's inventions containing the so-called private language argument.' (15) This, together with his claim that by asking whether we can in § 243 imagine a private language, Wittgenstein invites us to conclude that '..... we cannot really imagine this, or rather that there is nothing of the sort to imagine....' (16) has allowed many commentators to see Cavell as someone decades ahead of his time, providing the kind of *resolute* account to gain prominence only much later in the secondary literature. Yet there are aspects to his presentation that invite comment : justifiably puzzled in its context about Wittgenstein's stipulation in § 258 that 'a definition of the sign cannot be formulated', (17) he later surmises that the sign 'was simply and solely to be inscribed by me on just those occasions on which something happened to me. Is this itself why Wittgenstein remarks that there is no definition of it? - as if to say: The sign's sheer being there is all that matters; its use is all the meaning it has, and in this case the use never varies.' (18)

Cavell's question suggests that he is not engaging with what has conventionally been taken to be the reason why a definition of the sign cannot be formulated, *viz.*, that it would then no longer be a sign in a *public* language, just as his remarks on § 270 about the lack of interest shown in correct or incorrect *identification* by Wittgenstein appear to veer away from the main point: 'The correlation is there; *it* is right and I am right about it (as the manometer has shown); it doesn't matter whether I keep calling the sensation a tingle when it is really a mild sting.' (19) Yet these speculations at the level of a public language are what lead to Cavell's now well-known idea of the fantasy of a private language *as* a fantasy, or fear of inexpressiveness, or of uncontrolled expressiveness, a reading of the text of which Mulhall approves insofar as it powerfully captures the peculiarity of Wittgenstein's long pause preceding his remark that a definition of the sign cannot be formulated.

But it is perfectly clear that this pause is equally capable of being succinctly explained in terms of the incongruity of the remark following the pause in relation to the quite ordinary context portrayed in the opening scene, an incongruity suggesting that in relation to marking a sign in a diary for ordinary purposes, the proposal that the sign cannot be *defined* is one that is being given no genuine application. Consequently, although, *contra* Mulhall, it is *not* difficult to read the *opening* of § 258 in Cavell's way, the difficulty with Cavell's reading does turn on the point that having to repress the expressiveness of his entries is something that, as Mulhall explains, only makes sense in an ordinary context. (20) The remainder of Mulhall's Cavellian treatment has Wittgenstein responding favourably to the diarist story, seeing himself 'in the other's fantasy or fear of a certain kind of expressive prose style.' (21) But this is pure speculation, suggesting that the real value of a Cavellian treatment in this context lies not in the way in which it illuminates Wittgenstein's text, but in the way in which reading Wittgenstein has led Cavell to shed light on significant cultural concerns.

That Wittgenstein and Cavell are actually pointing in different directions is also clear earlier in the book where, in Chapter 4, Mulhall discusses § 246, and the familiar claim by

Wittgenstein, echoed by Malcolm, that (Cf. § 247) in referring to one's sensations it is quite inappropriate to talk about *knowing* that one has them, for this can only mean here that the expression of uncertainty is *senseless*, and for that reason could not constitute a *genuine* claim to *knowledge* at all: this is again not an example of recognition or identification according to the application of criteria. Those philosophers who think that it is, are misconstruing the significance of this innocent feature of the *grammar* of sensation language in taking it to be the foundation - in the manner of Ayer and others of an empiricist persuasion in talking of sensations of colour - upon which all knowledge and meaning are based. This is both, in the terminology Mulhall prefers, a *substantial* and a *resolute* account of Wittgenstein's intentions, *substantial* insofar as it reveals that a certain way of looking at things has no application, but *resolute* insofar as this way of looking at things is saying nothing because it misconstrues the way in which sensation terms are actually used in a public context.

This is not, however, the gloss that Mulhall puts upon Cavell's treatment of the sceptic who says (§ 246) that 'only I know whether I am really in pain whereas another person can only surmise it':

Malcolm wishes, quite rightly in Cavell's view, to deny that first-person expressions of pain have the function of claiming certainty; but he does so by denying that 'I know I'm in pain' has any use in such contexts, and this strategy implicitly accepts the sceptic's assumption that 'I know' has no significant use except in association with claims to certainty. Malcolm's inability to question this assumption, an aspect of his blindness to the real varieties of normal use of 'I know' in first person contexts, accordingly entails that his contestation of the sceptic amounts to a further expression of scepticism. (22)

But if Mulhall agrees with this conclusion, he is surely being more than a little disingenuous. For the issue turns only marginally on the question of how the verb 'to know'

is actually used. Indeed, it would be much better to say that when Wittgenstein points out at the end of § 246 that it makes sense for others to doubt whether he is in pain, but not for him to doubt it himself, he is drawing attention to a distinction which reveals that it is only because he is confused by a misleading *picture* that the so-called sceptic might come to think that he cannot have knowledge of the pains of others in the way he can have knowledge of his own. It is through his attempt to apply the misleading *picture* to which he has become party that the sceptic comes to believe that knowledge of the pains of others are barred to him whilst his knowledge of his own is transparent. Certainly, when Wittgenstein points out in § 246 that as the verb to 'know' is ordinarily used, then others do often know that he is in pain, this might be taken to be no more than a begging of the question consequent upon his use of an argument from the paradigm case ; but the issue actually turns on the way in which in *philosophy* the sceptic has been misled by a *picture* of what it is for another person to be in pain, in which he has come to take his *understanding* of the application of the concept of pain to consist. The confusion has a semantic, rather than an epistemic base, and this implies that Wittgenstein's and Mulhall's / Cavell's sceptic are operating at different levels.

What Wittgenstein is effectively doing here through the application of his quite unique methodology, is describe the background against which our understanding of what it is to ascribe thoughts and feelings to each other makes sense; or, in older and rather misleading terminology, the conditions of the possibility of their ascription in first and third person use. But everything that Mulhall says about Cavell's sceptic only makes sense with this background *already* in place. Cavell's sceptic is someone whose doubts pertain to a level at which someone can *acknowledge* that he is in pain, and can therefore *deny* that he is in pain, allowing for the possibility that one might not come to *know* that someone is in pain unless that pain is acknowledged through its public expression, in spite perhaps of a person's best efforts to suppress it. But this *scepticism* pertains to human beings who are *already* behaving in a public context:

In short, the truth underlying the sceptical impulse here is the one we first encountered in § 244, that a person's behaviour is expressive of her mind; and this truth has, so to speak, two aspects. It entails that our knowledge of another person's feelings is dependent upon her giving expression to them in what she says and does, whereas her knowledge of them is not; and it also implies that there may be ways in which she can fail to acknowledge her feelings not only to us but to herself, and hence ways in which she may fail to know her own feelings. (23)

But if this is scepticism, it is on a par with the claim, made for example by someone who has suffered many personal disappointments in life, that one can never *really* know another person's thoughts, feelings or intentions. This is entirely consistent with the Cavellian notion that another person's pain makes a claim upon the knower to acknowledge and respond to his suffering, for this makes sense only against a background in which the *abstract* problem of philosophical *scepticism* about other minds to which Wittgenstein primarily responds can have no genuine place in our thinking. The 'truth in scepticism' Mulhall finds in Cavell derives from aspects of our human nature that are revealed within a context in which the 'problem of other minds', insofar as it can be said to receive treatment in the *Investigations*, does not so much as arise. Readers will enjoy Mulhall's detailed discussion of Cavell's Corsican Brothers in Chapter 5, where the argument can easily veer from one standpoint to another; yet the significant feature of this chapter lies in its final portrayal of a sceptic who, whilst rejecting Malcolm's superficial appeal to 'what we would ordinarily say', yet appears to inhabit a world in which (24) 'Malcolm fails to see the sceptic's words as ones that might seriously be meant by another human being, and thereby fails properly to acknowledge the sceptic as another, equally competent speaker, another speaking out of the common human condition.'

In chapter 2, 'A Child is Crying', concerning § 244-245, Mulhall returns to a subject he had covered in *Inheritance and Originality* (25) - where he had already discussed sections of the *Investigations* leading up to § 243 - and describes 'linguistic expressions replacing or displacing.....natural, non-linguistic behavioural expressions or manifestations of sensations.' (26) The language of pain builds on expressive pain behaviour, where naming becomes a *function* of expression, allowing in Mulhall's terms for the introduction of the evaluative dimension of truth and falsehood. Here he is confident of his ground, vividly describing the child's introduction into a language of pain - and a great deal more - within a social context, suggesting that his very development as an expressive human being with a rich inner life is itself a function of his having been acknowledged by his elders to be a participant in the natural processes of training that lead to linguistic mastery.

But what, it may be asked, has this got to do with philosophy? This description of our natural history for Mulhall provides a background to combatting those elements within the so-called *Augustinian Picture* of which Wittgenstein disapproves - for Augustine's tale also contains references congenial to Wittgenstein about the natural expressive repertoire of all peoples. Mulhall describes in detail the elements within this picture which Wittgenstein finds misleading, the notion of the child as already conceptually articulate requiring only a naming relation to the outside world to complete his role as his own teacher, a naming relation to be established between his already complete inner world and outer objects, a process facilitated by the natural language of all peoples functioning as a substitute for his elders' failure to pay him any attention.

This has by now become a familiar story, and Mulhall tells it with a certain panache. This partly explains why in his earlier book the tale of the chanting shopkeeper as only an *apparently* ordinary example of how 'in this and in similar ways one operates with words' (§ 1), with its surrealist overtones and mechanistic picture of the inner life reflected in its outer expression, seemed to provide such a convincing account of what Wittgenstein is up to in

this passage, ironically drawing attention to the hidden pictures governing this impoverished conception of the mental, pictures revealed in the association of names and images of red, and in counting out numbers with imagined number strokes. For Mulhall, it seems that a certain inner picture of *understanding* - associated with the *Augustinian Picture* - is here brought to the surface by Wittgenstein and revealed for the sham and empty account that it is:

It follows that if we, as readers, happily accept Wittgenstein's invitation to regard this oddly mechanical tale as an episode from ordinary life, and proceed to berate his interlocutor for failing to do likewise, then we are participating in the very confusions that we are so quick to condemn in others. Our eagerness to rebut our opponents implicates us in their errors. (27)

This sounds remarkably like the motes in our eyes that Mulhall detects in his account of our reactions to the manometer case in § 270, and the question to which it inevitably gives rise is why he would appear to have provided a genuinely perceptive reading in the earlier case but not in the later. Even the most astute commentators can pass over the shopkeeper, taking Wittgenstein at his word, accepting that there is nothing genuinely amiss in what for others can be a pointer to Samuel Beckett or the theatre of the absurd. (28) The answer is clearly that the Augustinian context in which the shopkeeper occurs, lends additional support to a reading in which his mechanical movements only too readily jar with our sense of the ordinary, just as the sluggish and brutish builders have the appearance of automatons, suggesting that the limitations of their languages reflect limitations in their levels of awareness. These apparent implications, however, can never be *more* than suggestive, as Mulhall himself illustrates later on when he imagines - in a rather Cavellian way - various contexts in which the shopkeeper tale might take on a more normal appearance: suppose that the *shopper* hands over a slip of paper because he is mute, is shopping in a foreign country with no knowledge of the language, or is perhaps a young child who has been sent on an errand by his mother.

In the final analysis, therefore, Mulhall's brilliantly perceptive treatment of the shopkeeper is going to illuminate the text only to the extent that the reader can imaginatively participate in the reconstruction. It may be argued, by those of a more prosaic cast of mind, that it is ultimately of no more importance than his introduction of Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis, the relevance of which to § 293 Mulhall freely admits to be of purely personal significance.

The comparison of the shopkeeper example to that of the manometer in § 270, then, points to an interpretative failure in the later case because it contains none of the surroundings which make the shopkeeper so suggestive, gesturing rather to the conclusion that since the correlation of a pain in the knee with a manometer reading is, or can be a day-to-day occurrence, there need be nothing amiss about it. The suggestion, on the other hand, that the shopkeeper is an example of 'how we operate with words', like the idea that in marking a sign in a diary for a particular purpose one might easily do so even if 'a definition of the sign cannot be formulated', is already pointing to the conclusion that something rather strange, or even surreal is taking place in these passages, pointing to an assessment of § 258, for example, that would make it rather more than the traditional self-contained logical *reductio* it has often been taken to be.

So how are we to finally evaluate Mulhall's often rich and stimulating account of the private language passages of the *Investigations*, viewed against his avowed aims and purposes ?

In short, this essay has been shaped by the conviction that no one of my three orienting concerns can be pursued without pursuing the other two. (29)

It has been shown that this is simply not true. The relevance of Stanley Cavell's work to these passages is far from straightforward, pointing to significant insights which sometimes do view Wittgenstein's texts from an original cultural perspective; but these whilst stimulated by his reading of Wittgenstein do not always illuminate the text of the *Investigations*. The distinction between *substantial* and *resolute* approaches to the text, imported without further ado from its use to evaluate the concept of *nonsense* in the *Tractatus*, provides us with a rough and ready way

of distinguishing what often looks like a rather more theoretical, from a rather less theoretical way of interpreting any particular passage ; but its ultimate value as a way of specifying two clearly distinguishable approaches to the text is an issue over which even Mulhall might sometimes appear to prevaricate:

.....it would seem profitless to insist that one reading is essentially faithful to Wittgenstein's text and the other intrinsically faithless. Perhaps its author rather means to make possible both ways of reading it - to give us two apparently different ways of reaching the conclusion that the private linguist has failed to invoke anything in particular in attempting to invoke the 'idea' of a private language, and to force us to ask whether it matters which way we dramatize the process of reaching that conclusion. (30)

That is surely nearer the truth, were it not for the disturbing fact, which Mulhall has indirectly allowed us to discover, that the idea of a *wholly* therapeutic philosophical methodology, like the distinction between the *substantial* and the *resolute* as a clear way of evaluating purely theoretical from non-theoretical readings of passages in the *Philosophical Investigations*, collapses as soon as one resolutely attempts to apply it. (31)

ENDNOTES

- (1) Mulhall, 125 *et seq.*
- (2) Mulhall, *Ibid.*
- (3) Mulhall, *Ibid.*
- (4) Mulhall, *Ibid.*
- (5) Mulhall, 130 *et seq.*
- (6) Mulhall, 127.
- (7) Brendan Wilson, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations, A Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 15.
- (8) Mulhall, 134.
- (9) Mulhall, 137.
- (10) The tension referred to here bears comparison to that referred to by Michael Williams in making his distinction between the *substantive* naturalism of Hume and the *methodological* naturalism of Wittgenstein. For Williams, naturalism is a distinctive position (for Hume) only insofar as sceptical doubt is idle yet still retains an intelligibility and power. This would point towards naturalism as an anti-realist position, which, in theory, it would cease to be on his view of Wittgenstein because, methodologically, Wittgenstein for Williams presents a *theoretical* objection to scepticism. The tension referred to arises from an inherent instability in holding a naturalist position, wavering between the Hume/Wittgenstein alternatives. This for Williams has implications beyond epistemology and into the theory of meaning, for if meaning is immanent in use, meaning cannot be independent of truth in the way that Williams's sceptic must suppose for his doubts to remain intelligible. Now, all of this is describable, for Wittgenstein, in terms of the sceptic being party to a misleading picture in which he takes our understanding of relevant statements (physical objects, other minds) to consist. Michael Williams, Review of P.F. Strawson, *Scepticism and Naturalism Some Varieties* (London: Methuen, 1985) *The Philosophical Quarterly*, July 1986, Vol. 36, No. 144, 444.
- (11) Mulhall, 137 *et seq.*
- (12) Mulhall, 143.
- (13) Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (Oxford, Blackwell Pub., 2006) Chap.10.
- (14) See, for example, Stewart Candlish & George Wrisley for this presentation, 'Private Language' in *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Internet access.
- (15) Stanley Cavell *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 343.
- (16) Cavell, 344.
- (17) Cavell, 345.
- (18) Cavell, 346.
- (19) Cavell, 350.
- (20) Mulhall, 104.
- (21) Mulhall, 106.
- (22) Mulhall, 44.
- (23) Mulhall, 48.
- (24) Mulhall, 84.
- (25) Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Part I.
- (26) Mulhall, 28.
- (27) Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality*, 46.
- (28) David Stern, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations, An Introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 85.
- (29) Mulhall, 15.
- (30) Mulhall, 20.
- (31) Another reviewer who questions the role of this distinction in the *Investigations* is Steven Hall, *Philosophical Investigations*, July 2008, Vol.31, No.3, 272. Cf. Genia Schonbaumsfeld's doubts in her Review, *Mind*, October 2008, Vol. 117. No. 468, 1108. I am grateful to Stephen Mulhall for his kindness at an earlier stage in allowing me to study pre-publication chapters of his book.

As do most philosophers, Derek McDougall fondly remembers the publication of his very first paper. This was in MIND in 1972. He has, however, continued to worry whether Gilbert Ryle's comment that "the matter is stated well and almost interestingly" referred more to the quality of its treatment rather than to Ryle's aversion to the nature of its subject (religious belief). Other papers have appeared in organs including PHILOSOPHY AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH and PHILOSOPHIA. His latest, on Wittgenstein, appears in the 2008 edition of JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH.