**NOTES ON WITTGENSTEIN, HIS PHILOSOPHY, AND ITS EVOLUTION**

In memory of Jaakko Hintikka and Hilary Putnam, astute Wittgensteinian scholars and dear friends

**Wittgenstein’s Evolution of in his Neo-Kantian Epistemology: Transcendental Idealism in the *Tractatus*, Phenomenalism in *Philosophical Investigations* and Common-Sensism in *On Certainty*.**

Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein was an Austrian-British philosopher who worked primarily on logic, the philosophy of mathematics, the philosophy of mind, and the philosophy of language. He is considered by some to be the greatest philosopher of the 20th century (April 26, 1889,April 29, 1951).

**Introduction**

Ludwig Wittgenstein is one of the prominent philosophers of the twentieth century (26 April 1889 – 29 April 1951). He was an [Austrian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austrians%22%20%5Co%20%22Austrians)-[British](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_people%22%20%5Co%20%22British%20people) [philosopher](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosopher) whose work in [logic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logic%22%20%5Co%20%22Logic), [philosophy of mathematics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy_of_mathematics%22%20%5Co%20%22Philosophy%20of%20mathematics), [philosophy of mind](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy_of_mind%22%20%5Co%20%22Philosophy%20of%20mind), and the [philosophy of language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy_of_language%22%20%5Co%20%22Philosophy%20of%20language) endeavors to explain human behavior and life. From 1929 to 1947, Wittgenstein taught at the [University of Cambridge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Cambridge%22%20%5Co%20%22University%20of%20Cambridge). His first book, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, was published in1921, and its English translation in 1922. Among his other work, published in his lifetime, was the article, “[Some Remarks on Logical Form](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Some_Remarks_on_Logical_Form%22%20%5Co%20%22Some%20Remarks%20on%20Logical%20Form)” (1929). The first, and best-known, of this posthumous texts is *[Philosophical Investigations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophical_Investigations%22%20%5Co%20%22Philosophical%20Investigations)*(1953)and another important book is his *On Certainty* (1969). In these texts, Wittgenstein endeavors to explain our knowledge of ourselves, of reality, and of life from a Kantian perspective. We can understand Wittgenstein’s philosophy as continuously developing through different stages of a neo-Kantian epistemology that reflect different aspects of Kant’s transcendental epistemology: Transcendental Idealism in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Phenomenalism in his *Philosophical Investigations* and Common-Sensism in his *On Certainty*.

The following is a review of Wittgenstein’s progression through different components of Kant’s epistemology. Thus, in the *Tractatus Logico-*Philosophicus, Wittgenstein attends to Kant’s *transcendental subject*, who tries to infer from its *Platonist thoughts* a *picture* of the phenomenal world, which fails to reach reality and, thereby, remains *solipsist*. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, he follows Kant’s transcendental epistemology with its *empty formal* *concepts* of language and its *blind material* *objects* of experience, without being able to explain how his *language-games* can have meaning and how they can amount to genuine representations of reality. He thus remains *confused* about how to play those games. In *On Certainty*, he is a Kantian phenomenalist with respect to *sensual intuitions*, whose *blind objects* remain subjective or unexplainable, i.e., common-sensist. As such, he remains a *skeptic* about knowledge of oneself, of *phenomenal* reality, and of Kant’s *noumenal reality* (cf. Nesher, 1979-2005).

Wittgenstein’s influence on the philosophy of the twentieth century was very notable in promoting neo-Kantianism; a point that was week established already at the 1976 meeting of the International Wittgenstein Symposium at Kirchberg, Austria. I participated in this symposium almost continuously from 1977 (with my work on “The Nature and the Function of ‘Elucidations” in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus.*”) until 2017 (with my work on “Wittgenstein and Pragmatism: On the True Meaning and Knowledge of our Conventions.”).

**1. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Wittgenstein Addresses Kant’s Transcendental Subject, whose Thoughts Only Present the Phenomenal World**

In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Wittgenstein addresses Kant’s transcendental subject. In the *Philosophical Investigation* he follows Kant’s epistemology with its *empty formal* *concepts* and *blind phenomenal* *objects*, without being able to explain how his *language-games* can have meanings and how they can be representation of reality. Finally, in *On Certainty*, he is a Kantian phenomenalist of the *sensual intuitions*, whose *blind objects* remain subjective or unexplainable, i.e., common-sensical. He thus remains a *solipsist* and *skeptic* about knowledge of oneself, of reality, and of Kant’s *noumenal reality* (cf. Nesher, 1979-2005). Wittgenstein’s influence on the philosophy of the twentieth century was profound. From 1976 and onwards this influence was established in the International Wittgenstein Symposium at Kirchberg, Austria, in which I participated almost continuously from 1977 (with my work “The Nature and The Function of ‘Elucidations” in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus.*”) until 2017 (with my work “Wittgenstein and Pragmatism: On The True Meaning and Knowledge of Our Conventions.”).

In his *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein was influenced by Gottlob Frege, following some Fregean interpretations of Kant’s epistemology in his *First Critique*, in which *formal semantics* replace Kant’s *transcendental logic* in justifying the ability of *empty transcendental concepts* to meet *or* clear the *blind objects* of *sensual intuitions*. But, at the end, Kant was unsuccessful in this enterprise, due to the unbridgeable gap in his epistemology between the transcendental *formal* component and the sensual *material* components of cognition (as he admitted in a letter to is friend, 1798). However to overcome Kant’s epistemological difficulty Frege appeals to *formal logic* to infer from the transcendental Platonist axiomatic *thoughts* the *model of reality*, which in Kantian terms is *sensual intuition* with its *blind objects*, which replace reality but do not represent *noumenal reality*, i.e., the *things in themselves*. Wittgenstein, as a follower of this Kantian and Fregean transcendental epistemology, concluded with *solipsism*, which is the gist of his inquires in the *Tractatus.*

# 2. In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein Endeavors to Explain the Place of Meaning of Natural Language in Human Conduct in Languish-Games

From this Kantian transcendental *a prioristic* component Wittgenstein proceeded to develop his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), in which he attempts to explain human knowledge and behavior in the framework of the subject, including the unexplainable *empty concepts* of *ordinary language* and the *blind objects* of sensual intuition, which are as separated from any experiential representation of reality. Thus, Wittgenstein remains committed to a phenomenological epistemology by adopting Kant’s sensual intuitions in his attempt to understand human linguistic behavior through his conception of *language-games*.This is a conception that is isolated from the human experience involved in learning linguistic concepts through perceptual empirical judgments that are true representations of components of reality. Yet, the phenomenological intuition must remain subjective, without explaining how persons understand each other’s languages while failing to represent reality by means of the true representation of the inner subjects and of the external objects of reality. That is, Wittgenstein remains within Kant’s sterile epistemology, as his basis for understanding human *linguistic behavior*.

The last epistemological stage of Wittgenstein’s inquiries, which appears in his *On Certainty* (1969), is based on human *common-sense* as providing the accepted general human beliefs. These are like Kant’s experiential *sensual intuition* of the *blind material objects*,which are meaningless in and of themselves and which, à la Kant, cannot amount to the *logical judgments* of the *First Critique,* as evidential knowledge, without the *a priori* *empty formal* *concepts*. Indeed, Wittgenstein cannot explain if, and how, those judgments represent the realities of the subject and of the object, which, as I explained elsewhere (Nesher, 2007) can only be represented like Siamese twins in that we must explain knowledge of the one simultaneously with the other, e.g., in Descartes’ “I think therefore I am (exist).”

**3. In *On Certainty,* Wittgenstein Tries to Explain that, by Rejecting Certainty, the Skeptic Cannot Have Any Certain Knowledge of Reality**

In his*On Certainty*, Wittgenstein tries to explain that if he can reject the certainty of our knowledge of reality the skeptic can have no such certain knowledge whatsoever, since the rejection of knowledge cannot be based on subjective feelings only. We therefore remain with skepticism about the refutation of *skepticism*, or of *solipsism* according his *Tractatus*, and of Russell, concerning our knowledge of reality. This is similar to Kant, who admitted to not having any theory of truth by which to prove our knowledge of reality, as well as to all neo-Kantians from Kant onwards (though it cannot be said of the entirety of philosophy, since we can see the seeds of such a theory of truth in Spinoza and Peirce, as I show in my 1994 and 2018, respectively, and especially in my book, from 2002: X, and in my work on *epistemic logic*, 2021).

Hence, from the above we learn that our *certainty* cannot be absolute. This can be explained by the pragmaticist theory of truth, according to which we prove our hypotheses in accordance with our *relative proof-conditions* that are available to us at the time. We can prove either the *truth* or the *falsity* of these hypotheses, and if we cannot prove them, they are *doubtful*. Hence, upon the accepted *proof-conditions*, those are *certain*. That is, about my proofs of the *truth* and *falsity* I am *certain* and about the *doubtful* I can be *certainly* *skeptic* for a time, unless I am able to prove their *certainly* upon new *proof-conditions.* The difficulty withWittgenstein and other neo-Kantians, like Popper, Putnam, Davison, and so on, is that they considered truth as an absolute and also identified it with reality, which for Kant is the noumenal *realm* that we can feel but cannot reach. Indeed, it is interesting to see how much Wittgenstein took the phenomenalist aspect of Kant, the *sensual intuition* as separated from transcendental logic and of the understanding. Yet, without showing how we actually replace them in our real experience in reality, we must explain the relation between the inner experience of pain (or pleasure) and its natural expression of crying (or cheering) and the verbal exclamation “I am in pain” (or “I am happy”).

If I say of myself that it is only from my own case that I know what the word “pain” means--must I not say the same of other people too? And how can I generalize the *one* case so irresponsibly? Now someone tells me that *he* knows what pain is only from his own case! … No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle. --Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. --But suppose the word “beetle” had a use in these people's language? --If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all. (Wittgenstein, *PI*: #293)

The epistemological difficulty is if and how we can establish that without inner experience it is impossible to explain our knowledge of ourselves and our representation of reality, since these are like Siamese twins that cannot be known independently. Yet this is based on a theory of truth that was unavailable to Kant, as he admitted, and similarly unavailable to all other neo-Kantians, Wittgenstein among them (Nesher, 2007). Indeed, Pragmaticist epistemology is based on Peircean *semiotics* and its elaboration in my *epistemic logic*. Generally, we can say that Wittgenstein, as the prominent neo-Kantian, influenced in different ways the philosophers of the twentieth century, such as Russell, Popper, Davidson, Putnam, Hintikka, Reacher, and many others.

**1. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Wittgenstein Pursues the Kantian Transcendental Subject, Formal Logic, and the Phenomenal World**

**1.1. Wittgenstein was Influenced by Gottlob Frege in Following Some Fregean Interpretations of Kant’s Epistemology in his *First Critique***

In his *Tractatus* Wittgenstein was influenced by Gottlob Frege in following some of the Fregean interpretations of Kant’s epistemology in his First Critique, with the *formal semantics* which replaces Kant’s *Transcendental logic* as the justification of the *Transcendental empty concepts* to meat *or* clear the *blind objects* of the *sensual intuitions*. But, at the end Kant was unsuccessful in his such enterprise due to the unbridgeable Gap in his epistemology between the Transcendental *formal* component and the Sensual *material* components of cognitions as he admitted in a letter to is friend, 1798. However instead of this Kant’s epistemological difficulty Frege uses the *formal logic* to infer from the Transcendental Platonist axiomatic *thoughts* the *model of reality*, which in the Kantian terms it is the experience *sensual intuitions* with their *blind objects*, that replace reality but does not represent the *noumenal reality*, the *things inthemselves*, and Wittgenstein as a follower of this Kantian and Fregean Transcendental epistemology he ended in his *solipsism* as being closed in his own *a priori thoughts* which is the gist of his inquires in the *Tractatus.*

**1.2. The *Metaphysical Subject* Presenting-Describing Worldly Facts and Picturing Reality, and Frege’s Conception of Logic and Mathematics.**

How can the *truth-conditions* of elementary propositions be known in order to determine whether they truly present the world? In Wittgenstein’s metaphysics of the *Tractatus* the metaphysical subject is the only one who can, with thoughts and their sense, use the Tractarian descriptive language to depict worldly facts, by elementary propositions, and picture reality (Wittgenstein, *T*: #4-4.01, #4.461-4.463).

4. A thought is a proposition with a sense.

The difficulty is to explain whether the metaphysical subject, the philosopher, or Wittgenstein himself in his *Tractatus*, being as they are outside the empirical-psychological world, can truly present the facts of the world and picture objects of the possible states of affairs in reality, or as Kant would have it, supersensible reality. The metaphysical subject can be considered as a Cartesian God, unlike us humble human beings, standing outside the world with separate access to propositional facts and to bare facts that enable him to present their logical form, their multiplicity. Thus, the metaphysical subject can project a new sense to the propositional fact, and its component names, in order to connect it with the objects of the states of affairs in reality that it intends to picture.

4.027 It belongs to the essence of a proposition [sign] that it should be able to communicate a *new* sense to us.

 The propositional-sign is a fact in the world and by projecting new thought into this sign it becomes a proposition with sense (cf. Wittgenstein, *T*: #3.12).

**1.3. Formal Logic and the Phenomenal World**

The logical form of the propositional fact is not enough for a pictorial representation, because with one logical form, e.g., R(a, b), one can represent different facts with the same logical form but with different material structures, e.g., that “This chair stands at the table” and that “This book stays on the table.” Furthermore, sometimes a proposition with a particular material structure, e.g., “The bank is crowded” or “Green is green” can represent with different senses different facts that have the same logical form but different material structures. Only with a specific sense that is projected as the content of the pictorial form–the logical syntax–can the sign present an object and a propositional-sign can present a possible state of affairs in reality (Wittgenstein, *T*: #2.18-2.22).

 3 A logical picture of facts is a thought.

 3.01 The totality of true thoughts is the picture of the world.

 3.326 In order to recognize a symbol by its sign we must observe how it is used with a sense.

3.327 A sign does not determine a logical form unless it is taken together with its logico-syntactical employment. (cf. #3.328, #3.33)

In other words, the logical expression in the pictorial form of a sign is its logico-syntax. The proposition-sign can pictorially present states of affairs only while the metaphysical subject projects the sense of its thought onto this sign and projects it in picturing objects of possible states of affairs in reality.

3.11 We use the perceptible sign of a proposition (spoken or written, etc.) as a projection of a possible situation. The method of projection is to think of the sense of the proposition.

3.12 I call the sign with which we express a thought a propositional sign. And a proposition is a propositional sign in its projective relation to the world. (cf. Wittgenstein, *T* 1921: #3.13-3.1431)

3.4 A propositional sign, applied and thought out, is a thought.

3.21 The configuration of the objects in a situation corresponds to the configuration of simple signs in the propositional signs.

However, there is a difference between picturing reality and presenting states of affairs in the world, in picturing or describing facts in the world.

 4.01 A proposition is a picture of reality.

A proposition is a model of reality as we imagine it.

 4.021 A proposition is a picture of reality: for if I understand a proposition, I know the situation that it represents [dargestellte ~ shown]. And I understand the proposition without having had its sense explained to me.

 4.0311 One name stands for one thing, another for another thing, and they are combined with one another. In this way the whole group – like a *tableau vivant* [living picture] – presents a state of affairs.

 The above paragraphs of the *Tractatus* are the core of Wittgenstein’s pictorial theory of presentation that comprises his theory of meaning and truth, in contrast with some basic elements of Russell and Frege’s theories of representation. The epistemological difficulty is how we understand the meaning of a proposition without it being explained to us. The realist-pragmaticist explanation is that we learn language and propositions in our experience. The preverbal components of a proposition are the iconic feelings and the indexical reactions to them, and their synthesis interprets the conceptual meaning of a proposition, which is interpreted in the symbolic thought. So, it is not by *use*, as Wittgenstein explains in his later philosophy, but by *learning* the language in experience, as Peircean semiotic makes clear (Peirce, 1906 *EP*II: #26; Nesher, 2001). Thus, the preconceptual components of propositions are what Kant calls the *Aesthetic Intuition* of the phenomenal subject, and this can be considered by Wittgenstein as the imaginative or pictorial components of propositions, namely, the experiential contents of the propositions (Kant, *CPuR*: A141; *Prolegomena* #34-35). Thus, realistically, propositions are meaningful in virtue of their confrontation with reality, as a precondition of their being true or false, and their truth and falsity are not referential objects of sentences, but are determined by proving the truth of perceptual judgments as facts representing reality (Nesher, 2002: X; cf. Wittgenstein, *T*: #4.064). The factuality of a states of affairs is the proof-conditions of the hypothetical proposition that, by being proved true, represents this situation. The Wittgensteinian metaphysical subject determines the truth of the elementary proposition when he or she detects that the presented states of affairs are an existing fact in the world. This cannot be done from the structure of the form and from the content of the proposition but only from outside the world, from a nonhuman perspective on the structure of reality and of the factual world.

5.631 There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas.

5.633 Where *in* the world is a metaphysical subject to be found?

You will say that this is exactly like the case of the eye and the visual field. … and nothing *in the visual field* allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye.

5.64 Here it can be seen that solipsism, when its implications are followed out strictly, coincides with pure realism. The self of solipsism shrinks to a point without extension, and there remains the reality coordinate with it.

5.641 Thus there really is a sense in which philosophy can talk about the self in a non-psychological way. What brings the self into philosophy is the fact that ‘the world is my world’. **The philosophical self** is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather, the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world—not a part of it. (Emphasis mine)

**[5] Wittgenstein’s Conceptions of the Meaning of Propositions Picturing my World and Personal Solipsism (5.64f.)**

 **“The philosophical self”** “non-psychological I” (5.641) “A logical picture of facts is a thought” (3).

 The **Eye** **⁄ MS \**=*Metaphysical Subject* with its Projected Thoughts (Senses) to **World** and **Reality** (5.6331) ⁄ [***Thought*]**\ (3) by the *Metaphysical* *Logic* (5.633-5.641) or *Transcendental Logic* (6.13),

 W⎛human body and soul⎞ = “*Pictorial Form*” (2.15-151) = “Representational Form” (2.173-4).

 O⎥ / / \ ⎥ = The Structure Possibility of Pictorial Structure. (*T*: 4.01-4.463; 5.62)

 R**⎨P = RL (a \* b)** ⎥ = “*Pictorial Structure* “names and relations with *meaning* and *sense* of

 L⎥ | | | |the **Actual** States-of-Affairs: **Facts** in **The World ≈ Propositional Facts** (1.)

 D⎥ ▼ ▼ ▼ ⎥ = *Truth-Conditions* of Propositions (4,45) A picture is *Model* of Reality (2.12).

 ⎥ ⎛ **fact**1 **fact**2 **fact**3⎞ | | “Pictorial Relationship” (2.1513) “pictorial form” (2.22)"sign is a fact”(3.14)

 ⎥ |Facts in The **World**]|⎥Meaning-Conditions of Propositional Signs. ((Kant, *CPuR*: B75/A51)

 ⎝⎝ *(Model of Reality*⎠ ⎠ = “Logical Space”-“things and relations” (1.12) “The facts in the Logical Space

 ***Noumenal Reality*** are the world” (1.13)

The *Philosophical Self*is the metaphysical subject, who with its *thoughts* creates its world according to the method of formal semantics. Yet, the *Philosophical Self* itself is outside the empirical world,which the philosopher can think and pictorially explain by the thought being the content-meaning of the language of formal semantics. Indeed, it is crucial to note (*T*: #4.01) that “A proposition is a picture of reality. A proposition is a model of reality as we imagine it.” Namely, one can imagine or intended to know reality from its picture, which is inferred from the metaphysical subject’s true thought to present the world and eventually depict reality.

Wittgenstein transforms Kant’s transcendental metaphysics, with its transcendental subject, into his own language of formal semantic, all of the components of which are drawn from the human cognitive mind except the metaphysical subject and the reality of all objects, i.e., the reality outside of human cognition. The experiential world, which Wittgenstein considers as a psychological element of the human being, exists beside the empirical human body and human soul. For Kant, the experiential world is the human phenomenal subject with its *sensual perception* and *aesthetic intuition* (Kant, *CPuR*: B137, B296). Indeed, all the philosophical systems that do not have a theory of truth to prove our knowledge of reality are actually solipsist: Russel, Frege, Wittgenstein, Davidson and others, with the possible exception of Spinoza and Peirce.

**2. Can Wittgenstein Explain our Knowledge of Meaning? A Pragmaticist Revision of his Conceptions of Interpretation and Criteria**

# 2.1. The Place of Meaning in Human Conduct: *Philosophical Investigations*

From this Kantian Transcendental *a prioristic* components Wittgenstein moved to his ***Philosophical Investigations*** (1958) in which he is trying to explain human knowledge and behavior in the framework of the Subject with its unexplainable *empty concepts* of the *ordinary language* to explain human experience; and yet, only with the *blind objects* of the Sensual Intuition as being separated from any experiential representation of Reality. Thus, Wittgenstein remains in the phenomenological epistemology by following the Kantian sensual intuitions components to understand human linguistic behavior in his conception of the *language-games* which is isolated from human experience of learning the linguistic concepts in the empirical perceptual judgments as true representations of components of reality. And yet, the phenomenological intuition must remain subjective without explaining how persons understand the languages of each other without representing the reality through the true representation of the inner subjects and the external objects realities. Namely, Wittgenstein remains in the Kantian sterile epistemology, as the basis of Wittgenstein’s understanding of human *linguistic behavior*.

The last epistemological stage of Wittgenstein’s inquiries which appear is his ***On Certainty*** (1969) being based on human *common-sense* as the accepted general human beliefs, as the Kantian experiential *sensual intuition* of the material *blind objects* which by themselves are meaningless which a`la Kant, without the *a priori* formal *empty concepts* they cannot ended in *logical judgments* of the firs Critique as the evidential knowledge. though for Wittgenstein without the common *a priori* Transcendental Understanding and thus similar to the subjective aesthetical *reflective judgment* of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. Indeed, Wittgenstein cannot explain if and how those judgments represent the realities of the subject and the object which as I explained they can be represented only like the Siamese Tweens that we cannot explain the knowledge of the one without of the other in distinction, e.g., from Descartes’ “I think therefore I am (exist)” (Nesher, 2007b).

In this inquiry, I analyze Wittgenstein´s conceptions of use and his criteria for the meaning of our language. I interpret his conception of the explanation of the meaning of a word in terms of its use in a language, of teaching someone the use of the words, and I show that the knowledge of the meaning of a word must precede its use in language. Otherwise, how could members of the linguistic community know how to use them? Thus, we must explain how the communal conventions of meanings are established and used. I argue that Wittgenstein´s conception of the ostensive teaching of a language is central to an infant’s acquiring meaning conventions on her way to mastering the language. We cannot begin our inquiry from the assumption of already existing communal meaning conventions, since the challenge is how to explain their acquisition and how human beings develop and manage their communication. Hence, we face a paradox of learning in Wittgenstein´s *Investigations*, since the only possibility of achieving word meaning is internal to the verbal language-game, yet according to Wittgenstein the ostensive teaching of the meaning of the word cannot be an element within any language-game. The next challenge is to understand what the criterion is for learning and using the meaning of the word in the language-game. We face a Fregean difficulty because if the criterion is a private-subjective experience, how do we know that persons experience the same phenomenon and if it is external to the language-game and to our experience, how do we know that our experience represents it truly? My conclusion is that we have to revise Wittgenstein´s grammatico-phenomenological conceptions of meaning, interpretation, and criteria, with the pragmaticist theory of meaning and truth. The criterion of meaning should be the quasi-proof of the truth of their interpretation in propositions, which makes them clear by being true representations of reality.

**2.2. Wittgenstein’s Conception of Explanation of Meaning of Words by their Use.**

In this inquiry I analyze Wittgenstein´s conceptions of *use* and *criteria* for the meaning of our language. I interpret his conception of the *explanation of the meaning* of a *word* in its *use* in the language (*PI*: #43, *#*49) and show that the knowledge of meaning of words must precede their use in language. Otherwise, how could members of the linguistic community know how to use them (*PI*:#197-202)? Thus, we must explain how the communal conventions of meanings are established and used. I argue that Wittgenstein´s conception of *ostensive teaching* of a language is central to the infant´s acquisition of meaning conventions on her way to mastering the language (*BB*: #17, *PI*: #27-49). We cannot begin our inquiry assuming already existing communal meaning conventions, because the challenge is how to explain their acquisition and how human beings develop and manage their social communication (Bloor, 1997; Habermas, 1998). Thus, we face a paradox of learning in Wittgenstein´s *Investigations*: the only possibility of acquiring word meaning is *inside* the verbal language-game, yet the *ostensive teaching* of the meaning of the word cannot be an element within any language-game. Consequently, the infant cannot learn the *word meaning* either from inside or from outside a language-game. Therefore, in Wittgenstein's grammatical philosophy we cannot explain how language is learned and taught: either we already know the language-games mysteriously or we can never know them (Plato, *Meno*: 80e).

The next problem is to understand what the *criterion* is for learning and using the meaning of the word in the language-game. We face a Fregean difficulty because if the criterion is a private-subjective experience, how do we know that different persons experience the same phenomenon, and if the criterion is external to the language-game and to our experience, how do we know that our experience represents it truly? Wittgenstein´s device to maintain his conception of meaning in the language-game is similar to Frege´s conception of objective Platonic *thoughts*, though Wittgenstein replaces them with his communal *conventions*, which come from nowhere (Nesher, 1987, 2002:X). My conclusion is that we have to revise Wittgenstein´s grammatico-phenomenological conception of *criteria* with the pragmaticist theory of meaning and truth. The *criterion* of *meaning* should be the *proof* or nonverbal perceptual *quasi-proof* of the truth of their *interpretation* in propositions, which makes them *clear* by being *true* representation of reality (Nesher, 2002, 2004).

According to Wittgenstein, the meaning of a word is given by the *grammatical rule* of a *language-game* that connects that word with a specific criterion for its meaning in the language-game. Following the *grammatical rule of meaning* is done according to our *conventions* regarding how this specific word is to be used in a proposition while asserting it in the language-game (Hintikka, 1986: 201ff.).



According to Wittgenstein, we can learn the meaning of a word either from *inside* the language, i.e., when someone explains a word to us by using other words whose meanings we already know, or by *ostensive teaching*, i.e., when someone shows us an object *outside* the language that the word is about. When Wittgenstein says, “Let the use *teach* you the meaning,” (*PI*: #212) he means that we can learn the rule of meaning of the word from the use of the word by others who already know its meaning. This *use* is the *criterion* for learning the *rule of meaning*, but we cannot identify the *meaning* itself with the *use*, as some suggest (Nesher, 1992). To describe our use of verbal language, Wittgenstein extends the framework of language to what he calls the *language‑game*. This extension includes nonverbal activities, tools, samples, and objects, i.e., “the field of use of the expression” (Malcolm, 1958: 50), pertaining to the operations of the language itself (Wittgenstein, *PG*:#29, *PI*: #6, #7, #16, #23, #50).



Accordingly, to know how to use a word is to know the rule of grammar operating on the word with its *known meaning* and applying it in the specific field of use (UseF) of the language-game. The knowledge of word meaning must *precede* its use. It is only in *ostensive teaching* of words to an infant that she first learns the meanings of rules and words. Thereby we can clearly see how one can learn a verbal language without knowing any implicit conventions about the meanings of its expressions.

**2.3. Wittgenstein’s Problem with *Ostensive Learning*.**

The predicament of *ostensive teaching* is that if it is a language-game then how does the infant learn such a language-game without knowing any verbal language. Clearly, she learns the first conventions of a language-game instinctively and practically, from outside any verbal language-game, and she must learn it with her private pre-verbal language. According to Wittgenstein, however, without *public criteria* there cannot be any objective understanding of meanings of rules and words. This is probably the reason why Wittgenstein tries to avoid calling *ostensive teaching* a language-game and regards it only as a preparation for the language-games.

We may say: *nothing* has so far been done, when a thing has been named. It has not even *got* a name except in the language-game. This is what Frege meant too, when he said that a word had meaning only as a part of a sentence. (Wittgenstein, *PI*: #49)

We can see how Wittgenstein’s problem with *ostensive teaching* is connected to his rejection of the possibility of a private language (*PI*: #174ff., #378ff.; *BB*: #3-4). This paradoxical situation concerning how an infant learns the meaning of their first words in a language can be due to the fact that Wittgenstein restricts his conception of learning to verbal language alone. Consequently, one has to learn verbal language meanings in a language-game that one does not yet know. It follows that it is impossible to learn verbal-language, and with non-verbal language *certain* communication is impossible (*PI*: #202). Hence, the infant learns her first language-game by utilizing pre-verbal cognitive communication. In a similar manner we can explain the entire development of the language-game, i.e., how human beings start to use language.

Our language-game is an extension of primitive behavior. (Wittgenstein, *Z*: #545)

But what is the word “primitive” meant to say here? Presumably that this sort of behavior is *pre-linguistic*: that a language-game is based *on it*, that it is the prototype of a way of thinking and not the result of thought. (Wittgenstein, *Z*: #541)

The explanation of the ostensive teaching must start from the instinctive and practical components of our perceptual operation and how they represent external reality and terminate in true judgments. This is Wittgenstein’s difficulty with the relation of the basic empirical propositions to external reality. According to his grammatico-phenomenology, our “picture of the world” is the “reality” against which we evaluate other propositions (Wittgenstein, *OC*: #94f.; *PI*: #354-5).

The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. (Wittgenstein, *OC*: #95)

If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not *true*, nor yet false. (Wittgenstein, *OC*: #205)

However, the criteria for meaning and truth are both in the system of language-games and constitute its foundations (cf. Wittgenstein, *OC*: #80ff.). For Wittgenstein, the ostensive definition is problematic as an attempt to establish meaning because it does not have the *certainty* that he claims grammatical rules have (cf. Wittgenstein, *PI*: #31ff.). For him only rational justification inside the language-game can be certain, and such justification is based on already accepted *empirical propositions* of our inherited background. Yet this relation of linguistic expressions to their *criteria* of meaning is the most primitive and genuine grammatical relation: without it the grammatical rules *in the language* cannot be established.

**2.4. Wittgenstein´s “Paradox of Interpretation” and the Meaning of Rules, Words, and Propositions.**

In his discussion of the interpretation of meaning of rules, Wittgenstein shows that under some understanding of *interpretation* we arrive at a paradox about following rules.

“But how can a rule shew me what I have to do with at *this* point? Whatever I do is, on some interpretation, in accord with the rule.” –That is not what we ought to say, but rather: any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support. Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning. (Wittgenstein, *PI*: #198)

This is the case with Wittgenstein´s kind of hermeneutic conception of *interpretation*.

This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rules, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here. It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it. What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call “obeying the rule” and “going against it” in actual cases.

Hence there is an inclination to say: every action according to the rule is an interpretation. But we are to restrict the term “interpretation” to the substitution of one expression of the rule for another. (Wittgenstein, *PI*: #201)

I argue that Wittgenstein’s “Paradox of Interpretation,” as I call it, comes from a wrong conception of *Interpretation*, like the “liar paradox” which comes from a wrong conception of *truth* (Nesher, 1997). Wittgenstein’s conception of *Interpretation* is of endless operations in which we replace “one interpretation after another.” The epistemological basis of this conception of interpretation is Wittgenstein’s phenomenological conception of the language-game, neither from the inside nor from the outside can we reach any *confrontation* with *reality* (Wittgenstein, *PG*: #68). Yet only by such confrontation can we prove the *truth* of our *interpretation* without continuing it endlessly. Without such proof, “Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning.” Due to this paradoxical situation, Wittgenstein rejects *interpretation* as a way of understanding the meanings of expressions (Baker & Hacker, 1984: 19).

To overcome the “paradox of interpretation” Wittgenstein had to invent a mysterious conception of “grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*” (Wittgenstein, *PI*: #201). Without having any epistemological explanation of how we learn the rules, understanding them and controlling their use, we cannot distinguish between “‘obeying the rule’ and ‘going against the rule’ in actual cases,” which is only a description of a behavior with respect to already established conventions. Therefore, we have to perform a radical revision of the epistemology of our acquiring the meaning and the truths of our cognitions (Tarski, 1969; Nesher, 2002). I suggest that we move away from the premises of Wittgenstein’s grammatico-phenomenological conception of knowledge of meanings to a pragmaticist realism by which we can understand the *criterion* not as the phenomenon but as the *proof* of the *truth* of the *interpretation* of the *meanings* of our cognitive signs and “make our ideas clear,” to know their *meanings*.

**2.5. Wittgenstein’s Conceptions of Criteria and Symptoms and how they are Distinguished.**

Without Wittgenstein’s mysterious “grasping,” what are the *criteria* for the pre-verbal behavior by which new conventions of a verbal language-game are created and learned? According to Wittgenstein, the tacit presuppositions of our language-games are our basic *empirical propositions*, i.e., the basic “descriptions” of the activities of our form of life. These are the indubitable *criteria*, our norms against which we measure the truth and falsity of other propositions, the meanings of their words, and adjudicate between right and wrong behaviors in following the rules of our language-games (Wittgenstein, *OC*: #94ff.). But how do we acquire these *criteria* and how is the conception of the *criteria* distinct from the conception of *symptoms*? Some interpreters suggest that the distinction is not comprehensive and systematic because it follows a variety of different ordinary-language usages of these terms. Wittgenstein suggests a relative distinction between *criteria* and *symptoms* because it is not clear how the normative criterial justifications of meaning and truth differ from the empirical inductive logic of symptoms (Wittgenstein, *BB*: #24-25, #51; *PI*: #322ff., #354f.). The distinction between criteria and symptoms seems to be between the grammar of conventions and the experiential sense-impressions by which we acquire the former (Wittgenstein, *OC*: #94ff.). Our basic propositions are our basic conventions but, as such, cannot be derived from other conventions, and since they are not merely arbitrary propositions, they must be somehow proved to be true representation of our reality. Without confrontation of the language-game system with reality through experiential sense-impressions, our common-sense world-picture will remain only *mythology* without any explanation of the development of our form of life through the replacement of the norms of one language-game with those of a new one (cf. Wittgenstein, *OC*: #§94ff.). But Wittgenstein, in his grammatico-phenomenological investigations, cannot explain such confrontation with reality.



What is the criterion by which we “explain” or “define” the meaning of a word? Some Wittgensteinians call the explanation of the nature of the criteria for the meanings of the rules and words in a language-game “criterial semantics,” as distinct from “truth-conditions semantics.” What is the nature of this criterion? Is it for the *meaning* of the word or for the *truth* of ostensive teaching, or for both? According to Wittgenstein it is for the meaning of the word, but since the first basic words can be learned only in *ostensive teaching* how can a private experiential phenomenon be an objective criterion for the meaning of its name? Therefore, the *true perceptual representation of the name's object* is constitutive of the *criterion* for the *ostensive teaching*. The *meaning* of the *word* and the *truth* of the *ostensive teaching* are connected, and without them the entire procedure cannot work. Wittgenstein's epistemological problem lies in his severing the connection between the *interpretation* of cognitive meanings from within the language and the representation of reality from without it. This inevitably leads to an endless series of interpreting criteria and to the impossibility of representing reality. The question is whether Wittgenstein can explain the meaning of our language without connecting the experiential meaning or content to the truth of such experience. The experience of the *feeling of meaning* can only be the *symptom* of understanding the meaning of a word, not its *criterion*, if it is to be a conventional norm and therefore certain. The *symptom as feeling the meaning* of a word is one’s reflection on the relation between the word and the *meaning, or content, of experiencing* an object. If the feeling of meaning of a word is only the *symptom* of *understanding* its *initial-vague meaning*, how may we establish it as a *clear* meaning? The *criterion* for such meaning cannot be any phenomenal experience or external object but must rather be the *quasi-proof* of the *truth* of our *interpretation* of the initial-vague meanings of the components of the perceptual judgment. The conception of *quasi-proof*, which I developed from Peircean cognitive semiosis, is the instinctive self-controlled perceptual proof of our perceptual judgments (Nesher, 2002). The following is a pragmaticist-realist reconstruction and alternative to Wittgenstein’s rule of meaning in ostensive teaching

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Here the *symptom* is the feeling of the initial-vague meaning, or content, of one perceptual experience with an object/behavior. The *criterion* is the *quasi-proof*of the *truth of the interpretation*of the *initial-vague meanings* synthesized in the perceptual judgment *representing* the real object/behavior. Hence, the feeling of “wet and cold” is only a symptom of experiencing rain. The feeling of the initial-vague meaning, or content, is without the proof of the truth of its interpretation and is thus still doubtful (cf. Wittgenstein, *PI*: #354). This is to be distinguished from the Wittgensteinian conception of the *criteria* as phenomena that belong to the grammar of a language-game without being proved a true representation of external reality, and which is thus defeasible (McDowell, 1983: 369ff.). This pragmaticist epistemology of the criterion as the quasi-proof of the truth of the interpretation of meaning is not the *truth-conditional conception of meaning*. It is not the *truth-conditions* that determine the meaning of the word but the *criterial proof* upon the truth-conditions, which are components of the proof operation (Nesher, 2002).

**2.6. Conclusion: Pragmaticist Theory of the Truth of Interpretation and Representation**

My conclusion is that with the pragmaticist theory of meaning interpretation and the proof of its truth, we also prove our knowledge of reality. These proved-true cognitions are the communal conventions of our form of life. The problem of Wittgenstein’s two philosophical perspectives is that neither the Tractarian *formal semantic model* nor the *grammatico-phenomenological* *Investigations* can explain human cognitive behavior and its meaning and truth. Thus, neither Analytic Philosophy nor Philosophical-Phenomenology can explain our representation of the reality in which human beings operate and develop their lives (Nesher, 2004). The pragmaticist revision of Wittgenstein’s conception of the criterion is also a solution to the Fregean puzzle of “compositionality” and the “hermeneutical circle” paradox.



We begin our perceptual operation with the initial-vague cognitive meanings of feeling A and emotion C as experiences of some real object. If there is *coherence* between A and C then their interpretation in the proposition A –> C is proven a true representation of the same *real object*. Therefore, the interpretations of A and C are true and their meanings are *certainly clear* as components of A – >C being a *true representation* of the real object. This can be seen as a solution to the Fregean puzzle of “compositionality” and to the “hermeneutical circle” paradox in that through reflective control over a complete proof, not a formal proof but the Peircean trio sequence of abduction, deduction, and induction, we can avoid any vicious circle or infinite regress (Nesher, 2002). We do not prove the truth of the meanings of the proposition’s components but the truth of their interpretation-synthesis in the proposition itself. We prove the interpretation because every proof is an interpretation of the assumptions, and every complete proof is a true interpretation.

This is not a sort of *Verificationist Theory of Meaning*, since the proof of the truth of the proposition “C is A” only makes *certainly clear* the meanings of its initial-vague components A and C. According to the logical positivist’s verifiability principle of meaning, a proposition is meaningful if, at least in principle, it can be verified or falsified in the formal semantics. This *verificationist* principle has the function of eliminating metaphysical propositions that are meaningless because they are unprovable as true or false. According to my pragmaticist theory of meaning and truth, every human experience involves some initial-vague meanings and in their *interpretation* we can make the meanings or ideas *clear and distinct* representations of reality. Metaphysical propositions also have experiential meaning, or contents, as our utmost empirical generalizations, but in contrast with Kant and contemporary neo-Kantians, e.g., Putnam, we can evaluate them empirically. If such propositions have not been proven true or false, they remain doubtful, but a doubtful proposition is meaningful though it is still vague. Thus, I reconstruct Wittgenstein’s conceptions of *meaning* and *criterion* with the pragmaticist theory of meaning and truth.

3. IN *ON CERTAINTY* WITTGENSTEIN TRIES TO EXPLAIN THAT BY REJECTING *CERTAINLY* THE *SKEPTICISM* IN ORDER

3.1. On Having Any Certain Knowledge of Reality and Vice Versa

Indeed, in his ***On Certainty*** Wittgenstein tries to explain that if he can reject certainly the skepticism in order about having any certain knowledge of reality whoever, since this cannot be based on the subjective feeling only and therefore we remains with skepticism about the refutation of skepticism, or solipsism according his *Tractatus*, and also of Russell, about our knowledge of Reality. This can be explained that like Kant which admitted of not having any theory of truth to prove our knowledge of reality as with all the neo-Kantians from Kant on, and if I can say of the entire philosophy though we can see the seeds of such theory of truth in Spinoza and Peirce as I show in my 1994, 2018 respectively and especially in my book of 2002: X, and on *epistemic logic*, 2021. Hence, from these we can learn that *Certainty* cannot be absolute since in the Pragmaticist theory of truth we prove it in our *relative proof-conditions* available to us any time and we can prove either the *truth* or the *falsity* of our hypotheses and if we cannot prove them they ate *doubtful* which for a time this is *certain*. And thus about my proofs of the *truth* and *falsity* I am *certain* and abut the *doubtful* I can be *certainly* *skeptic* for a time until I will be able to prove their *certainly* upon new *proof-conditions.*

Indeed, it is interesting to see how much Wittgenstein took the phenomenalist aspect from Kant, let us say, the *sensual intuition* but as separated from the Transcendental Logic and Pure Understanding and yet, without showing how we actually replace them in our real experience in Reality, we have to explain what is the relation between the inner experience of pain (or pleasure) and its natural expression of crying (or cheering) and the verbal exclamation of "I am in pain" (or "I am happy").

If I say of myself that it is only from my own case that I know what the word "pain" … means--must I not say the same of other people too? And how can I generalize the *one* case so irresponsibly? Now someone tells me that *he* knows what pain is only from his own case … No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle. --Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. --But suppose the word "beetle" had a use in these people's language? --If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all. (Wittgenstein, *PI*: #293.)

The epistemological difficulty is if and how we can learn and prove that without the inner experience we cannot explain the knowledge of ourselves and the representation of Reality since in cognitive experience they are like the Siamese Twins that we cannot know one without knowing the other one and yet this is based on the theory of truth which Kant did not have as he admitted, and so also all the neo-Kantians and Wittgenstein among them. Indeed, the Pragmaticist epistemology based especially on Peircean *semiotics* and its elaboration in my *epistemic logic*. Generally, we can say that Wittgenstein as the prominent neo-Kantian, influences in different ways the philosophers of the Twenty Century as Russell, Popper, Davidson, Putnam, Hintikka, Reacher, and many more (Nesher. 2021).

However, what brings Wittgenstein to reject *skepticism* is that human beings and animals instinctively know how to live in nature and society. Further, what brings him to reject *certainty* is the fact that we err and harm ourselves in nature and society and therefore need rational knowledge and even the sciences in order to thrive within them? That means that animals and human beings have instinctive knowledge of reality, yet, like Kant, Wittgenstein cannot explain this instinctive knowledge and therefore he (and possibly Kant as well) moves between certainty and skepticism without being able to explain our life in reality.

The epistemological question is how are we to explain this instinctive behavior in reality – when is it successful, and *certain*, when does it fail, and leads to *skepticism*, and what can true knowledge be and how long can it be so?

# 3.2. The Place of Meaning in Human Conduct: The Nature of Mental Processes of Human Beings and Other Living Things

The nature of mental processes of human beings and other living things is a topic for the philosophy of mind. Cognition is the self-conscious mental process and is thus the subject matter of the philosophy of language, the theory of knowledge, and subsumed by other branches of philosophy such as aesthetics, ethics, logic, and philosophy of science. Wittgenstein’s later philosophy is a paradigmatic case of addressing the relations between cognitive behavior and language, where I understand every human behavior as cognitive and where cognition encompasses also inner experiential processes. An analysis of Wittgenstein’s philosophy can show why the meaning of language and of human behavior cannot be explained within it.

It seems quite clear that Wittgenstein made all efforts to separate the "subjective" component of cognition from the "objective" component of cognitive behavior. His position is that we cannot rely on introspective reports for our description of human cognitive and linguistic behavior; therefore, the inner experience cannot be a subject matter of philosophy *qua* analysis and description of the grammar of language and its rules of meaning (cf. Wittgenstein, 1991(*TS*: 213):11, 16; *PI*: #90, #109; comp. Hacker, 1986: Ch. VI).

I will contend that, if Wittgenstein’s conception of the language-game is intended to explain the meaning of language and its representational relation to reality (cf. Hintikka, 1986: 212-213), then it cannot work without assuming cognitive inner experience as a necessary element of the entire cognitive process and, therefore, also of the language-game.

**3.3. Wittgenstein and Frege’s Struggle for the Objectivity of Meaning**

Wittgenstein, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, attempts to overcome Frege’s Platonism and his own Tractarian Kantianism with respect to the nature of *thought* and its function in the meaning of language (e.g., *BB*: #4). Frege, in his attempt to explain how linguistic communication is possible, endeavored to avoid mentalism, introspectionism, and psychologism in understanding the meaning of language in order to sustain its objectivity. Frege's solution to the problem of the objectivity of meaning is to locate meanings in the “third domain” of Platonic thoughts, which are distinguished from the “second domain” of mental states and the “first domain” of physical objects (cf. Frege, 1918: 523ff.; comp. Plato’s *Sophist*; Popper, 1972: Chs. 3, 4). Thus, thoughts of the third domain are not subjective mental states and the same thought is “the common property of many.” Objective thoughts are combined with and expressed in the objective physical signs of language (cf. Frege, 1892: 59-61; 1918: 511-524; 1923). Yet, unfortunately, Frege cannot get rid of the dross of subjectivity pertaining to the meaning of language. The problem for Frege’s enterprise, and Platonism at large, is how different persons can know that they are thinking and talking about the same thought. The argument against this position is that in order to know that they are thinking and talking about *the same* thought, their subjective acts of thinking about this thought must be compared. Yet, according to Frege, such comparison can only be achieved if these acts of thinking are located in the same mind, and they are not (cf. Frege, 1918: 522). Therefore, even if there are objective *thoughts*, independent of human mental consciousness, we cannot know them as objective entities, because we cannot separate them from our acts of thinking them.

Wittgenstein faced this problem of the objectivity of linguistic meaning. In the *Tractatus* he aims to anchor the meaning of language in the objectivity of the objects (physical and psychical) of independent reality. These objects can be known only through our acquaintance with empirical facts as configurations of these objects. However, if psychological facts are subjective and intentional, then their objects are also so, and the meanings of psychological words received by reference to these objects remain also subjective. To maintain the objectivity of psychical objects as well Wittgenstein had to avoid the intentionality of the psychical states, the empirical facts of psychology. Thus, he had to separate intentional thoughts from psychical states and to locate these thoughts themselves in the transcendental “metaphysical subject,” outside the world of facts and the reality of objects (Peirce, *CP*: 2.221-3.11, 4.1121-121, 5.5421,5.641, 6.41, 6.423; cf. Nesher, 1992. Comp. Pears, 1988: 154-155). In the *Tractatus*, linguistic meanings are formed by the metaphysical subject projecting his thoughts as linguistic senses into the propositional facts of the world and connecting their names with the objects in reality. Hence, if there are different metaphysical subjects, they have different thoughts that are differently projected and provide different meanings to language (cf. Wittgenstein, *T*:#5.62-5.641; *PG*: #163ff., #213f.; cf. Nesher, 1992: #II). Yet, with this solution Wittgenstein could not avoid solipsism and subjectivism, for how can a metaphysical subject compare his thoughts and projected rules with other metaphysical subjects, if such beings could be at all? (Cf. Nesher, 1979, 1986: II).

In this way Wittgenstein returned to the subjectivism that he and Frege attempted to avoid. To achieve the objectivity of the meaning of language and of knowledge, Wittgenstein had to criticize both mentalism and solipsism without falling back, with Frege, into the Platonistic pitfall. Wittgenstein’s later philosophy critically evaluated the so called mentalistic approaches of Russell's *The Analysis of Mind* (1921) and James's *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). Hence, Wittgenstein first argued that mental states are only ornaments and idle knobs, which have no real function in language-games and in the human form of life (cf. *PI*: #270-280, #132; *C&E*: #429). Secondly, he suggested that we understand the meaning of language not in the heavenly Platonic thoughts but in the framework of the public “language-game” based on “the common behavior of mankind,” “the form of life,” as the independent “hard rock” that grants meaning its objectivity (*PI*: #19, #23, #241, p. 226; *OC*: #94-99, #114, #446). These concepts become the cornerstones for understanding the objectivity of linguistic meaning in the framework of his cognitive behaviorism (e.g., *RPP I*: #927; *BB*: #4, #47; *PI*: #36; comp. Pears, 1987:154-155, 1988: 208ff.; Hallett, 1977: 43-44; Newell, 1986: 65).

**3.4. Criticizing Wittgenstein and Putnam for Rejecting Mental Meaning** In this section I will argue against Wittgenstein’s position concerning the place of inner experiences in linguistic meaning. Wittgenstein makes a philosophical-categorical mistake in assuming that images, feelings, and emotions are *objects* of “psychological concepts” (cf. Wittgenstein, *RPP* *II*: #62 (1980); comp. M. & J. Hintikka, 1986: Ch. 10; Budd, 1989: Chs. I, III, VII. Comp. Wittgenstein, *BB*: #47). These inner experiential processes are not objects at all and, therefore, are also not objects of linguistic names, but are, rather, “private” cognitive signs representing internal physiological and external physical processes. I will claim that these “private” signs are interpreted in our “public” conduct and linguistic behavior, and that these acts of interpretation are also cognitive processes. The “private language” of sensations, feelings, and attention, and the behavioral “public language” that interprets them, can only be separated abstractly, as they are merely different stages of the same cognitive process. Putnam (e.g., 1975: Ch. 12, 1981: Chs. 2, 3, 1983: Ch. 4) claims to follow Wittgenstein in rejecting mental states as components of language and its meaning.3 The difficulties with his arguments will be discussed and a pragmaticist alternative to Wittgenstein and Putnam’s anti-mentalist position will show that meaning and reference are cognitive processes of which mental images and mental acts are essential components, without which neither non-verbal behavior nor verbal language can work. Yet, these “subjective” components are not the ultimate source of our meaning, because they are developed and interpreted in social inquiry and communication.

**4. Wittgenstein and Pragmatism: On the True Meaning and Knowledge of our Conventions**

# 4.1. The Epistemology of Forms of Life and Their Conventions

In Wittgenstein’s conceptions of *forms of life* and their *conventions* there is no clear indication whether there can be any objective criteria for understanding how they can be known and considered as the framework for our entire cognitive life. The challenge is to show how the common-sense knowledge of those conceptions can make them valid and true explanations of human activity (Nesher, 1994).

To *imagine* a language means to *imagine* a form of life. (Wittgenstein, *PI*: #19, emphasis mine)

Indeed, according to Wittgenstein, to understand language is to consider it as a component of our activities in language-games, operating in the framework of our entire form of life.

Here the term “*language*-*game*” is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life. (Wittgenstein, *PI*: #23)

The difficulty is to show how we understand each other in different language-games and, moreover, how we can distinguish between true and false in the activity of *speaking* in language-games.

It is what human beings *say* that is true or false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life. (Wittgenstein, *PI*: #241)

What has to be accepted, the given, is—so one could *say*—*form of life*. (Wittgenstein, *PI*: p. 226)

Accordingly, we accept our *form of life* as a given and, hence, to be our last criterion for understanding each other, i.e., as our accepted conventions. Yet without being proved true the conventions cannot be the criteria for agreement on truth and falsity, but only the mode of behavior. In that case, however, the assumptions of the truth and falsity of linguistic behavior is no more than an empty convention, since Wittgenstein cannot explain how our linguistic cogitations can be true, in the sense of being in “agreement with reality” (Wittgenstein, *OC*: #215). Therefore, the epistemological difficulty is to explain how our *forms of life* can serve as criteria of agreement for our linguistic behaviors in language-games if we cannot prove our true knowledge of them. We can only conclude that by assuming that our forms of life are common to us, without providing proof of their veracity as common knowledge, they remain a *mythology*, although in most cases, this mythology feels grounded (Wittgenstein, *OC*: #95). Accordingly, there is no commonly accepted criteria for truth and falsity of any eventual agreement on our social behaviors, which could provide the rules for the meanings of our activities in language-games (Wittgenstein, *OC*: #204; Nesher, 2005).

The concept of *the given* is the positivistic-analytical notion of *sense data*, the so-called facts of the world, that are accepted as given, but without proving their truth are merely our perceptual cognitions, which, most of the time, we tacitly accept (Davidson, 1986; Nesher, 2002: VI). Wittgenstein’s conception of meaning and use in language-games is of a piece with Ordinary-Language Philosophy, as the given forms of life, and his *philosophy of commonsense* is only the phenomenological investigation of our ways of behavior in speaking a language. Yet, Wittgenstein cannot explain how we can commonly behave commonsensically, and the difficulty remains how can the meanings of our behaviors serve as the criteria for judging their truth, without any objective criteria? And if we cannot prove them to be objectively true, then we cannot presume to understand either our behaviors or our basic judgments. (Wittgenstein, *OC*: # 38, #308; Nesher, 1992, 1994, 2005).

# 4.2. Wittgenstein on Propositional *Meanings in Use* and William James’s *Practical Consequences* vs. Peirce on *Truth*

It is illuminating to see the similarity between Wittgenstein’s conception of *behavioral-linguistic meaning* in *use* and James’s conception of meaning and truth as traceable through their *behavioral practical consequences*. This similarity can be attributed to Wittgenstein’s interest in James’s writings and their eventual influence on his own theories (Wittgenstein, *PI*: pp. 219-220; *OC*: #422; Goodman, 2002).

… I have tried to show that, even if Wittgenstein was not in the strict sense either a “pragmatist” nor a “neo-Kantian” he shares with pragmatism a certain Kantian heritage (which William James, too, was extremely loathe to acknowledge), and he also shares a central – perhaps *the* central – emphasis with pragmatism: the emphasis on the primacy of practice. (Putnam, 1995: 52; comp. Nesher, 2005)

In this context it is interesting to follow the controversy between Peirce and James’s understanding of the pragmatic conception of meaning, by either the proof of its truth or by its practical consequences.

The pragmatist method in such cases [of disputes] is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to anyone if this notion rather than that notion were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle. (James, 1907: 28)

As we can see, the Jamesian “respective practical consequences” is the alternative to Peirce’s cognitive proof. That is, because James’s Kantianism lacks a theory of truth he must seek out an alternative. He is drawn, we might say to a pure common-sensist position in contrast with Peirce’s “critical common-sensist” position. (Peirce, 1905 *EP*II: #25, 353-4).

In a nutshell, the Jamesian position considers behavior as based on the semiotic interpretation of meanings; if our interpretations lead us to accomplish our intentions, they can be considered *behaviorally* true. Although James’s formulation seems to echo Peirce’s initial explanation of the Pragmatic Maxim of 1878, later (around 1898-1907) Peirce elaborated his realist epistemology and named his epistemology *Pragmaticism*, to separate it from James’s *Pragmatism*. Thus, according to Peirce, proving the true interpretation of cognitive meanings is connected to the proof of the true representation of reality and this is the condition for successful conduct in such known reality (Nesher, 1983, 2018). However, epistemologically, James’s pragmatism is rather similar to Peirce’s early pragmatism, in that it is still nominalist and “pure Kantist.” Yet, as Peirce admitted, it conflicted with Peirce’s mature realist pragmaticism:

The present writer was a pure Kantist until he was forced by successive steps into Pragmaticism. The Kantist has only to abjure from the bottom of his heart the proposition that a thing-in-itself can, however indirectly, be conceived; and then correct the details of Kant’s doctrine, and he will find himself to have become a Critical Common-Sensist. (Peirce, 1905 *EP*II: #25, 353-4)

Moreover, the philosophers of our times, who call themselves pragmatists, like Popper, Davidson, Putnam, Hintikka, Reacher, and many others are based on Peirce’s early writings and have unfortunately remained, like early Peirce, pure Kantists and nominalists.

Pragmaticism makes the ultimate intellectual purport of what you please to consist in conceived conditional resolutions, or their substance, and therefore, the conditional propositions, with their hypothetical antecedents, in which such resolution consist, being the ultimate nature of meaning, must be capable of being true, that is, of expressing whatever there be which is such as the proposition expresses, independently of being thought to be so in any judgment, or being represented to be so in any other symbol of any man or men. (Peirce, *CP*: 5.453, 1905)

Kant’s *transcendental logic* serves as the justification of the ability of the *transcendental empty concepts* to meetor clear the *blind objects* of the *sensual intuitions* and provide meanings to these concepts. But, at the end, Kant was unsuccessful in his enterprise due to the unbridgeable gap in his epistemology between the *formal* transcendental components and the *material* sensual components of cognition, as he admitted in a letter to his friend in 1798. Thus, we can understand that the forms of the *empty concepts* cannot have any meanings without closing the gap between an empty transcendental language and blind objects of sensual intuition. In this way, we can understand Peirce’s conception of Kantian nominalism, as mere names of concepts without contents or meanings. This led Peirce to his realist epistemology, which we can consider a contra-Copernican Revolution against Kant.

To say, as the article of January of 1878 seems to intend, that it is just as an arbitrary “usage of speech” choses to arrange its thoughts, is as much as to decide against the reality of the property, since the real is that which is such as it is regardless of how it is, in any time, thought to be. (Peirce, *CP*: 5.457, 1905)

The above is a criticism of the phenomenalist nominalism of James’s practicalist pragmatism and, indirectly, of the ordinary-language language-game of Wittgenstein’s conventionalism. According to Peirce’s realist epistemology, the meaning of the basic intellectual concepts, the linguistic symbols, can be interpreted and proved true by quasi-proving the truth of our perceptual judgments as our basic true facts representing external reality (Nesher, 2002: X). Hence, our conduct in reality can be considered the extension of the proof of the truth of a proposition or a theory, through which we are able to satisfy our intentions (Peirce, *CP*: 5.467, 1907).

But that the *total* meaning of the predication of an intellectual concept consists in affirming that, under all conceivable circumstances of a given kind, the subject of the predication would (or would not) behave in a certain way, —that is, that it either would, or would not, be true that under given experiential circumstances (or under a given proportion of them, taken *as the would occur* in experience) certain facts would exist, —*that* proposition I take to be the kernel of pragmatism. (Peirce, *EP*II (1893-1913): #28, 402; *MS* 318, 1907)

Hence the core distinction between Peirce’s pragmaticism and James’s Pragmatism is that, according to the former, our ensuing conduct is based on the proved true interpretation of meaning and our proved true propositions and theories representing reality and ensuring conduct, and not conversely, as James contends, that the truth of conduct determines their meaning and truth.

*‘The true,’* to put it very briefly, *is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as ‘the right’ is only the expedient in the way of our behaving*.(James, 1907: 106)

In the following we can detect the similarity between the Kantian conception of the reflective judgment concerning the beauty of artworks by feelings or satisfactions, and not by proving the truth of cognitions to enable normative conduct. Moreover, according to realist pragmaticism there is no *degree of truth*, à la James, but complete proved truth, yet relative to accepted proof-conditions (Nesher, 2002: X).

Well, I need hardly explain that *that degree of truth is also provided for in my account of the matter*. And if satisfactions are the marks of truth’s presence, we may add that any less true substitute for such true idea would prove less satisfactory. (James, 1907: 254)

 Thus, we can understand the controversy between Peirce’s pragmaticism and James’ pragmatism, namely the former’s “radical empiricism,” and also, how it relates to Wittgenstein, as he follows James’s practicalism, by understanding meaning in practical use (Wittgenstein, *WL*: 75-76). However, according to Peircean realist epistemology, the proof of the truth of our interpretation of meaning is achieved by proving the truth of our propositional representation of reality, which is independent of our experience. Such proof constitutes the objective criteria with which we seek to prove our knowledge of cognitive meaning and our conduct in reality (Nesher, 2018). Hence, given that without knowledge of external reality we cannot achieve our purposes and gain “satisfaction” through acting, behavior is the application of experiential knowledge and not its criterion (Peirce, *EP*II: #28, 1893-1913).

This is the difference between Peirce’s Pragmatic Maxim in his early writings (from 1878) his Pragmaticist Maxim, expressed in his controversy with James’s pragmatic “practicalism” (which James presented in his 1898 lecture in California), and Peirce’s mature epistemology, of the years 1903-1907 (Fisch, 1986: 284-585).

# 4.3. Wittgenstein as Phenomenalist in his Epistemology of *Language-Games* and *Forms of Life* and his Return to Solipsism is Enclosed in the Prison of Phenomenal Form of Life

Interestingly, for James, *use* or *usefulness* is related to the notion of *truth,* whereas for Wittgenstein the *use* is the criterion for *meaning* in playing language-games. This is probably because Wittgenstein does not have a real theory of truth and meaning in his late philosophy (Wittgenstein, *RPP*: #266; *PI*: #136-138; *OC*: #200; Ellenbogen, 2003).

Well if everything speaks for a hypothesis and nothing against it—is it certainly true? One may designate it as such. —But does it agree with reality, with the facts? — With this question you are already going round in a circle. (Wittgenstein, *OC*: #191)

Really “The proposition is either true or false” only means that it must be possible to decide for or against it. But this does not say what the ground for such a decision is like. (Wittgenstein, *OC*: #200)

Knowledge is in the end based on acknowledgment. (Wittgenstein, *OC*: #378)

Indeed, we use the words *true* and *false* to say something about propositions pertaining to our eventual knowledge, but on what grounds? What can be the criterion for such a decision, if it is not possible to represent the reality in which we live? If propositions cannot relate to reality, how can we determine whether they are true or false, and how does the absence of such criteria affect the language-games in our form of life? According to Wittgenstein, the ultimate criterion for judging the empirical propositions of our linguistic behavior is not whether they correspond to reality or to facts, but whether they correspond to the “ungrounded way of acting” (Wittgenstein, *OC*: #110). In Jamesian behaviorist phenomenology, the meaning and truth of our linguistic behavior is in the practical action.But the difficulty concerns the criterion for our action: how can we know whether we act in an effective or illusory manner, if we do not know the reality in which we act, or if our behavior is indeed *expedient* (James, 1907: 106)? James’s “radical empiricism” and Wittgenstein’s linguistic behaviorism are enclosed in the phenomenal human experience, wherein inexplicable common-sense is the accepted background. Neither James nor Wittgenstein’s conceptions constitute a realistic epistemology and neither offers objective criteria or proof of the truth of the interpreted meaning or of the true representation of reality (Ellenbogen, 2003: I.2.).

But you aren’t a pragmatist? No. For I am not saying that a proposition is true if it is useful.

The usefulness, i.e., the use, gives the proposition its special sense, the language-game gives it. (Wittgenstein, *RPP I*: #226).

This can be argued as well, once we understand that Wittgenstein basically accepted James’s phenomenal practicalism and Dewey’s conductivism without accepting their conceptions of truth, but rather attributing our phenomenal understanding of meanings to our conduct in language-games (Goodman, 1998, 2002). In this respect, it is interesting to note - and I wish to emphasize - that the body of philosophical work of the last two centuries is basically neo-Kantian, including the work of contemporary “American Pragmatists,” with the exclusion of Peirce (Nesher, 2018).

Indeed, Wittgenstein is philosophizing within his behaviorist *grammatical phenomenology*, and looking into the meaning and the use of words and propositions in *language-games*, including the meanings of “true” and “false,” in order to understand common human behavior. However, Wittgenstein’s methodology misses the basic problem of philosophy, namely, how we attain *true knowledge of reality*, including knowledge of social reality and of ourselves. Alas, without attaining this knowledge, we cannot explain how we establish our common social conventions, which must be based on proved true meanings and knowledge of ourselves and of reality. It seems that Wittgenstein’s behavioral-linguistic approach is isolated from reality and is related to his type of solipsism, as expressed in his *Tractatus*. Despite his efforts to avoid solipsism, Wittgenstein, like his contemporaries (e.g., Russell), could not explain how we can go beyond subjective cognitive-phenomenal perceptions to truthfully represent ourselves and external reality, as Russell sorrowfully admitted (Russell, 1914, 1959; Pears, 1988). Indeed, there are traces in Wittgenstein’s later epistemology of the criterion for understanding human behaviors that serves as a common background of human experience in this *form of life*.

 Nevertheless, without having any proof of its truth, this understanding of common human behavior is no more than a myth, because human beings cannot accept any convention without proving its truth (Wittgenstein, *OC*: #95). Only objective criteria can suffice if we are to prove our ability to truthfully represent external reality, and only by attaining such proof can we agree to accept our propositions and be released from the *prison* of our subjective, mental, and private languages. Indeed, the role of philosophers is to elaborate the epistemology of true representations of reality to explain human knowledge and conduct in it. This can be done by starting from our initial feelings and emotions, which are the basis of phenomenalism, and continuing to interpret them into rational conceptions of our perceptual judgments to prove their truth as our *basic facts* representing reality, as I elaborated also in the *epistemic logic*, as the basis of all our knowledge, theoretic, ethic and aesthetic (Nesher, 2002, 2018, 2021).

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