8 Notes and afterthoughts on the opening of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*¹

The notes to follow formed the basis of the first weeks of a lecture course on *Philosophical Investigations* initially given at Berkeley in 1960, then irregularly at Harvard and progressively amplified some half dozen times through the 1960s and 1970s. The last of such lectures, offered in 1984, was radically altered since by then my *Claim of Reason* had appeared. I would not have thought to present these notes without entering into a sort of uneven, late conversation with them, preceding, interrupting, and succeeding them with certain afterthoughts a decade after they were used in a classroom. Why this presentation was made in 1991, and to what purpose, will emerge. The lecture notes appear in italic type, the afterthoughts in upright. Of course – it is more or less the point of the enterprise – I begin with afterthoughts.

The clearest unchanging feature of the course over the decades was the opening question: How does the *Investigations* begin? Against even the brief, varying introductory remarks I would provide – all omitted here – concerning Wittgenstein's life and his place in twentieth-century philosophy, in which I emphasized the remarkable look and sound of Wittgenstein's text and related this to issues of modernism in the major arts, the opening question was meant to invoke the question: How does philosophy begin? And how does the *Investigations* account for its beginning (hence philosophy's) as it does? And since this is supposed to be a work of philosophy (but how do we tell this?), how does it (and must it? but can it?) account for its look and sound?

A number of reasons move me to make the notes public.
1) There is still, I believe, no canonical way of teaching the *Investigations* (unless beginning with the *Tractatus* and contrasting the *Investigations* with it counts as such a way), and young teachers have expressed to me their greatest dissatisfaction with their own teaching of it precisely over the opening weeks; typically, it seems to me, because they are unsure that when they step back from Wittgenstein’s text they are doing justice to their sense of the particularity of that text. (To give some account of what has been called its “fervor,” sensed as something like its moral drive, is among the motives of my “Declining Decline,” in *This New Yet Unapproachable America.*) Some who attended my lectures, and others who know of them, have suggested that their publication might accordingly be of pedagogical help.

2) I had thought that these lectures would provide a beginning for what became *The Claim of Reason*, but I did not manage in preparing a final version of that manuscript to get them to motivate its present opening – with its focus on criteria, leading straight to the issue of the role of skepticism in the *Investigations* – well enough to justify their significant lengthening of an already lengthy book. I think I may be able to do better this time around. What’s left of these opening lectures in *The Claim of Reason*, or epitomized there, is its paragraph-length opening sentence.

3) Because these lectures began as I was publishing my first two papers (the first two of what became *Must We Mean What We Say!*); and, as will emerge here, because the subject of beginnings is immediately on my mind as I have turned to work on certain autobiographical materials; and because the precipitating stimulus for making these notes presentable was to distribute them to the members of the seminar I offered at the School of Criticism and Theory at Dartmouth in the summer of 1991, where the members varied in culture, in field, and in age, so that the common thread through the range of work I asked them to think about was the fact of its running through the work I do; I allowed myself, as these notes proceeded, to locate various crossroads as they come in view in the intellectual geography implied by texts I had published, or was preparing to publish, sometimes quoting bits of them when they seemed to me both clarifying and to exist in a fuller, or stranger, or more familiar, context that one or another reader might one or another day wish to explore.
(4) There is an independent reason for wanting a readable statement of this material. Whatever its shortcomings in placing the opening of *The Claim of Reason*, it will help me place a recent turn in my thinking about the state of the child "learning" language, as presented in Augustine's portrait of [that is, his literary–philosophical remembering of himself as] such a child, which Wittgenstein uses to open his own book [his "album," he calls it] of literary–philosophical reminders. This recent turn, which was a significant feature of the greatly modified 1984 lectures, is sketched at the end of my consideration (in chapter 2 of *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*) of Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. This will come up in good time, when its possible value can be more readily assessed.

Since preserving the individual strata of the versions from 1960 to 1979 is of no interest to me here, and since the process of revision was a normal part of preparing successive versions, I mostly assume that the later are the better ones and mostly just give those. I have made a conscious effort to leave the wording of the notes (except for filling in their telegraphese) as it is. When I was moved to intervene in the moment of transcription (mostly the spring of 1991), this is indicated, if the fact is not sufficiently obvious from the context, by reverting from italic to regular type.

I

*How does Philosophical Investigations begin!* *There are many answers, or directions of answer.*

One might say, uncontroversially: *It begins with some words of someone else.* But why say this! Perhaps to suggest that Wittgenstein (but what or who Wittgenstein is, of course, not determined), is not led to philosophical reflection from his own voice (or what might be recognized, right off, as his own voice), but from, as it were, being accosted. The accosting is by someone Wittgenstein cares about and has to take seriously; in particular, it is by such a one speaking about his childhood, so in words of memory, and more particularly, about his first memory of words, say of first acquiring them.

Let's have a translation of Augustine's words before us:
When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shown by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all people: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires.

The assertions of Augustine's memories are not, rhetorically, accosting, or insisting, as, say, Socrates's interlocutors are in stopping him on the street with their accostive certainties. On the contrary, we need not see at once anything to stop or to puzzle a philosopher, anything he might be finding remarkable about Augustine's words. I note that I had read Augustine's Confessions before reading Philosophical Investigations, and I remember wondering, philosophically as it were, over his passages concerning time, but not over his passages concerning the acquisition of language. So if there is something disturbing or remarkable about those words, then I am prepared to find that that is itself a remarkable fact about them. As if to suggest: one does not know, in advance, where philosophy might begin, when one's mind may be stopped, to think.

Put otherwise: To open this book philosophically is to feel that a mind has paused here — which no doubt already suggests a certain kind of mind, or a mind in certain straits. Wittgenstein has come back here. Why? If we are stopped to philosophize by these words, then what words are immune to philosophical question?

Suppose you are not struck by the sheer (unremarkably) remarkable fact that Wittgenstein has set down Augustine's passage to begin with — in order, so to speak, to begin by not asserting anything. I have later come to speak of this theme — sometimes I think of it as the theme of philosophical silence, anyway of philosophical unassertiveness, or powerlessness — by saying that the first virtue of philosophy, or its peculiar virtue, is that of responsiveness, awake when all the others have fallen asleep. You might in that case find that the book begins with any one of several remarkable things Wittgenstein says about Augustine's passage.

He says, for example, that the passage "gives a particular picture
of the essence of human language.” This doesn’t seem obviously true. How does Wittgenstein know this? And if it does give such a picture, what is wrong with that? Is the picture wrong? Is giving a picture a wrong thing to do? Is picturing an essence wrong? Or wrong in picturing language? Or is it the wrong essence?

Again, Wittgenstein will speak of Augustine’s description as containing a “philosophical concept of meaning” (PI, 2). Yet Augustine’s words seem ordinary enough. They are arch and over-precise maybe, even pedantic. Why does Wittgenstein say “philosophical”?

Wittgenstein records other responses he has to Augustine’s words, but what interests me already is what Wittgenstein does not say about that passage, having singled it out as philosophically remarkable. He does not say, for example, that it is false, or that there is insufficient evidence for it, or that it contradicts something else Augustine says elsewhere, or that it is unclear, or that it contains an invalid argument. These are familiar terms of criticism in philosophy; and they are strong ones. If any of them does fit a statement, then that statement has been severely and importantly chastised.

This paragraph is specifically dated by its having been taken up, marked especially by its idea of “terms of criticism,” as footnote 13 of “The Availability of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy,” first published in 1962, and collected as the second essay of Must We Mean What We Say?

One of Wittgenstein’s first responses to Augustine’s passage had been to say, “If you describe the learning of language in this way you are, I believe, thinking primarily of nouns like ‘table,’ ‘chair,’ ‘bread,’ and of people’s names, and only secondarily of the names of certain actions and properties; and of the remaining kinds of word as something that will take care of itself” (PI, 1). So one might think that Wittgenstein will criticize the passage as (i.e., that he will use such terms of criticism as) (1) incomplete, though all right as far as it goes, or (2) a faulty generalization. He does not, and it is important that he does not. The avoidance of the obvious here suggests that it is not philosophically clear beforehand what is wrong with Augustine’s assertions and that Wittgenstein will not falsify his sense of finding words astray by resorting to an anxiously impatient explanation. To see the intellectual danger, or say emptiness, in imposing a judgment of error (as if the human forms of fallacy, or fallibility, have been well noticed and logged), let’s see what is
astray in using here either of the expected terms of criticism (i.e., either “incomplete,” or “faulty generalization”).

About (1). Augustine’s description, it emerges, is not “all right as far as it goes,” even about nouns and proper names. It contains assumptions or pictures about teaching, learning, pointing, naming—say these are modes of establishing a “connection” between language and the world—which prove to be empty, that is, which give us the illusion of providing explanations. Moreover, to the extent that we lack a good idea of what a “complete description” of the learning of a language would be, to the extent we lack a good idea of what we are saying if we criticize a description as “incomplete.” Wittgenstein goes on, in PI, 2, to ask us to “conceive” a set of four spoken words as “a complete primitive language.” We will come back to this request, to what it may mean to enter it.

About (2). What does “faulty generalization” say? Where does it fit? Take these cases:

a) Having drawn five red marbles from a bag of marbles you say, “The marbles in this bag are red.”

b) “Courses in physics are harder than courses in philosophy.”

c) “I like European films better than Hollywood films.”

About a) Suppose the next marble is green. Then it may be said to you: “See. One is green. You’re wrong.” You might defend yourself by saying: “I thought, could have sworn, that the marbles were all the same color. They were the same in the other bags I opened.” That could just be the end of the matter. You accept it as clear that you are wrong, and clear what you are wrong about. And, if you offer an explanation, it is to make clear why you are wrong, even how you could have been wrong about something you were so confident of. Or you might take a different line, and in instead of admitting wrong and giving an excuse or explanation, defend your original claim, or something close to it: “Well, one or two might not be red. It’s still right to call this a bag of red marbles, and to sell it as such.” Again this could be the end of the matter.

About b) Suppose someone objects: “Physics 3 is certainly not harder than Philosophy 287.” You may reply: “That’s not what I mean. Those courses aren’t comparable. I had in mind characteristic courses like Physics 106, which is harder than most middle group philosophy courses.” Which amounts to saying something
like: “Of course, but on the whole they’re harder.” Here you are accounting for your “wrongness” as a lack of explicitness. Your statement was abbreviated. Perhaps you should have been more explicit. But what you meant was right.

About c) Someone objects: “But you hated My Hitler and I know you love Citizen Kane.” To which an acceptable (accommodating) defense might be: “True. But I wasn’t thinking of such cases; they are exceptions. As a rule I do enjoy European films more.”

If these are characteristic examples of accusations against generalizations, and of certain excuses or defenses against the accusations, then if Augustine is guilty of faulty generalization, these accusations and defenses should apply to his remarks. Do they? Could Augustine accommodate Wittgenstein’s worries by, as it were, saying:

a’ [as in the case of the marbles]: “I thought, could have sworn, that all words were uniformly taught.”

or b’ [as in the case of the courses]: “I didn’t mean what I said to apply to each and every word. Words like “today,” “but,” “perhaps,” aren’t comparable to words like “table,” “bread,” and so on. On the whole, however, what I said was true.”

or c’ [as in the case of the movies]: “I wasn’t thinking of such words. They are exceptional. As a rule, however, . . . ”

These defenses don’t seem so satisfying now. They do not bring the matter to a close. “Bring to a close” means: With straightforward (empirical) generalizations, the defenses explain how the mistake or the odd case is to be accommodated, explained. But, applied to the case of Augustine’s statements, these defenses either make no obvious sense and strike us as false or faked (“I thought all words were taught uniformly” – granted that you had ever given a thought to the matter of how all words are taught, it is hard to imagine that you had ever thought that); or they make claims which we wouldn’t know how to substantiate (“aren’t comparable” – how are they not comparable?); or we don’t know what weight to attach to them (are the other words “exceptional”?). So: if Augustine is in error, has erred, if something he says has wandered off the mark, is inappropriate, we don’t know how he can be, how it can have, what might explain it.

This is a more important matter than may at once appear. It
suggests that we may at any time—nothing seems special about the matter of false generalization, saying more than you quite know—be speaking without knowing what our words mean, what their meaning anything depends upon, speaking, as it were, in emptiness. For me an intellectual abyss gives a glimpse of itself here, causes an opening before which the philosophical conscience should draw back, stop.

Different philosophers have given different lines of explanation for falsehood or error or intellectual grief, depending on what they have taken philosophical assertions and errors or griefs to be. For example, Bacon's Idols find the mind variously faced with prejudices and fanaticisms. Locke was less interested in mapping the specific, local, shortcomings of the human intellect than in humbling it, speaking of clearing it of rubbish. Kant seems to have been the first to make the diagnosis of reason's failures an internal feature of tracking reason's powers, developing terms of criticism of intellectual arrogance that show reason to be subject to "dialectical illusion." (Each of these theories of intellectual grief bear comparison with Plato's account of the human subjection to illusion by his construction of the Myth of the Cave.) Wittgenstein is radically Kantian in this regard, but his terms of criticism are, as they must be, specific to his mode of philosophizing.

Look for a moment at his first response to Augustine's passage, that it gives us "a particular picture" of the essence of human language. We shall return to this term of criticism many times. Here its implication is: What Augustine says (or is remembering about his learning to speak) is not just inappropriate; it is also appropriate, but to something else (something more limited, or more specific) than Augustine realized. In P.I, 3 Wittgenstein puts a response this way: "Augustine, we might say, does describe a system of communication, but not everything we call language is this system." That is not a very clear remark, but it is clear enough to show that it would not even seem to be a comprehensible explanation of the faultiness of a faulty empirical generalization: Suppose for the case of the red marbles we had said: "What you say, in saying the bag is of red marbles, is true of the red marbles in it, for example, true of the five red marbles you have taken from it; but it is not true of the marbles in the bag that are not what we call red; and there are some." This form of explanation, in this context, is, if serious, empty; but if, as
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likelier, it is parodistic, it rudely implies that what the other has said is empty.

Why is it illuminating, if it is, to say to what it is that Augustine's descriptions are appropriate? Well, obviously, to know the source of appropriateness would be to know how we can have passed it by; how, we might say, its remarkableness, its motivatedness, has been disguised. (This is the role, in other modes of thinking, that a theory of "ideology" is to play. It is a feature of the importance of Freud's discovery of phantasy.) Wittgenstein portrays the disguised remarkableness by noting the presence in Augustine's passage of (1) what Wittgenstein calls a particular way of conceiving language; and, moreover, (2) a way which it is natural or tempting to conceive of it when we are philosophizing about it (writing our Confessions! remembering something! — is it necessary to suppose Augustine is writing about events in his life that he is actually remembering?).

Before going on to comment on each of these points in Wittgenstein's diagnosis, I pause to mark one feature of our progress so far. We began the discussion of the opening of the *Investigations* by asking why Wittgenstein had quoted — brought himself to stop before — certain words of a certain saint. And we were asking how it was that we (he, before the day he stopped) could have passed over those words.

This pair of questions, or rather this double question, has marked my insistence, since the versions of this material in the early 1970s, on the existence of two principal and conflicting ways Wittgenstein shows of taking Augustine's words: either as — as I said earlier — remarkable or as unremarkable. Wittgenstein characteristically says: as philosophical (or metaphysical) or as ordinary. Hume, in the concluding section of Part I of his *Treatise of Human Nature*, speaks of the philosophical (or "refined reasoning") as the "intense view of [the] manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason," and contrasts the intense view with what we may, on his behalf, call the natural or sociable view. These views differ, among other ways, as malady and melancholy differ from cure and merriment. The radical differences between Hume and Wittgenstein on this point are, first, that Hume does not, apparently, find that the philosophical view requires, or allows, a philosophical account; and (or because), second, Hume does not doubt that the intense view is not inferior (intellectually, if not morally) to the natural or sociable view. While both Hume
and Wittgenstein see philosophy as an unsociable activity (like most — mostly male? — philosophers; Austin is an exception important to me), Wittgenstein is essentially more distrustful of this way of being unsociable. I imagine this is in part a function of the differences between writing half a century before the French Revolution and writing a century and a half after it, when "everyone and no one" as Nietzsche puts it, or "all and sundry" as Emerson had put it, arrogate to themselves the cloak of philosophy — Presidents and Secretaries and Professors of This and That. No wonder professors of philosophy are happier with themselves when they can rely in philosophizing on their technical accomplishments. Part of the discomfort, as well as part of the elation (both are to be distrusted), in reading Wittgenstein is his refusal of, even apparent contempt for, this intellectual reliance, technical or institutional. (This is surely related to Emerson's preaching of Self-Reliance, also part of the discomfort and elation in reading him. Both responses are to be distrusted in his case as well. Both writers, in their relation to, let's say, the systematic, have had good effects and bad. This is, so far, hardly unusual.) It is, I believe, sometimes inferred from philosophy's unsociability that philosophy is inherently, if not quite inveterately, undemocratic. It is a way of putting the motivation of my Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome to say that it is meant to make that inference unattractive.

To anticipate further than these notes will reach: Wittgenstein's Investigations is designed to show that (what I call) the voices of melancholy and merriment, or of metaphysics and the ordinary (or, as in my "Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," the voices of temptation and correctness), are caused by one another, and form an argument that is not to be decided but is to be dismantled. These various characterizations of the voices paired in philosophical argument are not to be dismissed as "merely literary" variations, amounting intellectually or philosophically to the same thing. They are meant to cite the need for an investigation of the voices, even to mark the beginnings of such an investigation.

In my lecture on Kripke's Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language (chapter 2 of my Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome), I say of such paired or locked voices that they are engaged in the argument of the ordinary. To bring this juncture of my thinking about up to date (or to 1988), and to indicate where I have (I trust)
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taken the matter further, and ask that it be taken further still, I quote a pertinent passage from that chapter:

The altercation over two ways [of taking the Augustine passage] may sound as follows: One observes, “What could be less remarkable than Augustine’s remark about his elders moving around and uttering sounds?” Another retorts [intensely, let us now add], “Less remarkable – when we are in a maze of unanswered questions about what *naming* is, what it *is* to call a thing or a person, what constitutes an *object*, how we [with certainty] grasp one idea or image or concept rather than another, what makes a pointer *point*, a *talker mean!*” Nothing is wrong; everything is wrong. It is the philosophical moment. (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, p. 98)

I will want to come back to this passage.

Go back to what I presented as Wittgenstein’s double way of accounting for the disguised remarkableness in Augustine’s passage – that it (1) contains a particular idea of language which (2) seems natural in the act of philosophizing.

About (1). “A particular idea of something” is, in Wittgenstein’s way of speaking, as much as to say, a particular “picture” of the thing. A point of speaking this way is that it makes me recognize that the idea or picture is mine, a responsibility of mine to be responsive to, a piece of my life that is, whether natural or violent, not inevitable, a contingency of having something as constraining (a freighted term of Kant’s) as a human life, a life constrained to make itself intelligible (to itself), to find itself in words. The excited prose of the preceding sentence indicates, I think, the mounting sense of the number of paths leading off from the topics I’m touching upon, here in particular the idea of the human as a life form among others, as described in an essay of mine (“Declining Decline,” mentioned earlier) on Wittgenstein as a philosopher of culture. I might say: In noticing distortion in my language I feel thrown back upon myself – except that I am simultaneously thrown forward upon the particular objects I am thinking about, and the particular words in which I found myself thinking about them.

About (2). Philosophy, on such a view of the process as Wittgenstein’s, has no facts of its own. Its medium – along with detecting the emptiness of assertion – lies in demonstrating, or say showing, the obvious. This bears comparison, at some stage, with Heidegger’s characterization, scrupulous to the point of the comic, of “phenome-
nology” early in Being and Time (p. 58): “to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself.” Then the question is unavoidable: How can the obvious not be obvious? What is the hardness of seeing the obvious? This must bear on what the hardness of philosophizing is — a hardness itself made obvious in the Investigations’ shunning of the technical, one way of stating Wittgenstein’s demand upon the ordinary. Whereas other philosophers, on the contrary, find that the technical is indispensable precisely for arriving at the obvious. Is this a conflict about what “obvious” means? (Mathematicians favor the word “obvious.” Wittgenstein’s rather competing term is “perspicuous.” This is an aside for those who are way ahead of us here.) It is, in any case, a philosophical conflict, not to be settled by taking sides. (Thereby hangs another tale, starts another path. For the moment I ask what causes the sensory privileging in the idea of the philosophically hard as “seeing the obvious.” When Thoreau is minded to note our philosophical falling off, he sometimes calls us hard of hearing. This fits moments in Wittgenstein at least as accurately as the idea of a difficulty in seeing does. Why don’t we say — why do we have no concept of — being hard of seeing?)

All this will come back. Let’s for now go on to ask how Wittgenstein concretely constructs the picture whose presence in Augustine’s passage he finds to account for our passing it by as natural, unremarkable. This task begins explicitly in PI, 2:

Let us imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right. The language meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building-stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words “block,” “pillar,” “slab,” “beam.” A calls them out, – B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call. – Conceive this as a complete primitive language.

Wittgenstein will later, in PI, 48, refer to a related task as “applying the method of PI, 2.” It is the twin of the task he describes as “providing the language game,” as called for summarily in PI, 116: “When philosophers use a word — ‘knowledge,’ ‘being,’ ‘object,’ ‘I,’ ‘proposition,’ ‘name’— and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way
in the language game which is its original home?" Beginning as I have, wishing to make explicit in one or two strokes issues that Wittgenstein allows to develop in steps through scores of examples, this critical example of the builders is not ideal for my purpose of illustrating unobvious obviousness, since it is not obvious that we can follow Wittgenstein's order to "Conceive this as a complete primitive language." That will itself prove to be a fruitful uncertainty, but it is at the moment in the way. I will return to it after first interpolating a set of examples that use the "method of PI, 2," or rather of the twin "providing the language game," and that, in principle, at each use of it arrives at a moment of our acceptance that seems, or soon enough will seem (unless the game is provided ineptly) an instance of the obvious. (In PI, 48 Wittgenstein describes the method as "consider[ing] a language game for which [an] account is really valid." ) For this purpose, and again for purposes of locating a region in which to consult further explorations of an issue, I reproduce herewith some stretches of pages 73–5 of The Claim of Reason. (It is important to me that the pages concern examples precisely of pointing to something, which is one of the significant features of Augustine's passage.) As follows:

The concept of "pointing to" can be used in conjunction with the concepts of such "objects" as colors, meanings, . . . places, cities, continents, . . . indeed, it would seem you can point to anything you can name; . . . But, of course, each of these different "objects" will (= can) be pointed to only in definite kinds of contexts. If one thinks one or more of these kinds of objects cannot be pointed to, that is because one has a set idea ("picture") of what pointing to something must be (consist in), and that perhaps means taking one kind of context as inevitable (or one kind of object as inevitable) (or one kind of language game as inevitable). For example, if you are walking through Times Square with a child and she looks up to you, puzzled, and asks "Where is Manhattan?," you may feel you ought to be able to point to something, and yet at the same time feel there is nothing to point to; and so fling out your arms and look around vaguely and say "All of this is Manhattan," and sense that your answer hasn't been a very satisfactory one. Is, then, Manhattan hard to point to? [What are language games for pointing to a city?] . . . If you were approaching La Guardia Airport on a night flight from Boston, then just as the plane banked for its approach, you could poke your finger against the window and, your interest focused on the dense scattering of lights, say "There's Manhattan"; so could you point to Manhattan on a map. Are such instances not really instances of pointing to Manhattan?
Are they hard to accomplish? Perhaps we could say: It feels hard to do
[it is, then and there, impossible to do] when the concept of the thing
pointed to is in doubt, or unpossessed, or repressed.

Take Wittgenstein's example of "pointing to the color of an object." In
philosophizing one may compare this with "pointing to the object" and
find that it is either difficult to do (feeling perhaps that a color is a peculiar
kind of physical object, a very thin and scattered one?) or that it cannot
literally be done at all: to point to the color of an object just is to point to
the object [with a special effort of attention on its color? or saying under
your breath "I mean the color"?]. What is the tip-off here that this is in the
grip of the intense view? I introduced this example with the words "In
philosophizing." How do you know when you are philosophizing? For Witt-
genstein this is an urgent, definitive question; for others not. When is this
a significant difference? But why? Wittgenstein's explanation is, we know,
that "we are misled by grammar," that "we lay down rules, a technique,
for a game, and . . . then when we follow the rules, things do not turn out
as we had assumed . . . we are therefore as it were entangled in our own
rules" (PI, 125). I wish I were confident that I understood this explanation
fully; but what he is getting at is, I think, clearly enough illustrated in the
present case. The "rule," the "technique," we have laid down for "pointing
to the object," is the trivially simple one of pointing to an object whose
identity we have agreed upon or can agree upon with the act of pointing [to
that object]. Then we suppose that we follow this technique in pointing to
that object's color, and when we point to the color according to that rule it
seems a difficult thing to do (in trying it, I find myself squinting, the upper
part of my body tense and still, and I feel as though I wanted to dig my
finger into the object, as it were, just under its skin). But one needn't
become entangled. If we look at the way "Point to the color of your car" is
actually used [give its language game; apply the method of PI, 2; scientists
used to call some such things thought experiments; lawyers refer to some-
ting of the sort as hypotheticals], we will realize that the context will
normally be one in which we do not point to that object, but to something
else which has that color, and whose color thereby serves as a sample of
the original. And as soon as we put the request in its normal context [give
its language game], we find that nothing could be easier [e.g., the shape of
the hand in pointing will be different, more relaxed]. And it won't seem so
tempting to regard pointing to something, or meaning it, as requiring a
particular inner effort – nor to regard a color as a peculiar material object –
only we see that, and see how, the difficulty was of our own making.
Someone may feel: "Doesn't this show that pointing to a color is, after all,
pointing to an object which has that color?" I might reply: It shows that
not all cases of "pointing to an object" are cases of "pointing to an object which has a color."

[Does this imply that some objects have no color? And does this mean that some are colorless?] Using the method of PI, 2, let us imagine a case for which "pointing to an object which has a color" is right. ["Is right" translates "stimmt" in PI, 2; in PI, 48 the German for the analogous "is really valid" is "gilt." Stimmen and geltten are fateful ideas for this fateful point of Wittgenstein's methods, the former invoking voice and conscience and mood, the latter invoking currency and recognition and the worth of questioning – matters broached in The Claim of Reason under the rubrics of "the aesthetics of speech," and "the economics of speech," pp. 94–5.]

... The case might be the one in which we are shown a group of variously shaped and differently painted blocks and then [when this group is covered or removed] shown a homologous group of unpainted blocks, each of which corresponds in shape to one block in the former group. ... We are then given a sample color and told "Point to the object which has this color." [I don't say you couldn't poignantly search, as it were, for an absent or invisible [painted] block to point to; in the meantime there is a perfect candidate among the present and visible [unpainted] blocks to point to.] [It may be significant that in the two passages [in the Investigations] in which the examples of "pointing to an object" and "pointing to its color" occur, Wittgenstein does not actually provide language games for pointing at all, but moves quickly to remarks about concentrating one's attention; and at PI, 33 he goes on to give varying contexts [using the method of PI, 2] for that].

Now let's go back to Wittgenstein's instruction in PI, 2 to "Imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right." Unlike providing language games for pointing, "imagining a language for which" (and moreover, one which the last sentence of PI, 2 directs us to "conceive as a complete primitive language") is not something it is clear we know how to do. Evidently we are to describe a language. Is a language described in PI, 2? And, moreover, a complete one?

One might say that there is no standing language game for imagining what Wittgenstein asks. Wittgenstein is then to be understood as proposing his game in PI, 2 as one which manifests this imagining, it is his invention, one may say his fiction. That is perhaps the differentiating feature of "the method of PI, 2." [Austin, the other candidate I take as definitive of ordinary language philosophy, does not go in for such invention. Yet another hanging tale.] That we can, as speak-
ers, invent language, or let me say, propose inventions of language, is radically important in Wittgenstein's "vision of language" (an unguarded phrase I use in the title of chapter VII of *The Claim of Reason*). But this is as language-dependent as any other act of speech, say of speaking ironically, or in tongues. Wittgenstein's inventiveness may be part of the reason why so many of his readers get the idea that philosophy, in Wittgenstein's practice, is a particular language game. I set it down here as provocation—since it is too early even to begin being sensible or orderly in exploring the idea—that philosophy, in Wittgenstein [and in Austin], is the quintessential activity that has no language games of its own; which perhaps will amount to saying that it has no subject of its own (call this metaphysics).

This is not to say that in the history of the West philosophy has developed no language (or discourse) of its own, that it has not proposed concepts of its own. The origin and status of this language has been the incessant question of philosophy since, I guess, Plato, until by now it can seem philosophy's only question. Since it is reasonably apparent that both Wittgenstein and Heidegger incessantly philosophize by putting the language of philosophy under fire (from which it follows that one cannot rest assured that what they are doing is philosophizing, but that that is an incessant question for each of them), and equally apparent that these fires are not the same (both are progeny of Kant's, but not both are progeny of Hegel's), the question is bound to arise [if, that is, one regards these figures as principal voices of the present of philosophy] whether both or neither of the fires will survive when they are turned upon one another. Since I do not believe that the question has yet been fully engaged, I philosophize, to the extent I do, within the sense of a split in the spirit of philosophy, of two live, perhaps dying, traditions that are to an unmeasured extent blank to one another. [And what does literary studies mean by "philosophy"? I do not assume that it means just one thing, nor that it should, nor that it is an "it."]

The endless importance (to me) of thinking within the split mind of philosophy, is something that would be mentioned in the introductory remarks I alluded to at the beginning of these notes. It shouldn't go unsaid. But what then is said? [How does philosophy begin?] I think I understand what it may mean to say that philosophy is a leaking boat that must be repaired while at sea. But what if the
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edifices of philosophy are in flames, like sections of cities? Shall we hope it is true after all that philosophy begins in water? And what is it that Wittgenstein’s builders are building?

*What is described in PI, 2 seems to be not so much a language as the learning of a language.* But then isn’t that what Augustine’s passage is describing? And Wittgenstein’s point in picturing the language for which Augustine’s account is right is then to suggest the thought that our idea of what language is is bound up with our ideas of what acquiring language is (and what using language is). *(We don’t, I believe, say that we learn our first language, our mother tongue. We say of a child who cannot talk yet that he or she cannot talk yet, not that he hasn’t learned his native language. If not (quite) as a feat of learning, how do we conceive of our coming into language, or “acquiring” it? I will have a late suggestion about this. Specifically, the implication is: If language were acquired and used as Augustine’s description suggests, then language would be something other than we think it or know it to be — communication, meaning, words, speech, would be different. It would, for example, look like what is going on in PI, 2.*

Wittgenstein says of the language there that it is “meant to serve for communication.” Evidently he wishes to avoid saying that the builder is speaking to his or her assistant. I think one senses why. To “conceive this as a complete language” we have, presumably, to conceive that these people only use their words when they are in this situation, doing this work. They cannot then, for example, use the words to “discuss” their work or “reminisce” about past work — not, at any rate, without inventing (or, as I proposed earlier, proposing) an expression. Perhaps one of them gives the other a look, or nod, in the direction of a certain one or pair of the building-stones, at dawn or dusk, sitting together before or after work. *(Wittgenstein is imagining something comparable, I believe, when at PI, 42 he imagines something he calls “a sort of joke” between the builders; it is a joke, so to speak, about a theory of language as the correspondence of name and thing. As though to suggest: as primitive as having words is having a theory of words and being anxious in the theory.*) In speaking of inventing forms of expression, turns of thought, I am, remember, speaking of inventing currency, something that stimmts or gilts. Inventing language is not counterfeiting it.

*If this is the way I am to conceive what is happening, then how*
can I not be in doubt whether these people can speak at all? Those four so-called words, of which their language is said to consist, then may seem like more or less articulate grunts. Wittgenstein refers to them as calls (Rufe, as in PI, 2 and PI, 6). Would it be less prejudicial, or less theoretically dangerous, to speak of these things as “signs” ; or would it be more prejudicial? We will want eventually to consider Wittgenstein’s associating an idea of the sign with an idea of death, as at PI, 432. How does the association come about? Not, I think, in Wittgenstein, through a philosophical [metaphysical] interpretation of writing. Are we reluctant to call this a language because its vocabulary is so small? What is our measure here? I feel that the builders’ responses (or I picture them so that they) are “too mechanical” for them to be using language, even using one word (and is my picture arbitrary!). Does this mean that I am not able to conceive that they are understanding their words, and therefore not speaking? I can imagine robots, or men hypnotized, doing the things the builders do at the same four calls. What is missing?

Wittgenstein at PI, 5 remarks that “A child uses such primitive forms of language when it learns to talk.” And it does seem easy to imagine a child with only four words. (Baby Books list the number of words a child can say. One may ask why keeping such a list stops so soon.) And is there a question about whether the child “understands” the words? I think we do not feel that we have to answer this, because, as Wittgenstein says, the child is “learning to talk” – that is, we do not have to imagine that the child is (yet, exactly) speaking a language, has, as it were, entered the language. The child’s language has a future. But when I try to imagine adults having just these words – e.g., the builder and his assistant – I find that I imagine them moving sluggishly, as if dull-witted, or uncomprehending, like cave men.

Try it out. Make yourself call out one of your only four words, making one of your only four choices (except for the choice not to work, if that is a choice in these circumstances). I confess to shuffling slowly down the sides of classrooms moaning out my four “words.” I want this experience in this room to bring itself, in contrast, to the way a child “says” its four words – with what charming curiosity, expectation, excitement, repetitions. . . . The child has a future with its language, the builders have, without luck, or the genius of invention, none – only their repetitions. We
must imagine Sisyphus happy, Camus reports. But isn’t that possibility a function of our knowledge that Sisyphus is being punished, hence that he has possibilities denied him? (The suggestion of the builders as constituting a scene, or allegory, of political denial comes up later, pp. 290–3).

Wittgenstein lets the question of understanding present itself at PI, 6—or rather Wittgenstein backs into the question and then backs out right away: “Don’t you understand the call ‘Slab!’ if you act upon it in such-and-such a way?” It is one of Wittgenstein’s signature nonrhetorical rhetorical questions designed, among other causes, to elicit conflicting responses within a group, and within an individual, as if to display the farce, and desperateness, of the philosopher’s drive to take a side, intensely. Let’s give the two conflicting responses.

1 One side says: “Acting on the call correctly is understanding the call. What more do you want, or imagine that there is to want?” This seems like something happening near the end of PI, 1, where Wittgenstein says about an implied question of a hearer’s understanding: “Well, I assume that he acts as I have described. Explanations come to an end somewhere.” This coming to an end (of philosophy, endlessly), is a great theme of Philosophical Investigations. The theme of ending has struck me as perhaps containing the most telling contrast between this way of philosophizing the overcoming of metaphysics, and other ways, in particular deconstruction’s Heideggerean way. I am going to take this up at the end. But here, in the beginning section of the book, Wittgenstein’s remark about coming to an end is comic; no doubt for some it is infuriating. I assume the effect is deliberate. What is the deliberation? This way of taking the question about understanding takes on the familiar reading of Wittgenstein as a behaviorist. Perhaps this is less common a way of deciding about him than when the lectures represented in these notes were first being given; but it is surely not over. Wittgenstein allows himself to be questioned about this many times. For example, “Are you not really a behaviorist in disguise?” (PI, 307). In the present case, however, if he is a behaviorist he is quite without disguise, without clothes altogether. That he can be read without apparent difficulty—sometimes almost irresistibly—as a behaviorist (think of this for now as denying the (independent) reality of our inner lives) is an important fact about his teaching, perhaps something essential to it
(as he suggests at PI, 308). Some of Wittgenstein’s followers, as much as some of his enemies, take him so, take him to be asserting (as a thesis, let me say, to mark another path untaken that we must go back to) that “Acting on the order is understanding it.” (I assume here that Wittgenstein’s (non-)rhetorical question about understanding is not assuming a definition of “acting on” which assures that that is not to be taken in a behaviorist way. The untaken path about “theses” is more visibly, if not more clearly, marked at pp. 33–4 of The Claim of Reason.)

2 Other readers, furious at this way of taking or deciding the question, decide the opposite way: “What more do I want? I want understanding, something going on upstairs, in the mind!” Thirty years ago, when this beginning was still beginning for me, I would call such readers “traditional philosophers”; there are vestiges of this habit in the first three parts of The Claim of Reason. Traditional philosophy was marked out for me by its blindness or deafness – so I took it – to the modern in letters and in the arts, most particularly to the questioning of the tradition raised precisely in Wittgenstein, and also in Austin. As I came to recognize that I did not know what a tradition is, nor what it takes to overcome tradition, I stopped speaking so, anyway so lightly. What I used to think of as traditional philosophical reading overlaps, I believe, with what today is called “humanism.” The mark of this side of things is perhaps expressed – in the present “opposite” (or oppositional) way of making Wittgenstein’s question into (or leaving it as) a thesis – by an obsessional searching for mind, innerness, understanding that seems suspiciously close to searching for substance. This search, or temptation, is part of what is under scrutiny in Wittgenstein’s interlocutors. “Interlocutor” is the name by which certain quoted voices in the Investigations are conventionally identified by Wittgenstein’s readers. Characteristically, I believe, there is in that convention the assumption that there is really one voice, held by an “interlocutor,” together with a picture that that figure is someone other than Wittgenstein, which is in a sense true, but in a sense not.

If I were forced to pick between these alternative decisions – the behaviorist and the antibehaviorist – I would pick the antibehaviorist, without a doubt. (The general reason, I think, is that the behaviorist seems to be denying something. Denial generally
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strikes me as more harmful, more fixated, than enthusiasm.) But
not without a qualm.

The behaviorist reading gives me a sinking feeling, or a feeling of
isolation – as though I am thinking that just possibly it is true that
there is no depth to human kind. Wittgenstein can give me the
feeling more starkly than behaviorist psychology ever did. I could
always dismiss the psychology as mere theory, or what used to be
called “methodology.” But Wittgenstein carries the suggestion that
the option of behaviorism may, as it were, become true, that human
kind can no longer afford its historical depth, or what it counts to
itself as depth. But can we wait for it to figure itself out here, re-
count itself? For me this becomes the question whether philosophy
is to give way to politics, to give up its patience in favor of the
urgency of polemics, of taking sides. As if giving up on the idea that
the conditions of philosophy can be achieved through philosophy –
which is how I see the “paradox” Plato expressed by the idea of the
Philosopher-King. The issue of the intolerability of the price of
philosophy, its powerlessness, is the subject of my "Emerson’s Con-
stitutional Amending."

The antibehaviorist reading leaves me cold. What would I get if I
decided that way, beyond the idea that understanding isn’t just
behavior, or merely or simply behavior, or behavior alone, or itself?
And now instead of there being no depth, or say no soul, the body
and the soul are too far apart. The soul is ineffective, a mere hy-
pothesis, which many will conclude that they have no need for, as
in the case of God (when God became a hypothesis).

Let us try to see a little past the edges of the antibehaviorist
fantasy. Let us grant that there is something inside the builders,
something we might call “understanding.” What might we imag-
ine a candidate for such an object, a meant, a referent, a signi-
ficate, to be?

A Let’s suppose it is some mechanism of the brain that estab-
ishes a much-needed “connection” between the call and the object
it calls for. Of course I know of no such mechanism, nor what any
such “connection” might be. It must have something to do with the
electrical/chemical linkages of nerves; but some connection of this
kind between calls and objects is patently already in place in the
case of the builders; it is what causes my problem with their life.
The connection is – what shall I say? – too direct, too hard; it lacks mediation. (Does this equally invite me to imagine something specific going on in the nerves? Something perhaps more devious?)

When would saying “There’s a mechanism inside” be informative? (What is a language game for this? What is “the role of these words in our language” (PI, 182)?) Take a case: You bring a human-size doll into the room, stand it up, and say to it “Slab!” and “Pillar!” etc., and at each command the doll goes off to the corner of the room and “fetches” back the object named in the call. I am impressed. I ask you how it works and you reply: “There’s a mechanism inside.” Does this explain how it works? It could mean: “You wouldn’t understand.” It could mean: “It’s not a trick” (which might mean that you’re not working with a confederate in the basement who holds a magnet under the place the doll is standing and walks the doll, via the magnet, to the correct places). “Try to figure out where a mechanism might be that runs this apparently transparent object” (a toy car, a real clock) is hardly an explanation of its working. In any case, the mechanism of connection is here not supplying understanding.

B What else might we feel is missing when we feel that understanding is missing in acting on a call? Wittgenstein’s interlocutors sometimes like to introduce the idea of having an image into such perplexities. Would it help in attributing the concept of understanding to the builders if we conceived them to have images of the respective building-blocks on saying or hearing their names? (Wittgenstein raises the question of images so-caused in PI, 6.)

Let’s give the builder an image, so that instead of, or as supplement to, saying “Slab!” he holds up a painting of a slab. Why not, indeed, supply him with a real slab and with one of each of the other building-stones, and so enable him to hold up an instance of what he wants? This might strike you as better or as worse, from the point of view of establishing communication, or establishing connection. As better: Now a connection is insured, he cannot fail to know what I want (that is, can’t mistake which one). Or as worse: It makes it seem even harder to establish connection; if there is doubt about the establishing of connection, the doubt deepens or sharpens. Because the doubt is now clearly not whether he knows which one but whether he knows that I want the thing I want, and that I want him to respond in such a way as to extinguish my
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desire. Suppose he stands and admires the picture I present of the object, or else thinks (if I hold up an instance of the object) that I am telling him that I already have one, have what I want. How do we imagine that having an image can establish a connection between my words and the desire that my saying them expresses? Might the character of the image enter in? Suppose the builder holds up his instance of the object he wants, e.g., a slab, and exaggeratedly (that is, for the benefit of the assistant) hugs and kisses it. You can see that this is subject to interpretation, and that it might or might not be interpreted to mean that he wants another object just like the one he is embracing. Would it help if the image comes up inside the assistant's head? Would greater intimacy of association be established?

One is not encouraged, from the fate of these examples, to go on searching for a something — if not a mechanism, or an image, then a meaning, a signified, a interpretant — that explains how calls reach what they call, how the connection is made; searching as it were for a new function for a new pineal gland. The philosophical interest in a philosophical search for a connection between language and mind, and between the mind and world, so far as I recognize an intellectual enterprise not taking its bearings from the current institutions of science, is to determine what keeps such a search going (without, as it were, moving). Wittgenstein's answer, as I read it, has something to do with what I understand as skepticism, and what I might call skeptical attempts to defeat skepticism. Heidegger's answer has something to do with Nietzsche's nihilism, with the metaphysics of the subject, and with the interpretation of thinking as representation. Derrida's answer has something to do with Heidegger's interpretation of western metaphysics as a metaphysics of presence. I might say that, so far as I have seen, the question "Why does philosophy persist in the search for substances in which understanding, intention, reference, etc. consist?" cannot be satisfied by the answer "Because of the metaphysics of presence." That answer seems to repeat, or reformulate, the question. Say that Wittgenstein shows us that we maintain unsatisfiable pictures of how things must happen. The idea of presence is one of these pictures, no doubt a convincing one. But the question seems to be why we are, who we are that we are, possessed of this picture.

At some such stage (we must ask what this stage is), Wittgenstein
will remind us that there are ordinary circumstances in which (language games in which) we say such things as “B acted as he did (made the connection) because he understood the order, or the hint; he didn’t just do it out of luck or entrancement.” A case may be of a teacher observing his or her chess student in a difficult game of chess. The student glances at the teacher, the teacher returns the glance and glances away sharply at the student’s remaining knight. The student evinces no understanding, looks over the board another instant and smoothly reaches out and makes the move the teacher wanted made. Did the student understand the hint? Didn’t he, since he acted on it correctly? But did he act that way because he understood? Suppose as he passes the teacher on the way out he says, almost under his breath, “Thanks.” Is there any doubt that he understood? Do I wonder whether something was going on, or is, in his mind, upstairs? I suppose not; which is not to say that I suppose that nothing was going on, or is. If there is a doubt now, looking inside the student will not reach it.

We have along the way of these remarks distinguished, among ordinary language procedures, what Wittgenstein calls giving a language game for which an account is right, which resembles what Austin calls “reminding ourselves of what we say when” (something that requires that there be standing, recurrent when’s, as in using a present object to point to the color of an absent object), from Wittgensteinian language games that extend to mythological cases (as when we gave the builder’s assistant an image in his head, which failed to produce a case of “establishing a connection” amounting to understanding), and both from what I called proposals of scenes which may or may not be satisfying realizations of some form of words (as in the case of the builders taken as illustrating a complete language). It may even now be worth noting that Wittgenstein’s idea of a criterion has only with my latest example, that of taking a hint, come well within view, and still quite unthematically or unceremoniously. The example takes the idea that our concept of understanding (our ordinary understanding of understanding) is grammatically related to, or manifested in, the concept of taking a hint, and the scene in question produces a criterion of giving a hint, here a gesture of the eyes in a particular circumstance of obscurity. This production of an instance of our criteria fits Wittgenstein’s description of his procedures as producing “reminders” since this chess story could
do its work only if we already know what giving and taking hints consist in. We might summarize what we learned from the example in the following form: It is part of the grammar (as described in *The Claim of Reason* at, for example, pp. 70ff.) of following a gesture that *this* is something we call "taking a hint"; which is to say that following the gesture is a criterion of taking or understanding the hint.

We might now find ourselves at the beginning of *The Claim of Reason* – not quite, no doubt, just as it stands – since that beginning rather assumes the importance of criteria for Wittgenstein’s understanding of philosophical investigations as matters of grammar. Then this transcription of early lecture notes would have accomplished one of its conscious purposes, to rebegin, or reopen, that material. Unless, however, it turns out that what we have come close to here is, on the contrary, Wittgenstein’s understanding of grammar as showing the importance of producing criteria; that is, as showing that what we produce when we consult ourselves (in a certain way) as to what we call something, are precisely criteria, grammatically decisive crossroads. To understand that decisiveness is hardly something for a beginning project, since that issue can be taken as the burden of the whole of Part One of *The Claim of Reason*.

Preparing these pages for the press, in late 1993, I report a new tack begun in a lecture course mostly on the *Investigations* that I offered jointly with Hilary Putnam in the spring of 1993, in which these "Notes and Afterthoughts" were distributed for a week’s discussion about halfway through the course. The question whether they actually do represent a reopening of *The Claim of Reason* rather lost its appeal when a representative group of students in the class found the transcription harder to relate to than that book’s actual opening. I think I might have found helpful ways to contest that judgment, but in the course of looking for them I came upon the new tack just mentioned. I had not taken it in before that the work of what Wittgenstein calls criteria – for all the importance many of us attach to that development – is (is precisely, I would now like to say) delayed in its entry into the *Investigations*, precisely absent from its opening. Its first appearance, I believe, is at PI 51, and it doesn’t really get going until some hundred sections later; it may not reach its height until PI, 580 and following. The significance of this opening or "delayed" absence seems bound up with Wittgenstein’s impulse to begin and maintain his thoughts in the region of
the "primitive," with a child before the life of language, with workers before their culture's possession (or permitting them possession) of a shared, undoubted language. Imagining, following Wittgenstein's instructions, the primitiveness of the builders – questioning their capacity to understand their words and actions; which is to say, questioning their possession of words – is imagining them without the possibility and necessity of exercising judgment, which is a philosophical way of saying: without the possession of (shared) criteria. Their humanity is the stake of the game. Ideas associated with the primitiveness of civilization will take on more life as my transcription proceeds.

My sense of Wittgensteinian criteria, as articulating what in *The Claim of Reason* I come to call our (whose?) agreement or attunement in ordinary words, depends as decisively on appreciating their triviality as much as their importance, their weakness as much as their strength. One could say that their weakness is the source of their methodological strength, small stakes with large shadows. (It may help certain readers of these notes to suggest comparing what "articulating criteria of ordinary words" will prove to mean with what Kant calls providing the "schematism of our concepts.") And since now, a dozen years after the publication of *The Claim of Reason*, and getting somewhat more familiar with the onslaught of French thought over the past quarter of a century, timed in my life from my finishing in the late 1960s the essays in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, I am increasingly aware of a new phase in philosophy's chronic distrust of the ordinary. There is, notably in that strain of radical thought called deconstruction, but widespread beyond that in modern radical sensibilities of other sorts (a point of comparison with certain conservative sensibilities, of whom perhaps Wittgenstein seems one) something I think of as a horror of the common, expressed as a flight from the banal, typically from banal pleasures. It stretches from a horror of the human, to a disgust with bourgeois life, to a certain condescension toward the popular. It is of high importance to me to determine to which of these, or from which, Emerson's aversion to conformity begins. It is with respect to their apparently opposite attitudes toward the ordinary that I have sometimes distinguished the philosophizing of Heidegger and that of Wittgenstein, the former seeking distinction from the ordinary conceived as "averageness," the latter practicing transformation into it.
But back to my transcription.

I was saying that we should mark the philosophical "stage" at which we had to remind ourselves of our orientation in the ordinariness of language. I might have described this as remarking our subjection to our language. The stage was one in which the philosophical search for some explanatory substance in the subject (some inner mechanism, image, etc.) came to grief. We might say philosophy had come to a halt, or say that we have had to stop to think. This bears comparison with the stopping or halting we noted as remarkable in Wittgenstein's taking up of Augustine's unremarkable passage. It will help to recognize that Wittgenstein, for all his repudiation of philosophical "theory," intermittently if not continually provides rigorous descriptions of his own practice, which you might call his (or his text's) theory of itself (presumably not of itself alone).

Among these self-descriptions of his practice is the following, in a region of the *Investigations* full of such descriptions: "A philosophical problem has the form: 'I don't know my way about'" (PI, 123). I understand this as a theorization of the search for the beginning of philosophy which produced the beginning of these lectures. It conceives philosophy's beginning for me as one of recognizing that I have lost my way, and in that way am stopped. This way of putting things is meant, as in *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, pp. 36f., to associate the project or quest of enlightenment, or coming to oneself, in the *Investigations*, fairly immediately with projects portrayed in *The Divine Comedy*, in Emerson's "Experience," and in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*. Given this beginning, the end that matches it I take to be given in the preceding section: "The concept of a perspicuous presentation is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of presentation we give, the way we look at things" (PI, 122). The progress between beginning and ending is, accordingly, what Wittgenstein means by grammatical investigation, which, since we begin lost, may be thought of as a progress in finding ourselves. (When it comes time to make this less crude, or less abstract, I will be sure not to seem to deny that "perspicuous presentation" might be taken to apply to the whole of Wittgenstein's practice, not solely, even if preeminently, to its (local, momentary – but how does one know that these restrictions contrast with anything?) end.)
Go back to Wittgenstein's saying that he wants to begin with primitive "kinds of application" of words. (The primitive is in principle a far more important theme to work out for the Investigations than we have brought out, or will bring out here. It would require accurately characterizing one's sense of the ethnological perspective Wittgenstein characteristically takes toward human kind as such.) He says that beginning with the primitive will "disperse the fog" surrounding the "working of language" produced by "this general notion of the meaning of a word" (PI, 5) – namely the notion, or the "particular picture of the essence of human language," in which, he goes on to say, "we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands" (PI, 1). An obvious motive for his description of his motives is to insinuate the idea that there is a "fog" coming in with the general notion of the meaning of a word. And this allows him to sketch a place for the philosophical goal of this motive, namely, to "command a clear view of the aim and functioning of [the] words" (that is, I take it, to arrive at perspicuous presentation).

But another motive for stressing the primitive is to prepare the idea of our words as lived, of our language as containing what Wittgenstein will shortly call, in one of his most familiar turns of thought, "forms of life": "To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" (PI, 19). As my earlier description of the builders in PI, 2 was meant to bring out, the clear view we are supposedly initially given is one in which not "merely" the language is primitive, but in which the corresponding life of its speakers is clearly expressed in the language. We might wish to say that not the language but each word is primitive; the words don't go anywhere. This intuition might come into play when, in discussion, we consider Derrida's idea of the sign as alienated from itself, already elsewhere. This seems to mean something in contrast with Wittgenstein's idea of the primitive.

Wittgenstein's phrase "form of life" has become a runaway phrase among certain of his readers. I have since tried to bring a little structure into the discussion of the phrase by distinguishing the ethnological and the biological directions or perspectives encoded in the phrase (in "Declining Decline," pp. 40f.). The ethnological, or horizontal direction (I believe the favored, virtually exclusive,
reading) emphasizes differences between cultures, for example, in whether they count or measure or sympathize as we do. The biological, or vertical, direction emphasizes differences between, we might rather say, life forms, for example, as between lower and higher, perhaps expressed in the presence or absence of the hand.

Let us go back over a way I imagined the lives of the builders in PI, 2— as moving laboriously, sluggishly, as if vacantly. This seemed interpretable as their dull-wittedness, as their lacking as a matter of fact (but as a matter of nature, or a matter of history!) a certain power of understanding. I was, it seems, responding to the fact that they only spoke in single “words” or “calls,” as if they were incapable of speaking in complete sentences, as if incapacitated or handicapped with respect to a certain kind of performance, of rising to an occasion; as though their words, hence their lives, were forever somehow truncated, stunted, confined, contracted. But there are contexts in which it is perfectly natural for there to be one-word commands or orders. “It is easy to imagine a language consisting only of orders and reports in battle” (PI, 19). I think of “Forward march,” “Enemy at 10 o’clock,” “Battle stations.” Athletic contests provide another context: “On your marks; get set; go!” There is, I suppose, no reason to think that the builders of PI, 2 are using “formulas” of this kind.

We also know of contexts in which commands or orders are (conventionally!) given in one word where there are no special formulas: e.g., (1) the context, beloved in old movies, of “scalpel,” “suture,” “wipe”; (2) the context in which builders are doing their jobs in a noisy work area, the context more familiar to us nonprimitives, an area surrounded by traffic, spectators, featuring heavy machinery. If in that noisy environment I imagine the calls “Slab,” “Pillar,” etc., I do not imagine them said sluggishly and vacantly (unless I were to imagine one of the workers ill or drunk), but vigorously, in shouts, perhaps with hands cupped around the mouth. Wittgenstein does not say that his builders are not in such an area. I imagined them alone, and in an otherwise deserted landscape. As though they were building the first building. Was this arbitrary?

And why have I not been interested in what they were building, or even that they were building a particular building— for the fact that they are building something in particular would influence the order and repetition and conclusion of the series of “four calls.” If I
could think of the task as dictating the (order of the) calls, hence of
the builder as ready for the next item; I might have imagined him or
her differently. Or is it to be supposed that we might merely see
(what we perceive as) a “heap” of items mounting at A’s location? I
gather that I cannot exactly make my perplexity comprehensible to
these workers. And can I make myself comprehensible to myself
when at the end of the working day the builder and the assistant
find a way to climb in carefully among the heap of building-stones
and go to sleep! Nor does the heap look like what we think of as
a result of preparing to build, where stacks of materials are neatly
laid. (How do things look at B’s location?) For me to imagine their
lives, they have to make sense to me. And this seems to me to
mean: I have to imagine them making sense to themselves, which
is presumably not a gloss I would add were I trying to understand
the behavior of bees or beavers.

In the cases of the operating room, or the real (noisy) environ-
ment, there are obvious reasons why the orders are one-word, or say
stylized: to save time, or gain maximum speed and efficiency, to
conserve energy. Try it out. Imagine that the workers are on a popu-
lous construction site. Now take away the spectators, and traffic,
and turn off for the moment the heavy machinery. They may still be
doing things essential to the job at hand, but don’t we feel that
there is no reason for them to shorten or stylize their sentences,
anyway none beyond the effect of the repetitiveness of the familiar
routines themselves? To raise the voice, stylize the sentence, is as
inappropriate there, without some practical purpose, as it would be
at a concert. That the voice is understood as responsive to its cir-
cumstances, but that there is no certain unambiguous level at
which to pitch the voice or fix the distance over which to project it,
creates an anxiety expressed in our laugh, familiar at talkies, when
one character continues to yell for a few words after a persistent
noise suddenly ends, or the distance is closed, that had made the
yelling necessary.

But it is not accurate, or not enough, to say about Wittgenstein’s
builders that there is no reason for them to truncate or stylize their
sentences. I would like to say that they just do speak, or behave in
the way described. But that is our problem. We might express it by
saying: They cannot behave anyway else, they have no alternative.
Earlier we imagined that they do not speak apart from working:
now we may imagine that they do not speak differently in noisy than in peaceful environments. They are not free. Maybe this is the sense of their behaving "mechanically" that I expressed earlier; and maybe this lack of alternative is the way to describe what was missing for me when I agreed that I missed a sense of understanding in them. But what is the connection between understanding and having or seeing an alternative? There is a connection between interpretation and seeing an alternative, since interpretation is a matter of taking something one way rather than another. Perhaps the connection with the case of understanding is that the alternative to carrying out an order is refusing to carry it out, disobedience to it. Disobedience has been taken (in Eden, to divine command; in Kant’s moral philosophy, to inclination) as a criterion of freedom. But which comes first? Earlier I felt that without endowing the builders with understanding I was not fully prepared to say that they were speaking, and hence not prepared to see them as fully human. But now what emerges is that I did not see them as human because they did not seem to me to have freedom. And now I feel I want to go beyond the thought that freedom is shown in the capacity to say no, to the thought that it is shown in saying no in one’s own voice (responsive to different circumstances, capable of distinguishing consent from duress) – perhaps related to the cause of Emerson’s and Nietzsche’s search for a ground on which to say yes, the yes they took as the sign of a human existence, that thinkers before them, whom they were going beyond, not repudiating, had taken as the sign of a political existence.

In somewhat intensifying the linking of understanding with freedom, and in the explicit emergence of the connection of having a voice with having a political existence (a connection stressed, but not systematically pursued, early in The Claim of Reason, pp. 22–8), I am prompted to interpolate here parts of a long paragraph from the Wittgenstein lecture in This New Yet Unapproachable America; the passage (pp. 62–4) is the most recent in which I have put into print thoughts about the builders:

One may well sometimes feel that it is not language at all under description [in the Investigations section 2] since the words of the language . . . seem not to convey understanding, not to be words. . . . But while this feeling is surely conveyed by the scene, . . . we need not take it as final, or unchallenged, for at least three lines of reason: (1) [There follows a lightning re-
hearsal of the figures of the primitive or "early human," of the sense of truncation in the calls in different environments, of the child with four words, ending:] Instead of the feeling that the builders lack understanding, I find I feel that they lack imagination, or rather lack freedom, or perhaps that they are on the threshold of these together. [2] Something is understood by the builders, that desire is expressed, that this object is called for. . . . There-with an essential of speech is present, a condition of it, and not something that can, as new words are taught, be taught. ("Therewith"? There I am taking the builders also as illustrating Augustine's scene as of an advent of language [challenging a picture of the accumulative "learning" of language], something that comes "with" an advent of the realm of desire, say of fantasy, "beyond" the realm of [biological] need. I have been instructed, here particularly concerning Freud's concept of Triebl, spanning the "relation" between biological and psychological drive, by the exceptional study of Freudian concepts in Jean Laplanche's *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis.*

[The instruction I speak of, as it enters, for example, into the scare quotes I have set in the previous sentences around "with" and "relation," etc., calls particular attention to Augustine's description of the use to which he puts the names he has lined up with the objects his elders line them up with, the description that ends the Augustine passage: "After I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires." The part of the picture of language here, forming other "roots" of the idea or philosophical concept of meaning Wittgenstein divines in Augustine (and evidently not there alone), is something like this: The preparation for my acquiring language is my possession of a structure of desires and a nameable world; when I have acquired my set of signs, I may then use them to insert those desires into that world. Then again I may not. What determines whether I invest in the world, say yes to my existence? When [historically] did this become an issue? [My little book on Thoreau's writing, *The Sense of Walden,* is, perhaps above all, about this investment, something I call [roughly in Thoreau's name] taking an interest in the world; this is not so much a cure of skepticism as it is a sign of its mortality. In *In Quest of the Ordinary,* I comparably take up in this relation to skepticism Wordsworth's declaration of his wish "to make the incidents of common life interesting" (pp. 6–7). The figure of the child, under the shadow of such questions, returns yet again at the end of these notes.][3] A further, noncompeting interpretation of the builders is as an allegory of the ways many people, in more developed surroundings, in fact speak, forced as it were by circumstances to speak in more or less primitive, unvaried expressions of more or less incompletely educated desires – here the generalized equipment of noise and the routines of generalized others, are perhaps no longer specifiable in simple descriptions, having become invisible through internalization. [Is it theory
that is wanted, more than fuller description?) [If there is a theory it must, I suppose, be understandable as one that demonstrates the modes whereby, in Foucault’s words, power “reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives.”] This allegory may be seen as a kind of political parody of the repetition [or say the grammar] without which there is no language. [I take the workers as political allegory in terms that allude to Heidegger’s description of the everyday (“generalized equipment,” “noise”) in order to indicate a possible site of meeting, or passing, of Wittgenstein and Heidegger on the topos of the everyday – a place from which it can be seen both why Heidegger finds authenticity to demand departure and why Wittgenstein finds sense or sanity to demand return.]

From a certain point of view, especially in certain moods of philosophizing, it would hardly occur to us to think that radical conceptual differences – for example, between calling something a language or not, or between calling a creature human or not – could turn on whether these creatures speak differently (for example, use different tones of voice) in noisy and in quiet environments. It would seem that when we “took away” the familiar, or everyday, or “natural” context in which the builders would speak in single words, we were taking away only something inessential, trivial, quite external – the builders are surely the same, surely they are doing the same thing, their behavior is the same, whatever their tone of voice! And yet the lack we felt in trying to attribute understanding to the builders, which we sought to compensate for by imagining some inner mechanism or image, was filled up precisely, i.e., it quite vanished, as we (re)supplied “outer” surroundings.

The mutual regulation of inner and outer is a great theme of the Philosophical Investigations, specifically forming the background against which criteria function – against which they do the little, the indispensable little, they do to keep body and soul, or world and mind together. Since a version of this theme motivates the opening – the direct discussion of criteria – of The Claim of Reason, we are again at a goal of this transcription of these lecture notes. That discussion of criteria in The Claim of Reason reaches a plateau at the conclusion of chapter 4, it starts up afresh, in the form of an extended discussion of privacy, as the beginning of Part Four.

The sense of the builder’s lack of freedom is confirmed, as suggested earlier, by Wittgenstein’s description (in PI, 6) of this lan-
guage as the whole language of a tribe. He says there that “the children are brought up to perform these actions, to use these words as they do so, and to react in this way to the words of others.” Surely it is easy to feel here: This group would have to exert great efforts to suppress certain natural responses of the children. It suggests itself that a perception housed in this feeling gives on to an idea that the concept of the natural at some point becomes linked (dialectically or not) with the concept of transgression. Suppose this link is expressed in the Kantian picture of discovering the limits of knowledge, to transgress which is to enter one of several systematically related forms of madness (dialectical illusions). (As if it is nature itself [herself?] which has become the thing-in-itself.) And suppose we give a sexualized reading (roughly what Laplanche calls a perverse reading, in his interpretation of Freud’s mapping of the human creation of, i.e., the creation of human “drives”) of the violence exercised in the course [or curriculum] of “being brought up to perform, use, react” in prefigured ways certain actions, words, and reactions. Then we perhaps have a way, in what I sometimes speak of as “our” part of the forest, of coming to see what Foucault means (and he seems to be speaking out of a thriving culture in his part of the forest – what is the conviction that these are parts of the same expanse of thought?) in speaking of Sade’s placement, in the discovery of sexuality, of “that firmament of indefinite unreality . . ., the discovery of those systematic forms of prohibition which we now know imprison it, the discovery of the universal nature of transgression.” (I’ve been reading Foucault’s “Preface to Transgression,” in language, counter-memory, practice, ed. Bouchard.)

So that the training of children is a process of stupefying them into the state in which we encounter the grown-up builders. I do not, in these phantasms, wish to appear extreme. We need not imagine the grown-ups, the representative men and women (presumably there are women) of the builder’s culture, taking brutal measures in moulding their charges. If the charges are recalcitrant, that is to say, fail the test of serious participation in performing, speaking, reacting, as the elders require, the consequences may be merely that the elders will not speak to them, or pay them full attention, or else that they perpetually express disappointment in the children, and tell them they are bad. As our kind mostly does.
On the opening of the *Investigations*

II

With that last paragraph (whose rhetoric I recognize as going with the sketches of children in the ending paragraphs of Part One, chapter 5 of *The Claim of Reason*, hence as dating from 1970–1, when that material was being revised into its present form), I come to the end of the notes I had chosen to transcribe. The notes for the lectures that continue from there take up various specific topics of the *Investigations*, versions of many of which found their way into the early chapters of *The Claim of Reason*, others of which became the general sketch of Wittgenstein's "vision of language" that forms chapter 7, and still others constitute the opening couple of dozen pages of Part Four. What follows here may be thought of as an epilogue to the transcription, unless indeed it is better thought of as an introduction to the interventions that intersperse the transcription, interventions without which I would not have been able to provide it, i.e., to deliver the lectures from where I now find myself.

NOTES

1 This contribution is a reprint of part I of an essay that originally appeared in Cavell, *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995). The text, reproduced here with permission of the author and the publisher, conforms to the original except for the correction of an erroneous reference to "the Augustine passage" to the intended "PI, 2," in the passage quoted on p. 291.