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Nestroy, Augustine, and the Opening of the *Philosophical Investigations*¹

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§ 1. Beginning at the beginning

In “Notes and Afterthoughts on the Opening of the *Investigations*,” Stanley Cavell tells us that the “clearest unchanging feature” of his Wittgenstein course over the decades “was the opening question: How does the *Investigations* begin?” (Cavell 1996, 261.) In this paper I attend to Cavell’s question about how Wittgenstein’s philosophy begins, but in a more narrowly focused way: by means of a close reading of the text, both of the opening words of the *Philosophical Investigations*, and of some of the leading interpretations. Cavell is on the right track, I believe, when he observes that “There are many answers, or directions of answer” (Cavell 1996, 261.) I shall be arguing that the most important characteristic of the opening of the *Philosophical Investigations* is the way in which it invites a multiplicity of readings, readings of the words Wittgenstein quotes at the beginning of the book, and of his opening words. Most interpreters take the opening of the book as an outline of Wittgenstein’s answers to questions about the nature of language. I propose that Wittgenstein’s opening is best understood as raising questions and introducing us to a number of voices in the discussion that follows.

Cavell begins his answer as follows: “One might say, uncontroversially: It begins with some words of someone else.” The uncontroversial answer rapidly becomes controversial, for he identifies that “someone else” as Saint Augustine; Cavell never mentions the motto, or its Viennese author, Johann Nepomuk Nestroy (1802–1862). While the first numbered remark of the *Philosophical Investigations* begins with a passage from Augustine’s *Confessions*, the published book begins, strictly speaking, with a line taken from Act IV, scene 10 of Nestroy’s play *The Protégé* (*Der Schützling*). Even more strictly speaking, the very first word to appear in the final typescript after the title, namely the word “Motto:” is not to be found in any of the printed editions of the book prior to Joachim Schulte’s critical-genetic edition (Wittgenstein 2001, 741).

The motto in question, “Überhaupt hat der Fortschritt das an sich, daß er viel größer

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ausschaut, als er wirklich ist", has received relatively little attention, especially when one considers how much ink has been spilled over the question of how the *Philosophical Investigations* begins. In part, this is because it was not translated in any of the existing editions of the bilingual German-English edition, and so has been left out of every English translation to date; it is still left untranslated in the most recent edition (first edition 1953, second edition 1958, third edition, 2001.) However, there are also principled reasons why philosophers have not taken it seriously; these usually take the form of an argument that the front matter is not part of the book, properly speaking.

Reviewing previous translations of the motto, by Norman Malcolm (1958), Herbert Spiegelberg (1978), Gordon Baker and Peter Hacker (1980), Georg Henrik von Wright (1982) and Andrew Barker (1985–6) will reveal some of its ambiguities and subtleties. In his memoir of Wittgenstein, Malcolm offers:

It is in the nature of every advance, that it appears much greater than it actually is. (1958, 60; 1984, 51.)

But this is triply problematic. First, "Fortschritt," like the English word "progress," is not just any advance; it implies movement toward a goal, and especially the goals of modern science. Baker and Hacker's translation corrects this:

It is in the nature of all progress, that it looks much greater than it really is. (1980, 4.)

The second problem is that the words immediately around "Fortschritt," namely "hat der ... das an sich" have a plainer and rather different sense than talk of "nature" would imply; they are identifying an issue, not taking a position on it. This problem is addressed in Barker's translation:

The thing about progress is that it appears much greater than it actually is. (1985–6, 165.)

Third, none of these translations does justice to the first word of the motto: "überhaupt." Depending on the context, "überhaupt" can serve either as a qualifier, an intensifier, or to indicate an aside; it can often be translated as "in general," "besides," or "at all." The word can also be used conversationally to indicate that what follows is only a rough way of putting things. In the Nestroy play, where this sentence serves to conclude a soliloquy about progress and introduce a big song about how progress "looks much greater than it actually is", the opening word serves both as a transition or link, connecting the final sentence with what precedes it, and emphasizes that the sentence in question is a summing up. In the motto, where no further context is provided, the first word of Nestroy's German has the effect of making the sentence sound even less like a thesis than these translations would lead one to expect. Spiegelberg and von Wright both take the word to be qualifying the remainder of the sentence, saying that it is only generally true:

In general, it is characteristic of progress, that it looks much bigger than it really is. (Spiegelberg 1978, 56.)

It is a thing about progress: it generally looks bigger than it really is. (von Wright 1982, 114.)

Both of these are fairly close to the sense of the Nestroy sentence, but neither conveys any of its folksy and conversational flavour. Wolfgang Kienzler has suggested that “anyway” is a better translation than “generally” (personal email, 23 and 26 November, 2001.) Like “überhaupt,” it is a conversational word that can both serve to indicate that what follows is connected with what went before, or that it is something new; it also better captures the implication that what follows is an aside, not a thesis. Adopting this suggestion, and making the translation as conversational and plainly spoken as possible, I propose the following translation:

Motto: “Anyway, the thing about progress is that it looks much greater than it really is.” (Nestroy) (based on Wittgenstein 2001, 741.)

§ 2. On taking the motto seriously

Given that the motto is left out of the standard translations, what reason do we have to take it seriously as the opening words of the *Philosophische Untersuchungen*? Is the front matter really part of the book, and even if it is, how much does that matter?

Eike von Savigny once argued that as the prefatory material is dated January 1945 and the book was not finished at that point, it was written for the “Intermediate Version” of the *Philosophical Investigations* (“Zwischenfassung” Wittgenstein 2001, 563–738). However, it has since become clear that the motto and preface are part of the final text of the book. Although the typescript that was used in publishing the book has been lost, we have two heavily corrected copies of the typescript that was used, which very closely approximate to the published text. (Wittgenstein usually had at least two carbon copies made of his philosophical typescripts.) In both of these surviving typescripts, the prefatory material takes up the first three and a half pages; the beginning of section one is half way down page four. In fact, the typescript, which dates from 1946, makes it clear that the motto was chosen only after the rest of Part I had achieved its final form. For the typescript contains a motto, later crossed out, from the introduction to Hertz’s *Principles of Mechanics*.

The Nestroy passage was presumably added some time after Wittgenstein wrote this passage down in a manuscript notebook, in an entry dated April 25, 1947, the only Nestroy quotation in the Wittgenstein *Nachlass* that provides his name (MS 134, p. 152.) Baker and Hacker (1980, 4–6) cite seven other passages that Wittgenstein considered as possible mottoes at one time or another. However, the choice of the author and the words in question was no afterthought. Another motto from Nestroy, taken from his play *Heimliche Liebe – Heimliches Geld* (Secret Love – Secret Money) began the first manuscript volume from 1929. Although the words were subsequently erased, they are still legible. They read “Hier hilft dem Dummen die Dummheit allein,” (Here only stupidity helps the stupid”) (my translation; see Wittgenstein 1994, vol. 1, p. vii.) In a conversation at the 2001 Kirchberg Symposium, Michael Nedo observed there are a number of other

unattributed quotations from Nestroy in Wittgenstein's manuscript volumes. Indeed, Wittgenstein was not only well acquainted with Nestroy, but was already quoting the words he was to use as the motto for *Philosophical Investigations* from memory in a letter to Schlick dated 18 September 1930, and describing it as "magnificent" [herrlich].²

Very well, the motto is part of the book, but how important is it? One could invoke a literary distinction here, and argue that the epigraph and preface, to be found on the preceding, roman numbered pages of the published book are part of the *paratext*, liminal material that is not really part of the book itself, and that the *text* begins on page 1 of the published book, not the first page of the typescript. Baker and Hacker must have had something like this distinction in mind when they decided to begin Part 1 of the first volume of their commentary with the sentence: "The *Investigations* opens with a quotation in which Augustine describes how he learned language as a child", (1980a, 1) for they devote three full pages of their exegesis in Part 2 to a discussion of the motto, and another nine pages to the preface (1980, 4–6, 7–15). But how are we to understand the relationship between the text of the *Philosophical Investigations*, its paratext, and other texts, an issue that Wittgenstein interpreters have only occasionally given their full attention?

In this connection, Hans-Johann Glock draws a convenient distinction between "immanent" and "genetic" approaches to the interpretation of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Roughly speaking, the "immanent" approach attends only to the text itself, while the "genetic" approach draws on other evidence as well. According to Glock, the immanent approach turns on two key assumptions: [1] that "the author's intentions are irrelevant and [2] that an interpretation should only take into consideration what a reader can understand by looking at the text itself." (1990, 153; repeated in 1992, 118.) We might add: what the immanent reading rules out are extra-textual intentions, not intentions as expressed in the text. Cavell and von Savigny provide two very different examples of such an immanent approach. A genetic reading, on the other hand, holds that the author's extra-textual intentions are important for an understanding of the text, and has no qualms about taking into consideration additional evidence not to be found in the text itself. There is, of course, a great deal of disagreement among those who belong in the "genetic" camp as to just how much extra-textual evidence one should admit, and how it should be used. One familiar position is that one should only consult the *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*; others make greater or lesser use of other published work, the *Nachlass*, and records of Wittgenstein's lectures and conversations.

2. Und ich wollte Sie könnten Ihre – so wohlgemeinten – Fanfarenstöße mildern. Es ist ja doch kein Grund zum Triumph; aus 1000 Gründen nicht. Und vergessen Sie, bitte, nicht das herrliche Wort Nestroys (ich kann es nicht wörtlich zitieren): Der Fortschritt hat es so an sich, daß er immer größer aussieht, als er ist.

And I wish you could tone down your – so well-intended – trumpet blasts. Indeed, there is no reason whatever for triumph; a thousand reasons against. And please don't forget Nestroy's magnificent saying (I can't quote it word for word): The thing about progress is that it always looks greater than it is. [My translation.]

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One might expect that those who take the immanent approach, a method that stresses the authority and self-containedness of the text, would give considerable weight to those opening pages that precede section one, but this has rarely been the case. The reasons for this become much clearer if one turns to Gérard Genette's *Paratexts*, which includes a systematic and encyclopedic study of those texts that precede the beginning of the text. He speaks of paratexts in general, and prefaces, epigraphs and mottos in particular, as a kind of threshold, "a transitional zone between text and beyond-text." (1997, 407.) The chief role of this part of the front matter, he maintains, is to communicate the author's intentions, to "ensure for the text a destiny consistent with the author's purpose." (1997, 407.)

In view of this, we can see why an immanent reader will be likely to overlook the motto and preface, for to pay attention to them is to attend to the author's intentions, and to be forced to consider the relationship between the "text itself" and other texts. A commitment to concentrating on what an intelligent reader can make of the text, without drawing on evidence of authorial intentions that is not present in the text, is well served by the conviction that the text begins with section one. This becomes particularly clear if one considers the content of the Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*, which discusses Wittgenstein's previous writing, both in the *Tractatus* and work leading up to the *Philosophical Investigations*, his philosophical discussions with others, and his fears and hopes for his book. For this very reason, proponents of the genetic approach usually regard the Preface as an important part of the book. Yet they too rarely attend to the motto, an oversight that is perhaps due to the fact that their more liberal method provides them with such a variety of other texts they can look to for guidance that the motto can seem like a decorative flourish that does not call for any particular attention.

We ignore the motto – and the preface – at our peril, for they "set the stage" just as much as the opening sections. Indeed, Genette's anatomy of paratexts turns on what he calls the "obvious fact" that the immanent reader, attending only to what is in the text itself, "does not exist, ...and cannot exist." The immanent reader, a familiar figure in the history of philosophy and modernist literary criticism, is an entirely fictional character, for in practice no one can bracket out everything they know or take for granted. Reflecting on this moral leads Genette to the following

advice à la Wittgenstein: what one cannot ignore, one is better off knowing – that is, of course, acknowledging, and knowing that one knows it. The effect of the paratext lies very often in the realm of influence – indeed, manipulation – experienced subconsciously. This mode of operation is doubtless in the author's interest, though not always in the reader's. To accept it – or, for that matter, to reject it – one is better off perceiving it fully and clearly. (1997, 409.)

The main concerns of Wittgenstein's Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations* are quite clear, even if there is great scope for disagreement about how to interpret it: it draws connections between the text and what lies beyond it and is clearly very important for our understanding of the character of Wittgenstein's philosophy in general, and the relationship between the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations* in particular. (For more on the Preface, see Stern 2003, chapter 1.) Here I will focus on the motto, which has

proved much more difficult for readers to notice at all, let alone “fully and clearly.”

What does the motto mean? What could the motto mean? Here, Genette’s chapter on the epigraph, or prefatory quotation, is helpful. Two of the tasks that Genette identifies as the work of an epigraph are clearly relevant when we look at the motto of the *Philosophical Investigations*. A motto can comment on the text, “whose meaning it indirectly specifies or emphasizes,” (1997, 157) thus orienting the reader, either by providing explicit guidance for the first-time reader, or by allowing someone who knows the book well to see how it hangs together. It can also work more obliquely, invoking the prestige or associations of the motto’s author; in some cases, the main point of the motto is not what it says, but who says it. But how does Wittgenstein’s motto orient us? What kind of a “comment on the text” is it? And what is the significance of Wittgenstein’s choice of an Austrian playwright, famous in his homeland – his admirers call him the “Austrian Shakespeare” – but virtually unknown elsewhere, because his plays depend on virtuoso use of dialect and wordplay? How are we to understand these words, taken from Nestroy’s play, and placed at the beginning of this book?

§ 3. Genetic readings of the motto

One way out of avoiding the difficulties that arise when one attempts to make sense of a few words in isolation is the genetic approach; one can investigate what the line means in the Nestroy play from which it is taken, its significance in Nestroy’s work as a whole, and what Nestroy might have meant to Wittgenstein. This strategy turns on attending to the original context that the words are taken from, and the sense that they make there. The lines that lead up to the motto in the play are spoken by Gottfried Herb, the hero, in a monologue that begins by deploring how little evil has been removed from the world, despite all our inventions, and then continues:

And yet we live in an era of progress, don’t we? I s’pose progress is like a newly discovered land; a flourishing colonial system on the coast, the interior still wilderness, steppe, prairie. Anyway, the thing about progress is that it looks much greater than it really is.

This line introduces a six verse satirical song, complete with a full score, which drives home the point of Herb’s observations about progress with lurid examples (Nestroy 2000, 427–431.) Each verse divides into three parts: (1) how bad things used to be, (2) how much better they seem now (3) why they’re actually worse than ever. The refrain at the end of (2) is always:

’s Is wirklich *famos*,
Wie der Fortschritt so groß!

It’s really *splendid*,
How progress is so great! (Nestroy 2000, 91–6; my translation; the odd German in the first line is an example of Nestroy’s use of Viennese dialect.)

and the last two lines of (3) are always:

Drum der Fortschritt hat beym Licht betrach't,
Die Welt nicht viel glücklicher g'macht.

So, progress examined more closely,
Hasn't made the world much happier. (Nestroy 2000, 91–6; my translation.)

Barker has drawn attention to the “many similarities” between Wittgenstein’s life and “Herb’s plight” (Barker 1985–6, 162.) The play begins with Herb living in a whitewashed room with barely room for a bed and a table, “having just given up his job as a rural schoolmaster because he feels destined for higher things.” Herb is a writer, considered by himself and his friend a genius, but facing the desolate fate that “genius has lost its privileges” in these times, and preoccupied by suicide. Eventually, Herb finds success in iron and steel technology, the very area where the Wittgenstein fortune began; the final act, from which the motto comes, is set in a wooded valley affected by the iron foundry: “the ambivalence of the setting, showing nature and industry in uneasy juxtaposition, is reflected in Herb’s view on the meaning of ‘Fortschritt’” (Barker 1985–6, 163.)

The new critical edition of the play (Nestroy 2000) includes a history of the play’s production and reception and its relationship to the revolutionary year of 1848. First performed in 1847, it was later seen as anticipating the problems of the following year. Most interpreters have concentrated on Herb’s, and Nestroy’s, attitudes to progress, as a guide to Wittgenstein’s use of the sentence. Some readers have regarded Herb as a protosocialist, for his sympathy for the suffering of the workers; others, more plausibly, have stressed his reactionary sentiments. While Baker and Hacker observe that “in its original context [the motto] expresses such negative views on progress as would harmonize with W.’s own repudiation of this aspect, and this ideal, of European culture” (1980, 4) they do not put any great weight on this. However, for a reader approaching the *Philosophical Investigations* as a philosophy of culture opposed to the ideal of progress, a critique of “the darkness of this time” (*Philosophical Investigations*, x), the Nestroy passage provides an opening to placing his philosophical writings within a cultural tradition. If Wittgenstein’s views about progress had changed since 1930, they had only become more negative, as these two passages, written in 1947, attest:

The truly apocalyptic view of the world is that things do *not* repeat themselves. It isn’t absurd, e.g., to believe that the age of science and technology is the beginning of the end for humanity; that the idea of great progress is a delusion, along with the idea that the truth will ultimately be known; that there is nothing good or desirable about scientific knowledge and that mankind, in seeking it, is falling into a trap. It is by no means obvious that this is not how things are. (1980, 56.)

Science and industry, and their progress, might turn out to be the most enduring thing in the modern world. Perhaps any speculation about a coming collapse of science and industry is, for the present and a *long* time to come, nothing but a dream; perhaps science and industry, having caused infinite misery in the process, will unite the world –

I mean condense it into a *single* unit, though one in which peace is the last thing that will find a home. (1980, 63.)

Brian McGuinness' biography names Nestroy as part of a current against the mainstream of Austrian culture, a current opposed to "nationalism, radicalism, progress, and so on," which Wittgenstein "felt he belonged to and which accords with his nostalgia for the period before 1848" (1988, 36.) Barker follows J. C. Nyíri (1976, 1982), McGuinness (1982) and von Wright (1982), in holding that Herb's "attack on 'progress' as expressed in the drama may ... be regarded as typical of the 'conservative style' of thought in its opposition to a world dominated by the material consequences of rationalist thinking." (Barker 1985-6, 163.)

Jacques Bouveresse and Beth Savickey have drawn connections with Wittgenstein's admiration for Karl Kraus, who was fond of quoting that sentence from Nestroy (Bouveresse 1992, 33; Savickey 1999, 10). Kraus was a great advocate of Nestroy's; many judge his *Nestroy und die Nachwelt*, [Nestroy and posterity] a speech given to 1500 people on the fiftieth anniversary of Nestroy's death, as his finest piece of work (Kraus 1912). It is also possible to construe the motto as hinting at a "a moral dimension to the *Investigations*" and as expressing "the thought that modern technical progress, whether in science or in philosophy, has not come to grips with our moral concerns" (Tilghman 1987, 100.)

§ 4. Immanent readings of the motto

On an immanent approach, one puts all this to one side and asks what the words mean to the reader when they are taken out of the context of Nestroy's play, placed alone on the first page of the book. Previous discussion of this issue has turned on the question of how this talk of "progress" is to be applied to our understanding of the book as a whole, and to what extent the book itself amounts to philosophical progress. Malcolm took the motto to be an expression of Wittgenstein's mixed feelings about the *Philosophical Investigations*: "He did not think of the central conceptions of his philosophy as *possibly* in error. He certainly believed most of the time, that he had produced an important advance in philosophy. Yet, I think that he was inclined to feel that the importance of this advance might be exaggerated by those who were too close to it." (1958, 60; 1984, 51) Garth Hallett (1977, 61) and Spiegelberg (1978, 56) both quote this passage from Malcolm, and follow his lead.

On the other hand, Baker and Hacker find it "unlikely" that Wittgenstein was intimating "that the advance made in PI over the philosophy of TLP is less substantial than it appears" (1980, 4) but in the end, their own reading is not so different from Malcolm's. For they immediately go on to propose the hypothesis that the "intention behind the motto echoes the end of the Preface to TLP: the value of this work ... is that it shows how little is achieved when these problems are solved" (1980, 4). This is odd, because if the intention behind the motto to the second book can be seen as echoing the preface to the first, that would seem to lend strong support to the reading they dismiss as "unlikely." One way in which the two books' prefatory disclaimers of their respective achievements differ is that the *Tractatus*' preface does not express any doubts about its contribution to philosophical

progress. The preface to the *Tractatus* seems to be saying that even though in philosophical terms a great deal has been achieved, this achievement may seem to matter little in different terms. The *Philosophical Investigations* also raises the possibility that here, even in philosophical terms, progress may look greater than it really is.

In an essay on Wittgenstein's mottoes, Spiegelberg includes an interesting discussion of his "personal experience in reading Wittgenstein and the help I derived from his mottoes. In my repeated attempts to penetrate into Wittgenstein's philosophical mazes I found myself constantly puzzled, stopped and frustrated...the almost total absence of chapters and chapter headings, of previews, summaries, indexes and other aids to the reader added to this frustration. Under these circumstances the presence of the mottoes served as a kind of clue for what lay ahead... adumbrative, directive, preparatory. Mottoes are sentences meant to guide our understanding of a longer text that follows" (1978, 57.) While Spiegelberg sets out both the approaches I have sketched so far, and there is surely something to be learned from each, it is a remarkably meager harvest. Certainly, the words can be read both as expressing a certain pessimism about modernity, and a conventional modesty about the book's achievement. The information about Nestroy's play, and Wittgenstein's affinities for Nestroy is valuable, but it is hardly plausible that Wittgenstein expected his readers to only be guided by such considerations in their reading of the motto: we would be tone-deaf if we weren't aware of the significance of those words in the play, but we must also think for ourselves about what those words mean on the opening page of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

§ 5. Approaching the motto as a guide to the text

Philosophical Investigations § 525, which begins by asking whether we understand a sentence taken out of context, provides a good starting point for reflecting on what other guidance we might be able to take from Wittgenstein's motto:

"After he had said this, he left her as he did the day before." – Do I understand this sentence? Do I understand it just as I should if I heard it in the course of a narrative? If it were set down in isolation I should say, I don't know what it's about. But all the same I should know how this sentence might perhaps be used; I could myself invent a context for it.

(A multitude of familiar paths lead off from these words in every direction.)

We can imagine how the quoted sentence could be used; but we don't know how it was used in the narrative. Nor do we have a sense of the quite particular significance that such a line can take on within a particular play or poem, a significance that it would not have if it were rephrased. In *Zettel* § 176, similar remarks are made about a line from a play by Schiller (*Wallenstein, Die Piccolimini*): Wittgenstein says that those words, together with their tone and glance "seem to carry within themselves every last *nuance* of their meaning [*Bedeutung*] within them." To this he replies that this is so "only because we know them as part of a particular scene. But it would be possible to construct an entirely different scene around those words so as to show that the special soul they have lies

in the story in which they come". In MS 129, an earlier version of *Zettel* § 176, these remarks about Schiller's words are followed by the last, parenthetical, sentence of *Philosophical Investigations* § 525b. In these passages, among others, Wittgenstein acknowledges that words can seem to have a quite particular significance, akin to the meaning we associate with a phrase from a familiar tune, yet in a different context, the same words could have a quite different meaning.

I propose that the motto prepares us for what comes ahead by forcing us to slow down, to think about what the sentence could mean, and to see that it can be set in a number of different contexts, has a number of different meanings, that our problems in understanding the motto are like our problems understanding "After he had said this, he left her as he did the day before." Philosophical readers of Wittgenstein's motto have been too ready to assume that there must be one "intention behind the motto" (Baker & Hacker 1980, 4), instead of taking a broader perspective on the "multitude of familiar paths [that] lead off from these words in every direction" (*Philosophical Investigations* § 525.) Philosophers have also been too ready to assume that the guidance in question must be clear and unambiguous; but as § 172 points out, we are guided not only when we follow directions, but also when we "walk along a field-track simply following it," a simile that should remind us of the criss-crossing journeyings across a landscape described in the Preface. Yet no discussion of Wittgenstein and Nestroy, including Janik & Toulmin's, which dwells on the fact that he was famous as a satirist whose words commonly had multiple meanings (1973, 85–87) entertains the possibility that the motto's ambiguities might have appealed to Wittgenstein.

Set in one context, the motto expresses pessimism as to whether scientific progress will improve our lives; set in another, it expresses the author's doubts about his own work. But at the beginning of this book, the Nestroy quotation has a broader significance, one that is missed by the single-minded reader, genetic or immanent. First of all, as we have seen, we are confronted with the exercise of making sense of this sentence, taken out of context, an exercise that should lead us to see at least some of its ambiguities. Second, we should consider the context in which Wittgenstein placed it: for it also serves as the first half of a double epigraph, the second half being the quote from Augustine that begins § 1. Oddly, no discussion of Wittgenstein's use of Nestroy has attended to the idea that the pair of quotations, one at the beginning of the book, and one at the beginning of the opening remark, might be connected, or that the motto also serves as a comment on the quotation from Augustine. The motto warns us that we should not take what follows at face value, and that what seems like progress – whether it is the progress that Augustine makes in learning to speak, or the progress we may think we have made since Augustine's time, or the progress Wittgenstein makes in responding to Augustine – may not be as great as it seems. Third, the quotations from Nestroy and Augustine are appropriate beginnings for a text that contains a number of voices, and should alert the reader to the presence of a number of voices in what follows – not all of them "Wittgenstein's" or "the interlocutor's." The last part of this paper outlines an approach to § 1 of the *Philosophical Investigations* that draws on this guidance.

§ 6. Augustine on language learning

According to Malcolm, Wittgenstein:

revered the writings of St. Augustine. He told me he decided to begin his *Investigations* with a quotation from the latter's *Confessions*, not because he could not find the conception expressed in that quotation stated as well by other philosophers, but because the conception *must* be important if so great a mind held it. (Malcolm 1984, 59–60.)

The oldest known source of the *Philosophical Investigations*' discussion of Augustine on language learning gives a similar explanation for the choice of Augustine. There, Wittgenstein stresses the significance of the distance between our time and Augustine's:

(Und was Augustinus sagt ist für uns wichtig weil es die Auffassung eines natürlich-klar denkenden Mannes ist, der von uns zeitlich weit entfernt gewiß nicht zu unserem besonderen Gedankenkreis gehört.) (Wittgenstein, MS 111, 15–16, 15 July 1931; the punctuation is Wittgenstein's.)

(And what Augustine says is important for us because it is the conception of a naturally clear thinking man who, being far away from us in time, certainly doesn't belong to our particular intellectual milieu.)

However, there is no quotation from Augustine in this passage, or in any other of the many subsequent drafts of material that was used in §1, until 1936. Even the reference to Augustine that opens the *Brown Book*, written in 1934, simply provides a very brief summary: "Augustine, in describing his learning of language, says that he was taught to speak by learning the names of things" (*Brown Book*, 77; cf. MS 111, 15). Only when Wittgenstein translated the *Brown Book* into German in August 1936 did he add a few words from the *Confessions*, and it was not until he wrote up the final revisions to the "early version" of the *Philosophical Investigations* in November 1936 (Wittgenstein 2001, 51–204) that he decided to use such an extensive passage from Augustine. The first drafts of both the first and second paragraph of §1 (henceforth, §1a and §1b, etc.) are part of that manuscript (MS 142). Thus, it was at a relatively late stage in the composition of the first 180 sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*, when nearly all of the other material had already been written, that Wittgenstein decided to begin with these words of Augustine's, and the particular response to them that we find in §1b. Schulte's edition of this material shows that the quotation from Augustine used in the first draft of MS 142, and probably in the first draft of the next version of that material, TS 220, omits the middle sentence of the passage we have in the published text, which is already included in the final revisions to MS 142 and TS 220 (Wittgenstein 2001, 1097; cf. 57 and 210.)

Wittgenstein's first sentence tells us that the opening quotation from Saint Augustine contains a definite picture of the essence of language, yet on first reading, Augustine's words can strike the reader as an entirely natural and unproblematic description of how he learned to speak:

My primary reaction to the citation from the *Confessions*, read by itself, is to think that what it expresses is obvious – it seems trivial, prosaic, well-nigh unobjectionable. It is just a harmless elaboration of the observations that early in life children learn what things are called, and learn to express their wants and needs verbally. (Goldfarb 1983, 268.)

Warren Goldfarb contends that Wittgenstein expected his readers to be shocked by his initial construal of Augustine, and those commentators who “would have us meekly acquiesce to this sentence” (ibid) have been too ready to take what he has to say at face value. Instead, Goldfarb proposes, the aim of these opening words is not to show us that Augustine’s conception of language is wrong and Wittgenstein’s right, but to throw us off balance, and so get us to see the unclarity of the very idea of what it is to have a conception of language, that the same words can be understood in both a commonplace and a philosophical way. Talk of naming objects, pointing things out, and states of mind, can be quite unproblematic, yet in certain contexts these notions “come to have a weight that our ordinary understanding of them does not support” (ibid.) For Augustine’s words can also be read as intimating a number of different conceptions of how language works, conceptions that can provide a starting point for philosophical theorizing about language and meaning. Wittgenstein’s primary concern is not with the sophisticated statement of philosophical problems and theoretical solutions that they lead to, but how those problems arise. He begins not with systematic philosophy, or the history of philosophy, but with the patterns of thought, the ways of speaking, which can lead us into formulating such philosophical theories.

Cavell (1979, 1996) proposes that the *Philosophical Investigations* is about “the argument of the ordinary.” He approaches the book as an argument between two opposing voices: the “voice of temptation,” which begins to formulate various philosophical theories, and the “voice of correctness”, which replies to these theories by reminding us of what we ordinarily say and do. Most interpreters take the “voice of correctness” to be a mouthpiece for Wittgenstein’s own views. Most Wittgensteinians provide a systematic account of the views they attribute to the voice of correctness, and most anti-Wittgensteinians argue against them, usually in defence of “Wittgenstein’s interlocutor.” However, Cavell replies that *neither* voice is straightforwardly Wittgenstein’s; he emphasizes the ways in which the book is more like a dialogue, a conflicted monologue, or a confession, than advocacy for any systematic position. Like Augustine in the *Confessions*, Cavell’s Wittgenstein struggles with temptation and correctness. Rather than seeing the multiplicity of voices, the lack of clear demarcation between voices, the frequent shifts in topic, the fragmentary arguments, the multitude of questions, suggestions, instructions, stories, and far-fetched imaginary examples as all advancing a single, authorial point of view, he proposes that we approach them as an invitation to explore the deep difficulties that arise when we start to philosophize. On the other hand, nothing can stop a philosopher from taking Wittgenstein’s arguments and drawing his or her own positive conclusions; indeed, the book both invites and resists such a reading.

Because the voices are never explicitly identified, and often permit, or even invite, multiple readings, the reader is continually forced to work out who is speaking, where the discussion is going, and what larger context or contexts these words belong to. As von

Savigny puts it, Wittgenstein's text continually raises the following three questions: (1) "who speaks?" (2) "where is it going?" and (3) "where does that belong?" (1994 vol. 1, 1–2.) One of the ways in which Wittgenstein forces his readers to "thoughts of their own" (*Philosophical Investigations*, x) is that we are continually brought up short by the "who speaks?" question: the problem of identifying the voices in these exchanges. To make matters worse, "who speaks?" expresses two related, but rather different, questions. It is not only a matter of identifying *speeches* – where one voice stops and another starts – but that the very identity of the *speakers* is unclear. Indeed, in certain cases, such as the opening words of the *Philosophical Investigations*, those words are open to a number of quite different construals.

Both the Nestroy motto and the book's opening paragraphs are like those ambiguous drawings which at first sight can seem quite straightforward, yet on closer examination, are open to a number of incompatible interpretations. Such drawings fascinated Wittgenstein and are repeatedly discussed in his writings; two prominent examples are the line drawing in *Tractatus* 5.5423 and near the beginning of *Philosophical Investigations* II xi, which can look like a cube sticking out of the page, a cube sunk into the page, or an assembly of flat geometric shapes, among other possibilities, or Jastrow's "duck-rabbit", which can be seen as a duck facing left or a rabbit facing right (*Philosophical Investigations*, II xi, shortly afterward.)

What, precisely, is the "particular picture of the essence of human language" that Wittgenstein speaks of in the first sentence of his own words in the book, or "the conception expressed in that quotation," as Malcolm puts it? To many philosophers, §1b provides a clear outline of the mistaken view of the nature of language that Wittgenstein finds in Augustine, a view that is presupposed in §1a, and that forms one of the principal targets in what follows. One line of interpretation concentrates on the question of the nature of this "particular picture", and its place in the overall project of the *Philosophical Investigations*. While I cannot do justice to the full range of such readings of §1b, the main disagreements concern the scope and character of the picture in question. On a "big picture" reading of Augustine's words, they serve to introduce the paradigm, or worldview, that Wittgenstein opposes throughout the book (Baker and Hacker 1980a 14, 1–27.) On a "small picture" reading, they set out a quite specific philosophical theory, the topic of the opening sections of the book.

While there is some support for each of these approaches in §1b, Wittgenstein's words are more equivocal than they may seem at first sight. He does say that the "particular picture" suggested to him by Augustine's words is that: (1) "individual words in language name objects" and (2) "sentences are combinations of such names". However, Wittgenstein qualifies all this by an "it seems to me," one of the expressions he repeatedly uses as a warning that he is introducing, or entertaining an idea, rather than giving it his full support. These words (§1b1–2) are followed by a long double-dash, used by Wittgenstein to indicate either a change of topic, or a new voice (unlike a single dash, which usually indicates a brief pause within a single train of thought.) Only then are we introduced to a further idea, which, we are told, has its roots in this picture: that (3) "every word has a meaning [*Bedeutung*]," and it "is the object for which the word stands." Thus we are introduced to at least two views of the Augustine passage: the "particular picture," which concerns the role of words in language, and a further development of this concep-

tion, which introduces the notion of a word's meaning.

Exponents of a "small picture" reading of these words are often attracted to the idea that the *Tractatus* is the real target. For instance, according to Jaakko and Merrill Hintikka, the passage from Augustine is Wittgenstein's starting point because it sets out the view that ostension – naming objects and pointing to them – is the "prime vehicle of language teaching and learning" (1986, 179.) This view supposedly follows from an "idea embraced by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* ... the basic links between language and the world are simple two-place relations of naming" (ibid.) On the Hintikkas' construal, the links in question are ineffable; nothing more can be said about them within the Tractarian framework. A related reading maintains that the picture is a little bigger, for the Tractarian conception of naming can be specified – and criticized – in more detail. Thus, according to Hacker, it is part of the *Tractatus* view of naming that it requires a mental act "that injects meaning or significance into signs, whether in thought or in language" (1986, 75). But such crude and simple views of language and mind fail to do justice to the subtlety of the *Tractatus*, a book that takes as its "fundamental thought" the idea that certain words do not stand for anything (4.0312). Neither of these remarkably naïve views of naming and the role of mind in meaning are of much independent philosophical interest, either. It is implausible, to say the least, that these are the principal topics raised by the *Philosophical Investigations*' opening (cf. Fogelin 1976, 96; Goldfarb 1983; Wilson 1998, 1).

Consequently, most of those who begin by spelling out the rather limited views they find in § 1b go on to say that their real interest lies in the bigger picture that they give rise to, or otherwise support. For instance, Baker and Hacker hold that this passage introduces the "Augustinian picture", which proves to be nothing less than an entire worldview or philosophical paradigm, the principal target throughout the *Philosophical Investigations*, and this interpretation has seemed obviously right to many. However, much of the attractiveness of this view depends on the way its expositors trade on the open-ended and vague character of the picture in question, moving between a relatively small and specific view in the initial exposition, and the much larger theoretical positions it supposedly underwrites. Glock's *Wittgenstein Dictionary* entry on the "Augustinian picture of language." is a good example of this:

[Wittgenstein] treated Augustine's view not as a full-blown theory of language, but as a proto-theoretic paradigm or 'picture' which deserves critical attention because it tacitly underlies sophisticated philosophical theories. ... The Augustinian picture comprises four positions: a referential conception of word meaning; a descriptivist conception of sentences; the idea that ostensive definition provides the foundations of language; and the idea that a language of thought underlies our public languages. (Glock 1996, 41; the last idea is not present in § 1b, but something like it is attributed to Augustine in § 32.)

Indeed, less sympathetic readers of Baker and Hacker have noted that "most of the leading ideas of the [*Philosophical Investigations* are] interpreted as so many aspects of an extended critique of the Augustinian Picture" (Carruthers 1984, 451; cf. von Savigny 1994, 37.) However, the "big picture" reading has a slender textual basis: the very expres-

sion "Augustinian picture" is an artifact that occurs nowhere in Wittgenstein's writing, and the "particular picture" of § 1b is only one of many quite specific philosophical mistakes and temptations that Wittgenstein discusses in the pages that follow. Indeed, Wittgenstein's explicit references in the *Philosophical Investigations* to the conception of language that he finds in Augustine are outnumbered by his references to other passages from the *Confessions*, each of which serves to introduce other philosophical pictures. Running these pictures, and others, into a single over-arching "big picture" runs contrary to Wittgenstein's emphasis on the diversity and multiplicity of the ways in which we go wrong.

Furthermore, the significance of the passage from Augustine for the *Philosophical Investigations* is not simply that the opening quotation is a convenient point of departure for a critique of mistaken views about meaning and language learning. For the very words from Augustine that Wittgenstein quotes do not lend unambiguous support to the particular interpretations he advances in § 1 ff., either. In fact, Wittgenstein's reading of the Augustine passage is itself remarkably one-sided. While the quotation from Augustine does begin with his learning that certain sounds his elders made were signs for things, and ends with his learning to use these signs to express his own desires, much of it does not fit Wittgenstein's description at all. Augustine does not claim that this gives a model for understanding all word meaning, and actually connects understanding words with grasping their "proper places," not only in the structure of sentences, but also the context in which they are used. He also draws our attention to the role of facial expression, and the play of the eyes and tone of voice in expressing intention.

Augustine scholars have repeatedly pointed out that Augustine's philosophical views on language and naming are much more sophisticated than those Wittgenstein attributes to him (Burnyeat 1987; King 1998; Kirwan 2001.) As Sir Anthony Kenny puts it:

Augustine is a curious choice as a spokesman for the views which Wittgenstein attacks since in many respects what he says resembles Wittgenstein's own views rather than the views that are Wittgenstein's target. (Kenny 1984, 10.)

Kenny argues that Augustine anticipates important aspects of Wittgenstein's treatment of language learning, for they both hold that understanding ostension presupposes a certain mastery of language, and that ostension by itself cannot make clear a word's linguistic role (ibid.) The main problem, however, is not just that Wittgenstein's Augustine isn't the historian of philosophy's Augustine, but that Wittgenstein's description of Augustine leaves out a large part of what Augustine says in the opening quotation:

Nothing is said about those 'bodily movements' which are, as it were, 'the natural language of all peoples.' Later Wittgenstein himself will say that 'words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of [a] sensation and used in their place' (§ 244). For Wittgenstein, it is important that language arises through shaping various 'primitive and natural' human responses, but a similar notion in the Augustinian passage is ignored. Nor does Wittgenstein notice Augustine's reference to the use of these words 'in their proper places in various sentences' even though a parallel idea was important to him throughout his philosophical development. Instead, Wittgen-

stein simply discusses 'a particular picture' that this passage suggests – a picture more naïve than the view actually presented by Augustine. (Fogelin 1976, 96; 1987, 108–9.)

Kenny argues that Wittgenstein's misrepresentation of Augustine in the opening of the *Philosophical Investigations* shows that he was "unreliable as an historian of philosophy ... even great admiration for a thinker did not ensure that Wittgenstein would represent him accurately." (Kenny 1984, 10, 11.) True, Augustine is misrepresented in § 1b. But is it really plausible that Wittgenstein was such a bad reader of Augustine that he failed to notice the misfit between the first two paragraphs of his book? We know that Wittgenstein had thought long and hard not only about how to start his book, but also about the opening chapter of the *Confessions*. The *Nachlass* contains a number of other quotations from the *Confessions*, including at least three others from Book I. The Bergen edition of the Wittgenstein papers shows 105 hits for Augustine; the only philosophers whose names occur more frequently are Russell, Frege, and Ramsey; a search for "Plato or Socrates" yields 111 hits. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, a book that only mentions a few other philosophers by name (Socrates, Ramsey, Lewis Carroll, William James, Frege, Moore, Russell, and the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*), Augustine's is the name that occurs most frequently, and the *Confessions* is the most frequently cited text. Among the few books in his possession when he died were Latin and German editions of the *Confessions*, which he usually read in Latin.

The first Augustine quotation in the *Nachlass* is the motto to the *Philosophical Remarks*, a typescript Wittgenstein put together in March 1930, so that Russell could read his work and write a fellowship report.

Et multi ante nos praestruxerant aerumnosas vias per quas transire cogebamur multiplicato dolore filiis Adam. (Augustine 1992, 1.9.14.)

[A]nd many, passing the same way in days past, had built a sorrowful road by which we too must go, with multiplication of grief and toil upon the sons of Adam. (Augustine 1993, 10.)

In the *Confessions*, these words are shortly after the passage that opens the *Philosophical Investigations*; Augustine describes how he first learned Latin in school, and the painful discipline it involved. Sheed translates the words leading up to this earlier motto as follows:

O God, my God, what emptiness and mockeries did I now experience: for it was impressed upon me as right and proper in a boy to obey those who taught me, that I might get on in the world and excel in the handling of words to gain honor among men and deceitful riches. I, poor wretch, could not see the use of the things I was sent to school to learn; but if I proved idle in learning, I was soundly beaten. For this procedure seemed wise to our ancestors: and many... (Ibid.)

Augustine's "sorrowful road" is not only the lessons he learned in school, but also the sin

of idleness and the punishment decreed by his elders; there is, in the talk of Adam, an allusion to original sin. Wittgenstein's "sorrowful road" is left unspecified. The preface to the *Philosophical Remarks*, which stresses his mistrust of scientific and technological progress, and the great distance between scientific philosophy and Wittgenstein's own, suggests a reading on which the many who have preceded him are the generations from which he received his cultural inheritance. But the inheritance in question is also the language we speak, and the ways in which it is both the source of philosophical problems and the source of their solution, a prominent theme throughout Wittgenstein's writing. There is a close connection here with the way in which Wittgenstein speaks of philosophy as a "struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by means of language," (*Philosophical Investigations* §109) a construction that invites us to consider language both as the means of bewitchment and of struggle against bewitchment. This ambiguity is present in Augustine's Latin, and especially so when it is quoted out of context, for *praestruxerant*, the word that Sheed quite naturally translates as "built," can also mean "blocked."

Given the amount of thought Wittgenstein clearly gave to the question of how best to start, and given his intimate acquaintance with Augustine, is it not much more likely that he expected the reader to be initially impressed by the reading offered in §1b, but then come to see its limitations? These are multiple: §1b is not only a very partial description of what Augustine says, and the picture that it does sketch is only a first example of how we can go wrong in philosophy, not the outline of an overarching "big picture." After all, in §1c and §2a, Wittgenstein suggests that it can help us to understand the over-simple conception of language attributed to Augustine in §1b if we see it, not as a misdescription of our language, but rather as a description of a language simpler than our own. Surely Wittgenstein expected the careful reader to eventually see that §1b is an over-simple, one-sided and provocative reading of §1a. Yet many of Wittgenstein's readers have either, like Hintikka or Hacker, taken §1b to be an unproblematic exposition of what Augustine says or presupposes or, like Kenny, as proof that Wittgenstein missed Augustine's point.

Wittgenstein's opening words, like Nestroy's and Augustine's, are not as simple as they seem. Like the motto, they offer orientation in several different directions. Clearly, they do introduce us to a family of views about how language is learned, and what words mean, that will be Wittgenstein's principal target in the first 64 sections of the book. Along these lines, Anscombe observes that the "main purpose" of the opening of the *Investigations* is negative, namely

to persuade us not to look at the connection between a word and its meaning either as set up or as explained by (a) ostensive definition, or (b) by association, or (c) by mental pictures, or (d) by experiences characteristic of meaning one thing rather than another, or (e) by a general relation of reference or naming or designation or signifying which has (logically) different kinds of objects as its terms in different cases. (Anscombe 1981, 154.)

However, while there is a good deal of argument along these lines in the sections that follow, much of it, like §1b, is directed at positions that are remarkably naïve. Baker and Hacker's explanation of this is that the real target is the big picture that lies behind the

particular topics that are discussed. There is something right about this: Wittgenstein is trying to get at the preconceptions and unexamined assumptions that lead philosophers to argue as they do. However, Wittgenstein does not see those preconceptions as something else, over and above these particular lines of argument, along the lines of the "Augustinian picture," the true motives hidden behind what philosophers say and do, but rather as present in the moves that begin philosophical reflection. For this reason he begins with particular examples of deceptively simple philosophical arguments, of the kind that are more likely to come up in a classroom discussion than a philosophical article or book, yet his main aim is not so much to show that they are wrong, as to get us to think about what is involved in beginning to look for a philosophical account of language and meaning. As Robert Fogelin puts it, "for the most part the work is not a criticism of the results of philosophizing, but an interrogation of its source" (1976, 97–98).

This question about the character of Wittgenstein's critique of philosophy, in turn, is connected with the question of what Wittgenstein means by saying that past philosophy is nonsense. On Hacker's reading, Wittgenstein appeals to the grammar of our language to show that what philosophers say makes no sense. While it is true that there is a strand in the book's dialogue – Cavell's "voice of correctness" – that does make use of grammar in just this way, I take it that the point of the book is not to get us to cheer on this side of the debate. Rather, to say that philosophy is nonsense is just to say that it falls apart when we try to make sense of it:

The results of philosophy are the discovery of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running up against the limits of language. These bumps make us see the value of this discovery. (*Philosophical Investigations* § 119, my translation.)

But this must emerge out of the reader's involvement in the dialogue of the *Philosophical Investigations*, our temptation into, attraction toward, philosophical theorizing, and our coming to see that it doesn't work in particular cases, rather than as the message that any one voice in the dialogue is conveying.

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