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TO BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING:

WITTGENSTEIN AND THE PROBLEM OF METAPHYSICS

Michael R. Smith, Jr.

Submitted to the faculty of
The Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts
in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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Accepted by the faculty of the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

George Smith, Ph.D.

Doctoral Committee

Simonetta Moro, Ph.D.

Sigrid Hackenberg, Ph.D.

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It is *so difficult* to find the beginning. Or, better: it is *difficult to begin* at the beginning. And not try to go further back.

–LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *On Certainty*

Dedicated to the memory of my grandfather.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Giving thanks is at once a humbling and precarious activity. Humbling because one realizes how little one can achieve on one's own; precarious because one cannot possibly acknowledge all those who deserve one's recognition.

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ABSTRACT:

Michael R. Smith, Jr.

TO BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING:
WITTGENSTEIN AND THE PROBLEM OF METAPHYSICS

This text is concerned with the exposition and interpretation of the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein in light of what is here called the "problem of metaphysics." This problem is based on the claim that philosophers throughout history have approached metaphysics from one of two broadly flawed positions. Firstly, there are those who have tended towards the belief that various metaphysical suppositions are self-evidently true. Secondly, there are those who have attempted to deny the possibility of metaphysics altogether by an appeal to various "non-metaphysical" methodologies. The first of these assumptions is rejected based on the conclusion that any self-evident truth requires the universal assent of everyone, which *prima facie* has never happened. The second of these assumptions is likewise rejected for the reason that every methodology—anti-metaphysical or not—suggests a metaphysics. As this relates to Wittgenstein, it will be seen that we can read his philosophical development as simultaneously encompassing both of these disparate views. These problems are dissolved, however, in much of the work that Wittgenstein did in the last years of his life, especially in *On Certainty*. There he dismisses the possibility of absolute certainty while acknowledging that some concepts must be fixed in place in order for any description of the world to be possible at all. The question then arises:

How do we decide between various possible modes of description? The answer, it will be suggested, is that every mode of description is predicated on an aesthetic predilection alone. This inclination can be given no further justification, nor can it be described. It simply admits that we are free to choose whatever metaphysical construct we see fit and that there is no reason to adopt one metaphysical supposition as opposed to another save our aesthetic proclivity for one thing and not another.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction:
The Problem of Metaphysics 1

Chapter 1:
Metaphysics and Silence 38

Chapter 2:
Metaphysics and the Ordinary 89

Chapter 3:
Metaphysics and Certainty 143

Chapter 4:
Metaphysics, Aesthetics, and Ethics 182

Chapter 5:
The Metaphysical Subject and the Work of Art 222

Bibliography 300

Notes 306

INTRODUCTION:
The Problem of Metaphysics

> Around the hero everything becomes a tragedy; around the demigod everything becomes a satyr-play; and around God everything becomes—what? perhaps a 'world'?
>
> –FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *Beyond Good and Evil*

> "Here I have arrived at a foundation of all my beliefs." "This position I will *hold*!" But isn't that, precisely, only because I am completely *convinced* of it?—What is 'being completely convinced' like?
>
> –LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *On Certainty*

A good deal of what follows in this text will depend on two central philosophical voices. The first, and most prominently featured of these will be that of Ludwig Wittgenstein, about whom much will be said in the proceeding pages. The second of these philosophical voices belongs to Friedrich Nietzsche, featured less prominently in terms of exposition, but no less centrally. Two concepts of Nietzsche's in particular will figure most importantly here. The first of these is the "metaphysics of art" which Nietzsche describes in *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*; and the second is the concept of "perspectivism," which informs a good deal of Nietzsche's philosophical writings, although it is one that he rarely discussed directly.

Both of these notions will figure prominently here, especially in regards to one of the central themes of this text: the "problem of metaphysics." This problem is, in many respects, related to the "problem of the criterion" in epistemology. Whereas the latter must contend with questions such as "What do

we know?" and "How do we know it?" the former deals with the separate but related questions, "What is the fundamental basis of our knowledge?" and "How do we discover what it is?" Philosophers have often been tempted to answer these questions by resorting to the claim that some principles are self-evidently known to our intuition because if there were no such principles then we would be faced with the likely prospect of an infinite regress. The problem with such "self-evident" metaphysical principles is that they resist the kind of universal agreement that seem to be required of them. This then is one aspect of the problem of metaphysics: the inability to give indubitable first principles coupled with the desire to avoid regress. It should also be stressed that this problem is fundamentally inseparable from the problem of the criterion. Every principle of metaphysics is always subject to epistemological consideration. Whenever any principle is advanced as fundamental, we must always ask how it is that we know it is fundamental. Regardless of how one chooses to answer this question, it is important to point out that any treatment of metaphysics must also be a treatment of epistemology. What follows is no exception.

The "problem of metaphysics"—unlike the "problem of the criterion"—is not a phrase widely used in philosophical parlance. It is used, however, by Hartley Burr Alexander in his dissertation of 1902, *The Problem of Metaphysics and the Meaning of Metaphysical Explanation: An Essay in Definitions*. The "problem of metaphysics," as he sees it,

> May be variously stated: it may be a quest for the essence of things, or for a reality within things themselves, or for their truth. But in every case the real object of the inquiry is the discovery of a

> ground or *raison d'être which shall seem to us a sufficient reason why reality is what it is.* Such a ground . . . can only be satisfying when it embodies a motive or a purpose intelligible to us in terms of our motives and our purposes. It is only as revealing design that we consider any action to be reasonable. . . . The problem of metaphysics is thus *par excellence* the problem of teleology.[1]

While we will be content with Alexander's summation of the problem of metaphysics as the inquiry into why reality is what it is, we will differ from him by insisting that metaphysics can in no way be intelligible to us in terms of our motives or purposes. In fact, we will go so far as to suggest that metaphysics is what makes intelligibility possible and as such cannot be intelligible itself. Thus, instead of characterizing the "problem of metaphysics" as "the problem of teleology" *par excellence*, we will prefer to designate it as "the problem of aesthetics."

The term "aesthetics," as it is here being used, has a very specific and somewhat untraditional meaning. It is, first and foremost, used as the designation for the activity of selection without sufficient reason. As such, it is distinct from all conceptions of aesthetics which might pre-determinedly fix its meaning in place. It is a term that we here employ as a stand in for undecidability, i.e., the utter and absolute freedom to change any precept without the encumbrance of justification. In this respect, it bears some resemblance to the judgment of taste, because, as Kant maintains, "There can be no objective rule of taste that would determine what is beautiful through concepts."[2] This lack of an objective rule is called "aesthetic" by Kant because its "determining ground cannot be other than

subjective."[3] Our own use of the word "aesthetic" will preserve this essential subjective feature.

This is key, because, as we will maintain, the problem of metaphysics is typified by the maxim: everything can be otherwise than it is. That is to say, in other words, that there can be no such thing as a self-evidently true or certain principle of metaphysics which can be determined according to an objectively universal rule. Our maxim of metaphysics is, thus formulated, distinctly non-Kantian, and to a large extent, runs contrary to the majority of the Western metaphysical tradition which has valued—by and large—truth, certainty, and objectivity above all else. Our characterization of metaphysics distinguishes itself by being primarily axiomatic, that is to say, it is concerned with the business of defining ones terms. If we accept this characterization it soon becomes clear that the one thing metaphysics cannot itself be about is "the Truth" because it is the criterion by which we determine what counts as truth in any given situation. Definitions cannot be analyzed according to a truth function, nor can they be substantiated simply by making an appeal to self-evidence. The only ground on which a definition can be placed is our willingness to believe in it without reservation. This "belief without reservation" we will term "aesthetic" because it is subjective and cannot be determined in accordance with an objective rule.

Our central claim can thus be summed up as follows: every metaphysical proposition is fundamentally definitional and as such is aesthetic because there is no *a priori* mandate which requires our belief in the truth of any definition. Consequently, the problem of metaphysics—which seeks to discover the *raison*

d'être for why things are as they are—can also fall under the alternative heading: "the problem of aesthetics." In the very attempt to determine why it is that things are this way instead of that way, we have already betrayed the subjectivity of our position. Since there is no metaphysical principle which commands our obedience, we are thrust into a position of limitless freedom, on the one hand, and ultimate responsibility, on the other. This freedom is the subjective freedom to choose amongst innumerable metaphysical axioms coupled with the responsibility for selecting amongst them. One could call this responsibility the impossibility of the non-choice. Collectively, we will assign the name of "aesthetic choice," or, alternatively, "aesthetic preference," to this "imperative of freedom."

First and foremost, the aesthetics of choice does not posit any axiom of metaphysics as necessarily and universally true. This is because judgments of taste, as Kant has frequently reminded us, are only subjectively universal and not objectively so. There is, consequently, no such thing as a self-evident axiom of metaphysics. The only substantiation such axioms can be granted is that of aesthetic preference. Thus, a theory of metaphysics which predicates itself on aesthetics implicitly leaves the door open to every possibility. We can either choose to accept or reject any axiom of metaphysics, but we cannot leverage any proof for our choice save for our willingness to believe in it. According to this conception, aesthetic choice is—to borrow William James' phrase—the "will to believe" in any supposition that, both in principle and practice, cannot be proven either true or false, but can only be accepted or rejected. It is, to state the matter in James words, a "justification *of* faith, a defense of our right to adopt a believing

attitude in religious matters, in spite of the fact that our merely logical intellect may not have been coerced."[4] Such a lack of coercion is in fact the very thing we are denying to metaphysics, and consequently, we are obliged to offer a similar defense of our right to adopt a believing attitude in metaphysical matters as well.

After the fashion of James, we could call our "aesthetics of choice" a kind of "radical empiricism," in as much as it regards "its most assured conclusions concerning matters of fact as hypotheses liable to modification in the course of future experience."[5] This aesthetics of choice regards no principle "as something with which all experience has got to square."[6] Instead, it regards every dogmatism as a denial of freedom and treats every alternative as concomitant with "one's general vision of the probable."[7] Given that each of us has a generally divergent vision of what is probable and what is not, it would be presumptuous to assume that any one view point may be established that could simultaneously account for every possible one. It is even more presumptuous to assume that we are required to do so. We must, in other words, leave all "matters of fact" open to the possibility of revision in the due course of new experiences. Doing so serves to demonstrate the extent to which past and present experiences are open to continual interpretation. As such, the aesthetics of choice specifically denies us the ability, *a priori*, to demarcate what is true objectively from what is true subjectively. In the end, we can only admit that truth is truth, only insofar as it is true for someone at some particular point in time, at some particular place in the world, according to some predetermined set of criteria.

While a metaphysics predicated on an aesthetics of choice is implicitly pluralistic, it cannot, without violating its own principles, deny the possibility of monism. A thoroughly pluralistic view of the universe, which admits to the viability of a multitude of various conceptions of existence, must also admit that monism is a concept of as much verisimilitude as any other, given that we are willing to ascribe to its tenets. In any given case, it is this willingness to believe that enables us to know "the truth," and thus belief can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Belief makes truth possible, and without it, truth would be a nonexistent concept. The truths of metaphysics, insofar as they are anything, are in each respect only something in relation to someone, hence their fundamentally aesthetic nature. The will to believe—which is simply the acknowledgment that all justification is ultimately predicated on a baseless supposition—can hang existence upon any thread it so chooses, and in so doing, it creates "existence" itself in the process. Whatever metaphysical truths may be, they are not divined, but contrived by us. Whatever our convictions may be, the act of believing itself can fulfill the truth conditions that our convictions demand. Philosophy cannot be an inquiry into essences or truths or ideals (*causa sui*), and, for that matter, philosophy is only an "inquiry" if we understand by that term the "invention" that inquiry breeds, which is in all instances a form of aesthetic invention. Philosophy creates truth, and this happens, as Nietzsche notes (and here he prefigures James), "As soon as ever a philosophy begins to believe in itself. It always creates the world in its own image; it cannot do otherwise; philosophy is this tyrannical

impulse itself, the most spiritual Will to Power, the will to 'creation of the world,' the will to causa prima."[8]

In every sense of the word, the aesthetics of choice is the expression of the will to *causa prima*. It is, in other words, the embodiment of "master morality," the morality of the "noble man," who "feels *himself* to be the determiner of values, . . . he himself is the one to first confer honour on a thing, he *creates values*. He honours everything which he knows pertains to himself: a morality like this is self-glorification."[9] Above all else, the morality of the master expresses the axiom: "honor thyself as creator and arbiter of values." It is the "master" that values, as an end in itself, the freedom to discharge the will to power, which we will regard as fundamentally interrelated to the concept of aesthetic choice, insofar as it is subjective and not constricted by any outside dictates. The will to power is, we might add, an inherently creative activity which regards invention as the first undertaking of metaphysics. "The powerful are the ones who *understand* how to honour, it is their art, their realm of invention."[10] This art "is the highest human task, the true metaphysical activity,"[11] which does not seek to become "an imitation of nature but its metaphysical supplement, raised up beside it in order to overcome it."[12]

It is the formulation of such a "metaphysics of art" that we will take to be the primary end of the aesthetics of choice, without which we would be incapable of conceiving truth and falsity. Our metaphysics of art must also recognize that there can be no ultimate certitude at the foundation of our knowledge which would compel the universal belief of everyone. The only "mandate" which

dictates our aesthetic choice is that of freedom: you are free to choose but choose you must. This injunction of choice entreats us to the realization that no *a priori* justification can be given except one that is predicated on the whim of our aesthetic fancy. It is in this sense that metaphysics is not so much a "philosophy" or a "science" as it is an "art." In all matters metaphysical, let us be artists, for you will no doubt accept or reject any axiom of metaphysics according to your own aesthetic sensibilities. Yes, we could call the aesthetics of choice a kind of "faith," but not a faith in what is given, but rather a faith in what might be. In James' words, "There are, then, cases where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming."[13]

The current study, as it is thus conceived, concerns itself not only with the topics of aesthetic choice and the metaphysics of art, but also, and more broadly with the nature of metaphysics in general. We will thus concern ourselves with two subsequent questions. The first of these is also the largest: "What is metaphysics?" (a question that Heidegger has already asked). The second being, somewhat more specifically, "Can we eliminate metaphysics once we have discovered what it is?" It will no doubt be noticed that the questions as they are here put forward lead us straight away into the heart of the problem itself. To inquire into the nature of metaphysics already puts us in a position that is itself undeniably metaphysical. An inquiry into metaphysics already assumes a metaphysics on which the inquiry is founded and thus the second question "Can we eliminate metaphysics?" is answered before it can even be asked. We are inescapably bound to metaphysics, but the problem of metaphysics, though it is in

the widest sense framed by the questions above, is characterized by a more troubling difficulty. Even if we admit to the indispensability of metaphysics, in the sense that any inquiry is structured by any number of metaphysical assumptions and definitions, what are we to make of such queries that not only delve into the nature of metaphysics but do so via the implementation of metaphysics? Or to state the question more directly: How is it possible to use metaphysics to inquire into metaphysics?

In answering this question, we are seemingly faced with two possible answers. Either metaphysics is incapable of discovering itself from within, in which case we would need a second-order "meta-metaphysics" that stands outside of metaphysics. Or, metaphysics must be capable of a kind of self-evaluation that does not require any second-order description whatsoever. The problem with the former option is that we are quite obviously faced with what would quickly become a series of metaphysical explanations *ad infinitum*. The problem with the latter option is that we must take the assertion that metaphysics is discoverable to itself purely on faith. Or, if we are so inclined, we may assert that certain metaphysical propositions are self-evident or incorrigible and thus need no further explanation. Of course, if we pay attention to history, what counts as "self-evident" has a curious way of evolving with time and ideology. Descartes, for instance, believed with absolute certainty that the "proposition, *I am*, *I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind,"[14] because he could "clearly and distinctly" perceive its truth. Is it not odd that there can be such dissent over what can be clearly and distinctly perceived? The fact

that Descartes received, in his day, so many objections and replies to his meditations, let alone the copious number that have since been advanced, should tip off our suspicions immediately. The overall point is this: concerning any matter which is truly incorrigible, it must be logically impossible for dissent to occur. Self-evidence cannot stand for any one person alone. It must stand for everyone and for eternity. Or as Wittgenstein puts it,

> If there were theses in philosophy, they would have to be put such that they do not give rise to disputes. For they would have to be put in such a way that everyone would say, Oh yes, that is of course obvious. As long as there is a possibility of having different opinions and disputing about a question, this indicates that things have not yet been expressed clearly enough. Once a perfectly clear formulation – ultimate clarity – has been reached, there can be no second thoughts or reluctance any more.[15]

Wittgenstein's above comments are all the more pertinent given the fact that he at one time considered the theses of the *Tractatus* to be "unassailable and definitive."[16] His later repudiation of the *possibility* of theses in philosophy can in part be seen as indicative of his own belief that Russell, Frege and the Logical Positivists fundamentally misunderstood the *Tractatus*, a sentiment which he relates to Russell in a letter dated June 12, 1919. It is "galling to think that no one will understand it,"[17] Wittgenstein laments. It is also worth noting that Wittgenstein anticipates that his book will be misinterpreted, stating in the 1918 introduction to the *Tractatus*, "Perhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it."[18] The fact that so few did understand the book at its conception is no doubt indicative not only of the novelty of the *Tractatus*, but its profundity as well. One

cannot help wondering why it is that the *Tractatus* suffered such misinterpretations if in fact it does contain the unassailable truth as Wittgenstein believed it did. It took Wittgenstein many years of laborious thought to arrive at the propositions of the *Tractatus*, and no doubt a lesser mind would not have been up to the task, but once he had arrived at them—more importantly: once he had shown others how to arrive at them—his assumption seems to have been that everyone would necessarily see them as self-evidently true as well. Russell, for one, was not entirely convinced of their truth, as he made clear in his own introduction to the *Tractatus*. "As one with a long experience of the difficulties of logic and of the deceptiveness of theories which seem irrefutable, I find myself unable to be sure of the rightness of a theory, merely on the ground that I cannot see any point on which it is wrong."[19] The concern that Russell expresses here is important, for if the *Tractatus* does indeed contain the irrefutable truth then it ought to be impossible to raise any objection to it at all, even Russell's relatively minor one.

A subsequent problem to the ones outlined above is that of "self-referential incoherence." There are many famous examples of this problem throughout the history of Western philosophy. Plato's objection against the relativism of Protagoras in section 171a of the *Theaetetus*,[20] known as the *peritropê,* or the "table-turning" argument, is a variation of it, and related to it are the liar's paradox and what has come to be known as Russell's paradox. In general these paradoxes all derive from an assertion, that when applied to itself, contradicts itself. For the statement "all truth is relative" to be true, the statement

"all truth is relative" must be true for everyone and thus truth cannot be relative (or at the very least there must be one eternal truth). Our concern with the problem of self-reference is here limited more specifically to instances where a metaphysical proposition is used to deny the impossibility of metaphysics. In modernity, this is perhaps best exhibited by the Logical Positivists. Rudolf Carnap, for instance, asserted that "in the domain of metaphysics, including all philosophy of value and normative theory, logical analysis yields the negative results that the alleged statements in this domain are entirely meaningless. Therewith a radical elimination of metaphysics is attained, which was not yet possible from the earlier antimetaphysical standpoints."[21] The basis of Carnap's assertion is, as he puts it, due to the fact that "the meaning of a word is determined by its criterion of application (in other words: by the relations of deducibility entered into by its elementary sentence-form, by its truth-conditions, by the method of its verification), the stipulation of the criterion takes away one's freedom to decide what one wishes to 'mean' by the word."[22] It is also well known that Russell distinguished between "knowledge by acquaintance" and "knowledge by description,"[23] which resembles in the main what Carnap refers to when he states that "every word of the language is reduced to other words and finally to the words which occur in the so-called 'observation sentences' or 'protocol sentences.'"[24] Essentially, all this is to say that where Carnap is concerned, meaning is stipulated by its verification via empirical criteria and the logical syntax of language in which our observations are conveyed.

The trouble with Carnap's conception of meaning is that it commits the very metaphysical offense that it purports to radically eliminate. We are inclined to ask, albeit rhetorically, "Is not Carnap doing metaphysics?" In defining how words gain their meaning he is undertaking a mode of philosophical inquiry that is not altogether dissimilar to the one which Plato used to derive his doctrine of the Forms. Which is not to say that Carnap's and Plato's conceptions of meaning do not differ greatly, for it is quite certain that they do. However, in attempting to define what meaning is, Carnap is continuing what is a long tradition in metaphysics, one in which Plato has been firmly entrenched for some two and a half millennia. So, how is it possible that Carnap and the Logical Positivists disposed of metaphysics when metaphysics is implicit in their own strategy? In his article, "The Metaphysics of Logical Positivism," Feibleman attempts to answer something very similar to this question. According to his suggestion, "Logical positivism mistakenly identifies all metaphysics with (a) a transcendental metaphysics, and (b) an ostensive and explicit metaphysics."[25] This confusion, if Feibleman is correct, would explain why Carnap fails to realize that his critique of metaphysics is undeniably self-referentially incoherent. Carnap, by equating metaphysics in general with transcendental metaphysics superficially appears to avoid contradiction. However, he fails to see that his own theory implicitly suggests a metaphysics, because it is not "ostensive or explicit" in the sense that it openly purports to "be about" metaphysics. Which is to say, as Feibleman does, that

> Carnap wants, for instance, the position of nominalism without the term "nominalism." That is, he wants the anti-metaphysical position implicit in nominalism, but he does not want it to be called nominalism. In this school, ontology is an ugly epithet, to be reserved for each wing to hurl against the other. He recoils with some horror at the prospect that if variables are to be interpreted realistically instead of nominalistically, physics would imply some degree of Platonic philosophy.[26]

For all intents and purposes, "Logical positivism as it stands contains statements of a metaphysical character. 'Metaphysics is nonsense' is metaphysics."[27]

It should come as no surprise in regards to what Carnap terms "metaphysical pseudo-statements"[28] that Heidegger is touted as the practitioner par excellence of such grievances against language. As noted by Martin Puchner,

> Carnap's essay tries to exemplify what it means to conduct a logical analysis of language through a critique of Heidegger's *What is Metaphysics* (1929). Whatever one might think about Heidegger's philosophy, Carnap's text is less an argued critique than a polemic, for is [*sic*] does not even pretend to reconstruct the concerns and arguments of Heidegger's text, of which it analyzes only a single paragraph. Rather, the logical analysis of language, here, presents itself as a weapon with which one can fire almost randomly at so-called metaphysical sentences.[29]

The polemics that Puchner points to in Carnap's essay are of course clearly based on the ideological supremacy of the scientific world view that dominated much of the early twentieth century intellectual landscape, but this is not necessarily an objection against Carnap per se. Heidegger, after all, was embroiled in his own sort of ideological struggle for nothing short of a redefinition of the entire Western tradition of ontology. The question then becomes, "Can metaphysics be practiced without polemics?" Much of what follows will be devoted to answering

this question in the negative. We cannot do without metaphysics, nor can we do without the fact that at its core, metaphysics is nothing but strongly asserted opinion. This contention (polemic as it is) will comprise a significant component of our focus. Suffice it to say, for now, the attempt will be made to show that metaphysics necessarily forms the basis of all knowledge and that metaphysics itself can have no further basis besides what would be referred to in philosophical parlance as "mere opinion."

In a 1969 article entitled "How is Non-Metaphysics Possible?," John O. Nelson poignantly asserts "that every-one who uses a language is in effect engaged in metaphysics, for he is expressing metaphysical theses."[30] His suggestion is well taken, given some of the difficulties pointed out with Carnap's criterion of meaningfulness above. To use a language is to adopt some metaphysical assumption as to how words get their meaning, even if it is only implicitly suggested. Nelson's distinction between "live" and "dead" metaphysics[31] is a useful metaphor to keep in mind here. Not only does he seem to derive the distinction from William James, but the difference between the two bear similarities to what Feibleman referred to as explicit and implicit metaphysics. In the main, Nelson seems correct, save that near the end of his article he quickly falls into what Feibleman calls "an unbridled rational dogmatism or . . . uncontrolled empirical scepticism."[32] Clearly Nelson means his question, "How is non-metaphysics possible?" in a strictly rhetorical sense, for according to him, if we call on Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*,

> We see, then, that ordinary discourse can exist without metaphysics, but metaphysics cannot exist without ordinary discourse. The substance of metaphysics is provided by ordinary discourse . . . we err by supposing that because the substance of metaphysics is at least indirectly the substance of ordinary discourse and because this substance is neither given empirically or logically (but is rather the basis for empirical observation and logical intuition) ordinary discourse must be metaphysics.[33]

The problem with Nelson's assertion, as is intimated by Feibleman, is that the dogmatic ascription to ordinary discourse (which smacks of uncontrolled empirical skepticism) is somehow going to absolve us of our metaphysical burdens, but the assertion, "there is only what is ordinary" falls far outside of almost all ordinary usage, and is thus a metaphysical assertion. There can be no proof of this statement other than a fervent belief that it must be so. The maxim, "look to what is ordinary" is not a proof. At best, it is a methodology, which is to say that it is a form of metaphysics, for a methodology is simply a systematization of a set of non-provable metaphysical assumptions that guide how an inquiry should be undertaken. The dismissal of the possibility of metaphysics is essentially to dismiss the possibility of any method of inquiry whatsoever. To dispose with metaphysics is to dispose with definitions, and definitions are the backbone of any methodology. What, for instance, constitutes "ordinariness?" What constitutes "extraordinariness?" We can conclude nothing from such terms until we have defined what we mean by them, and if we have defined our terms properly we will have done so with the realization that all proofs must end somewhere. Beyond that, we must proceed on our assumptions alone.

The problem of metaphysics is, by and large, the problem of Western philosophy in general, insofar as both have been characterized by the search for the indubitable and unalterable truth at the heart of existence. This topic, large as it is, will comprise one of the main focal points of this text. The inevitable failure with which this inquiry has been met is also a point of importance. It is, in the broadest possible sense, one important aspect of the problem of metaphysics and is typified by two fervently opposed poles. The first of these is the belief that—given enough time—philosophy might reach some sort of eternal truth. Antithetical to this belief is the all too real possibility that this goal might turn out to be unattainable—despite the due course of time and our best efforts. This aspect of the problem of metaphysics, therefore, is implicitly related to a good deal of Wittgenstein's philosophical work. In the *Tractatus*, for example, he attempts to present a theory of how language stands in relation to the world which it represents. The "picture theory," as it is known, declares that for propositions to have a sense, they must mirror the logical form of that for which they stand. In this very strict conception of meaning, language is defined as what can be said and has a sense (i.e., what can be thought) and that which cannot be said and is senseless (i.e., what cannot be thought).

The picture theory, as Wittgenstein conceived it, quickly runs into many self-referential inconsistencies, for it falls outside of what itself construes as "meaningful language." Wittgenstein no doubt realized this and attempted to avoid the self-referential incoherence by making a distinction between what can be said and what can be shown. Whether he was successful in doing so is most

certainly up for debate, and given his own disillusionment with his early philosophy there is good reason for us to be hesitant to accept this distinction. The second rhetorical device that Wittgenstein employs is the "metaphor of the ladder," which asks us to imagine the propositions of the *Tractatus* as "steps" which allow us to transcend the limitations of the picture theory. In so doing we are meant to see that the *Tractatus* is, strictly speaking, nonsense, but useful nonsense nonetheless. It is no doubt true that at one level this metaphor allows us to avoid the inherent self-referential incoherence of the picture theory, but then again, there seems to be very little reason for us to implicitly accept this metaphor save that it allows us to escape the inconsistency that is embedded within the picture theory.

In the years after he composed the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein abandoned philosophy altogether, which is not surprising considering that if he sincerely meant, as he states in the preface, that he had believed himself "to have found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems."[34] One cannot help but notice that these problems are mostly of a metaphysical nature. The unbending belief in logic, the picture theory of language that develops from that belief, and the mysticism that is the hallmark of the final passages of the *Tractatus*, are all metaphysical responses to metaphysical problems, even though Wittgenstein deployed his early philosophy as a tool to dispatch those very same problems. After his hiatus from philosophy, Wittgenstein, of course, would later find that he was mistaken on several essential points, the picture theory not the least of them. In the preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*, dated 1945, Wittgenstein wrote,

"For since I began to occupy myself with philosophy again, sixteen years ago, I could not but recognize grave mistakes in what I set out in that first book."[35] This realization would, in part, herald his return to Cambridge in 1929 where he began to work out a new approach to the problems that the *Tractatus* had left unresolved. The *Philosophical Investigations* represents the culmination of much of that effort and was never published during Wittgenstein's lifetime. This is due mainly to Wittgenstein's continuous dissatisfaction with his many attempts at putting together a cohesive work. In actuality, he had, more than once, secured publication of his work only to later withdraw it.[36] His final words in the preface to the *Investigations* are something of a strange admission, considering the longevity and profundity of the book's influence. "I should have liked to produce a good book. It has not turned out that way, but the time is past in which I could improve it."[37]

Much is made of the many points of departure between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*. The difference between the respective theories of meaning in each book stands as the most potent example of what is a somewhat superficially stark contrast between the two. The picture theory of the *Tractatus* and the language-games of the *Investigations* offer widely divergent descriptions of how words get their meanings. This is undeniably true, but beyond this difference, which much of the orthodox interpretation of Wittgenstein's work dwells on, there are many startling similarities between his early and late work. Consider his overtly staunch, anti-metaphysical stance in the *Tractatus* and the self-referentially incoherent nature of that stance. Now consider the fact that much the

same problem presents itself in the *Investigations*. In that work, Wittgenstein wishes to draw our attention to the varied and multi-faceted nature and usages of language. Often dubbed as an instantiation or a precursor to the ordinary language philosophy that dominated much of the mid-twentieth century analytic tradition, the *Investigations* implores us to look at how language *is* used, not to think about how it *ought* to be used. Just as the *Tractatus* sought to dispatch with the very same transcendental metaphysics that Feibleman points to, the *Investigations* also attempts to rid philosophy of metaphysics, especially of the idealistic sort. Indeed, in both the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein makes little if any distinction between transcendental or ideal metaphysics and metaphysics in general, just as Feibleman had accused the Positivists of doing.

This general lack of distinction leads Wittgenstein to make much the same sort of error in the *Investigations* as he does in the *Tractatus*. Implicit within Wittgenstein's later philosophy is a metaphysical claim that equates meaning with how words are ordinarily used. This doctrine, as it is developed in the *Investigations*, is often seen by Wittgenstein's interpreters as one of his chief anti-metaphysical arguments. While it is true that there are many compelling points why we ought to at least doubt the validity of any idealistic conceptions of language, it does not, nor could it, reject as meaningless all metaphysical claims. Even though Wittgenstein's appeal to the ordinary seems to effectively rid philosophy of the problem of metaphysics, as he failed to do in the *Tractatus*, there is a self-referential incoherence buried in this solution as well. Implicit in Wittgenstein's ruminations on the ordinary is a metaphysical methodology which

we might call "empirical descriptivism." The self-reference paradox of the *Investigations* occurs because "looking and describing" as a criterion of truth cannot account for its own truthfulness. We cannot therefore "know" whether Wittgenstein's methodology is correct because to "know" something only "means" something when it is considered within a given context, which is just another way of saying that the binary distinction between "truth as certain knowledge" and "falsity as mere opinion" can only mean something when we define truth and falsity as such. To ask whether the definitions of truth and falsity are either true or false is to apply the calculus of truth functions before their terms have been defined. There can be no ultimate foundations to any metaphysical claim, but this will only trouble us if we hold to the belief that foundations equate to certainty. This, it must be maintained, is not a belief which we must necessarily hold.

There is however, at least one "belief" which we are simply incapable of discarding. In regards to how we describe the metaphysical foundations of any methodology, inquiry, philosophical system or "form of life," as Wittgenstein calls it, we are always faced with a decision that we must make. If there can be no ultimate justification for our metaphysical definitions, if our beliefs, and the actions that follow from them, are contingent only and not necessary, then we must ask ourselves why it is we choose one definition over another, one belief over another, or one metaphysical construct over another. There can be no answer to this question, but nevertheless we must choose if we are to move forward. There is nothing before the choice. Nor can there be such a thing as a

non-choice, for one must choose not to choose. If there can be no basis for any choice and an irrevocable need to choose, how is it that choices are made at all? The answer is deceptively simple: we choose without reason, but the act of our choosing one thing over another establishes a preferential hierarchy in the world. In the broadest possible sense, all of our knowledge is based on the necessity of choice and the preference that our decisions bear out, which is to say, again in the broadest possible manner, that the act of choosing is essentially aesthetic in nature. This is the proposed solution to what has been described as the problem of metaphysics, and more specifically, the problem of self-referential incoherence as it is related to the problem of metaphysics. The following chapters will seek to explicate this argument more fully through the lens of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

There is no doubt that a copiously rich literature of interpretation already exists on Wittgenstein. This presents its challenges and benefits. On the one hand, it may be difficult to find a novel problematic on which to base a thesis. After all, much of what *can* be written on Wittgenstein probably *has*. On the other hand, when it is the case that a philosophical discourse reaches the level of received orthodoxy, as Wittgenstein's has, there is an inherent danger that the codification of that discourse may become calcified and resistant to alternate and potentially fruitful modes of interpretation. Besides this, there are several fields of interest that may be further specified within the broader context of Wittgenstein's philosophy. These include the relationship between his early and his late philosophy, the relationship of his philosophical method to the Analytic

and Continental traditions, and the implications of his work for metaphysics, all of which we will touch on to a greater or lesser extent.

The problems that stem from Wittgenstein's philosophy are in part due to the fact that so few philosophers resist categorization more staunchly than he does, and there are still fewer who are claimed by more competing philosophical camps than he is. It is a most telling fact that his influence is seen both in the Analytic and Continental traditions alike (less so in the latter, but not negligibly so), which is odd when one considers the gulf between the two, and even stranger that any one philosopher could be placed so comfortably on both sides of that great intellectual divide. He has, for example, influenced thinkers as diverse as A. J. Ayer and Jean-François Lyotard. One of the reasons which might account for the wide net that Wittgenstein has cast in the corpus of Western philosophy might be a result of the litany of divergent thinkers that influenced him; such as Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Tolstoy, Russell and Frege, to name but a few. Wittgenstein's varied interests are thus all too evident in the equally varied subjects that he treats, such as logic, language, meaning, epistemology, ontology, mathematics, psychology, mind, aesthetics and ethics.

These topics, amongst others, will occupy us, in one form or another, for the remainder of this text. Chapters one through three will specifically concentrate on Wittgenstein's most important philosophical texts with the intent of reading them for their metaphysical implications and the problem of self-referential incoherence that follows from those metaphysical implications. The topic of chapter one will be Wittgenstein's early philosophy, from 1911, when he

first arrived at Cambridge to 1918 when he completed the *Tractatus*. Chapter two will be devoted to the work Wittgenstein did upon his return to Cambridge and philosophy in 1929 up until 1947 when he resigned his professorship there, with particular attention being paid to the *Philosophical Investigations*. Chapter three will be comprised of a reading of his work during the last years of his life, especially the notes that would later be published as *On Certainty*.

The main contention throughout these three chapters will be that the problem of metaphysics is a dominant force in much of Wittgenstein's work. His thoughts in the *Tractatus* represent an early attempt to expel metaphysics from philosophy, and by extension, to solve the problems of philosophy once and for all. Wittgenstein's famous "picture theory" of language sought to set the criteria by which this would be done. The problem, of course, is that the picture theory fails to meet its own criteria of meaningfulness, and is thus self-referentially incoherent. To be sure, this is a problem that Wittgenstein obviously realized and thus he employed the distinction between "showing" and "saying" as a means to avoid this inconsistency. However, it will be argued that what Wittgenstein means by "showing" is just a reiteration of a long ensconced philosophical linchpin: incorrigibility. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein attempts to circumvent the problem of metaphysics by appealing to the ordinary, but there is an issue of self-referential incoherence buried in this solution as well because "looking and describing" as a criterion of truth cannot account for its own truthfulness. However, in *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein comes to something of a solution. He does not abandon the empirical descriptivism of the *Investigations*,

but he does abandon any notion, explicitly stated or implicitly suggested, that incorrigibility is the marker of truth. There can be no Archimedean Point from which we can leverage the entire world, such as Descartes' *Cogito* purports to be. In fact, Wittgenstein's remarks in *On Certainty* indirectly reject the *Cogito* as something one could rightfully claim to know. We are, in effect, absolved of self-referential incoherence because Wittgenstein dismisses the requirement that true knowledge be certain knowledge.

Not only does Wittgenstein's engagement with the problem of metaphysics go a long way towards suggesting a basic continuity in all of his work, one gets the sense that the question, "What use is philosophy?" is constantly on his mind. Having believed himself to have solved the problems of philosophy, he states in the preface of the *Tractatus*, that the "thing in which the value of this work consists is that it shows how little is achieved when these problems are solved."[38] In the *Investigations* he asks, "What is your aim in philosophy? – To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle."[39] From such remarks and others, Wittgenstein makes it abundantly clear that whatever intrinsic value philosophy does have is limited to clearing up our confusions about language and its relation to the world, which is, in the end, a rather trivial task to set oneself to accomplish. There is also, however, an ethical and aesthetic component to Wittgenstein's call for clarity. For him, the nature of reality is intimately linked to what can be said in language, or more precisely, what can be said meaningfully. When we misunderstand language, we misunderstand existence and our place therein. If there is a key to understanding what

Wittgenstein means by ethics and aesthetics, it is this: What cannot be said is what is mystical. While the mysticism of the *Tractatus* is well known, it could be argued that there is an implicit mysticism in Wittgenstein's later work as well, and that this mysticism is intimately tied to the problem of metaphysics and the yearning for the metaphysical that so characterizes much of the Western tradition, and especially Wittgenstein's philosophy, which is a microcosm of this characterization.

Wittgenstein's belief that language fundamentally shapes the reality we experience (in an *a priori*, Kantian sense), seems to naturally suggest that metaphysics and ontology are one and the same for him. In instances where he uses the word "metaphysics," one gets the distinct impression that he means to evoke the conception of Idealist ontology in our minds. This brings up an important difficulty that must be met. The point will here be stated directly, and will be reiterated in the future, that metaphysics is in no way necessarily synonymous with ontology, regardless of whether Wittgenstein held that belief or not. This is not to say, however, that an inquiry into Wittgenstein's ontology would not be worthwhile. A case could be made for several interpretations of Wittgenstein's ontology and it is quite feasible to find monistic, dualistic and pluralistic implications embodied in each of the phases of his philosophy, early, middle and late. On the other hand, one may also argue that Wittgenstein thoroughly rejects any metaphysical assertion that would lay claim to any of these ontological positions. Such a denial of ontology, it should be noted, would not run afoul of any self-referential incoherence. It is not a contradiction to state that

certain forms of metaphysics are impossible, but only that metaphysics in general is. This is a key point, because for many in the Western tradition metaphysics and ontology are unequivocally the same.

Chapter four will focus primarily on the relationship between ethics and aesthetics—important subjects for Wittgenstein—and the problem of metaphysics. The aim of this chapter will be to show that there is a metaphysical component to the ethical and the aesthetic in Wittgenstein's work, and vice versa. The overarching aim of this chapter will be to present a theory of ethics and aesthetics (making use of Wittgenstein's work as its launching pad) that will effectively cut off the possibility of self-referential incoherence in metaphysics. The theory will not be outlined in detail here, but in brief it depends on three basic concepts: the groundlessness of all metaphysical claims, the necessity to choose amongst groundless metaphysical claims, and the preference that such choices inevitably create. The latter two of these concepts, it will be suggested, have important implications for ethics and aesthetics which differ significantly from what might be considered more "traditional" theories which treat ethics and aesthetics as inquiries into what is good and beautiful, respectively. Ethics and aesthetics are here employed as a metaphysical solution to a metaphysical problem.

This brings up a tangential but not inconsequential point. If we are going to do justice to the breadth of Wittgenstein's philosophy we cannot ignore the great importance that he placed on art. His tastes are known to have been very rigidly oriented towards the classical, especially in his love for music, which is

due in part, no doubt, to his upbringing in one of Vienna's most fabulously wealthy families. His aesthetic sensibilities also leaned heavily towards the minimalistic. As noted by Ray Monk in his biography of Wittgenstein,

> To understand the strength of Wittgenstein's feeling against superfluous ornamentation – to appreciate the *ethical* importance it had for him – one would have to be Viennese. . . . One would have to have felt . . . that the once noble culture of Vienna . . . since the latter half of the nineteenth century, atrophied into, in Paul Engelmann's words, an "arrogated base culture – a culture turned into its opposite, misused as an ornamental mask."[40]

Wittgenstein's distaste for ornament is seen not only in his philosophy, but also—and just as evidently—in the work he did in designing (along with Paul Engelmann) a starkly sparse and modern house for his sister Margret. There has been much fruitful scholarship that has attempted to examine the relation of the Stonborough House (as it has come to be known) with Wittgenstein's philosophy, especially that of the *Tractatus*. One of the more successful of recent attempts at examining the philosophical implications of the Stonborough House has been written by Nana Last in her book *Wittgenstein's House: Language, Space, and Architecture*. In brief, Last suggests that Wittgenstein's notion of logical space in the *Tractatus* is intimately connected to the way he treated architectural space. A central implication of her book is, as she states "that spatial and visual practices and constructs are *involved in the very process of concept formation in language, subjectivity, aesthetics, ethics, and throughout philosophy*."[41] Visual practice, and more specifically, thinking *spatially*, seem to have played a crucial role in the formation of Wittgenstein's thought, as is all but obvious where the picture theory

of language is concerned. Last suggests that there are also "*different spatialities at work*"[42] in both the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*, which "accords with the widely held view that Wittgenstein's late philosophy of language marks a decisive break from his early work."[43]

Though Wittgenstein's short stint as an architect gives us a concrete example of how he applied his aesthetic values in a particular case, his approach to architecture and philosophy were equally rigid, and in both pursuits aesthetics was of the upmost importance to him. We therefore have from Wittgenstein a broader and more copiously rich body of art: his philosophy. If there is a connection between his architecture and his philosophy it ought to be recognized that it lies in the fact that his architectural and philosophical practices were not so much separate fields of interest as they were different modes of expressing a larger system of aesthetics. The importance of aesthetics for Wittgenstein has been an oft neglected and underappreciated point. It is a terrible shame that the beauty of Wittgenstein's writing has not been given the attention by scholars that it is due. One of the points that this text will endeavor to make is that one cannot read Wittgenstein and understand him if one does not recognize the great artistic achievement of his writing. When admonished by Russell that "he ought not to *state* what he thinks true, but to give arguments for it," Wittgenstein paid it little heed, replying that "arguments spoilt its beauty, and that he would feel as if he was dirtying a flower with muddy hands." Indeed, Russell much admired Wittgenstein's sensitivity for beauty, remarking how "the artist in intellect is so very rare,"[44] a quality that more than aptly describes Wittgenstein's own intellect,

but one which, it is safe to say, is somewhat lacking in Russell's. To say that Wittgenstein treated his philosophy as a work of art should seem obvious to anyone who has paid the least bit of attention to his writing, and the laborious care that he put into crafting it.

Finally, chapter five will examine the metaphysical relationship between subjectivity and the work of art, especially in regards to the subjective universality of the Kantian judgment of taste. Specifically, the argument will be made that the axioms of metaphysics function in much the same way as do these judgments. That is to say, in other words, that when we advance an axiom of metaphysics as true, we are making a claim, based on our individual pleasure, which supposes universal validity for everyone else as well. To postulate an axiom is to give it the form of finality required for it to substantiate a truth. Thus all truths, even those that are objectively universal, derive their certitude from an aesthetic basis. In fact, the more objective a truth is, the greater the finality of its form and the more difficult it is to disbelieve it. The degree of objectivity one assigns to a truth directly correlates to the degree one finds it beautiful. Thus truth, when it is understood as an aesthetic function manifested in the judgment of taste, is simply a product of our willingness to believe in it, or alternatively, our inability to imagine it otherwise. This does not, however, constitute a proof that any particular axiom of metaphysics is indubitably true. Truth, when it is understood as a manifestation of the judgment of taste, can only be a measure of the aesthetic preference produced by universalizable pleasure.

The second argument of this chapter concerns Kant's oft-maligned disinterested subject, a reiteration of which we can see in Wittgenstein's metaphysical subject, which was for the latter the "limit of the world," and thus the "limit of thought." This limit, we will suggest, is exhibited in the finality of form indicative of the judgment of taste, which is required if the metaphysical subject is to substantiate any axiom of metaphysics. The metaphysical subject, and the judgments it postulates, are thus not only the basis for the possibility of thought, they are also the boundary beyond which thought cannot pass. The other side of the limit must be unthinkable if it is to be, properly speaking, a limit. Because Wittgenstein does little to distinguish between thought and existence, we are forced to admit that if the metaphysical subject cannot be thought that it cannot exist, either. It is a "Being-for-itself," to use Jean-Paul Sartre's term: a kind of suspended nothingness which provides us a profound aesthetic license and responsibility for the act of self-creation. Although Sartre was certainly critical of Kant's concept of a universal human nature, we cannot ignore the fact that the aesthetic act of self-creation is a redressed expression of the judgment of taste. This of course implies the very same finality of human nature implicit in Kant. Not only is the nothingness of Being, in its own right, a finality of form—it is the absolute condition of freedom—the act of self-creation itself produces the very same finality as does the judgment of taste. Sartre, like Kant and Wittgenstein, puts a subjective limitation on the world, which necessitates the concept of a "universal" subjectivity. Hence, it is quite correct to say that the disinterested

subject does not exist. It is the limit of existence and is therefore not concomitant with it.

Although the disinterested, metaphysical subject is not an object in the world, it is nevertheless a basic requirement of a cognizable world. If nature is to be intelligible, it can only be as the aesthetic expression of the metaphysical subject. The fact cannot be overlooked, however, that this produces a dualism of Kant's sort between phenomenon and noumenon, a distinction which is echoed in Wittgenstein's separation of thought from non-thought. The result of this separation is that the metaphysical subject must in principle be unthinkable. Thought can only get a hold of what is within the world. Thus, we must be careful to distinguish, as Wittgenstein does, between the "philosophical I" and the "I of the natural sciences," i.e., the human body. The latter is thinkable whereas the former is not. The basic definitional framework postulated by the metaphysical subject is the scaffolding under which nature becomes thinkable. To put the matter differently, the "I of the natural sciences" can be metaphysically defined according to a set of established axioms. The "philosophical I," however, cannot be structured according to such dictates because it is the basis for dictating definitions in the first place.

This brings us to an analogous problem regarding the work of art. On the one hand, there is a sense in which art is a perfectly explicable concept. This is no doubt the case, for example, where the formal, ideological and historical components of art are concerned. These aspects of the work of art all exist within a metaphysical framework from which they derive their intelligibility. On the

other hand, the framework itself can be given no such intelligibility. Art, in this sense, does not exist because there is no definition that serves to delimit its boundaries. This is not to say that we can simply dismiss the physical manifestation of the work of art as inconsequential. Even though the work of art in the metaphysical sense does not exist within the world, it is immanent in it. It exhibits the limit of the world from within the world, thus making it possible for us to cognize the world. Consequently, Kant's question, "How is nature itself possible?" is roughly synonymous with the question, "How is the work of art itself possible?" Art, when framed in these terms, is an integral component of our understanding: it is the apparatus that metaphysics employs in the construction of definitions. Consequently, we cannot "define" art without begging the question of art: How is it possible? The moment we offer an answer to this question it poses itself again. What we thus encounter at the horizon of all possible thought is not the limit of thought per se (one does not "encounter" a limit), but rather its embodiment in the work of art. It gestures towards the other side of the limit without revealing it. At the metaphysical level art is always a mystical yearning for the unrealizable.

To illustrate some of the metaphysical difficulties inherent in the attempt to define art we will look at the work of two artists: Joseph Kosuth and John Cage. Of the two, it is Kosuth who overtly addresses his work to the analytic tradition. His essay of 1969, "Art After Philosophy," even makes use of some of Wittgenstein's most essential ideas, such as "meaning is use" and "family resemblance." Much of Kosuth's work as a visual artist addresses many of the

very same philosophical problems that Wittgenstein grappled with. Kosuth's work which is based on self-referential analytic propositions, such as *Five Words in Orange Neon* and *Glass Words Material Described*, are excellent examples of this. What is interesting about such pieces is that as analytic propositions, they can never be "complete." This is to say that they are always selective of certain self-reflexive properties. Why Kosuth choose the phrase "five words in orange neon" as the particular analytical proposition to describe a particular object when one could choose from a nearly infinite number of propositions that would describe it equally well is beyond what the analytic proposition itself could say. It is, so to speak, where the work of art lies—in what the analytic proposition cannot say. This difficulty is inherent in Cage's work as well, more so in fact—and in this regard his work is even more in line with Wittgenstein's philosophy than Kosuth's is. The struggle to express the inexpressible, which so characterizes not only Wittgenstein's philosophy, but his views on art, is echoed and amplified in the work of Cage. In his 1959 "Lecture on Nothing" he writes, for example, "Our poetry is the reali-zation that we possess nothing."[45] Such words as these could just have easily been written by Wittgenstein, and often are. In attempting to draw the similarities between the two, it is difficult to ascertain whether Wittgenstein would have appreciated Cage's work, had he been aware of it. This is not really the point, however. Rather, all that we are required to show is that both Wittgenstein and Cage occupy and work from the same theoretical space, and in so doing, demonstrate that the work of each is more closely aligned than is apparent at first glance. More importantly, one of the central conclusions of

chapter five will be the suggestion that art is—in many important respects—a "metaphysical impossibility." In other words, there is no such thing as a "definition of art" that can sufficiently account for every possibility of art. This is, so it will be maintained, one of the chief reasons why Wittgenstein believed that art was mystical: the idea of it cannot adequately be expressed in language.

Finally, we will conclude this chapter by addressing Alain Badiou's reading of the *Tractatus* and the mysticism that permeates its final passages. According to Badiou, Wittgenstein's mysticism is the inevitable outcome of the correlation that he establishes between thought and states of affairs. What can be actualized in such a state can also be cognizable. This strict definition of sense, however, produces what Badiou sees as an unacceptably large extension of non-thought (including most of philosophy). Indeed, it is precisely this distinction which leads to what Badiou calls Wittgenstein's "two regimes of sense." The first is inter-worldly and can be framed in terms of the proposition; the second is extra-worldly and cannot. Thus, a proposition has a sense if it accurately describes a state of affairs. No such state of affairs, however, can stand in a representational relationship to the whole of existence. Consequently, there can be no such thing as a propositional account of value in the world. This would require that the proposition transcend existence, which it cannot do because it is concomitant with existence. The implication that Badiou draws from this division of sense is that truth can have no value, and value no truth—a prospect which does not, at least on the surface, seem to sit very well with Badiou's concept of generic procedures, a central component of his philosophical repertoire.

Despite Badiou's dislike of the division that Wittgenstein makes between truth and value, Badiou is careful to make a distinction of his own that is not dissimilar to Wittgenstein's. For Badiou, we must differentiate between truth (events which are based on the absolutely pure choice of the subject) and knowledge (events which are calculable according to an already established situation). Accordingly, a truth is not something which can be derived from knowledge. Truth stands only on the substrate of the metaphysical subject and is thus outside knowledge insofar as the subject is outside of existence. Knowledge is a derivative of truth and is hence of "lesser value." There is nothing novel about knowledge; truth is the only mechanism for Badiou that allows for the possibility of encountering the new. Such a possibility, however, requires that the metaphysical subject fix an undecidable event in place. It must be willing to make a wager, take a leap of faith or assert a universal without cause to do so. The metaphysical subject must, in other words, be willing to demand the agreement of everyone. Every decree of truth is always a judgment of taste which imparts it the form of finality. This decision on the part of the metaphysical subject can be given no justification. In the end, all axioms, all truth and all knowledge can be traced to the archiaesthetic act of choice. We must first believe before we can know and the only constituent of belief is the aesthetic propensity to choose one thing and not another. Without the ability to insert preference into the world, truth would be an impossibility.

CHAPTER 1:
Metaphysics and Silence

> The rest is silence.
>
> –WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Hamlet*

> Speech is of time, silence is of eternity.
>
> –THOMAS CARLYLE, *Sator Resartus*

> What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.
>
> –LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

The main problem that underlies an inquiry into Wittgenstein's metaphysics is, of course, the fact that he seems, at least at first glance, to be entirely hostile to that particular branch of philosophical endeavor. By the end of the *Tractatus*, after propounding to his readers that logic forms the actual structure of the world, and that for language to be adequately meaningful, it must share the logical form of that which it depicts, he comes to the following conclusion as regards the aims of a proper philosophical methodology:

> The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science—i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy—and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. Although it would not be satisfying to the other person—he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy—*this* method would be the only strictly correct one.[46]

While there is no doubt that Wittgenstein very diligently attempts to refute certain kinds of metaphysical propositions (usually of the idealistic sort), he does so only by substituting his own. The whole concept of "logic as the structure of the

world," which is at the very heart of the *Tractatus*, cannot be mistaken for anything but a metaphysical proposition. In the *Notebooks* which date from 1914–1916, and in which Wittgenstein worked out many of the main ideas that would later be culled in the composition of the *Tractatus*, he writes, "The logic of the world is prior to all truth and falsehood."[47] A statement such as this, which postulates logic as the prerequisite condition by which truth and falsehood are possible is a metaphysical assertion if ever there were one. Indeed, it is very easy to read the majority of Wittgenstein's early work as engaged entirely in this sort of *a priori* metaphysics. One of the primary aims of the *Tractatus* is, after all, not to displace the whole of metaphysics from philosophy (as he suggests in the quotation above), but to put the *correct* metaphysical method clearly within our view and thereafter remain silent about it. This is the cure to our philosophical ailments: to not talk about them.

The problem of self-referential incoherence presents itself here. According to Wittgenstein, we are to reject all language that does not accurately picture the logical structure of that which it depicts as metaphysical nonsense. However, in so doing, we would also have to reject the picture theory itself, for it too does not depict the logical structure of anything. Thus, it is metaphysically nonsensical according to its own rules, and, so, we have a conundrum to consider. On the one hand, we ought really to do as Wittgenstein suggests and keep quiet about metaphysics, but on the other, we need to speak metaphysically if we are going to establish our need to keep quiet about metaphysics. In an attempt to dissolve the problem Wittgenstein offers the following metaphor:

> My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he as climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.[48]

Just as Plato uses the dialogue (a form of poetry in its own right) to expel the poets from the Republic, Wittgenstein's ladder metaphor is no more meaningful than any of the other propositions of the *Tractatus*. If we recognize the propositions of the *Tractatus* as senseless, how can they be elucidatory in any way, shape or form? There is no clear cut answer to this question (even Wittgenstein was somewhat at a loss in his effort to formulate a solution), but a significant component of it must lie in the difference between what Wittgenstein meant by "saying" and "showing," about which we will give significant consideration to later on. Suffice it to say for now, Wittgenstein's solution to his metaphysical difficulty can be summed up thusly, "What *can* be shown *cannot* be said."[49] Thus we must take the *Tractatus* as an endeavor to *show* us the correct method of metaphysics and not to tell us about it. Whether Wittgenstein actually does this or not is a question that is most certainly open for debate.

Some of the difficulties outlined above have been the subject of ongoing debate within Wittgensteinian scholarship since the *Tractatus* was first published in 1921. Among the early positivistic interpretations, A. J. Ayer's 1934 essay, "Demonstration of the Impossibility of Metaphysics," is an excellent example. It is an essay that, by its author's own admission, was inspired by work

of Wittgenstein,[1] which is readily apparent in terms of the essay's heightened anti-metaphysical sentiment—a sentiment that Ayer no doubt picks up, at least in part, from Wittgenstein. Unlike Wittgenstein, however, Ayer places a much higher premium on the role of experience in establishing a criterion for demarcating metaphysical propositions from meaningful ones. As Ayer puts it,

> Metaphysical propositions are by definition such as no possible experience could verify, and as the theoretical possibility of verification has been taken as our criterion of significance, there is no difficulty in concluding that metaphysical propositions are meaningless.[2]

Ayer's criterion of verification via experience, would, as he believes, show metaphysical propositions to be meaningless, if he can show that his criterion for identifying them is correct. But the criterion as Ayer formulated it, is, by way of its own rule, meaningless metaphysics, simply because no possible experience could verify that the correct method of verification is via experience. Thus the assertion, 'no future experience will confirm any metaphysical assertion,' is itself an assertion that cannot be confirmed by any experience, past, present, or future.

In general, then, we can say that the definition of a metaphysical proposition is one that cannot provide for itself the basis of its own verification. What is immediately made evident by this definition, however, is that metaphysics is *indispensable* to philosophy, despite Ayer's rigorous attempt to discard it. If anything, he makes an admission to this of sorts.

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[1] A. J. Ayer, "Demonstration of the Impossibility of Metaphysics," *Mind* 43, no. 171 (July 1934): 335.
[2] Ibid., 343.

> In our criterion we have something that is presupposed in any . . . philosophical enquiry. . . . For the business of philosophy is to give definitions. . . .We must adopt some rule according to which we conduct our enquiry, and by reference to which we determine whether its conclusions are correct. In formulating our criterion we are attempting to show what this rule should be. We cannot do more.[3]

Ayer is quite right, of course. We can do no more than to adopt some rule or definition by which we must conduct an enquiry. However, whether we are justified in so doing is simply not verifiable by experience, or by any other self-evident criterion whatsoever. Such criterions of verifiability, even Ayer's, are thus metaphysical 'pseudo-propositions,' as he calls them. In all fairness to Ayer, we should take care to note that he anticipates this objection with no uncertainty:

> If we admit that the proposition in which we attempt to formulate our criterion of significance is nonsensical, does not our whole demonstration of the impossibility of metaphysics collapse? We may be able to *see* that metaphysical propositions are nonsensical and by making a special set of nonsensical utterances we may induce others to see it also.[4]

As Ayer no doubt recognized, his proof of the impossibility of metaphysics, if it is to be successful, must admit the following proviso: in order for the proof not to contradict itself, it must admit of a 'special set' of 'sensible' nonsensical utterances. The assertion, however, that we need a special set of nonsensical utterances to avoid the paradox of denying nonsensical utterances is just another in an ever increasing line of metaphysical propositions. Ayer could have just as

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[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 344.

easily cut his losses and admitted to only one metaphysical proposition (his criterion of verifiability), and been done with it. Instead, he attempts to give credence to his criterion by evoking the claim that it is a member of a 'special set' of propositions and therefore not under the jurisdiction of its own rules, which at best only serves to shift the metaphysical burden of proof from one proposition to another, and at worst threatens us with the possibility of a string of metaphysical propositions *ad infinitum*.

It would appear that Ayer, far from demonstrating the impossibility of metaphysics, has done more to prove its insolubility than anything else. Is it conceivable that we should be capable of escaping this vicious circle? Herbert De Vriese argues that it is. In his article, "The Myth of the Metaphysical Circle: An Analysis of the Contemporary Crisis of the Critique of Metaphysics," published in 2008, he takes the opposing view to the one being presented here. In the contemporary discourse on metaphysics he identifies what he calls a "widespread and virtually unchallenged acceptance in contemporary philosophy of an inescapable circular relationship between metaphysics and its critique."[50] This "unchallenged acceptance" takes one of four forms. The first is the assertion that "critique is metaphysical,"

> Which reflects the view that criticism is an immanent part of metaphysical thinking. . . . The core of their argument is that metaphysics is, essentially, a self-critical discipline. Engaging in this way of thinking requires self-criticism; it means exploring the question of what metaphysics is supposed to be and justifying every decision taken. Criticism, in short, is identified by definition as part of metaphysical thinking.[51]

The second of these suggests that "critique produces metaphysics." This

> strategy is close to the first. It espouses the view that critiquing metaphysics is an immanent part of the history of metaphysics. The underlying thought here is, not that a particular type of criticism is *ipso facto* part of some metaphysical project, but that critique is the driving force behind the historical development of the metaphysical tradition.[52]

The third of these interpretations "holds that every critique of metaphysics necessarily departs from metaphysical premises. . . . This view is expressed in . . . exposing the hidden metaphysical assumptions of renowned opponents of metaphysics."[53] The last strategy that De Vriese identifies is "the wholesale rejection of metaphysics as such. . . . These approaches essentially come down to the observation that the absolute rejection of metaphysics must be relativized, because such criticism is either a purely self-serving, self-defeating, or self-overestimating argument."[54]

Part of the problem, as De Vriese sees it, is that the vicious circle that we seem to have fallen into depends on a broadly conceived notion of what metaphysics is. As such, the belief that "the critique of metaphysics cannot free itself from metaphysics"[55] must necessarily include a radical anti-metaphysical metaphysics without contradicting itself. "If it is true that metaphysics can only be contested by metaphysics," De Vriese asks, "why not take seriously the 'metaphysical' rejections of the entire history of metaphysics?"[56] The answer to the question is that such ways of thinking have become "philosophically illegitimate"[57] for contemporary metaphysicians. De Vriese's point is valid in as much as it is currently *en vogue* to eschew most positivistic leaning philosophies within the greater corpus of metaphysical research. In truth, one cannot deny the possibility of anti-metaphysics any more than one can do likewise for

metaphysics. One can only point to the fact anti-metaphysics is self-referentially incoherent and leave it at that. This does not, however, *prove* anti-metaphysics to be untenable, it simply requires us to abide by a contradiction.

In an attempt to shore up what it is we mean by "metaphysics," De Vriese offers his own definition based on its traditional historical aims (which he admits is "too broad to comprehensively capture the nature of metaphysics"[58]).

> The field of metaphysics can be delimited by reference to five major tendencies: an idealistic tendency to consider thought-objects . . . as a primary, underived reality; a speculative tendency to acquire or develop knowledge beyond the limits of experience; a systematic tendency to reduce difference to unity within the framework of a rational order; a foundational tendency to provide ultimate grounds for knowledge and reality; and a totalizing tendency to think in terms of wholes.[59]

According to this definition, De Vriese argues that historical challenges to metaphysics, such as Hume's skeptical critique, and Wittgenstein's later linguistic criticism, do not properly belong to the field of philosophical inquiry that has usually been understood by the moniker "metaphysics." Even according to this definition, Hume's skepticism of metaphysics, based as it is in his commitment to empiricism, must assume that experience is self-evidently the "correct" philosophical foundation. Experience does not show this however, and Hume's philosophy is thus "metaphysics" even according to De Vriese's definition, simply for the reason that the dogmatic ascription to empiricism constitutes "knowledge beyond the limits of experience." As for the metaphysical implications of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, that is a topic which will be dealt with more fully in the next chapter. Although De Vriese claims that the "general

statement of the inescapability of metaphysics is nothing but an assumption, and the radical consequences to which it leads show that it is a highly improbable assumption,"[60] one cannot help but notice a few of his own assumptions at work in his judgments. The first of these, no doubt, is that "radical consequences" are produce by "highly improbable assumptions." Take Einstein's special theory of relativity, for example, the second axiom of which asserts "the constancy of the velocity of light, from which follows the relativity of spatial and temporal measurements."[61] The "assumption" that this axiom makes, namely that the speed of light in a vacuum is constant for all observers in all frames of reference, is not "highly improbable" in the sense that all hitherto experimental data has confirmed it (though one must admit that it is nevertheless an assumption, because it is in principle "falsifiable" in Popper's sense, i.e. new experimental data may yet prove it to be incorrect). From such a relatively indubitable assertion, we are of course led to the "radical consequence" that there can be no such thing as "absolute" time and space in the classical Newtonian sense. The point being: there is no necessary connection between "radical consequences" and "highly improbable assumptions." Quite to the contrary, it is more often the case that the most probable of all assumptions produces the most inconceivable of all consequences.

There are still further assumptions that sit quietly at the back of De Vriese's estimations. His attempt to "demonstrate that the categorical assertion of a circular relationship between metaphysics and critique cannot be logically justified"[62] is predicated one such assumption. Let us consider what "logically

justified" means for him: self-evidence, or at least the possibility to discover it. Therein he is clearly reverting to a metaphysics that is playing possum, inasmuch as the "search for the indubitable" has been one of the primary goals of metaphysicians throughout history (one which he fails to identify). De Vriese's claim that there is no "logical justification" of the "metaphysical circle" leads us not away from the circle, but directly into it. The justification for entering this circle is not that the "critique of metaphysics" produces metaphysics, but rather that there can be no ultimate justification for any axiomatic metaphysical assertion whatsoever, and that any mode of argumentation, whether it be critique or otherwise, must be predicated on such unfounded definitions. Backsliding into "self-evidence" (in the guise of the logical) will be of no avail to us unless it can be shown that disagreement is categorically impossible. Therefore, De Vriese ought to be met with the question "According to what logic does this non-justification of yours conform to?" Surely there is no such thing as one "uniform logical system" any more than there is one "uniform geometrical system" or one "unified scientific method." Tell us your definition of "logic" before you propound to us its implications, but do so with the realization that a definition is an arbitrary adopted code that cannot be proved beyond a shadow of a doubt and to which your estimations will conform.

This point is also made by the German philosopher of science, Hans Reichenbach, in an essay, "The Philosophical Significance of the Theory of Relativity." "Consider, for instance, the problem of Geometry," he says.

> That the unit of measurement is a matter of definition is a familiar fact. . . . However, . . . the comparison of distances is also a matter of definition. . . . That a certain distance is congruent to another distance situated at a different place can never be proved to be true; it can only be maintained in the sense of a definition. More precisely speaking, it can be maintained as true only after a definition of congruence is given.[63]

Within the confines of the theory of relativity, it makes no sense to say—in the absolute sense—that two separate distances are equivalent without postulating what would count as "congruence" in a particular situation. As Reichenbach notes, "Definitions are arbitrary and it is a consequence of the definitional character of fundamental concepts that with the change of the definitions various descriptional systems arise."[64] And although various definitional systems are "equivalent to each other, and it is possible to go from each system to another one by a suitable transformation"[65]—which is to say that 1 inch is by definition equal to 2.54 centimeters—we should not make the mistake of inferring from this, as Reichenbach does, that "all these descriptions represent different languages saying the same thing; equivalent descriptions, therefore, express the same physical content."[66] This would be to put the cart before the horse. The concept of "equivalent physical content," apart from its context in a particular frame of reference, is to resort to a quasi-Newtonian absolutism. It cannot be proven whether 1 inch and 2.54 centimeters refer to the same physical length without resorting to an arbitrarily adopted definition as such. In other words, the definition cannot be separate from the physical content. We therefore cannot infer that "equivalent descriptions" express the same "physical content" without begging the question. We may only surmise this from the definition of "1 inch"

and "2.54 centimeters." This does not, however, equate to a demonstration of "physical equivalency."

The above considerations are made in order to set the tone of this chapter. The argument being put forth here is that Wittgenstein's philosophical development can be read as an attempt to escape the vicious metaphysical circle that we seem to have fallen into. This chapter will be devoted to a reading of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and in that book there is no doubt that Wittgenstein takes up a partially anti-metaphysical position. There is also no doubt that Wittgenstein employs his own metaphysical strategies in substitution of those he rejects. However, these do not lead him into a vicious circle—there is no self-referential inconsistency in denying one metaphysical assertion in favor of another (this is simply the way in which aesthetics functions as the determining apparatus of our metaphysical axioms). The vicious circle arises not from an overt critique of metaphysics, but because a primary implication of Wittgenstein's metaphysics is that metaphysics itself cannot be given any meaning within language. The whole endeavor of the *Tractatus*, as far as it is an attempt to use metaphysics to explicate the senselessness of metaphysics, is an attempt to say what language will not allow us to say. This is certainly not unbeknownst to Wittgenstein. Given the logical frame of reference that he postulates as the primary metaphysical structure of reality, it is all but obvious. His solution to the problem of metaphysics, that logic shows its sense, is an attempt to avoid the contradiction inherent in his theory. The argument will be made that

Wittgenstein's doctrine of showing is simply a reiteration (albeit in a new form) of an old philosophical hat: indubitability.

Though the *Tractatus* was published in 1922, it had "received its final form" in the summer of 1918.[67] In truth, Wittgenstein had been doing work in philosophy after his arrival at Cambridge in 1911, the accumulated effort of which would result in the highly condensed propositions of the *Tractatus*. The fact that Wittgenstein's thinking underwent such long periods of maturation with no tangible finished product to show for it was a scholarly habit born out of his self-perceived inability to give his thoughts the degree of polish that he desired. This was a character trait that Bertrand Russell took note of. "He has the artist's feeling that he will produce the perfect thing or nothing – I explained how he wouldn't get a degree or be able to teach unless he learnt to write imperfect things."[68] The laborious care that he took in formulating the *Tractatus* is evident in its placid and pristine sequence of numbered statements, which often do not provide the background against which they may be understood and without which it can be difficult to glean their intended meaning. It is also therefore difficult to apprehend the problem with which Wittgenstein is concerning himself. This is perhaps one of the reasons Wittgenstein came to reject the picture theory—it does not take into consideration the malleability of language according to the context in which it is given meaning. In a broad sense, what Wittgenstein wanted to do was to give a Platonic explanation of language that could account for all its vagaries ("logical form" is the linguistic equivalent of "ideal form"). His failure to do so (and his eventual realization of this failure) is recounted in an anecdote

Wittgenstein told to both Norman Malcolm and G. H. von Wright. It recalls an exchange that took place between himself and the Italian economist Piero Sraffa

> in which Wittgenstein insisted that a proposition and that which it describes must have the same 'logical form'. . . . Sraffa made a Neapolitan gesture of brushing his chin with his fingertips, asking: 'What is the logical form of *that* ?' This, according to the story, broke the hold on Wittgenstein of the Tractarian idea that a proposition must be a 'picture' of the reality it describes.[69]

A seemingly ancillary contention to those that have thus far been suggested is that Wittgenstein's philosophy does not entirely make sense unless we read him, first and foremost, as an artist. Many of the people who knew or met Wittgenstein have remarked that his temperament was artistic in inclination, including Rudolf Carnap. "His point of view and his attitude toward people and problems, even theoretical problems, were much more similar to those of a creative artist than to those of a scientist; one might almost say, similar to those of a religious prophet or a seer."[70] Although the *Tractatus* is concerned almost entirely with logic, Wittgenstein remarks in a letter to Ludwig von Ficker, "My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have *not* written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one."[71] What is left out of Wittgenstein's book, of course, is the ethical and the aesthetic. While there is certainly a degree of truth to this bifurcated division of the *Tractatus*—inasmuch as there is an ethical and aesthetic component to remaining silent for Wittgenstein—it is not as silent on those topics as Wittgenstein suggests. First of all, the *Tractatus* is as much a work of art as it is a work of philosophy, and taken as such, it shows us (more than it tells us) what Wittgenstein's conception of art

was like: starkly and beautifully minimalistic. Second, even though it is not possible to say what cannot be said, there is an ethical virtue in the attempt itself. We are also therefore given a glimpse into Wittgenstein's ethics: striving to do what cannot be done.

The larger part of this chapter, more specifically, will be given over to an exegesis of the implicit metaphysics of the *Tractatus*. There can be little doubt that Wittgenstein, from the very first lines of the *Tractatus*, is giving us what amounts to a conception of the true nature of reality as he believes it to be.

> 1 The world is all that is the case.
>
> 1.1 The world is the totality of facts, not of things.
>
> 1.11 The world is determined by the facts, and by their being *all* the facts.
>
> 1.12 For the totality of facts determines what is the case.
>
> 1.13 The facts in logical space are the world.[72]

What is fascinating about Wittgenstein's style of argumentation is the axiomatic quality of the assertions he makes. Like Nietzsche's aphorisms, the propositions of the *Tractatus* offer little by way of evidence in their favor. They are simply stated, though with such aesthetic force that any evidence that might be offered in their favor seems as if it would be either an unnecessary afterthought, or worse, a detriment to their beauty (which is of course their chief appeal). In truth, however, no evidence is given because none can be given. Axioms, by their very nature, are not provable. We either accept them or we do not. This, however, is what metaphysics chiefly consists of: axioms. Wittgenstein, unlike many other

philosophers, dispenses with the charade of presenting "evidence" for metaphysical propositions and instead puts them forth without any such support.

Though this alone is evidence enough that the propositions of the *Tractatus* are metaphysical, there are still other reasons to consider. In the main it must be recalled that the terms "metaphysics" and "first philosophy" are interchangeable in the sense that a metaphysical theory is not only prior to experience, but also prior to any other theory, which again, is simply another way to state that they are axiomatic. In this sense, the logical theories of the *Tractatus* are metaphysical ones. Furthermore, when Wittgenstein asserts that the world consists of facts and not things, he is essentially denying ontology status as a metaphysical first philosophy, replacing it instead with logic. This does not constitute an outright denial of metaphysics, however, only a reinterpretation of what its fundamental axioms are. Although "the world of existing states of affairs is apparently reality, meaning our actual world,"[73] the ontological status of states of affairs is only concerned with those states of affairs that are corporeal. Ontology therefore concerns itself only with the subset of actual states of affairs, and not the entirety of possible states of affairs, which is the domain of logic. A "fact," then, is one such actual state of affairs, the totality of which is the world as it currently is. Facts, however, do not deal with the metaphysical boundaries of existence. A fact states "this is the way things are," not "this is the way things can be." Metaphysics (logic) is about the latter, and not the former, a point that Wittgenstein makes in 2.0121. "If things can occur in states of affairs, this possibility must be in them from the beginning. (Nothing in the province of logic

can be merely possible. Logic deals with every possibility and all possibilities are its facts.)"[74]

It is exactly in this sense that much of Wittgenstein's early philosophy deals with the *a priori* conditions of existence. The assertion that "the completely general propositions can all be formed *a priori*"[75] is one of the central themes the *Tractatus*. It is, so to speak, the metaphysical crux of his whole argument. The entire edifice of a Wittgenstein's logic rests on the possibility of such general propositions *a priori*, and he sees their possibility as being essentially bound to what he believes is our ability to analyze simple propositions from complex ones. "It seems that the idea of the SIMPLE is already to be found contained in that of the complex and in the idea of analysis, and in such a way that we come to this idea quite apart from any examples of simple objects, . . . and we realize the existence of the simple object—*a priori*—as a logical necessity."[76] And although Wittgenstein is intellectually committed to this doctrine, he does tentatively explore the possibility that simples are not logically necessary in his *Notebooks*. "*Is it*, A PRIORI, *clear that in analysing we must arrive at simple components—is this*, *e.g.*, *involved in the concept of analysis*—, or is analysing *ad infinitum* possible?—Or is there in the end even a third possibility? . . . Nothing seems to speak against infinite divisibility."[77] Wittgenstein raises an interesting metaphysical question here. If nothing logically prevents us from infinitely analyzing components into smaller and smaller constituents, why should we settle on the supposition that there are such things as "simple components" that may not be further analyzed at all? Yet, if we do not settle on this supposition, it becomes

difficult to make the case that "the world is the totality of facts, not of things," for there would be no possibility of a "totality of facts" if each fact could be infinitely divided into other facts. In short, we are faced with two differing views about the nature of existence. One holds it to be finite and the other infinite. One is constrained by boundaries, the other is not. It is clear that Wittgenstein holds the former metaphysical supposition to be true, but of course, there is a substantial difference between a supposition and a true fact and telling the difference is no small feat.

At base, Wittgenstein is struggling to devise a demonstration of the necessity of simple "facts" that cannot be further analyzed into still further facts, but such a proof is extraordinarily difficult to formulate, and Wittgenstein, in the end, is ultimately unable to do so, but can only admit that "*it keeps on* forcing itself upon us that there is some simple indivisible, an element of being, in brief a thing."[78] This then is the only "proof" that Wittgenstein may fall back on: self-evidence, i.e., the force of the idea itself. Does this, then, amount to a demonstration of its necessity? This is a metaphysical question that proves much more troublesome to answer. Wittgenstein was not deterred by the fact that no one had yet to discover some "simple, indivisible element" of a proposition.

> It does not go against our feeling, that *we* cannot analyse PROPOSITIONS so far as to mention the elements by name; no, we feel that the WORLD must consist of elements. And it appears as if that were identical with the proposition that the world must be what it is, it must be definite. Or in other words, what vacillates is our determinations, not the world.[79]

The feeling of certitude that Wittgenstein is describing above is most notably marked by his conviction that no matter what happens, a change of mind is all but impossible to conceive of. The failure to demonstratively point out any example of a basic propositional unit, for instance, was not reason enough for Wittgenstein to disregard their necessity. In truth, however, basic propositional units are only necessary for the kind of philosophical inquiry that Wittgenstein wishes to make. They are not necessary to all philosophical inquiry *a priori*. Rather, it is Wittgenstein's desire to see the world as definite rather than indefinite that is the cause of his certitude. After all, if it is our determinations that vacillate, and not the world, then the determination that the "world is definite" would similarly be subject to an alteration of opinion. The "feeling of being unconditionally right" is not a result of the accuracy of one's determinations; the feeling can occur even if a determination turns out to be incorrect. Rather, what leads us to the experience of certitude is an aesthetic sensibility. In other words, the belief that "I am correct," does not arise from a proof, but rather from the conviction that things would be better off one way as opposed to another. In Wittgenstein's case—at least in his early philosophy—his aesthetic inclination moved him towards the belief that the world must be definite. The fact that he changed his mind about the nature of language in his later work is not due to the discovery of an error, but rather to a change in his aesthetic preference.

Although Wittgenstein makes a few brief references to aesthetics in the *Tractatus*, the aesthetic underpinnings of its metaphysics are not in any overt treatment of the subject, but rather in the treatment of logic itself as the *prima*

facie condition of existence. It is this unalterable belief of Wittgenstein's—that the nature of existence is logical and that its logical structure may be mirrored in language—that is precisely where his aesthetic inclinations moved him to. This is seen in propositions such as 2.012, for instance, where he states, "In logic nothing is accidental: if a thing can occur in states of affairs, the possibility of the state of affairs must be written into the thing itself."[80] Logic does not deal in potential or actual states of affairs, but rather in the possibility of them. Thus, in 2.0121 we read, "Logic deals with every possibility and all possibilities are its facts,"[81] which, taken more banally, simply means "what has the potential to exist has that potential." To put it in other words, logic is tautological; it says nothing about what exists, only about what might exist. It is the condition of existence, insofar as nothing can be which is illogical, a point that is made in 3.031. "It used to be said that God could create anything except what would be contrary to the laws of logic.—The truth is that we could not *say* what an "illogical" world would look like."[82] Not only could we not say what an illogical world would look like, the intimate relationship between thought and language for Wittgenstein prevents us from even thinking about it. "Thought can never be of anything illogical, since, if it were, we should have to think illogically."[83]

We cannot think illogically because to do so is to think about what cannot—under any circumstances—be a state of affairs. This would amount to "thinking about what cannot exist." If it is possible for a state of affairs to be thought of, it is also thereby possible for that state of affairs to come about. This,

then, is how we arrive at the picture theory language: whatever can exist can also be meaningfully represented in a thought.

> 2.1 We picture facts to ourselves.
>
> 2.11 A Picture presents a situation in logical space, the existence and non-existence of states of affairs.
>
> 2.12 A picture is a model of reality.
>
> 2.141 A picture is a fact.
>
> 2.151 Pictorial form is the possibility that things are related to one another in the same way as the elements of the picture.
>
> 2.1511 *That* is how a picture is attached to reality; it reaches right out to it.
>
> 2.16 If a fact is to be a picture, it must have something in common with what it depicts.
>
> 2.17 What a picture must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it— correctly or incorrectly—in the way it does, is its pictorial form.[84]

The possibility of pictorial form, like the possibility of existence or non-existence of a state of affairs, is written into the pictorial form itself. There can therefore be no such thing as a pictorial form that correctly depicts an impossible state of affairs (i.e., an illogical one), for there would be no form that a picture could share with it. Pictorial form, as a mode of representation, is limited to the realm of possible states of affairs, as is indicated by 2.171. "A picture can depict any reality whose form it has."[85] What pictorial form cannot depict, however, is its own form; but it can show it. It cannot, in other words, state in logical form the proposition "this is the logical form of picturing." In order to do so, pictorial form would have to step outside of itself in order to picture itself. That is because the

logical form of picturing involves the concept of exteriority—the picture of a state of affairs must be outside of the state of affairs that it is representing. We cannot therefore say what pictorial form is, because in order to do so we would require the use of pictorial form. Wittgenstein does, however, make it clear that pictorial form does display its structure. The basis for the distinction between saying and showing is first laid out in propositions 2.172–2.174.

> 2.172 A picture cannot, however, depict its pictorial form: it displays it.
>
> 2.173 A picture represents its subject from a position outside it. (Its standpoint is its representational form.) That is why a picture represents its subject correctly or incorrectly.
>
> 2.174 A picture cannot, however, place itself outside its representational form.[86]

Representation, according to the above definition, must always be external to that which it depicts. Since a picture must stand outside of what is pictured, a picture cannot depict the logic of its own form. Just as a painting of a tree is not the same thing as a painting of a painting of a tree, a picture of a state of affairs is not the same thing as a picture of a picture of a state of affairs. Even if one were to construct such a second-order "picture of a picture," it is not as if this would amount to a picture that pictured its own form. Although the logical form of the first picture would be contained in the second, the second picture would nevertheless not be a picture of itself. Rather, a picture of a state of affairs shows its form simply by way of its being a picture. It shows its sense, it does not depict it. Just as we do not need a painting of a painting of a tree to understand what a painting of a tree is, we likewise do not need a picture of a picture of a state of

affairs to understand what a picture is. If we understand the sense of what "representation" means—that it stands outside of that which it depicts—we also understand that a second-order representation becomes extraneous, indeed, even impossible. We cannot represent the "form of representation," for that would require us to step outside of representation in order to do so. In other words, a picture is a picture, and we cannot say any more about it than that.

It ought to be noted that the significance of the tautological (and conversely, the contradictory) was indispensable to Wittgenstein's conception of logic, which Bertrand Russell, in his attempt to give a logical basis to mathematics, was, by his own admittance, indebted to. In his 1919 book, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, he notes, "The importance of 'tautology' for a definition of mathematics was pointed out to me by my former pupil Ludwig Wittgenstein."[87] In a letter written to Wittgenstein in August of the same year, Russell says of the *Tractatus*, "I am convinced you are right in your main contention, that logical props are tautologies, which are not true in the sense that substantial prop[osition]s are true."[88] Although this is certainly one of Wittgenstein's points in the *Tractatus*, it is by no means the main one, as Wittgenstein was quick to point out to Russell.

> Now I am afraid you haven't really got hold of my main contention, to which the whole business of logical prop[osition]s is only a corollary. The main point is the theory of what can be expressed (gesagt) by prop[osition]s – i.e. by language – (and, which comes to the same, what can be *thought*) and what can not be expressed by prop[osition]s, but only shown (gezeigt); which, I believe, is the cardinal problem of philosophy.[89]

The cardinal problems of philosophy arise, so Wittgenstein thinks, because philosophers throughout history have attempted to say what can only be shown and to think what cannot be thought. Wittgenstein's unassailable and definitive solution to these problems, therefore, is to clarify those things which can only be shown so that we may thereafter be silent about them. Of course, the *Tractatus* is anything but silent about such issues; it says a great deal about such things as simple indefinable elements of being, for instance—and quite lucidly, at that—which according to its own tenets, should not be possible at all. Yet, surely one can read its propositions and understand them. This tension in the *Tractatus* is never quite resolved, and Wittgenstein's attempt to deflate it by claiming that simples show their sense instead of saying it is really only a reformulation of the metaphysical appeal to self-evidence. This is of course despite the fact that Wittgenstein thought that the idea of "self-evidence" was completely superfluous in logic. In 5.4731, for instance, he writes, "Self-evidence, which Russell talked about so much, can become dispensable in logic, only because language itself prevents every logical mistake.—What makes logic a priori is the *impossibility* of illogical thought."[90] Certainly we may recognize that in theory, illogical thought is metaphysically impossible, for this amounts to saying only that what cannot be a possible state of affairs cannot also not be meaningfully spoken of in language. In practice we must be able to distinguish between a proposition with and without a sense. For it is not impossible to say something illogical, it is only impossible to give an illogical proposition a meaning. Wittgenstein, in 6.3751, gives us an example of what a logical impossibility might look like. "The simultaneous

presence of two colours at the same place in the same visual field is impossible, in fact logically impossible, since it is ruled out by the logical structure of colour."[91] To reiterate, although it might be logically impossible for the same place in the visual field to be two colors simultaneously, this does not prevent us from saying it, and so, the job of philosophy for Wittgenstein is to eliminate from language what cannot be meaningfully said. To do this we must understand that simples are indefinable, but that we can nevertheless know, with certainty, what they are, or at the very least, that there are such things as simples. Such simples would in fact be tautologies, for they would say nothing except for "I am what I am," but we would nonetheless be able to understand there meaning without being able to define it in language. This is of course not very far from admitting that simples must be objects with which we can be intuitively and self-evidently acquainted. This much is obvious from the fact that it is possible for language to both have a sense and none at all. We need to know how to tell the difference between propositions that are meaningful and those that are not, and the only way to do this, without attempting to contradict ourselves by saying what cannot be said, is to acknowledge that "showing" (in Wittgenstein's terms) practically amounts to the same thing as "self-evidence."

There is also something of an echo of G. E. Moore's use of "indefinable simple notions" in Wittgenstein's conception of showing. In *Principia Ethica*, Moore poses the following question to himself:

> If I am asked 'What is good?' my answer is that good is good, and that is the end of the matter. Or if I am asked 'How is good to be defined?' my answer is that it cannot be defined, and that is all I

> have to say about it. . . . My point is that 'good' is a simple notion, just as 'yellow' is a simple notion; that, just as you cannot, by any means, explain to any one who does not already know it, what yellow is, so you cannot explain what good is. Definitions of the kind that I was asking for, definitions which describe the real nature of the object or notion denoted by a word, and which do not merely tell us what the word is used to mean, are only possible when the object or notion in question is something complex.[92]

Moore's definition of good is of course tautological and therefore cannot be a definition in any appreciable and positive sense, which is exactly his point: definitions must end somewhere. At some base point in an analysis, one can only name the constituent simples, but that is as far as one can go. In the strictest sense the only thing we may say about them is that they are what they are, and if you do not already know what they are, there is no way to explain what they are to you. Just as no amount of explanation will suffice in elucidating what it is like to see yellow to someone who has never had an experience of that color, likewise there is no appreciable way to explain what good is to someone who does not, in some sense, already know. One might imagine that the same would be applicable to the concept of logical simples. Since one cannot meaningfully define them, it is also quite impossible to meaningful speak of them as well. If one did not already know that logical analysis required logical simples, one would not gain this knowledge definitionally. One must be acquainted with what the notion of a logical simple is like, which is to say, more directly, that the idea of logical simples must itself be the logical simple *par excellence*, from which the possibility of logical simples derives. The question ought to be asked, "If one cannot know through language what a logical simple is, how does one know that

there are such things at all?" The only possible answer, it would seem, is that logical analysis itself provides the basis for logical simples, and that if one is acquainted with logical analysis, it must also be self-evident that logical analysis demands the existence of logical simples. It is difficult to avoid this conclusion without either trying to administer further proofs of the necessity of logical simples or admitting that they are an arbitrary requirement of logical analysis, which is not at all the same thing as a demonstration of logical necessity in general.

Julius Weinberg suggests that "the doctrine of logical simples is fundamental to the philosophy of Logical Positivism."[93] The argument could easily be made that the concept of "simple indivisible elements of being" are just as fundamental for Wittgenstein's logical analysis, as they were for Moore's philosophy of ethics. Though Wittgenstein was certainly only loosely and reluctantly associated with the Vienna Circle, Wittgenstein was by no means a logical positivist. When Wittgenstein met with some of those affiliated with the Circle, especially those close to the German philosopher Moritz Schlick, "to the surprise of his audience, Wittgenstein would turn his back on them and read poetry . . . as if to emphasize to them . . . that what he had *not* said in the *Tractatus* was more important that what he had."[94] Not only is poetry the sort of thing that is outside the confines of meaningful propositional language (i.e. the language of natural science), so too is the nature of logical simples. One cannot say what simples are, but one knows that there are such things, not because one has discovered them, but because analysis demands that they must be there. "The

doctrine that ultimate simples exist is required to ensure the completeness and uniqueness of any given analysis. The doctrine can either be assumed, or demonstrated, or introduced as an arbitrary postulate (convention) to be justified by the success of the system employing it."[95] Of course it is here that Weinberg has put his finger on the metaphysical pulse that not only drives the logical positivists, but Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* as well. For no one has yet to empirically demonstrate a specific instance of a logical simple and we therefore cannot use this as the basis of our belief in their existence. One might retort that this is quite beside the point, that an empirical demonstration would only be a confirmation of a logical necessity. In reality, logical simples are only necessary to certain kinds of analysis, and thus if one wants to do the sort of kind of analysis that requires the concept of logical simples, one can hardly do away with it. If one adopts this form of analysis as "self-evidently" correct the need for logical simples will take on the aura of being necessary in itself. Let us not forget that logical analysis does not, nor could it, prove that logical analysis is the correct form of analysis *a priori*. Starting from the premise "logical analysis is the only correct kind," we will seem to arrive, as if by necessity, the existence of logical simples. This "proof," however, is only predicated on our unquestioned acceptance of logical analysis as self-evidently correct. This is how Wittgenstein was able to arrive at the conclusion that "self-evidence" was completely unessential to the project of logical analysis. He took for granted the postulate that logical analysis must necessarily be the only possible correct one, and forgetting this fact, it seemed as if logical analysis was able to bypass the need for

"self-evidence." In truth, the whole endeavor of logical analysis depends on an "arbitrary postulate," to use Weinberg's words once again. Whether the success of such a system is used as a justification for it is quite beside the point; its success—or lack thereof—is not a demonstration of its truth or its falsity.

At base, Wittgenstein's conception of language is dependent on a definition of tautology—in the sense that language can only meaningfully refer to that which can logically exist. This is for good reasons, too. A tautology, insofar as it is an expression of the law of self-identity, *seems* to bypass the need for self-evidence, because it makes no other claim save a purely formal one: everything is whatever it is. Even though this is an empty truism, it is nevertheless the boundary of existence—not because it has content, but rather because it does not. It only tells us what is logically permissible to exist, not what actually does exist (the latter is the realm of the natural sciences). Of course, this depends on our willingness to accept the law of self-identity as unquestionably true. That a thing is the same as itself is an axiom that is by no means provable beyond the possibility of doubt. We may either say that it is self-evident—which is not a proof of its truth, but rather a declaration that we will not doubt it—or we may acknowledge that no ultimate proof may be given and that our belief in the law of self-identity is an arbitrarily adopted convention that makes certain kinds of methodologies possible. It is not true unconditionally, but only contingently true according to the kind of analysis one wishes to make. In the case of logical analysis, the need for a definition of tautology is indispensable to its cogency, as

are the existence of logical simples. Both are assumed by the methodological constraints of logical analysis.

The epigraph with which Moore begins *Principia Ethica* comes from Bishop Butler's oft quoted witticism, "Everything is what it is, and not another thing."[96] Wittgenstein too, was fond of this phrase, and as Ray Monk notes in his biography of Wittgenstein, he thought of using it "as a motto for *Philosophical Investigations*."[97] One gets the feeling, however, that it would serve as an equally good motto for the *Tractatus*. Logic, insofar as it is concerned with what must be self-evidently the case in all possible worlds, is concerned only with what is tautological. This much is stated by Wittgenstein in 6.1 and 6.11.

> 6.1 The propositions of logic are tautologies.
>
> 6.11 Therefore the propositions of logic say nothing. (They are the analytic propositions.)[98]

Accordingly, a tautology, on the face of it, is only meant to convey the idea that "if *p* then *p*."[99] Even though a tautology, strictly speaking, "says nothing," it can nonetheless be used, oddly enough, to say many other things besides. Dorothy Emmet makes several interesting points about the various ways in which tautologies are sometimes anything but silent.

> Philosophers have questioned whether any proposition true in virtue of its form of words alone can be factually informative. There are problems here in the notion of necessary truth and of synonymity. But it would seem as though the lowest, simplest form of a tautology 'A is A' could not possibly be informative. Yet there are ways in which it may be sensible to assert this, and in which 'A is A', though vacuous in what it directly asserts, may be communicative in what it indirectly conveys.[100]

Emmet details several of these uses, such as the "'This is what matters' use. . . . Close to this, but I think distinct from it, is the use of a tautology to remind us of the generic meaning of an idea."[101] Besides this, there are also, as she calls them, "'Shut up' tautologies,"[102] which she claims is the sense that Moore uses it in. The use of a tautology in this sense "is invoked when the analysis is becoming so artificial as to lack a sense of proposition."[103] This also, seemingly, is the sense in which Wittgenstein uses the term. It is in effect meant to convey to us that things are what they are and that is the end of the matter. The conclusion of the *Tractatus*, it might be said, which entreats us to pass over what we cannot say in silence, is one of the most grandiose "shut up" tautologies ever devised. Its sole purpose is to put an end to the conversation, or more directly, to put an end to the possibility of philosophy as traditionally understood.

Emmet's consideration of the various non-vacuous uses of tautologies is a view that Wittgenstein seems not to have shared, or possibly not even considered. The fact that a phrase like "no means no" has an entirely different (and meaningful) connotation then what its tautological form allows shows the inevitable inadequacy of Wittgenstein's *Tractarian* linguistic theory. No doubt it was instances similar to this that led Wittgenstein to have second thoughts about his first book. Nevertheless, there is something inexorably important about the use of tautology in the *Tractatus*, not just for logic, but in metaphysics in general. An essential component of a tautology, after all, is that it stands in for a logically simple object. Such objects, as Wittgenstein remarks in 3.221, "Can only be

named. Signs are their representatives. I can only speak *about* them: I cannot *put them into words*. Propositions can only say *how* things are, not *what* they are."[104] In 3.26 he goes on, "A name cannot be dissected any further by means of a definition: it is a primitive sign."[105] In this respect, names serve a basic metaphysical function in the *Tractatus*, they are the necessary components that allow us to construct definitions in the first place. One immediately sees the problem that this creates. If a name is what allows us to give definitions, then how is it that we can give a definition to "names" in general? If we have defined "names" as "that which allows us to give definitions," are we not saying something to the effect that names are both the cause and effect of names? This, however, cannot be accepted as valid. A definition of "names" must be given prior to its application in determining other definitions. How "primitive" can a sign be, however, if it requires such a definition?

Wittgenstein, in a move that is an uncanny foreshadowing of the *Investigations*, seems to be attempting to resolve this issue in passages 3.262–3.3.

> 3.262 What signs fail to express, their application shows. What signs slur over, their application says clearly.
>
> 3.263 The meanings of primitive signs can be explained by means of elucidations. Elucidations are propositions that contain primitive signs. So they can only be understood if the meanings of those signs are already known.
>
> 3.3 Only propositions have sense; only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have a meaning.[106]

The idea of "elucidations" provides Wittgenstein a means of escaping the vicious circle described above. Primitive signs, which are not definable, but only

nameable, are completely meaningless by themselves. They are tautologies only, and nothing follows from them save for other tautologies. Simple, primitive signs, therefore, gain their sense in combination with other primitive signs. Their meaning is illustrated by their use in a proposition. A proposition cannot say what the use of a primitive sign is, but if one understands the sense of a proposition, one can see the sense of the primitive signs contained therein. The importance of the "application" of primitive signs that Wittgenstein places in the above quotation bears some resemblance to the concept of the notion that "meaning is use" which pervades the discussion of language in the *Investigations*. Primarily, this similarity is limited to the importance that context is given within the conception of language. The difference, however, is that where the *Tractatus* is concerned, "the nexus of a proposition" shows that the meanings of simple names is fundamentally set in stone. Not only does the *Investigations* take the completely opposite view (no name is ultimately immalleable according to its tenets); the very notion of primitive signs is taken into serious question. It is of course a short coming of the *Tractatus* that it can give no real justification for why we need to suppose the existence of primitive signs to begin with. If their existence is due to methodological constraints, there seems to be little reason to assume that this implies their necessity. Furthermore, if primitive signs are known only by way of their application within the context of propositions, they are a superfluous addition to Wittgenstein's theory of language. In other words, the assertion, "what signs fail to express, their application shows," implies that we need not understand signs at all. This is despite the fact that Wittgenstein claims

that propositions "can only be understood if the meanings of those signs are already known." This leads us straightaway into the problem of cause and effect once more. If we can only understand the meaning of a primitive sign by its application in a proposition, and if we can only understand the meaning of a proposition if we understand the meaning of the primitive signs of which it is composed, it would be impossible for us to understand either without first understanding the other.

It is at this point that Wittgenstein's metaphysics come into a more focused consideration. Not only does the notion of primitive symbols make an assertion about the nature of language, it also sets conditions on the nature of existence. Although the world, in a certain sense, is entirely separate from its depiction in language—which is to say that we may correctly or incorrectly mirror any particular state of affairs in language—in another sense entirely, "*the limits of my language*," as Wittgenstein states in 5.6, "mean the limits of my world."[107] If it is not possible for something to be meaningfully said in language, it is not possible for it to exist either (and vice versa), for there would be no possible logical form that language and reality could have in common. More importantly, this point provides the key to the problem of solipsism for Wittgenstein. "For what the solipsist means is quite correct; only it cannot be *said*, but makes itself manifest."[108] What makes itself manifest is the "metaphysical subject," as Wittgenstein calls it. Michael Hodges, in his excellent book, *Transcendence and Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, asks why it is that Wittgenstein felt it necessary to

introduce such an idea into a conception of language that is rigorously realistic, as the picture theory undoubtedly is. The answer, he says,

> Has to do with representation: if one fact (a sentence) is to represent another fact (a state of affairs), there must be a subject. A fact merely as a state of affairs and a fact as a representing sentence are logically distinct. Only for a subject can one fact represent another. Without subjectivity there would be merely an unarticulated totality of facts. Thus subjectivity is a *logically* necessary condition for the possibility of representation.[109]

A picture, in other words, is always a picture for someone, and so it is quite true that the possibility of representation is predicated on their being a subject to whom the representations is presented. "I am my world,"[110] Wittgenstein remarks. From this realization we see that "solipsism, when its implications are followed out strictly, coincides with pure realism."[111] It does so because the metaphysical subject is not a part of the world, it is the limit of it. It is, as Wittgenstein says, "exactly like the case of the eye in the visual field. But really you do *not* see the eye. And nothing *in the visual field* allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye."[112] Just as the eye does not see itself in the visual field, but is nevertheless the mechanism by which the visual field is seen, so too is the metaphysical subject the mechanism by which the world—my world—exists. The metaphysical subject, although it is not in any appreciable sense, a part of the world, is the prerequisite for it, just as a picture requires a viewer in order to be a picture. This is the real metaphysical consequence of the picture theory. If we start from the premise that language is essentially representational (and this of

course is not the only one from which we may begin) then it is quite impossible to avoid the consequence of the metaphysical subject.

This, however, is only one particular consequence of the metaphysics that belies the *Tractatus*. In truth, its basis is simply the idea that arbitrary decisions produce necessary results. From a given set of axioms one must derive a given set of corollaries. One cannot justify adopting any particular axiom without further recourse to still other axioms, in which case it ceases to be an axiom and becomes a corollary. This is to say that metaphysical propositions, by their very nature, are analogous to the axioms and laws of logic. While we may claim that they are self-evident, there is no way to prove that they are—not to mention the fact that no one can seem to agree universally what is and is not self-evident. In granting this point we see that although even the most obvious seeming axioms are entirely arbitrary, their validity is based solely on the will to believe them. This is what distinguishes a metaphysical proposition from other kinds of propositions: it cannot be proved because it cannot be derived from other propositions. The same, of course, applies to logical propositions. Let us hasten to add that this is not at all Wittgenstein's main point in the *Tractatus*, but something like it is hinted at in 3.342. "Although there is something arbitrary in our notations, *this* much is not arbitrary—that *when* we have determined one thing arbitrarily, something else is necessarily the case. (This derives from the *essence* of notation)."[113] This is certainly an important point. For although notational rules are arbitrary, once established, one must abide by them or discard them in favor other rules. This is the essential feature of metaphysics.

To be sure, however, there is no notational rule *a priori* that allows us to determine what sorts of elementary propositions there are. Rather, it is in "the *application* of logic," Wittgenstein says, that "decides what elementary propositions there are. What belongs to its application, logic cannot anticipate. It is clear that logic must not clash with its application."[114] In another anticipation of the *Investigations*, the above passage calls into question the idea that logic may be separated from its application. If one cannot determine what elementary propositions there are without the application of logic, then it becomes suspect to assert that there is such a thing as elementary propositions apart from how they are used. Although it is fairly obvious that what Wittgenstein is referring to above are elementary propositions which are actually the case and not potentially so, given the assertion that "the application of logic decides what elementary propositions there are," there can be no such thing as "potential elementary propositions that are not actually the case," because to discover such an elementary proposition would require an application of logic, and the application of logic decides what elementary propositions there are. In 5.5571 Wittgenstein remarks, "If I cannot say a priori what elementary propositions there are, then the attempt to do so must lead to obvious nonsense."[115] This means, roughly speaking, that there is no "logic before logic," or, more precisely, there is no logic before its application. The attempt to say what logic is apart from its application therefore leads to nonsense. It is endeavoring to say what cannot be said.

There has been some attention given to the topic of Wittgenstein's metaphysics within the corpus of the secondary literature, but mostly it has been

concerned with the ontological aspects of the *Tractatus*. While ontology is most certainly a topic of interest within metaphysics, it is by no means the only one. What has here been argued is that the problem of metaphysics is best typified by what amounts to a crisis of justification. One can only give reasons for one's suppositions up to a certain point, at which point validation must come to an end. The inability to justify an assertion is thus the condition by which it is to be considered "metaphysical." Therefore, ontology need not be synonymous with metaphysics, inasmuch as ontological propositions may be derived from non-ontological ones. Metaphysics, in the above sense, means simply "first philosophy."

Peter Carruthers, in his cogently written (if somewhat absorbed in details) book, *The Metaphysics of the Tractatus*, remarks that "Wittgenstein, like Frege, took logic and semantics to be prior to metaphysics and ontology."[116] There are certainly good textual reasons to suppose that Wittgenstein derives his conception of ontology from his logical methodology in general. This is seen most evidently in the doctrine of simple and indefinable elements of being. His use of logic, as discussed above, requires such an ontology, but Carruthers' contention that logic is also prior to metaphysics is somewhat inaccurate. There are certainly aspects of Wittgenstein's thinking in the *Tractatus* that adopt a metaphysical tenor. The emphasis on mysticism is but one instance, (which is also derived from his use of logic). Logic, therefore, does not precede metaphysics, it is metaphysics. At least it is in this particular case. Carruthers also notes that "Wittgenstein wants his simples to have necessary existence."[117] We need only answer the question of

how this necessity is to be achieved. The answer, not surprisingly, is that Wittgenstein's logic necessitates the existence of simples. However, this leaves us with yet another unanswered question: How is logic to be validated as the necessarily "correct" methodology to the exclusion of all others? There is no answer to this question, unless one wishes to resort to "self-evidence," which it seems Wittgenstein does. Although, the truth is, Wittgenstein never gives any attempt at a justification of logic whatsoever. It is merely assumed without question. This is precisely the point at which aesthetics enters into his metaphysical considerations: where reasons fail and conjecture is the only viable option in establishing any basis for our assertions.

Where the topic of ontology in the *Tractatus* is concerned, there has been some interesting debate within the secondary Wittgensteinian scholarship as to what sort of theory is suggested therein. On this, there are several divergent and irreconcilable interpretations. John W. Cook, in *Wittgenstein's Metaphysics*, asserts that by 1916 Wittgenstein "had embraced that version of empiricism that William James called 'radical empiricism' and Bertrand Russell later called 'neutral monism.' From that date until his death his fundamental views changed very little."[118] The radical feature of neutral monism, as Cook describes it,

> Is that, unlike idealism, it does not hold that everything is mental or *in* a mind. On the contrary, it claims to eliminate altogether the (Cartesian) mind or ego, thus doing away with the subjectivity of experience. In this view, then, there is nothing that is subjective (or private) and therefore there is nothing that is unknowable.[119]

There are certainly elements of neutral monism in the *Tractatus*, and Cook does and admirable job in drawing them out. Wittgenstein's assertions in 5.621, "The world and life are one," and 5.63, "I am my world. (The microcosm.),"[120] are enough to demonstrate this point. However, like Wittgenstein's use of logical simples, the elements of neutral monism that pervade the *Tractatus* are necessitated by the dictates of his logic. The picture theory requires, as noted above, the "metaphysical subject." I am the boundary of my world, and thus there can be no difference between my experiences of the world and the corporeal world. They are one and the same.

This is, as Cook noted, more or less a reiteration of James' concept of radical empiricism, which is central tenet of his famous essay, "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?":

> My thesis is that if we start with the supposition that there is only one primal stuff or material in the world, a stuff of which everything is composed, and if we call that stuff 'pure experience,' then knowing can easily be explained as a particular sort of relation towards one another into which portions of pure experience may enter. The relation itself is a part of pure experience; one of its 'terms' becomes the subject or bearer of the knowledge, the knower, the other becomes the object known.

Wittgenstein adopts much the same argumentative apparatus in the *Tractatus*. The world is essentially one sort of thing: "facts," which stand in a given set of logically possible relationships to one another. Accordingly, "subject" and "object" are not two separate substances, as an idealistic leaning dualist might hold, but rather a relationship between facts. In Hodges' account of the *Tractatus*,

he describes how "Wittgenstein proposes an ontology of facts . . . as well as a theory of meaning that takes the propositions as the basic unit."[121] This, along with Cook's interpretation of the neutral monism of the *Tractatus*, goes a long way towards giving the *Tractatus* a monistic slant (in the same vein as the concept of immanence in Spinoza's philosophy). If the world is reducible to ontologically basic units called "facts," then it follows that the world is constructed of facts and nothing else, despite whatever illusion of corporeality it might have. Furthermore, if the world is "my world"—the totality of facts and not things—then we should acknowledge, as Cook does, that "the world of the *Tractatus* is a phenomenal world."[122]

The above interpretation, however, does little to account for the mystical and transcendental aspects that abounds in the later passages of the *Tractatus* (of which little will be said here—the topic will be taken up more fully in chapters four and five). Carruthers, in the preface to his book on *The Metaphysics of the Tractatus*, tells his reader,

> I shall say nothing about Wittgenstein's remarks on value and on mysticism. . . . It is, in my view, clearly unnecessary to take any particular stance on the *TLP* [*Tractatus Logico Philosphicus*] doctrine of the Ethical in order to interpret and assess the semantic and metaphysical doctrines which make up the body of the work.[123]

This, however, seems to be a difficult assertion to give credence to. It is, at the very least, indicative of the sort of oversight reminiscent of the early positivistic interpretations of the *Tractatus*—especially given the importance that

Wittgenstein put on the subjects of transcendence, mysticism, ethics, and aesthetics in the latter pages of the *Tractatus*. It is precisely these interests that give the book something of a dualistic flavor. It should be noted that where Wittgenstein can be made out to be a dualist, he bears little resemblance to the dualism of someone like Descartes, for example. For Wittgenstein, the world is made up essentially of facts, all of which may be meaningfully expressed in language. However, what lies beyond language (i.e., what is transcendental, mystical, ethical, aesthetic, etc.) is curiously present in the world nonetheless (it shows itself). Unlike Descartes—for whom mind was more "real" than the body—Wittgenstein does not implicitly favor either the world of facts or the transcendental as being more "essential" than the other. Both are equally "real" in the sense that the world of facts is predicated on the transcendental, and vice versa.

The metaphysical subject, although it is not a fact about the world, must, in a loosely conceived sense, "exist" if there is to be a world at all. It is in this way too that Wittgenstein believes logic to be transcendental. In 5.61 he remarks,

> Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits. So we cannot say in logic, 'The world has this in it, and this, but not that.' For that would appear to presuppose that we were excluding certain possibilities, and this cannot be the case, since it would require that logic should go beyond the limits of the world; for only in that way could it view those limits from the other side as well.[124]

We cannot go beyond the limits of the world, for this would require us to think the other side of the boundary of the world, in which case it would cease to be a

boundary at all. The attempt to go beyond this boundary is what typifies all metaphysical tendencies for Wittgenstein, and thus all metaphysics is "transcendental," including logic. In 6.13 he states, "Logic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror-image of the world. Logic is transcendental."[125] Logic, understood thusly, is virtually synonymous with the metaphysical subject, as can be inferred from 5.641.

> Thus there really is a sense in which philosophy can talk about the self in a non-psychological way. What brings the self into philosophy is the fact that 'the world is my world'. The philosophical self is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world—not a part of it.[126]

Since "the world is my world" and both the metaphysical subject and logic are its "boundaries," it must be concluded that in reality, they are the same thing. Thus, there is the world: that which is bounded by the logical-metaphysical self; and there is the transcendental: that which lies on the other side of the world's boundary. In positing both the "world" and the "transcendental," Wittgenstein can most certainly be regarded as a dualist.

This partly explains why Wittgenstein believes that all facts are on the same level in logical space, as can be seen in 5.556, "There cannot be a hierarchy of the forms of elementary propositions;"[127] and in 6.42, "Propositions can express nothing higher."[128] Accordingly, we may gather that the world is composed only of facts which may be mirrored in propositions and that they cannot express anything which is not a fact, i.e. what is transcendental or beyond

the boundary of the world. This of course lends itself to the neutral monism interpretation advocated by Cook. However, in 5.5561, Wittgenstein goes on to say, "Hierarchies are and must be independent of reality,"[129] which again points towards a dualist interpretation, for it implies that there are such things as "higher propositions," although they must necessarily be independent of reality. Even though "the world," according to Wittgenstein, is essentially made of facts and nothing else (a monist interpretation), Wittgenstein nevertheless makes a clear (and dualistic) distinction between what is logically permissible (the boundary of the world) and what actually is the case (the world of all true propositions). The former decides what can and cannot be a possible state of affairs, e.g. there is nothing "illogical" about unicorns even though none exist. The latter is the realm of the natural sciences. Though the existence of unicorns is not logically restricted, the natural sciences do not deal with them because only the "totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science."[130] Thus, even if we dismiss the implicit dualistic divide between logic and mysticism in the *Tractatus*, we can still infer a quasi-dualism in Wittgenstein's distinction between logic and natural science.

A brief word about the "pluralism" of the *Tractatus*: examples have been given above suggesting that one could sometimes construe it as monistic and sometimes as dualistic. This fact alone—the fact that multiple interpretations can be made—is enough to imply the possibility of pluralism. Even if we were to grant the monist's main contention—that the world consists of facts and nothing else—the possibility of an alternative pluralistic interpretation based on this

supposition is not thereby eliminated. Supposing that the world is everything that is the case, and that all facts stand on the same level, this does not necessarily imply that these facts may be reducible to one grandiose "metafact" which all other facts are derivatives of (analogous to the Form of the Good in Plato's metaphysics). This is the conclusion which monism, neutral monism included, must necessarily lead us to. There can only be one thing and one thing only; the appearance of difference is an illusion. William James, whose doctrine of radical empiricism supposed "a world of pure experience," remarks that his theory "is essentially a mosaic philosophy, a philosophy of plural facts."[131] The same may be said of Wittgenstein's facts in the *Tractatus*. Although it might well be the case that the monistic interpretation is correct, that the only true fact is that the world is the totality of facts, that "everything, whether we realize it or not, drags the whole universe along with itself and drops nothing,"[132] as James puts it. It might also be the case that facts are simply non-reducible to any one single metafact thus giving us a pluralistic world consisting of a plurality of facts.

In an interesting way, James' pluralism anticipates the same exact turn that Wittgenstein would make in the *Investigations*. "For pluralism," James says "all that we are required to admit as the constitution of reality is what we ourselves find empirically realized in every minimum of finite life. Briefly it is this, that nothing real is absolutely simple."[133] Wittgenstein, in a certain sense, must have come to something of the same conclusion, because one of his main points of self-criticism in the *Investigations* is leveraged against the very idea of a "simple indivisible element of being" as a logical necessity which is at the heart of the

Tractatus. As a result, there is a shade of pluralism that colors the *Investigations* as well, the reason being that a pluralistic universe does not allow for the possibility of any simple and indivisible element of being. Accordingly, multiple interpretations are always nascent. The metaphysical subject—the boundary of the world—is the pluralistic subject: no account of it is forever fixed in place.

The topics with which the *Tractatus* deals—especially those of logic and language—present us with a quandary not easily solved. There is no question that Wittgenstein prescribes a theory that attempts to clearly demarcate the boundaries of meaning, and thereby the boundaries of the world. The question is whether he is successful in so doing. The picture theory, while it gives us a way of identifying a meaningful proposition from a pseudo-proposition, falls noticeably flat in one way: it breaks its own rules. It says what can only be shown. Russell, in his introduction to the *Tractatus*, makes this very same point. "Mr Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said, thus suggesting to the sceptical reader that possibly there may be some loophole through a hierarchy of languages, or by some other exit."[134] Wittgenstein, writing to Russell on April 4, 1920, expresses his dissatisfaction with the latter's introduction. "There's so much in it that I'm not quite in agreement with – both where you're critical of me and also where you're simply elucidating my point of view. But that doesn't matter. The future will pass judgment on us – or perhaps it won't, and if it is silent that will be a judgment too."[135] This final remark, regarding the judgment of silence, is a poignant one, for the future has been anything but silent about the *Tractatus*, least of all where it beseeches us to

remain silent. Despite Wittgenstein's dislike of the book's introduction, there is no definitive way for him to respond to Russell's observation concerning his supposed ability to say a good deal concerning what cannot be spoken of.

Russell, of course, picked up on Wittgenstein's division between saying and showing in his introduction. A proposition is a picture of a fact via a shared logical structure that the two must have. "It is this common structure which makes it capable of being a picture of a fact, but the structure cannot itself be put into words, since it is a structure *of* words, as well as of the facts to which they refer."[136] One of the contentions that has been made in this chapter is that Wittgenstein, apart from his criticism of the need for self-evidence in logic, in the end, must resort to a form of it (as is seen in his conception of showing). Wittgenstein, for his part, seems to recognize the issues that surround self-evidence—a theory is inherently weak if it must resort to it—and Wittgenstein's use of showing, as the theoretical basis of logic, is meant to side step this weakness. He is particularly hard on Frege in 6.1271, for his recourse to it. "It is remarkable that a thinker as rigorous as Frege appealed to the degree of self-evidence as the criterion of a logical proposition."[137] Part of the problem with self-evidence is that disputes may easily arise about exactly what does and does not count as "true beyond doubt." The purpose of showing in the *Tractatus* is to avert this difficulty. It does so, or at least it attempts to do so, by making mistakes in logic impossible. It is not possible, even for God, to think contrary to the laws of logic and therefore the laws of logic are manifest in the world because reality is logical. This is how "propositions *show* the logical form of reality. They display

it."[138] Wittgenstein's doctrine of showing is thus an attempt to remove the "self" from self-evidence. There can be no disagreement in logic because illogical thought is impossible and therefore we are constrained by logic to think logically. Logic thus shows itself in the world because there can be no such thing as an illogical world, even if the logical form of reality cannot be meaningfully put into words.

Wittgenstein's attitude towards self-evidence, was, it has been noted, to disregard it as completely unnecessary in logic. One cannot help but get the feeling that he is talking out both sides of his mouth. In 5.551 he remarks, "Our fundamental principle is that whenever a question can be decided by logic at all it must be possible to decide it without more ado."[139] The same may be said, however, of self-evidence: When one makes an appeal to it, one does so as an indication that no further ado is considered possible. This is exactly the kind of quality Wittgenstein assigns to the questions of logic: There can be no arguing about them. This sort of attitude towards logic is seen in many of the propositions of the *Tractatus*, all of which implicitly suggest self-evidence as their basis. Take 6.1265 as an example. "It is always possible to construe logic in such a way that every proposition is its own proof."[140] A proposition that was its own proof, evidently, would show this fact. So too would a self-evidential one, and thus there would be no way to distinguish between the certainty of a logical proposition and a proposition that is purportedly self-evident.

In 5.1363 Wittgenstein asserts that "if the truth of a proposition does not *follow* from the fact that it is self-evident to us, then its self-evidence in no way

justifies our belief in its truth."[141] Wittgenstein's point seems to be that if it the truth of a proposition does not logically follow from our belief that it is self-evident then it is not a proof of its truth, which is no doubt correct. One may believe a proposition to be self-evident and yet the proposition may nevertheless turn out to be false. This, however, cannot be possible for a logical proposition. On the other hand, surely the proposition "logic shows its sense" is not a logical one—it is not a true proposition *a priori*. Rather, it requires us to "believe" in its truth. More to the point, Wittgenstein's concept of showing itself requires us either to accept it as an axiomatic principle which cannot be proven but is nevertheless methodologically useful, or to declare that it is self-evidently certain that self-evidence is superfluous in logic, in which case self-evidence would be anything but superfluous to logic (a self-referential incoherence). It seems to be the avoidance of self-referential inconsistencies that lead Wittgenstein to his idea of showing in the first place. While Wittgenstein seems to intend his doctrine of showing as a means to absolve ourselves of the need for self-evidence, the former is merely a redressing of the latter on all main points. We could just as easily say that "a tautology shows its sense" as we could say "a tautology is self-evident." It is therefore no surprise that Wittgenstein places so much importance on the tautology in the *Tractatus*:

> 5.142 A tautology follows from all propositions: it says nothing.[142]
>
> 6.1264 Every proposition of logic is a modus ponens represented in signs. (And one cannot express the modus ponens by means of a proposition.)[143]

Given the fact that logic is entirely composed of tautological propositions, and that tautologies say nothing, whenever we speak about logic, we are of course saying nothing. In this sense, the *Tractatus* remains dutifully silent. It is also in this sense that it is most appreciably a book that treats of a metaphysical topic: logic, which according to Wittgenstein "*is prior* to every experience."[144] We cannot, however, determine that logic is the correct metaphysical construct *a priori*. This would require us to use logic to justify logic. It also requires that we make a great many presuppositions about the nature of reality, as is suggested by Wittgenstein in 6.124 (which rather succinctly sums up the whole of the *Tractatus*).

> The propositions of logic describe the scaffolding of the world, or rather they represent it. They have no 'subject-matter'. They presuppose that names have meaning and elementary propositions sense. . . . It is clear that something about the world must be indicated by the fact that certain combinations of symbols . . . are tautologies. This contains the decisive point. We have said that some things are arbitrary in the symbols that we use and that some things are not. In logic it is only the latter that express: but that means that logic is not a field in which *we* express what we wish with the help of signs, but rather one in which the nature of the absolutely necessary signs speaks for itself. If we know the logical syntax of any sign-language, then we have already given all the propositions of logic.[145]

Metaphysics, as it is expressed in the context of Wittgenstein's logic, must make certain assumptions that cannot be proved in any appreciable sense, including not only the belief that names have a meaning and elementary propositions a sense, but also the belief that logic is the only form of legitimate metaphysics. Logic in the *Tractatus* does not prevent us from metaphysical speech; it is a form of it.

This self-referential inconsistency is only reinforced by the fact that Wittgenstein says so much about what cannot be spoken of, which is yet further evidence suggesting that logic is the metaphysical backbone of the *Tractatus* (logic can no more be meaningfully spoken of than metaphysics).

Some things are arbitrary in logic, just as in metaphysics, and some things are not. For what is arbitrary selected, no justification can be given except for an aesthetic one. As for necessity and its relation to logic, let it be noted that a great many things must be presupposed before that can even be a consideration for us, but once they have been made, many things will inextricably follow. The source of Wittgenstein's certitude—that logic provided him the unassailable truth to the problems of philosophy—does not, to be sure, result from its indubitability, but rather the aesthetic belief that the world *must* conform to it. This is all the more evident when Wittgenstein changes his mind about many of his early assurances in the *Tractatus*, which is not so much a refutation of his early work as it is indicative of a change in aesthetic preference.

CHAPTER 2:
Metaphysics and the Ordinary

> Metaphysics means nothing but an unusually obstinate effort to think clearly.
>
> –WILLIAM JAMES, *The Principles of Psychology*

> What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.
>
> –LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*

After considering the *Tractatus* at some length in the previous chapter, it should be fairly clear that Wittgenstein's early philosophy has a good deal to say about the nature of metaphysics and much the same argument will be made about Wittgenstein's late philosophy in this chapter. Where he criticizes philosophy in the *Investigations*, which he often does, it bears much in common with the criticisms to be found in the *Tractatus*. The latter brings words back from their metaphysical to their logical use, whereas the former brings them back to their everyday use. Now, it is true that two very different conceptions of language are at work in each book. Despite this, the goal of each is to clearly differentiate between meaningful and non-meaningful language.

Part of the argument that this chapter aims to put forth is that Wittgenstein makes a renewed attempt in the *Philosophical Investigations* to displace metaphysics altogether from philosophy. This was, roughly speaking, one of the principal aims of the *Tractatus*, and it resurfaces front and center in the *Investigations*. One of the chief issues that confronts the *Tractatus* is its self-reverential incoherence. It is a book that breaks its own rules. It displaces more

philosophically traditional notions of metaphysics as nonsensical and puts logic in its place. This is a something which Wittgenstein intrinsically seemed to realize, as can be inferred from §97 of the *Investigations*.

> We are under the illusion that what is peculiar, profound and essential to us in our investigation resides in its trying to grasp the incomparable essence of language. That is, the order existing between the concepts of proposition, word, inference, truth, experience, and so forth. This order is a *super*-order between – so to speak – *super*-concepts. Whereas, in fact, if the words "language", "experience", "world" have a use, it must be as humble a one as that of the words "table", "lamp", "door".[146]

The problem with Wittgenstein's use of logic in the *Tractatus* is that it has the very same air of "profundity" that characterizes some of the great metaphysical systems in the Western tradition. There is something strangely Platonic in it that extends itself towards an encapsulation of the "incomparable essence" of language and the "super-order" between "super-concepts." By the time of the *Investigations* this tendency in Wittgenstein had run its course. Whatever meaning words like "language," "experience," and "world" might have, it must be a completely ordinary one, thereby eliminating all trace of metaphysics from philosophy once and for all.

This, however, is exactly what the *Investigations* fails to do. The recourse it makes to the ordinary must still own up to the problem of metaphysics in general. It needs to provide us a reason to adopt the methodological turn to the "humble" origin of our words. This, it will be argued, cannot be done. In order to give a convincingly irrefutable justification would require the sort of super-

concepts that Wittgenstein railed against in the *Investigations*. There is, in other words, something undoubtedly extraordinary about the ordinary. Despite his best efforts, Wittgenstein can no more show that his method in the *Investigations* is any more unassailable than it was in the *Tractatus*, which is exactly where the metaphysics of the *Investigations* enters the stage. Faced with the inability to give his methodology any sound and unshakable footing, Wittgenstein is forced to make a great many assumptions, assumptions which are guided by his (somewhat) altered aesthetic sensibilities. This chapter will focus its attention on explicating some of these assumptions in an attempt to demonstrate their axiomatic and metaphysical character.

No doubt there are objections that could be raised against the above interpretation. What Wittgenstein really wanted to do, one might retort, was to show that metaphysics amounts to a misapplication of words—a divorcing of the meanings that words possess from their use in language. Clearly, Wittgenstein wants us to forgo such questions as "What is the essence of language?" and to instead look at how language is used in context. Metaphysics, according to Wittgenstein, is the attempt to say what language will not allow us to say. The humble origins of our words apply equally to all words—there are no higher, essential or super-order words—only words as they are used in language. This does not, however, equate to a "metaphysical" doctrine in any appreciable sense of the word. To the contrary, it is an argument that is stridently anti-metaphysical. The retort, however, that "criticism of metaphysics does not imply metaphysics" was dealt with in the previous chapter. Besides, this is not the claim

being made here. Rather, the main point is that the "ordinary," whether or not it is leveraged against metaphysics, implies a metaphysical foundation. It has nothing to do with the critique of metaphysics per se, but it does contradict itself if it is used in this fashion (granting that a contradiction is a reasonable cause for objecting to an assertion).

To be sure, the above analysis is a fair enough sketch of Wittgenstein's thought in the *Investigations*. This much is not disputed. Wittgenstein quite obviously believed that language understood in the context of its use was the only cure for our metaphysical misunderstandings. What is being disputed is the idea that "ordinary language" is itself a metaphysically neutral principle. One of Wittgenstein's primary aims in the *Tractatus* was to discover just such a theory that afforded no possibility of any metaphysical implications, which it was, in the end, incapable of doing. This goal was ultimately carried over into the *Investigations*, although it was framed in a very different way of describing language. Aside from the differing conceptions about the nature of language, the "metaphysics" that Wittgenstein critiques in the *Tractatus* is similar in many respects to that of the *Investigations*. In both cases the term generally refers to anything that lies outside the bounds of meaningful language. The only difference between the two is what *counts* as meaningful language. This is but one instance of the common threads that link the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations*, and others may be produced. A few of the passages in the *Tractatus* could just as easily be at home in the *Investigations*. Propositions 3.326 and 6.211, for instance, show a concern for how language is understood in the context of its use.

> 3.326 In order to recognize a symbol by its sign we must observe how it is used with a sense.[147]

> 6.211 In philosophy the question, 'What do we actually use this word or this proposition for?' repeatedly leads to valuable insights.[148]

Proposition 5.1362 on the other hand, bears a resemblance to the "private language" argument that is one of the key features of the *Investigations*. "'*A* knows that *p* is the case', has no sense if *p* is a tautology."[149] It would of course make no sense to doubt a tautology, and where we cannot speak of doubt, we cannot speak of knowledge either. This point will be dealt with in more depth later in this chapter. For the time being it is enough to note that many of the most important ideas of the *Investigations* were already sewn in the soil of the *Tractatus*. It would, however, take an alteration in the sunlight for those seeds to sprout. This change of climate would come by way of a new conception of language, away from the rigidity of the picture theory towards the malleability of the language-game. Ultimately, it is this, more than anything else, which distinguishes the *Tractatus* from the *Investigations*.

The first point to make about the metaphysics of the *Investigations* is essentially the same that was made of the *Tractatus*. Just as the *Tractatus* is not written in the "logically perfect language" of the sort that it expounds, it is difficult to see the *Investigations* as an exercise in a language that is altogether "humble" or within the context of "ordinary use," which is Wittgenstein's criterion of meaningfulness in the *Investigations*. Part of the trouble behind this

criterion is that there is the tendency to assume that what is "ordinary" is metaphysically "neutral," a point that is not lost upon Penelope Mackie in her essay, "Ordinary Language and Metaphysical Commitment"[150], in which she is decisively critical of this view as it is propounded in Peter van Inwagen's book *Material Beings*.[151] "The central tenet of van Inwagen's metaphysics," she says,

> Is that there are no tables, chairs, rocks, stars, or any other visible material objects except living organisms. Yet he maintains that this theory is consistent with what ordinary people mean when, in everyday life, they say things like . . . 'There are rocks that weigh over a ton'. This . . . thesis is defended by an appeal to the metaphysical neutrality of ordinary language. Van Inwagen holds that the everyday utterances are sufficiently free of metaphysical commitment to be insulated from conflict with his metaphysical denial of the existence of chairs, rocks, etc.[152]

Mackie's objection to van Inwagen seems centered on the observation that his metaphysics *requires* a metaphysically neutral ordinary language to avoid a blatant contradiction that arises from the fact that ordinary language makes reference to the existence of all sorts of material objects. First of all, there is no obvious reason to suppose ordinary language to be metaphysically neutral (contrary to its appearances). Second of all, it would take a more convincing proof of metaphysical neutrality besides the requirement of the revisionist metaphysics that van Inwagen has produced. The most convincing argument available is that any appearance of ontological commitment in ordinary language is "simply the product of a misleading idiom."[153] Of course if ordinary language sometimes "misleads" us into ontological commitments that are not accurate, one may inclined to wonder how metaphysically neutral it really is. For ordinary

usage to be truly metaphysically neutral, it cannot give the appearance to the contrary. Otherwise we would have to assume that behind those apparent ontological commitments there is no actual commitment either way, which hardly seems "metaphysically neutral" in any appreciable sense. As Mackie observes, "In the absence of further argument, we should take it that, in this respect, things are as they appear to be."[154]

Gordon Baker, on the other hand, defends the idea of metaphysical neutrality. He asserts that Wittgenstein "used 'metaphysical' in a traditional way, namely, to describe philosophical attempts to delineate the essence of things by establishing necessities and impossibilities. On his conception, 'everyday' simply means 'non-metaphysical'."[155] Baker is correct on the first point. When Wittgenstein does mention metaphysics by name he unquestionably means to evoke a traditional conception of the sort alluded to in the quotation above. Even if we grant this point without any hesitation, it does not necessarily imply that the *Investigations* is a metaphysically vacuous text. Towards the end of his paper, Baker suggests that we should see Wittgenstein as "trying to do justice to individuals' metaphysical uses of words by bringing to light what motivates their utterances."[156] This is a very interesting statement indeed. Does Baker mean to suggest that metaphysical utterances are by their very nature motivated by some particular interest and as a consequence cannot be "true" precisely because they lack "objectivity" or "neutrality?" If we take "motivation" as our signification of "metaphysical utterances," can we possibly imagine Wittgenstein as being "unmotivated?" All of Wittgenstein's writings are ripe with rhetorically

motivated assertions, the *Investigations* not the least among them. And as has been previously suggested, one of the key features of metaphysics is its rhetorical character.

Whether or not Wittgenstein actually asserted that "ordinary language is metaphysically neutral" is debatable. For instance, Marjorie Perloff remarks, "Wittgenstein's *ordinary* is best understood as quite simply *that which is*, the language we do *actually* use when we communicate with one another."[157] Understood in this light, the ordinary takes on the guise of a quasi-realistic ontology, which would clearly not make it metaphysically neutral. Again, we may feel inclined to question whether or not Wittgenstein was a realist of any sort, quasi or otherwise, but what Wittgenstein does tell us to do is to look at how our language is used and to avoid thinking how it ought to be used, as can be seen in §66 of the *Investigations*, for instance. Even still, we do not escape metaphysical implications wholesale. If we want to know how language is used, so Wittgenstein thinks, the correct method for doing so is not going to be an analytical one, such as he used in the *Tractatus*. The right one is going to be something like an "empirical descriptivism" (observe what you see and describe it). Not only does this suggest an epistemological theory, but Wittgenstein seems to be taking such a theory as his "first philosophy," i.e., as the set of principles, expressly defined or implicitly suggested, that form the basis of his entire inquiry.

The second point to be made is that there is a certain fundamental "belief" that Wittgenstein holds to in the *Investigations* that can only be adequately characterized as an "aesthetics of the ordinary." This becomes all the more

important if George Leonard is correct and we can trace "the art of the commonplace" to its origins in the early nineteenth century. One of the central contentions of his book, *Into the Light of Things*, is

> that the turn against the art object [which] . . . Emerson and Whitman make was inevitable, given their credo that paradise, perfection can be found in the "simple produce of the common day," the commonplace, the "eternal picture which nature paints in the street," in "mere real things." Does not the very existence of the separate term "art object" imply a class of things which aren't identical to mere real "objects"?[158]

Leonard also suggests that Whitman and Emerson's elevation of the common, and the attack on art objects in general, "Were not anomalies . . . but the necessary outcome of what M. H. Abrams cautiously termed 'a new intellectual tendency' in Western culture around 1800, 'Natural Supernaturalism.'"[159] This new intellectual tendency, the argument could be made, was just as prevalent in philosophy as it was in literature and art. Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, as much a work of literature as philosophy, is an exemplar of this tendency, and from which the term "Natural Supernaturalism" is derived. (It is the title of Chapter VIII—in which Diogenes Teufelsdröckh "finally subdues under his feet this refractory Clothes-Philosophy, and takes victorious possession thereof."[160]) This "philosophy of clothes," is in no small part a rather oblique lampooning of German Idealism:

> Philosophy complains that Custom has hoodwinked us, from the first; that we do everything by Custom, even Believe by it; that our very Axioms, let us boast of Free-thinking as we may, are oftenest simply such Beliefs as we have never heard questioned. Nay, what is Philosophy throughout but a continual battle against Custom; an

> ever-renewed effort to *transcend* the sphere of blind Custom, and so become Transcendental?[161]

This "complaint of philosophy" which Carlyle identifies—that custom throws a veil over ultimate reality, just as clothes conceal the body—is also implicitly rejected by the ironic overtone of his style. By making an artificial distinction between "appearance" and "reality," it is philosophy that has hoodwinked us, and not custom. Transcendence, then, is not a matter of rising above appearances. Rather, it is about seeing mere nature as itself transcendent. There is no truth behind appearances—there are only the appearances themselves. Similarly, if there is any sense in which we might describe Wittgenstein's later philosophy as "transcendental" it is only because he puts such a high premium on the ordinary.

One of the chief concerns that is woven into nearly all aspects of Wittgenstein's philosophy—in both the *Tractatus* and the *Investigation*—is the search for the "correct" methodology that would not, so to speak, solve our metaphysical conundrums, but simply dissolve them. In the *Investigations*, this delineation is centered chiefly on the everyday—the preference for all things "commonplace," or "unremarkable." Not in any pejorative sense that those terms may sometimes connote—for it is obvious enough that Wittgenstein did not find anything deplorable about them—but in the sense of Natural Supernaturalism, in which the ordinary and the extraordinary are one and the same. It could also be suggested that this aesthetic preference for the ordinary is anything but ordinary. After all, why is it that we ought to subscribe to an ordinary view of language as opposed to that of the idealist? Of course, there really is no definitive answer to

this question at all insofar as it is a metaphysical one which is predicated on axioms that can be given no ultimate foundation. We are always, in the end, left to ponder why it is that we ask one question and not another without any justification for so doing.

Something like this metaphysical quandary is hinted at in §201 of the *Investigations* (the rule following paradox):

> This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule. The answer was: if every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule, then it can also be brought into conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.[162]

The suggestion being made is that metaphysical propositions are subject to the same sort of criticism. There can really be neither accord nor conflict between one metaphysical construct and another—between an ordinary conception of language and an idealistic one. What counts as according and what counts as conflicting will be dependent on what we are willing to accept as proof of accord or conflict. By altering what satisfies the criterion for "following a rule," we alter how actions accord with it. The same is true of any metaphysical supposition. How it accords with reality is largely dependent on what is taken as evidence. Hence any metaphysics can be made to conflict or accord with reality (or any other metaphysics). So, the reason why Wittgenstein adopts an "ordinary use" conception of language as opposed to an idealistic one is contingent on the metaphysical claim that "how language is used" is to be the rule we follow when

we are ascertaining its meaning. Can we determine if this is the correct rule for us to be following? What of an idealistic conception of language? If the above claim is correct then there can be no obvious discord between ordinary and idealistic language, which seems an odd thing to claim given that they are by all appearances mutually exclusive. To be clear, the assertion being made is only that the outcomes are discordant, not the assumptions from which they are derived.

For example, Plato in Book X of the *Republic* tells us that, "Whenever a number of individuals have a common name, we assume them to have also a corresponding idea or form."[163] This is due to the fact that:

> God, whether from choice or necessity, made one bed in nature and one only; two or more such ideal beds neither ever have been nor ever will be made by God. . . . Because even if He had made but two, a third would still appear behind them which both of them would have for their idea, and that would be the ideal bed and not the two others. . . . God knew this, and he desired to be the real maker of a real bed, not a particular maker of a particular bed, and therefore he created a bed which is essentially and by nature one only.[164]

Because there is only one "real" bed, when one uses the word "bed," we are necessarily referring to the idea of the bed and not any bed in particular. Thus, when we speak of such an object, our word gets its meaning by making reference not to this or that "bed," for such beds are but appearances only, but rather the idea or form of all beds—that which each and every bed has in common.

Wittgenstein, on the other hand, held that (broadly stated) "meaning is use." §88 of the *Investigations* will provide us just such an example.

> If I tell someone "Stay roughly here" – may this explanation not work perfectly? And may not any other one fail too? "But still, isn't it an inexact explanation?" – Yes, why shouldn't one call it "inexact"? Only let's understand what "inexact" means! For it does not mean "unusable". And let's consider what we call an "exact" explanation in contrast to this one. Perhaps like drawing a boundary-line around a region with chalk? Here it strikes us at once that the line has breadth. So a colour edge would be more exact. But has this exactness still got a function here: isn't it running idle? Moreover, we haven't yet laid down what is to count as overstepping this sharp boundary; how, with what instruments, it is to be ascertained. And so on.[165]

Unlike the idealist, who implies that for a word to have meaning it must refer to one thing only, Wittgenstein asserts that exactness (or lack of it) is not a requisite or restraint for or against using it. The fact that it might be "inexact" or "vague" does not necessitate that it be unusable, nor is it necessarily an obfuscation of the "truth." In other words, exactness does not correlate to usefulness or meaningfulness, which is certainly one of the assumptions that the argument of the idealist hinges upon. Another is that a commonality of names *must* imply a commonalty of idea or form, which Wittgenstein also dismisses, and rightly so.

Considering both examples, it is plain enough that they are antithetical to one another. While it is true that Wittgenstein levels a devastating critique of the idealist's language, he does so only insofar as we are willing to accept a few his presuppositions ourselves. This, in the main, is that usefulness and meaningfulness are more or less equivocal. But where is the proof of this? Is it not as baseless as the idealist's claim that exactness is the criterion of meaningfulness? Furthermore, "usefulness" is subject to the same sort of critique that Wittgenstein makes of "exactness," namely that we must determine what it is

for something to be useful—what the "rule" of usefulness is. In sum, what we are suggesting is that at the substratum of both the idealist's and Wittgenstein's conception of meaning is a supposition that is *unfounded*. In this sense "groundlessness" is the characteristic that an action or proposition possesses when it is non-derivable from a rule or when it can be made to accord or conflict with a rule arbitrarily (i.e., it is metaphysical).

So far, the attempt has been made to demonstrate that there are, within any philosophical methodology, certain intrinsically implied claims about the nature of reality that are themselves unverifiable (these often take the form of definitions). While such claims are indispensable to any method of inquiry, in as much as an inquiry must start from somewhere, we must not mistake them as "neutral." Out of the infinity of possible starting places, where one chooses to begin always already betrays an attitude, a position, a posture, a way of looking at the world that cannot be justified—the hallmark of "metaphysics." In the broadest possible sense our inquiry begins where our metaphysics ends. One cannot inquire before one's definitions have been given (either implicitly or explicitly). These definitions, on which inquiry depends, are not, however, a justification for undertaking any particular inquiry in the first place. If we take what has been called Wittgenstein's empirical descriptivism as an example, all that we can say is that he *adopted* one mode of inquiry as opposed to another. He can give no reason why. In this sense, all philosophy commits the fallacy of *petitio principii*: it *always* assumes the point, it *always* begs the question, and it *always* fails to prove the most fundamental principles. This is obviously no

deterrent to philosophical inquiry. The fact that we ask one question and not another when we can in theory ask any question we desire establishes our preference in the world—which is the basis for aesthetics and in turn metaphysics. As it regards Wittgenstein and the *Investigations*, we can see the turn to the ordinary, which is the hallmark of that book, as one that is for all practical purposes, aesthetic in nature.

The rule-following paradox is important to the overall schematic of the *Investigations* because it seems to be indicative of the sort of misunderstanding that philosophy is capable of leading us into. The "chain of reasoning" that is the source of our confusion, is the result of our desire to "place one interpretation behind another, as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another lying behind it."[166] The rule-following paradox is untenable for Wittgenstein because it contradicts what we actually do in practice. "There is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an interpretation, but which, from case to case of application, is exhibited in what we call 'following the rule' and 'going against it'."[167] There are many obvious instances we could think of here, and Wittgenstein gives us one. "Imagine a game of chess translated according to certain rules into a series of actions which we do not ordinarily associate with a *game* – say into yells and stamping of feet."[168] What would we make of such an interpretation of the rules of chess? Quite likely we would say that if anyone were to "yell and stamp instead of playing the form of chess that we are used to"[169] they would not be playing chess at all. We could of course translate the rules of chess into yells and stamps so that something like a game of chess were

produced, but nevertheless, it would be a reinterpretation of those rules and thus it would no longer be a game of chess.

The pivot point, on which the rule following paradox hinges, so Wittgenstein suggests, is a misconception of what "interpretation" means. "There is an inclination to say: every action according to a rule is an interpretation. But one should speak of interpretation only when one expression of a rule is substituted for another."[170] There is of course nothing that stops us from placing one interpretation of a rule behind another, but there is also nothing that stops us from abiding by a rule without interpreting it at all. If we did not, there would be no such thing as following a rule at all, and clearly there is such a thing. Which brings us to Wittgenstein's main point, and the solution to paradox (§202). "'Following a rule' is a practice. And to *think* one is following a rule is not to follow a rule. And that's why it's not possible to follow a rule 'privately'; otherwise, thinking one was following a rule would be the same thing as following it."[171] Just as following a rule is a practice, so too is interpreting a rule, one that follows its own set of rules, and if we were to reinterpret the rules by which we interpret we would no longer be "interpreting" in the sense in which we are accustomed to think of it. In other words, the practice of following a rule must consist in our content not to interpret *ad infinitum*, to "exorcise the insidious assumption that there must be an interpretation that mediates between an order,"[172] as John McDowell says. It is not a "choice between the paradox that there is no substance to meaning, on the one hand, and the fantastic mythology of the super-rigid machine, on the other."[173]

As noted earlier, one of the key differences between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* is the manner in which each describes language. In his mature work Wittgenstein ceased to look at meaning as consisting in a shared logical form between picture and pictured. Rather he began to see language as loosely defined, always open to interpretation, and intimately tied to how it was used. Seen in this light, language is a way of acting and interacting in and with the world as opposed to a tool of analysis. It is this re-conceptualization that leads Wittgenstein to what is perhaps one of the most central metaphors of his later philosophy: the language-game—a metaphor that is used to make one overarching point. "What we call the meaning of the word lies in the game we play with it."[174] Just as "our language contains countless different parts of speech,"[175] it also contains countless different uses and meanings in the context of countless different games. If we fail to realize this, we make a fundamental error (as Wittgenstein did in the *Tractatus*). "When we study language we *envisage* it as a game with fixed rules. We compare it with, and measure it against, a game of that kind."[176] In reality, this is only one of the various possible ways in which we might think of it.

Such a conception of language is what Wittgenstein refers to as a "primitive" game, in which there "are ways of using signs simpler than those in which we use the signs of our highly complicated everyday language."[177] Language-games of this sort are useful, for example, when "we want to study the problems of truth and falsehood . . . without the confusing background of highly complicated processes of thought."[178] When we take any one primitive language-

game as the "essence" of our highly complex one, we get an overly simplistic model of language that cannot possibly account for the vagaries of our everyday language. Wittgenstein's criticism of the Augustinian theory of language, which "does not mention any difference between kinds of word,"[179] is in a similar vein. "Augustine, we might say, does describe a system of communication; only not everything that we call language is this system."[180] We must be careful when thinking about the multitude of possible language-games not to lose sight of the "whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven."[181] Language, and the activities that accompany it, are inseparable from one another. When this fact is forgotten—especially in philosophy—it produces "misunderstandings concerning the use of words, brought about, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of our language."[182]

One of the most important aspects of a game is that it can be "played," which is why Wittgenstein places such an emphasis on his examination of rules. They can be precisely codified, such as in chess, or they can be vague and amorphous, such as when a child bounces a ball for amusement. This is also part of the reason that the metaphor of the language-game is so powerful: games are as diverse as language is and both consist in the performance of certain kinds of actions. Furthermore, there is no one type of game anymore than there is one thing in which language consists. There is no one thing "that is common to *all*."[183] Instead, there are "similarities, affinities, and a whole series of them at that."[184] In §67 of the *Investigations* Wittgenstein writes, "I can think of no better

expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblances'; for the various resemblances between members of a family – build, features, colour of eyes, gait, and so on and so forth – overlap and criss-cross in the same way."[185] What is most strikingly implicit within this concept is its seemingly staunch anti-Platonic stance. As David Finkelstein notes, "Typically, Wittgenstein's response to platonism is not, 'What you're saying is *false*," but rather, 'What you say is all right; only there's nothing queer or magical about it.'"[186] The issue raised in Finkelstein's point is further illustrative of the metaphysical differences between Wittgenstein and Platonic idealism. One might, under certain circumstances, have occasion to claim that all games have something in common. One could easily say that by definition a "game" is something that can be "played." While this tells us nothing about what games are, insofar as no definition of "playing" has yet to be given, nevertheless a game that was not playable is categorically not a game. A point such as this might even be useful when instructing someone on the meaning of the word "game." This is no reason to suppose, however, that there is a corresponding Form to which the term "game" must refer, which is why Finkelstein goes on to say, "Most of the platonist's words can be uttered innocently by someone who doesn't try to view signs apart from the applications that living beings make of them – apart, that is, from 'the weave of life.'"[187]

According to this view, the orthodox Wittgensteinian is simply trying to demystify our views of language. In so doing, we are meant to see that words have no meaning apart from their application in our lives, thereby ridding ourselves of idealist metaphysics—and metaphysics in general. A similar reading

of Wittgenstein is also expounded by Alice Crary. "For Wittgenstein, . . . questions about whether particular forms of criticism are metaphysically suspicious or innocent are questions which cannot be answered apart from investigations of how these forms of words are being *used*."[188] Interestingly, the word "innocent" is used by both Crary and Finkelstein to describe sans-metaphysical language, as if "ordinary use" was somehow void of any metaphysical corruption. One could argue, however, that the Wittgensteinain who ascribes to such a theory of language is engaging in metaphysics just as certainly as the Platonist is. Both are making "fundamental" claims about the nature of "reality." The former says that words get their meaning from their use, the latter say that the use of words are determined by their correspondence at an idea. There is, therefore, no "bringing" words back from their "metaphysical" to their "everyday" usage because the very idea of the "everyday use" is just as metaphysically loaded as the idealism of the Platonist. Which one is correct then, the Wittgensteinian or the Platonist? That depends on which one you are willing to accept without further interpretation, and as discussed above, it is the ability to *stop* interpreting that allows us to follow a rule in the first place. "The real discovery," Wittgenstein says in §133 of the *Investigations*, "Is the one that enables me to break off philosophizing when I want to. – The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question."[189]

Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance is no doubt employed as an antidote to Platonic idealism and the notion of universals in general. Stanley

Cavell makes much the same point when he says that it looks as if Wittgenstein is "offering the notion of 'family resemblance' as an alternative to the idea of 'essence'."[190] But as Cavell goes on to write, "For a philosopher who feels the need of universals to explain meaning or naming will certainly still feel their need to explain the notion of 'family resemblance'."[191] It is worth noting that a point very similar to this is made by Wittgenstein in §65 of the *Investigations*. "Here we come up against the great question that lies behind all these considerations. – For someone might object against me: 'You make things easy for yourself! You talk about all sorts of language-games, but have nowhere said what is essential to a language.'"[192] His response to this imagined accusation is, interestingly, more of a reiteration of his position on family resemblance than it is an answer to charge. "Instead of pointing out something common to all that we call language, I'm saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common in virtue of which we use the same word for all – but there are many different kinds of *affinity* between them."[193] But Wittgenstein's response to his imagined interlocutor is really not an answer to the allegation at all, for we could simply continue to reiterate the objection that the concept of 'family resemblance' amounts to nothing more than the universal 'essence' of all language. While there may be no way to ultimately overcome this objection, Cavell makes a compelling point when he suggests "that all that the idea of 'family resemblance' is meant to do, or need do, is to make us dissatisfied with the idea of universals as explanations of language."[194]

At most, all Wittgenstein can say is that he and the idealist are simply

operating according to differing metaphysical constructs that are fundamentally irreconcilable. Cavell suggests something similar (although he makes some assumptions of his own).

> Universals are neither necessary or even useful in explaining how words and concepts apply to different things; and . . . that the grasping of universals cannot perform the function it is imagined to have . . . once we see all this, the idea of a universal no longer has its *obvious* appeal, it no longer carries a *sense* of explaining something profound.[195]

There are two issues involved here. The first is that "usefulness" is a "proof" that "family resemblance" is the more-or-less "correct" model of meaning. The assertion that universals are "useless" is therefore a refutation of their necessity as an explanatory model of meaning. Notice how much this supposed refutation relies on an unquestioned and unacknowledged pragmatic inclination. The obvious response to the pragmatic perspective is to point out that "truth" and "utility" are equivalent only if we believe that they are. This is one of the metaphysical tenets on which pragmatism relies. The second issue is again not directly said by Cavell, but it is implied. If Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance does not refute the idealist or disprove the existence of universals, but only serves to make it unappealing, then it is not so much a demonstration as it is a rhetorical piece of persuasion. By making universals *lose* their obvious "appeal" we are of course making them "ugly" and "unworthy" of our belief. This is essentially "the problem of Socrates" which Nietzsche spoke so much about. "One knows, one sees for oneself, how ugly he was. But ugliness, an objection in itself, is among Greeks almost a refutation."[196] The point of

metaphysical "proofs" is not to "demonstrate the truth," but rather to make them as aesthetically pleasing as possible in order that we accept them without reservations.

One of the key features of language-games for Wittgenstein is the context in which they are played; just as the architecture of a building is altered by the landscape which surrounds it, so too are the meanings of words altered by their use in the language-game. Wittgenstein calls this linguistic background the "form of life" to highlight the fact that language and life are inseparably bound up with one another. It is also a term that despite its importance for Wittgenstein's philosophy does not occur with great frequency in his work.[197] One such occurrence can be found in §19 of the *Investigations*. "To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life."[198] Another is to be found in §23. "The word 'language-*game*' is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or a form of life."[199] Both of these quotations make it clear that that the kind of life in which language is used is the foundational basis for our understanding of a language in the first place. That is why when we think of imaginary language-games, especially primitive ones, we are imagining a primitive form of life which corresponds to it. In other words, a simplistic form of language equates to a simplistic form of life whereas a more complex form of language afford us the possibility of a more complex form of life. When we therefore imagine primitive language-games as a way of distilling our complex language into manageable theoretical components we will not arrive at any one theory that accounts for it in its entirety.

Wittgenstein shows us a few different instances of the irreducible complexity of our language-game. For example, "One can imagine an animal angry, fearful, sad, joyful, startled. But hopeful? And why not? . . . Can only those hope who can talk? Only those who have mastered the use of language. That is to say, the manifestations of hope are modifications of this complicated form of life."[200] We cannot say that an animal "hopes" because the only sense of that word which we understand is tied up with the kind of life we live. We do not share a common form of life with a dog and therefore we cannot know what being "hopeful" would be like for such a creature. It is not a matter of possessing language that separates our form of life from other animals, such as Aristotle suggested in 1.2 of the *Politics*. "Man is naturally a political animal. Proof that man is a political animal in a higher sense than a bee or any other gregarious creature: Nature creates nothing without purpose. Man is the only animal possessing articulate speech as distinguished from mere sounds."[201] Our form of life, however—whether it is essentially political or not—does not result from the fact that we possess language, but the other way around. This is why Wittgenstein goes so far as to state, "If a lion could talk, we wouldn't be able to understand it."[202] Even if an animal could speak the same language as us, we would not be able to understand it because we would not share the same form of life. The fact that we have language and animals do not is entirely irrelevant distinction to make. Communication is possible only in those respects were the form of life is similar enough to permit it (this is the case even amongst people who share the same language but have differing ways of life).

Newton Garver has taken the opposing view to the one outlined above, which he refers to as the misleading "orthodox reading" indicative of the widespread assumption "that Wittgenstein spoke of a plurality of human forms of life . . . [and] that each language-game . . . determines a separate life distinct from that determined by any other language-game."[203] This contention is centered on the observation that Wittgenstein almost always uses the singular German term *Lebensform* (form of life) and not the plural *Lebensformen* (forms of life).[204] Keeping this fact in mind, Garver concludes "that the correlation between *Sprachspiel* [language-game] and *Lebensform* is many to one rather than one to one. Each language-game does constitute or determine a special form, namely, a form of activity or behavior, not a form of life."[205] Garver of course does not base his assertion solely on the fact that Wittgenstein more frequently used *Lebensform* as opposed to *Lebensformen*. Although he does acknowledge that breakdowns in communication do occur, "they result from not having learned the practices [of other people] rather than not having the capacity to learn them. Therefore they do not connote any differences in form of life."[206] While it is certainly true that we possess the capacity to learn the customs and practices of other people, such that difficulties in communication are minimized, there is an implicit metaphysical claim in Garver's reading of Wittgenstein.

> Now it is a very general fact that speakers all have the same form of life. They are all human. What determines this form of life is the capacity to use language. So it is the same form of life which I imagine no matter which linguistic activity or which language I think of. This form of life is presupposed by a language or a language-game, that is, by the speaking of a language, because it is presupposed by the activities of the speakers.[207]

Garver's assertion above—that this form of life is determined by the ability to use language—amounts to a basic reiteration of the Aristotelian definition of "human." Because we all have this capability (to a greater or lesser extent) and because no other animal shows the obvious signs of possessing anything like the "complex" language that we employ, it is concluded that what ultimately distinguishes humans from other animals is language. From this conclusion it is further asserted that if no other animal besides humans possess language, then the ability to use language *must* be the "essence" of humans—that which every human being has in common.

The consequences of this interpretation, which Garver can hardly avoid, seem to run contrary to the general theme of Wittgenstein's work in the *Investigations*. In §25, for example, we read, "It is sometimes said: animals do not talk because they lack the mental abilities. And this means: 'They do not think, and that is why they do not talk.' But – they simply do not talk. Or better: they do not use language."[208] Wittgenstein's point in this passage is twofold. First of all, when we observe animals, the only thing that we see is that they do not use "language" (meaning "human" language). Second of all, this observation does not include any indication that animals do not "think" (in the way that "humans" think). It is thus the application of a descriptive model—for the purpose of species classification—that brings us to the conclusion that "language use" delineates humans from other animals. It is not, therefore, an empirical observation that language use is the essential feature that all humans share and

animals do not. The only thing that we *see* is that animals "simply do not talk." The rest is of course gratuitous inference. Whether the "human" form of life is essentially defined by the "capacity to use language" is quite beyond the pale of empirical observation, and so too is the assertion that "animals do not think."

In addition to running contrary to the methodological themes of the *Investigations*, Garver's reading of Wittgenstein more importantly contradicts the latter's emphatic and continuously repeated belief that warns us of putting too much stock in "essences." "We misunderstand the role played by the ideal in our language."[209] By dismissing the possibility of "a plurality of human *Lebensformen*,"[210] Garver is, in some sense, doing exactly this. His interpretation points to the existence of something like an "essence" of humanity. There certainly may be many characteristics which all humans similarly share, but it is a misguided endeavor to single out one thing as that which makes us human (such as language). Granted, humans, when taken collectively, share many "family resemblances," one of which is the preponderant tendency towards the use of complex language. It does not follow, however, that language use is what makes us human—it is but one feature of many. There are no hard and fast boundaries which separate this human form of life from that of a lion or a dog (there are family resemblances, even amongst differing species). Likewise, there are no hard and fast boundaries that prevent multiple forms of human life.

Besides all this, we should keep in mind Wittgenstein's reminder that meaning and use are closely weaved concepts, as we can see from §43 of the *Investigations*. "The meaning of a word is its use in the language. And the

meaning of a name is sometimes explained by pointing to the *bearer*."[211] Where the meaning of the word "human" is concerned, there is of course no way to point to the bearer of the name as a whole, though we can point to various examples of actual human beings, from which one may come to an abstract definition of the word that encompasses as many of the divergent members of the class of "human" as possible. More importantly, the meaning of the word "human," if it has one at all, is associated with how it is used in language. There are many instances where one might rightly speak of "humanity" in quasi-essentialist terms, e.g., a biologist may speak of a "human" species as distinct and unitary form of life—perhaps in relation to our genetic make-up. In this situation "human" serves a classificatory function in the language-game, and its meaning is tied up with that use. A sociologist, on the other hand, might use the term "human" in less distinct terms. The culture of ancient Egyptians, one might say, is significantly different from that of a modern industrial society so as to constitute a genuinely different form of human life. The meaning of the word "human" in this context would be much more permeable and less rigid. From these two uses, two quite differing metaphysical conceptions of "humanity" may arise. Neither is true or false in an absolute sense. They are true or false only in relation to their use. There is no way to determine whether the biologist's use of the word "human" is any more correct than that of the sociologist. There are thus instances where one can rightly speak of both a singular form of life and a plurality of forms of life. Sometimes, given the correct circumstances, imagining a language really is to imagine a form of life, or indeed, *forms* of life.

The concepts of the "form of life" and "family resemblance," it has been seen, are two of the most important aspects of Wittgenstein's language-games. Perhaps the most powerful and influential component of the *Investigations* is the "private language" argument. The idea makes its first overtly distinct appearance in §243—although Saul Kripke, in his influential exposition, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, asserts that "the real private language argument is to be found in the sections *preceding* §243. Indeed, in §202 *the conclusion is already stated explicitly*. . . . The sections following §243 are meant to be read in the light of the preceding discussion."[212] Kripke is no doubt correct, though we could go back even further if we like, insofar as the private language argument is dependent on the general context of the *Investigations* for its gravity—including the central concepts of the "form of life" and "family resemblance." To be sure, as Kripke notes, "The *Investigations* is written as a perpetual dialectic, where persisting worries, expressed by the voice of the imaginary interlocutor, are never definitely silenced."[213] This is also one of the *Investigations*' enduring strengths, and in this respect it is similar to the dialogues of Plato, in which Socrates is usually the victor, but in which doubts are never fully resolved. The dialectic form of the *Investigations*, like the crystalline structure of the *Tractatus*, is treated by Wittgenstein with a bent that is without a doubt artistic. The dialectic form in which the *Investigations* is written—and the aesthetic force of its prose—is even enhanced by the fact that there is often no clear distinction between Wittgenstein and his interlocutor. One might even say that Wittgenstein is his own best opponent, for who he is arguing with is his former philosophical persona—which

despite being handily refuted by his later philosophical persona, was always in some sense willing and able to critique all his revamped considerations.

Kripke's exposition of Wittgenstein will not be dealt with in detail here despite its importance for the secondary scholarship. For the present purposes it seems pertinent only to note the inseparability of the "rule-following paradox" from the "private language" argument, which is at the core of Kripke's account. He even goes so far as to call the rule following paradox "the central problem of *Philosophical Investigations*. . . . It may be regard as a new form of philosophical scepticism."[214] Both of these assertions are more-or-less true, though it will be argued below that the rule-following paradox is indicative of the larger problem of metaphysics which is, so it is being contended, the central problematic of Wittgenstein's philosophy. For now we will deal with the other components of the private language argument which are less connected with the rule following paradox, beginning with §243 (whether or not it is the first instantiation of the argument), in which Wittgenstein characterizes a private language as that which refers to "what only the speaker can know – to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language."[215] Within the confines of a private language, so it is supposed, one may represent ideas to oneself—concerning one's sensations, emotions, etc. If one were to attempt to translate from this private language of sensation into a shared public language, the act of the translation from private to public would diminish the representational authenticity of the sensations that one is attempting to express.

We can immediately see some problematic issues at work here. The first has to do with meaning, in which the accuracy of representation is equivocal to the accuracy of one's knowledge. This concept of meaning was at work in the *Tractatus* and it is one that Wittgenstein went to great lengths to dismantle in the *Investigations*. Thus, we see Wittgenstein asking in §244, "How do words *refer* to sensations?"[216] And in §245, "How can I even attempt to interpose language between the expression of pain and the pain?"[217] The question—and the answer to the question—is even more directly stated in §246.

> In what sense are my sensations *private*? – Well, only I can know whether I am really in pain; another person can only surmise it. – In one way this is false, and in another nonsense. If we are using the word "know" as it is normally used (and how else are we to use it?), then other people very often know if I'm in pain. . . . This much is true: it makes sense to say about other people that they doubt whether I am in pain; but not to say it about myself.[218]

The notion that Wittgenstein is attacking here is not that sensations are private, but rather that the presentation of sensations in a private language can be known with absolute certainty by me alone. The idea of absolute certainty as an expression of knowledge is troublesome, however. It is rather like the way Wittgenstein treats tautologies in the *Tractatus*. One cannot say that one knows that a tautology is true because a tautology is, by definition, true in all possible worlds. It is the *a priori* logical-metaphysical condition of existence and therefore one could not imagine a world in which it was not the case. The only things that we may rightfully "know" are what Wittgenstein refers to in the *Tractatus* as the "propositions of natural science" which may be either true or

false. It makes no sense to say of a tautology that "I know it" with absolute certainty. The same argument is being made against the supposed certitude of "private sensations." If it is senseless for one to doubt that "I am in pain" when one has just stubbed one's toe, then it is also senseless to say that "I know that I am in pain" when used as a philosophical expression of infallibility.

Wittgenstein's ruminations on the traditional philosophical trope that "true knowledge" is "certain knowledge" would receive a more sustained treatment in *On Certainty*, and to this topic we will return in chapter three. His critique of such expressions of certitude is only one aspect on the overall critique of private language, however. More devastating attacks come by way of his thought experiments in §258 (the diary) and §293 (the beetle in a box). The first of these is a form of memory skepticism, in which Wittgenstein imagines himself recording the occurrence of a certain sensation on a calendar each day that he has it. From one day to the next, what criterion is he to use to decide retrospectively that the sensations felt today are the same as the one he felt yesterday? We might say that he has committed the sensation to memory, but this is only possible if we remember the connection correctly in the future. "But in the present case, I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem correct to me is correct. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'correct'."[219] Wittgenstein's critique here is related to both the "rule following paradox"[220] and the "misuse of certainty,"[221] discussed above.

The "beetle in the box" thought experiment asks us to suppose a group of people, each of whom has a box that no one else is allowed to look into. When

someone is asked to name what it is that is in his or her box, the answer is always "beetle," but let's suppose that one of these people comes from a place where the word "beetle" signifies something other than "an insect with wings under its shell." The word might even literally be the sign for *nothing*, as in "there is nothing in my box." In that case, the function of the word "beetle" in the language-game "would not be as the name of a thing."[222] The problem that the "beetle in the box" is attempting to dispel is what Wittgenstein refers to as the grammatical model of "object and name" (which was, of course, a central metaphysical tenet of the *Tractatus*). When we apply this model to sensations, we get a distorted picture of the relationship between a sensation and the word for a sensation. This does not show, however, as John W. Cook has said,

> That sensations cannot have names, it shows that since the view that sensations are private allows sensations to have "no place in the language-game" and thereby makes it impossible to give any account of the actual (that is, the "public") use of sensation words, we must, if we are to give an account of that language game, reject the view that sensations are private.[223]

What Wittgenstein is rejecting here is "the grammar which tends to force itself on us,"[224] i.e., the baseless metaphysical supposition that a *name* must stand for an *object*. We feel that there is a paradox involved in naming our sensations because we have put the matter in an incorrect format. But as Wittgenstein notes, "The paradox disappears only if we make a radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts."[225]

It seems fairly evident that Wittgenstein's doctrines of the form of life and family resemblance must be dependent on their being essentially public activities. This much is of course the gist of §202. If the meaning of a word were decided by private use alone then there could be no difference between thinking that I am using a word correctly and using the word correctly. This alone is enough to give us pause to question whether or not a private language is a viable possibility. As potent as this argument is, it does not in fact prevent us from adopting the private language model of meaning as a viable possibility. We could note, for instance, that a private language may be based on the family resemblance of one's own private sensation, from which one may derive the certitude involved in representing them to one's self. The form of life that this language would be dependent on would of course be one's own and therefore does not categorically forbid the existence of private languages. This is to say that concept of meaning based on the private language model is metaphysically permissible, despite Wittgenstein's critique of it. We cannot infer from this critique, however, that private language models of meaning are false. At best we might say that the difference between a private and a public language is due to an irreconcilable metaphysical variance. Though we might be inclined to favor one over the other, we would be hard pressed to prove that one is correct and the other false.

The truth is that Wittgenstein did not deal very directly with the topic of metaphysics in the *Investigations*. In fact, the word "metaphysics" appears in the book only twice, once in §58 and once in §116. In the former passage,

Wittgenstein's view of the relationship between meaning and reality is explicitly laid out.

> "I want to restrict the term '*name*' to what cannot occur in the combination 'X exists'. – And so one cannot say 'Red exists', because if there were no red, it could not be spoken of at all," – More correctly: If "X exists" amounts to no more than "X" has a meaning – then it is not a sentence which treats of X, but a sentence about our use of language, that is about the use of the word "X".[226]

Wittgenstein's proposed restriction on the use of names in the language-game seems designed to head-off any possible metaphysical conflagrations before they even have a chance to begin. It is also a direct assault on the metaphysical doctrine of the *Tractatus*, i.e., that only "simple elements of being" have "names." This is exactly the kind of philosophical contagion which the ordinary language treatment is meant to cure: the disease of our understanding. Later in §58, Wittgenstein attempts to head off a potential misunderstanding.

> It looks to us as if we were saying something about the nature of red in saying that the words "Red exists" do not make sense. Namely, that red exists 'in and of itself'. The same idea – that this is a metaphysical statement about red – finds expression again when we say such a thing as that red is timeless, and perhaps still more strongly in the word "indestructible". But what we really *want* is simply to take "Red exists" as the statement: the word "red" has a meaning.[227]

By saying that the phrase "red exists" does not make sense, he is not, as stated, implying that this denial entails a metaphysical consequence—namely that there is some ideal and eternal "form of red" that is in itself alone, which gives reality to individual instances of that color. Rather, "red exists" might have some

meaningful use in the language-game, but not in the philosophical sense which posits various ontological categories of being. So while "we quite readily say that a particular colour exists,"[228] all that this can really mean is "that something exists that has that colour."[229]

Nietzsche, it could be argued, made a remarkably similar critique of the thing "in and of itself." In what he calls a critique of the concept of a "true and apparent world," he asserts that the world does not exist "'in-itself'; it is essentially a world of relationships; under certain conditions it has a differing aspect from every point."[230] This very notion was for Nietzsche, as it would later become for Wittgenstein, an extraneous and misleading notion that was born out of our language. In a passage from the *Will to Power*, it is remarkable to note how Wittgensteinian Nietzsche sounds (or more precisely, how Nietzscheian Wittgenstein would later come to sound). "Language depends on the most naive prejudices. Now we read disharmonies and problems into things because we think *only* in the form of language."[231] For both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, the traditional "problems of philosophy," were results of our inability to disengage with the "form of language," or at the very least to disengage with *one* form of language, the form of "subject and object" which produces in us the idea of a "thing-in-itself" as a metaphysical necessity. The same may said of "private language," which Nietzsche very nearly anticipates in many of its main points. "'Inner experience' enters our consciousness only after it has found a language the individual understands—i.e., a translation of a condition into conditions familiar to him—; 'to understand' means merely: to be able to express something

new in the language of something old and familiar."[232] The mistake philosophers make, of course, is to take the "understanding" which is produced when we express something in an "old and familiar way," such as we do when we express a "pain" and the "sensation of pain" in terms of a "physical object" and the "representation" of a "physical object," thus producing the idea in us that a "pain" is something only "I possess" and consequently only I can "know."

Nietzsche was, to be sure, a great destroyer of the metaphysical underpinnings of European "herd" morality, but he did not do so in the name of nihilism. He did not seek the "destruction of metaphysics" in general (which cannot be done anyhow, for even the nihilist must operate from a "metaphysics of nihilism"), but the destruction of life-stultifying metaphysics. His goal was to put a "metaphysics of art" in its place—a soil in which life could flourish. In this sense Wittgenstein was also a metaphysical revisionist, but in the *Investigations* he had not yet gotten past the belief that metaphysics could be done away with. There is still a latent positivism in many of his most pertinent and potent philosophical critiques—a remnant, no doubt, of his work in the *Tractatus*. This positivism had been something that Nietzsche had long since dismissed in his own philosophical writings.

> Metaphysics is still needed by some; but so is that impetuous *demand for certainty* that today discharges itself among large numbers of people in a scientific-positivistic form. The demand that one *wants* by all means that something should be firm (while on account of the ardor of this demand one is easier and more negligent about the demonstration of this certainty).[233]

The metaphysics to which Nietzsche refers to here, given the greater context of his work, is of the Christian variety, a general derivative of Platonism. Nietzsche could be counted amongst those for whom metaphysics is still needed, if we understand by that term something akin to his metaphysics of art. Despite having gone through his own positivist phase, there would come to be something of a nihilism in that particular world view for Nietzsche, one that hesitates in the face of interpretation and fears a lack of certainty. Nietzsche entered his positivist phase towards the middle of his career. It encompasses his work from the *Untimely Meditations* to *The Gay Science* and is marked by his supposed "use of science to criticize metaphysics."[234] By the time *The Genealogy of Morals* was written, we see instances of Nietzsche criticizing science for itself falling into many of the metaphysical tropes that he once used it to criticize. "For all its detachment and freedom from emotion, our science is still the dupe of linguistic habits; it has never yet got rid of those changelings called 'subjects.' The atom is one such changeling, another is the Kantian 'thing-in-itself.'"[235] He did not, of course, discard science entirely in his later works. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he calls for a return to psychology "as the queen of the sciences, for whose service and equipment the other sciences exist. For psychology is once more the path to the fundamental problems."[236] According to Robert Pippin, this passage, amongst others, suggests that Nietzsche viewed "psychology, not metaphysics or epistemology, . . . as playing a role very much like what Aristotle called first philosophy."[237] Taking up psychology as first philosophy has its advantages for Nietzsche, particularly as a means of explaining how we came to the Judeo-

Christian metaphysics in the first place. The certainty which has attached itself to this metaphysics has not done so by way of its inherent truth, but rather by our psychological will to believe it. Nietzsche's psychological first philosophy is thus both a critique and a replacement for Christian metaphysics.

This brief foray into Nietzsche's philosophy is undertaken to set the stage for a kind of analogy. Wittgenstein, like Nietzsche, went through a positivist stage and both would, to some extent, abandon it. There is in the *Investigations*, for instance, still something of a tension between the metaphysics that it critiques and the metaphysics which it suggests. The latter is never fully acknowledged by Wittgenstein, which was something that he at least did in the *Tractatus*, if only implicitly, as can be inferred from its closing passages. This kind of acknowledgement, however, never really occurs in the *Investigations*, and if we take this as one possible indication of latent positivism, then the *Investigations* is a more positivistic text than the *Tractatus*. All though this is something of a hyperbolic statement, it is meant to call attention to the extent which self-referential incoherence occurs in the *Investigations*. Many of its most central and important themes, e.g., ordinary language, meaning is use, family resemblance and the form of life have a flavor that one might describe as "anti-philosophical." Indeed, throughout the *Investigations* we see Wittgenstein railing against the misconceptions that philosophizing leads to. Sections 119–131 offers us excellent examples both of the kind of philosophy Wittgenstein wishes for us to avoid and the kind he advocates. Take §121 for example. "One might think: if philosophy speaks of the use of the word 'philosophy', there must be a second-order

philosophy. But that's not the way it is; it is, rather, like the case of orthography, which deals with the word 'orthography' among others without then being second-order."[238] The problem at issue with Wittgenstein is not that we cannot engage in such second-order philosophizing, but rather that is indicative of the fact "that we don't have an *overview* of the use of our words. – Our grammar is deficient in surveyability."[239] "Second-order philosophy" has no real explanatory power in Wittgenstein's view—it does not add anything "useful" to our knowledge and is thus superfluous.

> In giving explanations, I already have to use language full-blown . . . this is enough to show that I can come up only with externalities about language. Yes, but then how can these observations satisfy us? – Well, your very questions were framed in this language; they had to be expressed in this language, if there was anything to ask.

This poignant exchange between Wittgenstein and his interlocutor highlights an important consequence of the former's line of thinking: all philosophy is philosophy of language—a view that is expressed in both the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*. The belief in a second-order "metaphilosophy" is predicated on the belief that the "essence" of things can be apprehended outside the confines of language. It is further assumed that once this essence is discovered, it can be recapitulated in language without any loss of accuracy. Simply put, the thing-in-itself is not the same as the thing-in-language. If we could discover something outside language it would not be possible to say it in language. It is thus impossible to speak of a "second-order" philosophy that steps outside language and views it from afar.

This is a source of tension in Wittgenstein's philosophy. For him, philosophical problems are characterized by our inability to get an overview of our grammatical structure. "The concept of a surveyable representation is of fundamental significance for us. It characterizes the way we represent things, how we look at matters. (Is this a 'Weltanschauung'?)"[240] This last question is an interesting one, for it seems that the idea of "representation," and the importance which we attach to it, form the boundary of how we can view the world. Of course, we cannot exceed this boundary, and thus we can never quite reach the point where our grammar is no longer deficient in its surveyability. There is no all-encompassing point of view, which is why "a philosophical problem has the form: 'I don't know my way about.'"[241] And since there is no hope of achieving this vantage, there is also no hope of purging philosophy from our language either. The best that we can hope for is the "correct" vantage that makes philosophical problems evaporate. "It is not the business of philosophy to resolve a contradiction . . . but to render surveyable . . . the state of affairs *before* the contradiction is resolved."[242] Two senses of "philosophy" are obviously at work here: one which always manages to baffle us, and one that allows us to have peace—to be silent, as the *Tractatus* instructs us. In a passage that could have just as easily fit in his first book, Wittgenstein remarks in §126 of the *Investigations*, "Philosophy just puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. – Since everything lies open to view, there is nothing to explain. For whatever may be hidden is of no interest to us."[243]

Philosophy, in this sense is, as it was in the *Tractatus*, that which treats of the *a priori*. "The name 'philosophy' might also be given to what is possible *before* all new discoveries and inventions."[244] The key difference, however, between the sense of the *a priori* in the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* is that the former takes logic as *a priori* and the latter takes grammar. In other words, grammar in the *Investigations*, much like logic in the *Tractatus*, serves as the metaphysical frame of our understanding. "Wittgenstein's most basic conception of grammar," Michael Forster says, "is that it consists in rules which govern the use of words and which thereby constitute meanings or concepts."[245] Given this sense of what Wittgenstein means by the term we can immediately infer that the role of logic in the *Tractatus* presupposes the grammar of the *Investigations* because logic is itself based on its own kind of grammar; i.e., logic is a kind of language-game that is predicated on a particular set of rules which may or may not be applicable to other language-games.

Some forms of grammar are incommensurable with each other, which is shown by the fact that philosophical misunderstandings occur from the misapplication of our grammar. This of course happened in the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein took the grammar of "picture" and "pictured" as the *ideal* form of grammar—the form of which all meaningful language must be cast. Wittgenstein would ask—himself perhaps more than anyone else—"In what sense is logic something sublime? For logic seemed to have a peculiar depth – a universal significance. Logic lay, it seemed, at the foundation of all the sciences."[246] It of course *seemed* that way, but Wittgenstein *seems* to have changed his mind. It is

to an extent misleading to suggest that, as Baker and Hacker do, "The rules of grammar, by contrast with the rules of logical syntax, are not universal. They are rules of particular languages at particular times, characteristic of particular forms of representation."[247] Logical syntax is only "universal" in the sense that it is assigned that characteristic by a grammatical rule which is itself not universal. Universality, in other words, is one of the rules by which the language-game of logic is conducted. Wittgenstein discussed much the same point in §521 where he questions, "'So does what is, and what is not, called (logically) possible depend wholly on our grammar – that is, on what it permits?' – But surely that is arbitrary! – Is it arbitrary?"[248] The back and forth here makes it difficult to gauge which side of the fence Wittgenstein comes down on. At most what we might say is that it *sometimes* makes sense to speak of logic as "universal." At other times it does not. Logical syntax is therefore not universal in the sense of the *Tractatus*. It is, like all grammatical rules, arbitrarily selected for their convenience in a particular language-game, and Baker and Hacker duly acknowledge this quality. "The rules of grammar are not answerable to reality for truth or correctness. . . . In that sense they are, as Wittgenstein puts it, "arbitrary". They are not answerable to the "laws of thought", but constitute them. . . . Grammar is, in an important sense *autonomous*."[249]

The autonomist nature of grammar, in combination with its arbitrarily decided rules, is very much like the picture of metaphysics that has been developed up to this point. It is autonomous because language cannot proceed unless based on a grammatical structure of some sort, and arbitrary because there

is no *a priori* justification for the selection of grammatical rules. Justification exists only insofar as agreement exists. In this light, it would seem appropriate to suggest that grammar is very much the metaphysical construct of the *Investigations*—it determines what can and cannot be meaningful, and also, in a very real sense, what can and cannot exist. This much is evident in the fact that grammar can decide whether there is such a thing as the ego in the Cartesian sense. Further still, it can decide what is the ontological state of things that do exist. Pain, for instance, is not a corporeal object like a chair, thus we cannot apply the grammar of physical things to it without causing a good deal of confusion as to what pains are. Particular forms of grammar, however, can be difficult to break free from, so difficult in fact, that we cannot imagine what it would be like outside of it. "A *picture* held us captive," Wittgenstein remarks in §115 of the *Investigations*. "And we couldn't get outside of it, for it lay in our language, and language seemed only to repeat it to us inexorably."[250] In hind sight however, Wittgenstein did break free from the siren song of pictorial grammar, which during his *Tractatus* period would have no doubt seemed a categorical impossibility for him. This brings up an important point. To prove that something is impossible is quite a different thing from its seeming to be impossible. Kant, for instance, claimed that space was a necessary and *a priori* condition of all our external intuitions. His reason was that "we can never imagine or make a representation to ourselves of the nonexistence of space, though we may easily enough think that no objects are found in it."[251] His inability—or anyone else's—to imagine a representation of nonexistent space

does not qualify as a proof of its impossibility, or that space is an *a priori* condition of our intuition. It only shows that we are, at the present moment, incapable of so imagining the nonexistence of space. It says nothing about how we might one day view space or that we might even devise a way to represent nonexistent space. From its seeming impossible now does not equate to its being impossible categorically.

Wittgenstein's sense of the function of grammar, as potent as it might be, does seem to run into one particular snag in regards to its treatment of philosophy as a deviation from grammatical "norms." Wittgenstein is harsh towards philosophy all throughout the *Investigations* and particularly so at the end of §194. "When we do philosophy, we are like savages, primitive people, who hear the way in which civilized people talk, put a false interpretation it, and then draw the oddest conclusions from this."[252] Philosophical problems for Wittgenstein are always as a result of some error we make in the application of our grammatical rules, which results from our inability to get a clear view of its overall structure. The only task philosophy has—in Wittgenstein's sense of the word—is "to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle."[253] There is, however, at least one potential difficulty that may be drawn from this stance. If philosophical problems result from a misapplication of rules we must of course be able to tell the difference between what counts as "correctly" and "incorrectly" following a rule. We must be able to correctly tell the difference between a "primitive" and a "civilized" interpretation of language, i.e., between a "philosophical" and a "non-philosophical" interpretation—Wittgenstein seems to have believed that we were

in some sense capable of doing just that. The fact that the philosophical use of language is purportedly riddled with mistakes presupposes that we have the ability to distinguish between correct and incorrect uses. In other words, if philosophical misunderstandings exist, they exist because we have lost sight of the grammatical functions of our everyday language. Granted, the rules by which everyday language gets its meaning are not set in stone—they are always within the context of the form of life in which they occur. A difficulty remains in divining the criterion by which we are to measure any such deviations from this context. What counts as a deviation and what does not? Does it depend on the context of the language-game in which it occurs?

In order to attempt an answer to the above questions, one point should be made first. Wittgenstein does not, it could be argued, adequately acknowledge that the activity of doing philosophy is as much a part of our form of life as anything else. Indeed, it is one of the most enduring components of human life. In what sense then can we speak of it as a grammatical deviation when it is tied up with the form of life we live? Philosophical problems are discussed by people every day. They have actual consequences in regards to the world views we adopt and to the interpretations we give. Why then is this considered a deviation from the norm? In response to Wittgenstein's criticism of philosophy one might retort that the application of ordinary language grammar to the grammar of philosophy creates just as much misunderstanding as when we apply philosophical grammar to our everyday grammar. Philosophical problems are not misunderstandings of language according to its own lights. Why then should we

take the rules of one language-game and apply them to another where they do not belong? One might retort to this question that the language-game of philosophy is a derivative of the broader language-game that is its home and therefore the latter takes precedence over the former. Even if we grant this point, we do not thereby give a justification for dismissing philosophical grammar as a "misunderstanding." This would be like calling the use of the word "king" in chess a "misuse" because it does not conform to the sense that the word has in relation to the traditional head of an aristocracy. We might similarly say that calling a pain an "object" is not a misuse according to the grammar of certain kinds of philosophical language-games, even though this grammar may be derived from that of corporeal objects. In such a case it makes perfect sense to view a pain as "mine alone" and to assert that I "know it" with absolute certainty. Different language-games have different rules and different rules produce different meanings.

This, then, is the problem of metaphysics as it occurs in the *Investigations*: There is no way to justify the validity of one language-game as opposed to another. We might prefer one language-game over another. We might even be of the opinion that certain kinds of language-games are comprised entirely of hopelessly meaningless misunderstandings, but, we cannot prove that the grammar on which any language-game is based is itself either right or wrong. If we cannot do this, how can we assert that philosophical problems are "misunderstandings" of our ordinary language? It is a self-referential inconsistency to assert that the meaning of a word is based on its use in the

language-game and then deny outright that certain kinds of words, in certain kinds of language-games (i.e., philosophical ones), are meaningless, despite how they are used in the context of that language-game. To be coherent, this doctrine would have to admit that there are no such thing as "misunderstandings" in an absolute sense, only misunderstandings in relation to the context of various language-games, some of which may be based on incompatible grammatical forms.

In the main, Wittgenstein's general *modus operandi* in the *Investigations* is centered on the belief that the "true" discovery is the one that allows us to see philosophical problems as no problem at all. Of course, the philosophical point of view is typified precisely by this desire to see things as problematic. If we cease to look at the world with this intention we of course cease to do philosophy—which can be problematic for some philosophers, as Wittgenstein notes in *Zettel*.

> Some philosophers (or whatever you like to call them) suffer from what may be called "loss of problems". Then everything seems quite simple to them, no deep problems seem to exist any more, the world becomes broad and flat and loses all depth, and what they write becomes immeasurably shallow and trivial. Russell and H. G. Wells suffer from this.[254]

Interestingly, Wittgenstein never seems to have suffered very severely from this affliction, neither in his outlook on life nor in his philosophical writings—which is odd because he is very keen on convincing us that the "great" philosophical problems are really not problems at all. They are only the jumbled grammatical rules of our ordinary language-game. The problem for Wittgenstein—and a very

deep one at that—is to discover a way in which we might no longer see philosophy as a problem. To this end we may be able to cease philosophizing whenever we choose to do so, but we will not thereby show that philosophy is a grammatical misunderstanding. Nor will we prove this by using philosophy to show that philosophical problems are not problems—a self-referentially incoherent methodology. Perhaps this is why the question of the value of philosophy is one that Wittgenstein never strays very far from. For in order to ask the question, one must already assume a philosophical pose and thus we are trapped in a circle.

This is also, in part, an account of the motivation behind Wittgenstein's anti-philosophical tone in the *Investigations*. It is not as if he proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that philosophy is simply a misunderstanding of our grammar and therefore that we ought not to engage in it (except insofar as we use it to clear up our misunderstandings). He assumes such a position precisely because the problem of how to view philosophical problems as unproblematic gives his thought so much depth. In general, Wittgenstein's attitude towards philosophy in the *Investigations* should no doubt strike us as being remarkably similar to that of the *Tractatus*. Both seek to limit what we can do with philosophy—especially in the realm of metaphysics. As with the *Tractatus*, the *Investigations* hardly avoids the topic, however forcefully Wittgenstein rails against it. Not only does it make many axiomatic assumptions—first and foremost among them is the belief that everyday language is free from metaphysical consequences—it also has ontological implications. Chief among these is pluralism, and specifically James'

pluralism. When James asks in *The Principles of Psychology*, "Is voluntary attention a resultant or a force?"[255] he does not immediately answer, but goes on to note, "It is in fact the pivotal question of metaphysics, the very hinge on which our picture of the world shall swing from materialism, fatalism, monism, towards spiritualism, freedom, pluralism,—or else the other way."[256] The question for psychology on which metaphysics hangs is that of free will or determinacy. In regards to "voluntary attention," the question is important for deciding, as James notes, the hinge on which our world picture swings.

Questions of this sort would lead Wittgenstein to conclude that James, whatever the merits or demerits of his psychology, was not doing science.

> How needed is the work of philosophy is shown by James's psychology. Psychology, he says, is a science, but he discusses almost no scientific questions. His movements are merely (so many) attempts to extricate himself from the cobwebs of metaphysics in which he is caught. He cannot yet walk, or fly at all he only wriggles. Not that that isn't interesting. Only it is not a scientific activity.[257]

Throughout his writings Wittgenstein held the view that science and philosophy must be distinctly separate fields of inquiry. Philosophy is always *a priori* and science *a posteriori*—and James' psychology is, as evident in the above quote, not predicated on observation. This suggests that Wittgenstein, like Nietzsche, viewed psychology as belonging to philosophy in the sense that it is done before observation. It is not only first philosophy in as much as it is the justificatory basis of the inquiry that proceeds from it, but it is also metaphysical in the sense that it determines the conditions of our "world view" which, depending on how

we decided the "pivotal" question of metaphysics, can swing back and forth between pluralism and monism, fatalism and freedom. This question, then, is what gives philosophy its value: It makes things insoluble for us. It presents us with problems against which we must struggle. "This struggle, of course, is something in which Wittgenstein enlists, and so James interests Wittgenstein not only for the errors he commits, but for his only partially comprehended attempts to overcome them."[258]

Part of the problem of James' psychology for Wittgenstein was that the former failed to realize the extent to which he was engaging in philosophy. This, in part, is also what made James interesting for Wittgenstein. In a similar vein, we might say Wittgenstein also failed to realize the extent to which he was doing metaphysics in the *Investigations*—that all philosophy, if it is *a priori*, is metaphysical philosophy, including Wittgenstein's. Metaphysical implications abound in his later work, just as they do in his earlier. Not only is the *Tractarian* idea of "simple elements of being" dispensed with in the *Investigations*, it also dispenses with philosophy's obsession with the grammar of "object and name" that is the underpinning of such simple elements. We can, of course, imagine various language-games in which it makes sense to speak of simple elements of being, but then again, we may also imagine instances where it does not. It is not so much that simple elements of being are metaphysically untenable. Rather, they must be posited alongside a great many other metaphysical possibilities, none of which are true or certain *a priori*. What matters is how we take the world, not

what the world *is* in itself. What remains for us to do is to decide between our worldviews, not to discover the correct one.

This is more-or-less a reiteration of much of what Nelson Goodman put forth in *Ways of Worldmaking*, in which he says,

> The issue between monism and pluralism tends to evaporate under analysis. If there is but one world, it embraces a multiplicity of contrasting aspects; if there are many worlds, the collection of them all is one. The one world may be taken as many, or the many worlds taken as one; whether one or many depends on the way of taking.[259]

Lyotard mentions something very similar in *The Differend*. "The singular calls forth the plural (as the plural does the singular) and because the singular and the plural are together already the plural."[260] Our ways of taking then are also our ways of making, and the plural world may also be the singular world, and vice versa. The problem occurs, however, when we must decide between conflicting worldviews which are not easily made amicable to one another. Much depends on our willingness to accept or reject any particular aspect of a worldview. For instance, as Goodman notes, "The realist will resist the conclusion that there is no world; the idealist will resist the conclusion that all conflicting versions describe different worlds. . . . In practice, of course, we draw the line wherever we like, and change it as often as our purposes suit."[261] We may be able to draw the line between worldviews to suit our purposes, but this does not, to be sure, mean that we avoid conflict.

The worldviews we choose are, of course, not only a matter of suiting our purposes or avoiding conflict. In an important sense we choose them for aesthetic reasons as well. Indeed, we can endure a great many impractical and conflict ridden worlds in the name of aesthetics. Whatever purpose we envisage our worldviews as fulfilling, we of course will not be able to justify those purposes fully. When justification can go no further in support of a worldview, we must always, in the end, resort to a metaphysics of art, something which Wittgenstein comes very close to positing in §367 of *Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment*. "Compare a concept with a style of painting. For is even our style of painting arbitrary? Can we choose one at pleasure? (The Egyptian, for instance.) Or is it just a matter of pretty and ugly?[262] The answer, as with many of Wittgenstein's open-ended questions, could be both yes and no. Can we choose to paint like the Egyptians? Well yes, but one might have difficulty in justifying it according to contemporary notions of art making. At any rate, if one did choose to paint in the style of the Egyptians, it would not—and perhaps could not—be for any of the reasons that the Egyptians did. Nevertheless, this is no categorical imperative that either requires or prevents us from choosing any style of painting. Similarly, can we choose our concepts at will? Could we choose to believe that the world was flat, for instance? Again, the answer is both yes and no. Some concepts (such as the shape of the world) are so ensconced in collectively shared worldviews that they become difficult to deny. There is a world of difference between "difficult" and "impossible" and the concept that "the world is flat" is still possible for anyone to believe—even today—a fact that we can intimate from Wittgenstein.

> If anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize – then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him.[263]

How we decide such matters, whether they be styles of paintings or concepts, is, to a large extent, a matter of "pretty and ugly," but only if we mean by this "accepted or rejected." Yes, we can choose these things at will, but in so choosing, we are, in a certain sense, determining what is pretty and what is ugly insofar as we are determining what we prefer and what we do not. This much goes for Wittgenstein as well. His metaphysics of the ordinary is also his metaphysics of aesthetics.

CHAPTER 3:
Metaphysics and Certainty

> In the absence of actual certainty in the midst of a precarious and hazardous world, men cultivated all sorts of things that would give them the *feeling* of certainty. And it is possible that, when not carried to an illusory point, the cultivation of the feeling gave man courage and confidence and enabled him to carry the burdens of life more successfully. But one could hardly seriously contended that this fact, if it be such, is one upon which to found a reasoned philosophy.
>
> –JOHN DEWEY, *The Quest for Certainty*

> At the foundation of well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded.
>
> –LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *On Certainty*

The problems that have thus far been outlined in the previous chapters have all been centered around the claim that there can be no "escape from metaphysics" or a metaphysics that is "neutral" or "incorrigible" in the sense that it makes no assumptions about the way the world is. It has also been argued that at least part of Wittgenstein's philosophical career is bound up with this problem and the struggle to overcome it. In the *Tractatus* he thinks the solution is to be found in logic. By the time of the *Investigations* it is the ordinary that seems poised to topple metaphysics for good. In *On Certainty* there is something of an air of resignation. There can be no "overcoming" of metaphysics, no "demonstration" of its impossibility, no "special set" of nonsensical utterances. Here "resignation" is perhaps a misleading descriptor of Wittgenstein's attitude in *On Certainty*. If we are to call it that, we must understand it as the sort that empowers one to reappraise even the most basic of one's assumptions, no matter how difficult the task. As Wittgenstein remarks, "the *edifice of your pride* has to

be dismantled. And that is terribly hard work."[264] *On Certainty* is just such a work of edifice dismantling. The intent of this chapter is, therefore, not to demonstrate that Wittgenstein managed to solve the "problem of metaphysics" as he seemed to think he did in the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*, but that he comes to terms with and makes a strong case for its insolubility. There can be no ultimately solid foundation for our knowledge; no indubitable, incorrigible, self-apparent or primary truths; no simple element of being or thing-in-itself. There are only assumptions with which we proceed *as if* they were certain but which we are incapable of proving to be so.

Ayer once noted that many *a priori* propositions "have always been attractive to philosophers on account of their certainty,"[265] but that there certainty was due only "to the fact that they are tautologies,"[266] which only properly belong to logic. Thus he arrives at his definition of a "metaphysical sentence,"

> Which purports to express a genuine proposition, but does, in fact, express neither a tautology nor an empirical hypothesis. And as tautologies and empirical hypotheses form the entire class of significant propositions, we are justified in concluding that all metaphysical assertions are nonsensical.[267]

While Wittgenstein was an important influence on many positivists like Ayer, it is important to take stock of two things. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein did not consider tautologies to be a part of meaningful language. As he puts it in 5.5303, "Roughly speaking, to say of two things that they are identical is nonsense, and to say of *one* thing that it is identical with itself is to say nothing at all."[268] A tautology in this sense must indeed be metaphysical, for although it is not

"nonsensical" it is also not a "significant proposition" in the sense of an empirical hypothesis. The difference between tautologies and significant propositions is notoriously difficult to delineate—in his later work Wittgenstein would come to view propositions as sometimes serving a logical function and sometimes serving an empirical function—and thus Ayer's decision to include tautologies within the realm of significant propositions is not without philosophical precedence, it is simply contrary to Wittgenstein's.

That being said, let us assume that Ayer's definition of metaphysics is correct (apart from his exclusion of tautologies). What follows from it? If we assume that metaphysical sentences are not meaningful, insofar as they are not verifiable according to Ayer's criterion, have we thereby shown that they are *unnecessary*? Ayer certainly would answer this question in the affirmative, and one can see the pragmatic assumptions that underpin his philosophy when he asks, "What is the purpose of formulating hypotheses? Why do we construct these systems in the first place? The answer is that they are designed to enable us to anticipate the course of our sensations."[269] This then is the metaphysical assumption on which Ayer's criterion of empirical verification is premised: it holds that an empirical hypothesis has meaning only if it can enable us to predict the course of future sensations. The hypothesis "empirical hypotheses are significant only if they have predictive power" is itself not a significant hypothesis for the simple reason that it does not predict future sensations. The point is not so much to show that Ayer's definition of metaphysics is inadequate, it is rather to show that his criterion for significant propositions is dependent on

the sort of non-significant propositions which he is attempting to repudiate. In all actuality, metaphysics, which according to Ayer is exemplified by its nonsensicality—by which he means that they cannot be substantiated by any sort of proof—suffices as a passable characterization of the term. All that we are required to admit is that metaphysics is essentially definitional, and strictly speaking, a definition is itself nonsense inasmuch as it cannot be given any ultimate foundation.

Part of Ayer's problem is that his method tends towards regression—it must give a series of justifications for justifications. His verification criterion—itself an attempt at a justification—simply begs the question of its own justification, yet the question remains: why do our axioms require a justification at all? Why does the lynchpin of our knowledge need to be "certainty," or at least if not absolute certainty, the highest degree attainable thereto? It is this tendency, the "will to certainty," that is the source of our regression, and yet it is the last and most difficult thing that we seem capable of giving up. This "desire for certainty" was something Nietzsche took note in §2 of *The Gay Science*[270] and one of the goals of his philosophy in general was to "show that the question concerning certainty is already in itself a *dependent* question, a question of the second rank."[271] Certainty, as far as Nietzsche was concerned, is a psychological state only and does not distinguish between things as "they appear to be" and "things as they really are." "Being and appearance, regarded psychologically, yield no 'Being-in-itself,' no criterion for 'reality,' but only degrees of appearance,

measured according to the strength of the sympathy which we feel for appearance."[272]

Nietzsche, no doubt, is drawing our attention to the confusion between the psychological state of being certain and certainty itself, i.e., between "appearance" and "Being-in-itself." The question is, of course, how are we to tell the difference between feeling certain and actually being certain? The psychological feeling of being certain is surely something very much like "being unable to be convinced otherwise." When this feeling occurs, one finds one's self incapable of being swayed from a conviction that is steadfastly held. When in such a state, no amount of evidence, rhetoric or persuasion can alter one's beliefs to the contrary. The feeling of being certain is, in other words, typified by the inability to see things differently. This is not to say that a whole host of reasons could not be produced in support of a belief held to be certain. Then again, this is not a requirement. The feeling of being certain can occur whether there is proof for a conviction or not. The psychological state of being certain has no need of evidence, one way or the other, which is also why no amount of evidence can sway it. In part this is why Nietzsche dismisses this state of psychological certainty as a "criterion of reality." Being certain is based merely on the "strength of the sympathy" which we feel for the way things appear to us. It is thus an aesthetic inclination and an inclination that cannot in any sense be a "justification" for knowledge prior to the "question of values,"[273] which is, as Nietzsche claimed, "More *fundamental* than the question of certainty."[274]

The argument of this chapter is in the same vein as Nietzsche's above. It will also be argued that Wittgenstein comes to something of a similar conclusion in *On Certainty*. Though not as polemical as Nietzsche, Wittgenstein's critique of certainty as a criterion of knowledge in the grand philosophical style is no less poignant. Wittgenstein's terminology is also significantly different from Nietzsche's, but there are nevertheless many similarities between the points being made by both. Although there is nothing in *On Certainty* which is similar in form to Nietzsche's "metaphysics of art," it will be argued that something very close to it can be inferred from many of his writings. A conclusion of this sort is reinforced by the fact that art, and especially music, were central components of Wittgenstein's life—a biographical fact remarkably similar to Nietzsche's. Both are well known to have been musical virtuosos. Nietzsche, though not gifted at composition, was astonishingly able at improvising on the piano. Carl von Gersdorff, a friend from Nietzsche's youth, noted that he "would have no difficulty in believing that even Beethoven did not improvise in a more moving manner than Nietzsche."[275] Wittgenstein was also well endowed with a keen musical sensibility and was able to "whistle whole movements of symphonies, his showpiece being Brahms's *St Anthony Variations*, and that when other people whistle something wrong, Wittgenstein would stop them and firmly tell them how it should go."[276] Wittgenstein's views on art, music, and aesthetics are however not the topic of this chapter, (these topics will be addressed in more depth in the next chapter). This chapter will focus on an exegesis of *On Certainty* along with

the claim that from its basic tenets we can derive an aesthetic conception of the nature of metaphysics that dispenses with the problem of metaphysics in general.

On Certainty is comprised largely of a running commentary on two essays by G. E. Moore: "A Defense of Common Sense" published in 1925 and "Proof of an External World" published in 1939. In the former article, Moore details a list of propositions that he claims to "*know*, with certainty, to be true,"[277] which are too numerous to repeat in full, but include such assertions as "I have a human body," "my body has never been far from the surface of the earth," "the earth has existed for many years before my birth," "many other bodies exist now and have existed in the past, many of which have ceased to exist before I was born," etc.[278] Moore goes on to claim that, "such an expression as 'the earth has existed for many years past' is the very type of unambiguous expression, the meaning of which we all understand."[279]

In "Proof of an External World" Moore begins by noting the "scandal of philosophy" to which Kant refers in the preface of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: that the existence of external things must be taken on faith, a problem that Kant had thought he had solved by showing "the objective reality of outer intuition."[280] This is a solution that Moore is no means satisfied with. In order that we may devise a proof that will remedy this malady, he first sets about rephrasing the question "Are there things outside of us?", as "are there things external to our minds which can be met with in space?"[281] With this question in mind, Moore claims that "I can prove now, for instance, that two human hands exist. How? By holding up my two hands, and saying, as I make a certain gesture with the right

hand, 'Here is one hand', and adding, as I make a certain gesture with the left, 'and here is another.'"[282]

Wittgenstein, of course, begins *On Certainty* by making reference to Moore's proof, "If you do know that *here is one hand*, we'll grant you all the rest."[283] Here, right from the outset, we see what will be a vital component of Wittgenstein's critique. It is not that Moore fails to give a valid proof that there are such things that are "separate from the mind" and "can be met with in space," he does so by way of a *modus ponens*. If this is a hand, then external things exist. This is a hand. Therefore, external things exist. *Definition*: a hand is an external object (i.e., it is separate from the mind and can be met with in space). It is exactly with this definition that our suspicions lie, however, as Wittgenstein rightfully points out. It should be noted, however, that Moore only claims that his proof is valid if we are willing to accept his propositions as true. As he acknowledges, some will find this proof unsatisfactory. "They will say that I have not given what they mean by a proof of the existence of external things. In other words, they want a proof of what I assert *now* when I hold up my hands and say 'Here's one hand and here's another'. . . . This, of course, I haven't given; and I do not believe it can be given."[284] On this point, Wittgenstein agrees with Moore. No proof of the sort that Moore alludes to (and which his critics, including Wittgenstein, ask for) can be given.

Throughout *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein expresses his doubts about how the phrase "I know" can be employed. "Now, can one enumerate what one knows (like Moore)? Straight off like that, I believe not.—For otherwise the expression

'I know' gets misused."[285] The misapplication of this phrase stems from what Wittgenstein calls the "preeminently philosophical" use.[286] As the phrase is utilized in this sense, it is meant to exemplify a state of unflappable metaphysical certainty that its speaker is claiming to possess—the kind of "immovable point" from which one could "shift the entire earth"[287] that Descartes so longed for. Declarations of the sort "I know. . ." do not constitute an Archimedean point of this sort. "Even if the most trustworthy of men assures me that he knows things are thus and so, this by itself cannot satisfy me that he does know. Only that he believes he knows. That is why Moore's assurance that he knows . . . does not interest us."[288] This applies equally to cases where "*very many* (I do not say *all*) . . . of *us*" can be said to know all the same things "with regard to *himself* or *his* body" which "each of us has frequently known."[289] For as Wittgenstein retorts, "from its *seeming* to me—or to everyone—to be so, it doesn't follow that it *is* so."[290] Such an instance where we know something in common is by no means a guarantor of its truthfulness or a marker of its certainty. Besides this, the claim to know something that everyone else also presumably knows (in the metaphysical, preeminently philosophical sense) is not expressed, nor can it be expressed, by the phrase "I know. . ." or "we know. . . ." Wittgenstein directs our attention to this point when he asks, "Why doesn't Moore produce as one of the things that he knows, for example, that in such-and-such a part of England there is a village called so-and-so? In other words: why doesn't he mention a fact that is known to him and not to every one of us?"[291]

The answer, it would seem, is because by so doing Moore believes himself to be demonstrating the sort of thing we can be metaphysically certain about. Empirical propositions of the sort "in such-and-such a part of England there is a village called so-and-so" do not seem to qualify as "preeminently philosophical" in the sense that Moore uses the phrase "I have a human body." They do, however, seem to be things which one can legitimately claim to know. When we attempt to claim certainty about the kind of propositions that Moore gives as examples, we are not saying, in effect, "I cannot be mistaken." The future may yet produce a case where even our most fundamental beliefs are proven to be wrong. Rather, the fact that I, and everyone else, can be said to know something in common is indicative only of a common foundation to the language-game we play (i.e., we agree on the "rules"). The rules themselves are not properly an object of knowledge the way that empirical propositions are. This is because "knowing" (and likewise doubting) are not concepts that exist outside of the language-game. For one to properly know anything, it must be within the context of the language-game in which it is used. This is why such statements (similar to the ones Moore makes) seem so puzzling. "'I know that I am a human being.' In order to see how unclear the sense of this proposition is, consider its negation."[292] When one makes statements of this kind, Wittgenstein thinks, it seems as if we "have known something the whole time, and yet there is no meaning in saying so, in uttering this truth."[293] On the other hand, when someone says I know that "there are over . . . species of insects,"[294] we are liable to ask how it is that the knowledge in question was arrived at. To which one could respond, "I read it in a

reputable book," or "I have it on authority from an entomologist who makes careful study of the subject," etc.; the point being that demonstrable grounds may be given for the assertion in question. "If someone says he knows something, it must be something that, by general consent, he is in a position to know."[295] What grounds can we give for assertions that play a more fundamental role in our language-game?

For Wittgenstein, this question is unanswerable, or more accurately, wrongly put. Outside of a language-game, we cannot be said to know anything because the language-game itself forms the basis of all our knowledge claims. When we say we know something, our knowledge must be predicated on a foundation if it is not to be vacuous. This is why when we say we "know with absolute certainty" something as foundational as "I have a human body," we are misusing the phrase "I know." We are, in effect, attempting to know without a foundation for knowing, which is also the reason we may properly claim to know empirical propositions—they exist within the framework of a language-game. In other words, they have a foundation from which they are hoisted. Within a language-game, some propositions play a more fundamental role than others, but because a proposition is fundamental does not confer upon it the status of philosophical preeminence. Nor does it imply that we can know it with absolute certainty. Still further, the particular propositions that happen to form the foundations of our language-game are by and large arbitrary. As Wittgenstein says, "You must bear in mind that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or

unreasonable). It is there—like our life."[296] The "thereness" of our language-game must be seen as its distinguishing feature. In this sense, it is the foundation for everything that happens within it. The fact that "it is not based on grounds" means only that some propositions within the language-game remain fixed. Wittgenstein uses the wonderful analogy, "If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put."[297] This does not mean, however, that the pin that holds the hinge in place may not be removed. Language works perfectly well even if we are unable to give grounds for its foundation, just as a door works perfectly even though its hinges are not permanently fixed in place. We are quite mistaken, however, if we take this immobility of foundational propositions as certainly true in all possible worlds. At some point our ability to justify our propositions can go no further. "At the end of reason comes *persuasion*."[298] Persuasion is, as any good rhetorician knows, a matter of aesthetics.

There is yet another sense in which the phrase "I know that . . ." gets misused, one that was already present in both the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*. In the *Tractatus*, for instance, Wittgenstein remarks of skepticism that it "is *not* irrefutable, but obviously nonsensical, when it tries to raise doubts where no questions can be asked. For doubt can exist only where a question exists, a question only where an answer exists, and an answer only where something *can be said*."[299] Accordingly, one cannot raise skeptical doubts about a tautology because strictly speaking (that is logically speaking) it says nothing. One cannot, therefore, properly say that "I know" that "A = A" because one cannot also say "I doubt" that "A = A." Similar suggestions are made several times throughout the

Investigations. One of the points that the private language argument is intended to make is that "I know with absolute certainty what I am thinking" is an incorrect application of the phrase "I know . . ." because it does not make any palpable sense to say "I doubt what I am thinking." It is therefore "correct to say 'I know what you are thinking', and wrong to say 'I know what I am thinking'. (A whole cloud of philosophy condenses into a drop of grammar.)"[300] The same "cloud of philosophy" surrounds Moore's proof of an external world—"I know that I have a hand" amounts to a misuse of the phrase "I know . . ." because we must ask what it would be like to doubt such a thing. If we cannot imagine the possibility of a skeptic raising a doubt about our knowledge then one does not "know it." This is why one can say, "I know what you are thinking," because the possibility of doubt has entered the language-game. In other words, "I know what you are thinking" means I have a fairly cohesive idea of what's "in" your mind, although I might be wrong. Conversely, doubt is not part of the language-game which makes use of the phrase "I know what I am thinking," for as of yet we have not defined what the role of doubt is in this particular context and therefore we have not defined what the role of knowledge is either. So we read Wittgenstein's interlocutor in §278 of the *Investigations* as insisting, "'I know how the colour green looks to *me*, – surely that makes sense!" To which, Wittgenstein responds, "Certainly; what use of the sentence are you thinking of?"[301]

It is remarkable to note that Wittgenstein employs an epistemological theory that remains virtually unchanged through nearly every phase of his work. This theory is, roughly stated, that one can only know something where one can

also doubt it. It makes no sense according to this conception to say "I know that . . ." if one cannot also say "I doubt that . . ." of the same thing. Under usual circumstances, for instance, attempting to doubt the existence of one's hand would not be taken as a demonstration of the infallibility of one's knowledge. Rather, it would quite possibly be taken as a sign of psychosis, as Wittgenstein seems to indicate in §467 of *On Certainty*. "I am sitting with a philosopher in the garden; he says again and again 'I know that that's a tree', pointing to a tree that is near us. Someone else arrives and hears this, and I tell him: 'This fellow isn't insane. We are only doing philosophy.'"[302] What purpose, then, could such a statement as "I know that that's a tree" serve in a language-game? We might imagine, as Wittgenstein does, that the phrase "I know . . ." might be used in situations where "no one could doubt it, [it] might be a kind of joke and as such have meaning."[303] Another example of a correct use the expression "I know" would be when "someone with bad sight asks me: 'do you believe that the thing we can see there is a tree?' I reply "I *know* it is; I can see it clearly and am familiar with it'."[304] For Wittgenstein, this sort of usage is correct because "one says 'I know' and mentions how one knows, or at least one can do so."[305] As a philosophical expression of certainty, though, or a demonstration of the existence of things external to the mind, it makes no contextual sense within the language-game to say "I know that that's a tree" because there is no way to demonstrate the grounds from which one is basing one's claim. Which is why Moore admits that his premises cannot themselves be proven true—he can give no ground for how he knows them, we must simply accept them. If we do not, his proof fails. If we

do, his proof is valid. But why then should we accept any of his premises if there is nothing that categorically compels us to? This is the more difficult question to answer. Moore's response to this quandary is to reject those "who are dissatisfied with these proofs merely on the ground that I did not know the premisses."[306] Wittgenstein is no doubt in agreement with Moore on this point. One does not need to prove one's premises in order to use them. Moore takes things a step too far when he claims that there are things which I can know "which I cannot prove, and among things which I certainly did know, even if . . . I could not prove them, were the premises of my two proofs."[307]

This is where Wittgenstein differs sharply from Moore. He argues, as discussed above, that Moore does not actually "know" the premise that "this is a hand" and that he therefore does not "know" that there are objects separate from the mind and that may be met with in space. Although Moore refused to offer "proofs" of this premise, Wittgenstein came to see "Moore, like most traditional epistemologists, was working under the spell of a powerful philosophical model deriving from Descartes,"[308] as Avrum Stroll has suggested in his excellent book, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*. "This model," he continues, "made the need to give a proof of the external world virtually irresistible."[309] Indeed, it is the skeptics and idealists that Moore's proof is primarily aimed at and thus Moore is invariably and inescapably caught in the very discourse he is attempting to refute. As such, the weight of the argument is not in the validity of his proof, but in the fact that he points out that the arguments of the idealist and the skeptic are *also* based on "unproved premises" and therefore in the absence of any such

proof, we ought to side with common sense. This final conclusion, however, is simply a matter of Moore's aesthetic bias. There is nothing intrinsic itself about common sense that makes it preferable to any potential skeptical or idealistic metaphysics. We may accept or reject it as we see fit. There is nothing in Moore's proof that constrains the sorts of things that may serve as a premise and therefore any metaphysical assertion suffices equally as well as Moore's. It is no doubt true that Moore leverages many reasons why we should favor his premises over those of the skeptic or idealist—one of which is the rather unremarkable observation that an idealist philosopher who alludes "to the existence of other philosophers . . . [or] the human race"[310] are inconsistent with the denial that there are "*very many other human beings, who have had bodies and lived upon the earth*."[311] The obvious retort to this, however, is simply that of the solipsist. If one did not choose that path, the second retort would be simply to refuse that the inconsistency was of any consequence—that it is simply not a provable premise and is therefore subject to our acceptance or non-acceptance.

What constituted the appeal of common sense for Moore then? Even if we do not accept his premises or his proof there is still certainly something appealing to it in its own right. There is a certain finality about the sorts of things Moore enumerates that can perhaps only be adequately described as "intuitive." What is the source of this intuition? For Wittgenstein, Moore's proof of an external world is of little philosophical value, neither is his list of the things which he claims to know for certain to be true. What is of value is the role that these sorts of statements have in the language-game. "The assurance that one does know" such

statements "can't accomplish anything here"[312] and therefore "it's not a matter of *Moore's* knowing that there's a hand there."[313] Rather, what is of philosophical interest for Wittgenstein is the question, "What's it like to discover that it was a mistake?"[314] This question, when applied to the things which Moore claims to "know" produce interesting results. Being wrong about such a thing as "I know that this is a hand" would be very strange indeed (though not unimaginable). Explanations for a mistake here would, more than likely, be along the lines of "you were suffering a hallucination" or possibly, "you need to have your eyes checked, they are obviously poor." A mistake of this sort has a perfectly cogent and identifiable cause that once discovered will clarify the nature of the mistake that has been made. Suppose, though, that no such cause could be identified and the person who made the mistake was deemed to be of sound mind and body in all determinable respects? What would a mistake look like under these circumstances? Wittgenstein's response is that we would not know how to answer given the context of our language-game in which mistakes of that sort do not happen. A proof of Moore's sort must take place within this context and that is why "the truths which Moore says he knows, are such as, roughly speaking, all of us know, if he knows them."[315]

This brings us to a crucial point in Wittgenstein's critique of Moore. If, properly speaking, Moore (or anyone else) does not "know" propositions such as "this is a hand," then what is it that gave Moore the idea to the contrary? The confusion arises because we are under the impression that the rules of the language-game are something that we can "know." We do not so much know

them, however, as we follow them without doubting them. That is why if Moore "knows" that "here is a hand" then we all do, because he is not making an empirical observation about the world and the existence of objects external to the mind, he is pointing to a proposition that serves as a grammatical function in the language game. This was, for Wittgenstein, the chief philosophical importance of Moore's essays—the declarative sentences he made gave the appearance of certainty because they were part of the grammatical background against which the language-game is understood. Anyone who is acquainted with the language-game will also be acquainted with its "rules" and as such will also be acquainted with any proposition that serves a grammatical function in the language-game as a systematic whole, which all of us commonly understand. That is why Moore's propositions appear unconditionally true—he appears to be giving a testable hypothesis when in fact he is giving the conditions under which a hypothesis can be tested. As Wittgenstein puts it, "All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system . . . [it is] the element in which arguments have their life"[316] A proposition such as Moore's is therefore vacuous—it is put in the form of a hypothesis when in reality it is part of the structure which we use to confirm or disconfirm hypotheses in general. Consequently, Moore's propositions are not apposite to uses like "I know . . ." because they are the grounds for knowing in general. "And isn't that what Moore wants to say, when he says he *knows* all these things?—But is his knowing it really what is in question, and not rather that some of these propositions must be solid for us?"[317] This, then, is simply what we mean by "I know . . .": That some

things do not come into question; and not: It is categorically impossible for them to come into question. Rush Rhees puts it excellently when he says, "There are certain experiential propositions such that the opposite is never considered; where anything like doubt or any alternative is simply ruled out. And without this there could not be language-games at all."[318]

What is Wittgenstein getting at when he equates Moore's propositions with "grammatical functions?" In §57 of *On Certainty* he puts the question like this: "Now might not 'I *know*, I am not just surmising, that here is my hand' be conceived as a proposition of grammar?"[319] His acumen in this matter is stated most succinctly in §59: "'I know' is here a *logical* insight. Only realism can't be proved by means of it."[320] Moore's use of "I know," so Wittgenstein contends, only signifies the fact that certain propositions play foundational roles in the language-game. This does not, however, equate to "knowing" in the sense that Moore thinks it does, i.e., in the preeminent philosophical sense. The point that Moore wants to make—that the metaphysical doctrine of realism (in the guise of common sense) is proven by the fact that we all collectively understand the "logic" of the language-game—is what Moore's proof distinctly fails to do. It should be mentioned that Moore—who was no doubt disdainful of idealistic metaphysics, which was "the predominant ontological view of his time"[321] (especially in his youth)—was not hostile to metaphysics in general. He did, however, have a very specific sense of what the term metaphysics meant, as can be gathered from *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*. "The first and most important problem of philosophy is: To give a general description of the *whole*

Universe."[322] What is notable about this conception is of course the realistic spirit which undergirds it. This spirit, no doubt shaped in part by the physical sciences, is most distinctly typified by the belief that the first problem with which philosophy has got to deal with before it can even begin to address any other problems is the development of a methodology to determine what sorts of things there are in the Universe. Not in the sense of an exhaustive list which inventories the whole of existence, but rather in the sense of a schematic which distinguishes what is real from what is not. In this sense Moore was an ontological realist, as E. D. Klemke has noted in his detailed analysis of Moore's metaphysics; though he certainly could be associated with other kinds of realism, including the epistemological, transcendental, and axiological sorts, Moore's "defense of other forms of realism stem from his adherence to and defense of ontological realism."[323] This is the kind of realism that Moore's proof is meant to vindicate and from which all the other branches of philosophy may be derived.

Within Wittgenstein's critique of Moore's use of "I know . . ." there is also an implicit critique of the sort of ontological realism which Moore generally favored. This is certainly no endorsement of idealism on Wittgenstein's part, but only an objection that metaphysical proofs of this sort cannot be given, either for or against realist ontology. After all, it is not as if Moore's holding his hands up in front of a diehard idealist and insisting that "here are two hands" will be a very convincing tactic to winning the idealist over. This is because the phrase "A is a physical object" according to Wittgenstein "is a logical concept. . . . And that is why no such proposition as 'There are physical objects' can be formulated."[324]

Roughly speaking, the designation of a corporeal object as "physical" is part of its definition. To then assert that there are such things as physical objects is really only to assume the initial point. "There are physical objects" is thus nonsense, for it appears as though it is saying something when in fact it is simply tautological. "But is it an adequate answer to the scepticism of the idealist, or the assurance of the realist," Wittgenstein asks in §37, "to say that 'there are physical objects' is nonsense? For them after all it is not nonsense."[325] The only answer that we might give, Wittgenstein suggests, is to say that "this assertion, or its opposite is a misfiring attempt to express what can't be expressed like that. And that it does misfire can be shown."[326] So what if the propositions "there are physical objects" and "there are not physical objects" are misfiring attempts to "express what can't be expressed like that?" Even if this can be shown, what does it prove? Even if we were to demonstrate this fact to the idealist or the realist, would this be enough to sway them from their current metaphysical position?

Convincing others to alter their metaphysical construct is no small undertaking and Wittgenstein's work in *On Certainty* is, at least in part, concerned with the ramifications that such radical modifications have on our world views. Whatever such a change in one's metaphysical outlook might consist in it is hard to imagine that simply pointing out the misfiring propositions of the idealist and the realist will be enough by itself to alter the minds of either, though it might be a contributing factor. This is a realization that Wittgenstein seems to have at the end of §37 where he remarks that "an *investigation* is needed in order to find the right point of attack for the critic."[327] Finding the "right point

of attack" for the critic does not consist so much in any one particular point or another—it is a systematic endeavor that must occur within the broader scope of an investigation if it is to have the desired effect of changing someone's mind. A momentous shift in world view requires an equally momentous shift of metaphysical footing and this sort of metaphysical sea change is more often precipitated by a conglomerate of minor axiomatic alterations rather than one that occurs cataclysmically out of the blue. Though such ground-shaking incidents that radically alter one's metaphysical footing can and probably do happen,[328] they are likely the exception and not the rule.

A very similar point to the ones made above is also suggested in Thomas Kuhn's book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. For Kuhn, a paradigm consists of "universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners."[329] Paradigms can include "law, theory, application, and instrumentation together,"[330] all of which form the basis on which a community of practitioners is trained to understand. They thus are "committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice. That commitment and the apparent consensus it produces are prerequisites for normal science, i.e., for the genesis and continuation of a particular research tradition."[331] To be sure, paradigms shift over the course of history and when they do, the associated scientific revolutions that occur require a fundamentally altered world view in which the paradigm is substantiated and given credence. When an old paradigm begins "failing in application to its own traditional problems"[332] there is a recognition by its practitioners that it is no longer

applicable. A recognition of this sort, Kuhn says, "was the prerequisite to Copernicus' rejection of the Ptolemaic paradigm and his search for a new one."[333] With this alteration in paradigms there is also a subsequent alteration in world view, so much so that we may "be tempted to exclaim that when paradigms change, the world itself changes with them."[334] We might be very tempted indeed to make this claim after the Ptolemaic paradigm was supplanted by the Copernican. Dare we say that the world quite literally changed?

There will not, however, always be revolutions that have as far reaching implications as Copernicus' did. Normal scientific activity—i.e., science that operates according to the accepted standards of a given paradigm—could not proceed at all if it did not. In general, there are revolutions only when incommensurable paradigms make competing claims about the nature of the world. "To be accepted as a paradigm," Kuhn writes "a theory must seem better than its competitors, but it need not, and in fact never does, explain all the facts with which it can be confronted."[335] No one paradigm will account for everything. Even the much sought after "holy grail" of theoretical physics—the so called theory of everything—would really only consist of a general outline of the physical universe. Even if something like it is ever discovered there will no doubt be much work for science yet to do (and of course the paradigm in which the theory of everything is housed might someday be rendered obsolete by a future paradigm shift). This, however, brings us to a difficulty not unlike what has been earlier described as the problem of metaphysics.

> Like the choice between competing political institutions, that between competing paradigms proves to be a choice between incompatible modes of community life. Because it has that character, the choice is not and cannot be determined merely by the evaluative procedures characteristic of normal science, for these depend in part upon a particular paradigm, and that paradigm is at issue. When paradigms enter, as they must, into a debate about paradigm choice, their role is necessarily circular.[336]

There are several things at issue in the above quotation. First of all, Kuhn is quite explicit in his acknowledgment that there is a choice between paradigms. Not only do we at times have to choose amongst various incompatible paradigms, there will also be instances in which different paradigms will be coextensive with one another. In such cases as the latter—where no obvious discord would prevent us from adopting one and not another—we do not have to discard one in favor of the other. The standard model of physics is by no means incompatible with the evolutionary model of biology. Though it might be pointed out that they are in some sense both part of a larger scientific paradigm and are therefore not at odds with each other, it is also fair to say that they are each paradigms in their own right inasmuch as it is unnecessary—and perhaps even facetious—to reduce one to the terms of the other. Biology and physics, at least in a limited sense, are incommensurable paradigms. They each have their own aims, scopes, standards and methodologies which are simply not interchangeable.

Choices between paradigms then are not always forced. In this sense, there is always an aesthetic dimension to the motives which inform our choice—the preferences which undergird our rationale will never be entirely effable. Even when a paradigm fails to adequately address its traditional problems, this fact

alone does not force us into revolution. The shift from one paradigm to another is in part an aesthetic decision that is not predicated on any categorical necessity. It is possible to imagine that the practitioners of any one particular paradigm may dogmatically refuse to alter the fundamental world view which structures their paradigm despite the brevity of any evidence that might be leveraged against it. This too is an aesthetic inclination. The choice in paradigm then, like the choice between metaphysical constructs, is always in part determined by preference. It is also a product of the paradigm which it might at some point displace, which is why the discussion about paradigm shifts is always, as Kuhn notes, necessarily circular. In other words, those factors which come to precipitate a revolution always take place within the paradigm which will inevitably be replaced. Similar points to this have been made earlier in regards to the inescapability of metaphysics. The critique of one metaphysical construct always implies an alternative one—even where the critique in question advocates the impossibility of metaphysics. Still further, as it has been previously noted, any metaphysical construct may be made to contradict itself. This is to say that no metaphysics is ever "complete" in the sense that it is impervious to revision. Similarly, because one paradigm always faces the possibility of its own ineptitude in the light of new facts, there will never be an occasion where the possibility of revolution is snuffed out once and for all.

The fact that "each group uses its own paradigm to argue in that paradigm's defense"[337] is for Kuhn no objection to it. "The resulting circularity," he says,

> Does not, of course, make the arguments wrong or even ineffectual. The man who premises a paradigm when arguing in its defense can nonetheless provide a clear exhibit of what scientific practice will be like for those who adopt the new view of nature. That exhibit can be immensely persuasive, often compellingly so. Yet, whatever its force, the status of the circular argument is only that of persuasion. It cannot be made logically or even probabilistically compelling for those who refuse to step into the circle.[338]

One cannot be convinced then by logic or evidence alone, no matter the degree of probability involved. In the end, a paradigm shift is a matter of rhetoric, of persuading others to see things differently than they already do—which is, to a considerable extent—a matter of aesthetic manipulation. The importance of aesthetics in paradigm formation is a point that Kuhn takes note of several times throughout *Structure*. Apart from reasons that are either logically or probabilistically compelling, "There are the arguments, rarely made entirely explicit, that appeal to the individual's sense of the appropriate or the aesthetic—the new theory is said to be 'neater,' 'more suitable,' or 'simpler' than the old."[339] The information that such adjectives are meant to convey in relation to the theories which they describe are, not surprisingly, that of value judgments. There is of course nothing that logically mandates a principle such as Occam's razor, for instance. The belief that all other things being equal, the simpler explanation is preferable to the complex one is an aesthetic maxim only. Though they may not be the only thing that figures into a paradigm choice, "Nevertheless, the importance of aesthetic considerations can sometimes be decisive."[340] When new paradigms are proposed, so Kuhn suggests, "Something must make at least a few scientists feel that the new proposal is on the right track, and sometimes it is only

personal and inarticulate aesthetic consideration that can do that."[341] This need not be the only reason, Kuhn notes, but it can potentially be an important consideration.

Another analogy, it would seem, cold be drawn again here between the role Kuhn assigns aesthetics in paradigm formation and its role in metaphysical considerations. Kuhn—all though he does allow a place for aesthetics in scientific discovery—does not, the argument might be made, take full account of its broader permeation within the scientific discourses. It was suggested earlier that within any theoretical construct one will inevitably reach a methodological boundary beyond which one cannot pass. It is this boundary that represents the limit of our ability to give justifications for the suppositions of our theoretical constructs. Being that it is the business, speaking generally, of any theoretical construct to give justifications for the criteria by which it judges, there will always be some axiomatic hypothesis within the general framework which cannot be given a justification. This, then, is what is meant by the term "metaphysics." Just because a hypothesis cannot be given any ultimate qualification does not mean that it is unusable. We take it as if it was given; and this "taking without proof as if it were true" is simply a matter of aesthetic proclivity. Aesthetics, in this sense, is as much a factor in the sciences as it is in metaphysics. This should of course go without saying. Science is, after all, rife with its own axiomatic principles.

Despite this, Kuhn goes on to qualify his ruminations on aesthetics by suggesting that new paradigms do not "triumph ultimately through some mystical aesthetic. On the contrary, very few men desert a tradition for these reasons

alone."[342] The general scientific ethos, whose methods are based primarily on the ability to make predictions and give explanations, is itself the subject of a strongly held belief. Yes, science works very well indeed. Again, there is no necessary reason to treat the utility of science in this regard as a demonstration of its ultimate truth. This is an axiom that is often assumed within scientific discourse but never proven. There is thus an aesthetic underpinning even to the most basic of scientific principles. The concept of "reasoned arguments based on evidence and predictive power" is as much based on value judgments as is the evaluation of a painting or a poem. It is good for us because it is useful for us, but pragmatic considerations such as this are only one possible aesthetic criterion by which we may judge and the scientific penchant to take this value as its foundation is itself an aesthetic criteria.

There are many interesting correlations that may be drawn between Kuhn's work in *Structure* and Wittgenstein's in *On Certainty*. Kuhn even makes brief mention of Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblance" which is described by the former as "a network of overlapping and crisscross resemblances."[343] Kuhn then goes on to suggest that "something of the same sort may very well hold for the various research problems and techniques that arise within a single normal-scientific tradition. What these have in common is not that they satisfy some explicit or even some fully discoverable set of rules and assumptions."[344] But this fact does not imply that a research tradition is not coherent because it is not based on a universal set of guidelines. This is certainly a valuable insight that Kuhn makes and one that echoes much of what

Wittgenstein has to say in *On Certainty*. *Structure* was first published in 1962 and by that time the *Investigations* had been in print for nearly ten years. *On Certainty* would however not be published until 1969 and consisted of Wittgenstein's notes dating from 1949 until his death in 1951. Many of its passages are very much in the same vein as those to be found in the *Investigations* but they are of course more focused in their scope. They are also writings that Kuhn would not have been privy to at the time he penned *Structure*. Nonetheless, there are several points in *On Certainty* which anticipate something similar in form to Kuhn's thoughts on paradigms, normal science and scientific revolutions.

The first analogy to be drawn between *Structure* and *On Certainty* concerns what Kuhn calls the "primacy of paradigms" and what we might similarly call the "primacy of language-games" for Wittgenstein. The first is the general context in which normal science must be done whereas the second is the context in which words have their meaning. They are each "primal" in the sense that neither normal science nor meaning is possible without the "bedrock" on which they rest. Taken in this sense, paradigms and language-games are also "metaphysical"—if by that term we simply mean "basis for judgment." This is a key aspect not only for paradigms but also for language-games as well. For Wittgenstein, "learning how to judge" is a crucial feature of learning how to use language in general. The same is of course critical to the practice of normal science. If scientists are to do meaningful work they must be "brought up" in the tradition which they will contribute to. They are taught the various skills which they will need in order to correctly identify the problems with which a paradigm

is concerned and also how to address those concerns in a manner that is recognized as valid by the community of practitioners. Within the current paradigm of chemistry, for instance, students are not instructed in the techniques for the transmutation of base metals into gold because this is a problem which has become incompatible with current practices. Similar points are suggested by Wittgenstein in *On Certainty*. "When a child learns language it learns at the same time what is to be investigated and what not. When it learns that there is a cupboard in the room, it isn't taught to doubt whether what it sees later on is still a cupboard or only a kind of stage set."[345]

When one is learning language, one does not need to know that the possibility of doubt may be raised about the existence of physical objects. In other words, children do not start off by learning the language-game of doubting. In fact, Wittgenstein goes so far as to suggest that one cannot begin by learning the language-game of all-inclusive doubt without first learning language-games which are fixed in place and unquestioned.

> Children do not learn that books exist, that armchairs exist, etc. etc.,—they learn to fetch books, sit in chairs, etc. etc. Later, questions about the existence of things do of course arise. "Is there such a thing as a unicorn?" and so on. But such a question is possible only because as a rule no corresponding question presents itself. For how does one know how to set about satisfying oneself of the existence of unicorns? How did one learn the method for determining whether something exists or not?[346]

That a thing is unquestioned is of course not a demonstration that it might not possibly be called into doubt; it is rather a demonstration that its grammatical

function within the language-game is that of a rule. A rule then is not something which someone may say to know with certainty. It serves as the basis for language-use in general and as such is not an object of epistemology. For this reason, Wittgenstein remarks, doubt must come to an end somewhere. If you are to obey an order, for instance, such as "bring me a book,"[347] you will have to be familiar with what a book is and your understanding will be reflected in the fact that you carried out the instruction. If you do not know or are in doubt as to what a book is that information is something which you can discover. "Therefore," Wittgenstein concludes, "in order for you to be able to carry out an order there must be some empirical fact about which you are not in doubt. Doubt itself rests only on what is beyond doubt."[348] This fact does not imply, however, that there must be any one particular thing which must be beyond doubt in the context of all language-games. There is, in other words, no Cartesian foundation which is at the bottom of all language-games. Nor is it necessarily possible to say, as Wittgenstein hastens to add, "That in any *individual* case that such-and-such must be beyond doubt if there is to be a language-game—though it is right enough to say that *as a rule* some empirical judgment or another must be beyond doubt."[349] If there were no such empirical judgment that was beyond doubt then there would be, as far as Wittgenstein is concerned, no such thing as doubt at all. "A doubt without an end is not even a doubt."[350]

Language-games are, in this sense, the context in which doubting must take place, and if there is going to be a language-game, then there must be something which cannot be doubted. This "something which cannot be doubted"

is precisely what is metaphysical in any given form of life. It is the basis for all judging and without it no judgment would be possible at all, not even a judgment of doubt. We must learn to first believe in something that is not doubted and only then can we learn to doubt. "Doubt comes *after* belief,"[351] Wittgenstein asserts. To reiterate, the fact that a belief is unquestioned is not equivalent to its being certain. Empirical judgments that are taken as foundational in the language-game may in the course of future experience prove to be incorrect. In such cases there occurs something that is very much akin to what Kuhn would call a paradigm shift. There are, according to Wittgenstein, "Certain events [that] would put me into a position in which I could not go on with the old language-game any further. In which I was torn away from the *sureness* of the game."[352] Many things might have this effect, but in general they all run contrary to what we have come to expect in the ordinary sequence of events. Thus, Wittgenstein poses the question, "What if something *really unheard-of* happened?—If I, say, saw houses gradually turning into steam without any obvious cause, if the cattle in the fields stood on their heads and laughed and spoke comprehensible words; if trees gradually changed into men and men into trees."[353] If such things really did happen they would, Wittgenstein suggests, threaten to undermine the very foundation of the language-game itself. It might even do so to the point that we could no longer use the language-game as we had done before. In such instances we would quite likely have to construct a new language-game that was based on a new foundation that took account of our new experiences. This new language-game, however, would most certainly be incommensurable with the previous one such that the old

world-view would become, once the paradigm shift had been made, unrecognizable (just as we do not today understand what it is like to truly believe in a solar system that is anything but heliocentric).

There is no doubt that Wittgenstein viewed some elements of the language-game as serving a foundational role. These elements are, in manner of speaking, simply "beliefs." In other words, they are not the sort of thing which philosophers would traditionally categorize as "true" knowledge. "The difficulty," Wittgenstein says, "Is to realize the groundlessness of our believing."[354] While our beliefs are the ground on which the entire language-game rests, they are themselves not grounded on anything else. There is in this distinction something reminiscent of the doctrine of "saying and showing" that was so central to the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein appears to be suggesting that certainty cannot be said, but only shown. The kind of certainty that philosophers often talk about is, it would seem to Wittgenstein, simply not attainable. There is no ultimate and unalterable foundation which serves as the basis of all our knowledge. Rather, the certainty of the language-game shows itself in our actions, in the assumptions we make, the way we use language, the form of life that we live and it is alterable according to the context in which it operates. Wittgenstein suggests something very much like this in §7 of *On Certainty*. "My life shows that I know or am certain that there is a chair over there, or a door, and so on. – I tell a friend e.g. 'Take that chair over there', 'Shut the door', etc. etc."[355]

The similarity between "showing" in the *Tractatus* and foundational knowledge in *On Certainty* has also been noted by Jerry H. Gill in "Saying and Showing: Radical Themes in Wittgenstein's 'On Certainty'". He contends that "Wittgenstein's main contention in *On Certainty* is that the character of epistemological bedrock can only be *displayed* or allowed to *show itself*; every attempt to doubt it or justify it become entangled in self-stultifying confusion."[356] Part of what Wittgenstein accomplishes in *On Certainty* is a way of viewing epistemology that allows us to escape this "self-stultification" that renders obsolete the necessity of justifying knowledge in an absolute sense. Though one must be in a position to demonstrate how one knows something, one cannot do so forever. If we "know" something (in Wittgenstein's sense of the word) we are always capable of saying how we know. In situations where we claim to know something that is fundamental (i.e., metaphysical) we are always placed in a position where we are forced to give a justification of a belief that was itself formerly used as a justification. Thus we are stuck in a regress of justification where nothing is allowed to be taken as foundational. Without this framework in which to operate there would be no such thing as knowing or doubting, truth or falsehood. Although our epistemological framework is, in part, an inherited component of the cultural and biological form of life one lives, there is nothing "logically necessary," "self-evident," "indubitable" or "incorrigible" about it. It is, in some sense, "Misleading to speak as if we choose or *assume* the various aspects of our epistemological framework,"[357] as Gill states. "This way of putting it makes it sound arbitrary and self-conscious when in fact it is not."[358] It is no

doubt true, as Wittgenstein states, that "from a child up I learnt to judge like this. *This is* judging."[359] In order to make judgments they must be "in conformity with mankind,"[360] as Wittgenstein writes. Gill is thus quite right if he means that the individual cannot choose to be indoctrinated in one epistemological framework instead of another. This does not mean, however, that the epistemological framework is itself necessary. Although a certain form of life might be predicated on a certain kind of epistemological framework—and necessarily so—there is no reason to suppose that it might be rejected outright. This of course would imply a new form of life that may be incommensurable with the old one. Whether it is accepted or rejected, whether by a group or an individual, the act of accepting it unquestioningly or rejecting it outright is done so on a basis that is completely arbitrary. Where one must make decisions which are entirely baseless, one must do so according to one's aesthetic inclination.

Wittgenstein's critique of the "preeminent philosophical" quest for certainty is one that has important implications for the problem of metaphysics as it has been variously described thus far. Metaphysics, inasmuch as it has been characterized by the search for the immutable, has found itself caught in a vicious circle of justification. This circle has implicitly or explicitly dogged nearly every metaphysical doctrine in the history of Western philosophy. Whatever first principles that metaphysics might concern itself with, whether it be ontology—as has been its traditional trajectory—or something other besides; there has always been the problem of justifying the axioms with which one begins a philosophical inquiry. Thus, no matter the sort of metaphysical system that we begin with, it

seems as if we are always lead back to the question "How do we know?" Accordingly, epistemology has always been at the back of all our metaphysical ruminations, which is precisely where the problem lies. As Wittgenstein says in §482 of *On Certainty*, "It is as if 'I know' did not tolerate a metaphysical emphasis,"[361] for as soon as we claim to know something metaphysical we are always placed in a position in which we must give justification to our knowledge. Where the axioms of metaphysics are concerned, there is nothing base them on, for metaphysics *is* the basis of knowledge. With this line of thinking we have already been lured into the epistemological circle which is at the center of the problem of metaphysics.

In order to know anything, we must have a basis for our knowledge, but in order to have such a basis we must allow ourselves the opportunity to cease giving justifications *ad infinitum*. We must also resist the temptation to simply resort to that tired old refrain that philosophers seem to never tire of: self-evidence. Nietzsche once referred to such philosophers as

> harmless self-observers who believe that there are "immediate certainties"; for instance, "I think," or as the superstition of Schopenhauer puts it, "I will"; as though cognition here got hold of its object purely and simply as "the thing in itself," without any falsification taking place either on the part of the subject or the object.[362]

This, of course, is exactly what we cannot do. Whatever our "immediate certainties" may consist in, we will never be in a position to separate the feeling of being certain from actual certainty in itself. All judgments of certainty are

judgments made about a particular psychological state. The fact that something *seems* certain is, to be sure, no proof that it *is* certain. This is not to say that what is believed to be an "immediately certain intuition" might not be correctly applied to something which is actually certain in itself. If there are such things that are, properly speaking, "true in themselves," it might happen that our cognition might get a hold of them, simply by chance alone. Whether we do or whether we do not, however, will not be something which we will ever know for certain. In each case, the feeling of being "absolutely correct" is exactly the same.

How then, do we escape this problem of metaphysics? If we require metaphysics in order to have knowledge but can give no meta-epistemological basis that justifies the use of one metaphysical schematic over another, how is knowledge possible at all? The solution here is quite simple. A cue might be taken from John Dewey. He notes that "modern philosophies, in spite of their great diversity"[363] have retained "the conception of the relation of knowledge to reality formulated in Greek thought."[364] According to Dewey,

> The notion of a separation between knowledge and action, theory and practice, has been perpetuated, and that the beliefs connected with action are taken to be uncertain and inferior to value compared with those inherently connected with objects of knowledge, so that the former are securely established only as they derived from the latter.[365]

Part of the esteem with which theory is held over practice is due in part, Dewey contends, to a biological necessity. "Man who lives in a world of hazards is compelled to seek for certainty."[366] This drive, which is necessitated by the

demands of life, became a value in its own right apart from its function in securing even a modest amount of "control over nature."[367] For Dewey, this is the source of the privileging of knowledge over action. This is simply because pure, *a priori* knowledge is, in all instances, certain knowledge in comparison to practical knowledge. Much the same thing has also been suggested by Nietzsche.

> There is nothing outside ourselves about which we are allowed to conclude that it will become thus and so, must be thus and so: we ourselves are what is more or less certain, calculable. Man is the rule, nature without rule: in this tenet lies the basic conviction that governs primitive, religiously productive ancient cultures.[368]

Part of the problem of metaphysics, then, lies in this artificial separation of what is often referred to in philosophy as the difference between "knowing that" and "knowing how." There is, it would seem, much the same sort of argument present in *On Certainty*. For Wittgenstein, there is no getting beyond the sort of certainty that is provided to us by the form of life we live and the actions that are associated with it. This is, so to speak, the "foundation" of the very possibility of being certain about anything. So, in a very real sense, we are quite content to act as if we had the sort of absolute certainty that philosophers have endeavored to discover without actually having it. What is important are the choices that we make and not their ultimate foundation. Indeed, the ultimate foundations of our certainty are the choices that we make. There can be no self-sufficient and ultimately certain metaphysical theory that accounts for our actions apart from the actions themselves. We must choose to use one explanation of things amongst an untold number of them. Our selection, although it cannot be given any ultimate

justification, is simply constituted in our aesthetic sensibilities. For us, metaphysics will always be constituted by this sentiment in particular. When our ability to give justification runs dry and we have reached the bedrock of our knowledge, the only explanation left for us to give is "this seems better than that." There is no other justification possible. There is nothing that is self-evident, indubitable, incorrigible or ultimately certain about it. There is only what seems preferable.

CHAPTER 4:
Metaphysics, Aesthetics, and Ethics

> At this point we must take a leap into the metaphysics of art by reiterating our earlier contention that this world can be justified only as an esthetic phenomenon.
>
> –FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *The Birth of Tragedy*

> I think I summed up my attitude to philosophy when I said: philosophy ought really to be written only as a *poetic composition*.
>
> –LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *Culture and Value*

The aim of this chapter is to bring the relationship between metaphysics, aesthetics, and ethics within the corpus of Wittgenstein's work more sharply into focus. In one respect, it will attempt to demonstrate that something very much like Nietzsche's metaphysics of art is at play in Wittgenstein's philosophy. In other words, it will be argued that the only real "justification" for the world that we might give is as an "aesthetic" one. When one is dealing with metaphysics, it is, to be sure, sometimes tempting to think of the world only in ontological terms as a description of "that which is." This mode of description includes, of course, the conditions that in general make the existence of corporeal things possible. If we are basing our estimations on positivist metaphysics this ontological description of the world will be taken as synonymous with and inseparable from the justification of the world. This is by no means our only option, however. In fact, this chapter will implicitly suggest that a positivist metaphysic makes for a very poor justification of existence in general. Whatever "the world" is ontologically speaking, it is always a mode of description before it is anything else. It is also thereby the aesthetic phenomenon Nietzsche described that is

exactly what a positivist metaphysic is incapable of accounting for. "Description," when taken as an aesthetic activity, turns out to be at the bottom of any explanatory model. To give an explanation, in other words, is to present a chain of reasoning; and for an explanation to be valid, its chain of reasoning must also be valid, which is precisely where the difficulty presents itself. Part of any explanatory model—whether it is a worldview, a metaphysical doctrine or a scientific discourse—is the criteria by which it judges the validity of a particular line of reasoning. What then is the validation of that validation? The fact that we are caught in an infinite regress here should no doubt be obvious.

Metaphysics, though it is concerned chiefly with "first principles," has always been troubled by the problem of giving *justification* to whatever principles it deems to be "foundational." In this respect metaphysics has always been subject to the epistemological questions "What do we know?" and "How do we know it?"[369] When answering these questions we are seemingly faced with two possible justifications: either we are forced to make the assertion that the first principles in question are self-evident, or we must admit that a regress is unavoidable and that we therefore do not actually know anything at all. Both of these reactions to this particularly vicious circle are, however, based on a very specific criterion for what counts as "knowledge." This is to say, they are employing a metaphysical assumption that true knowledge is certain knowledge. This assumption is taken as being unquestionably indubitable when in reality it is anything but. For when we examine any chain of reasoning we will eventually come to a place where a justification can no longer be given. This is the

metaphysical terminus beyond which we cannot pass. If we are asked "How do you know that your metaphysical principle is correct?" the only answer we might give is that it is "aesthetically preferable" to the various other ones we might select. If and when we do feel as if a metaphysical principle is absolutely correct, our inability to see things otherwise is indicative only of our being aesthetically pleased with the principles we have adopted. The term "aesthetics," when we apply it to the epistemological justification of our metaphysical axioms, means only that one axiom (or set of axioms) is taken as fundamental to the exclusion of others. The term "metaphysics" refers to any definitional term (or set of terms) that cannot be given any other justification besides the above stated aesthetic one. When combined we arrive at the sense of a "metaphysics of art" that informs a good deal of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

It was previously suggested that we cannot entirely understand the better part of what Wittgenstein has to say unless we read him as approaching the philosophical discourse first and foremost as a form of poetic composition.[370] Some of Wittgenstein's commentators have regarded this suggestion as more or less superfluous. One such author is Peter Carruthers. Anyone can see, he notes, that the *Tractatus*

> is a work of extraordinary beauty; yet what makes it attractive is partially responsible for its obscurity. Firstly, because it is written in the style of pithy aphorism, without properly developed explanations of its own doctrines. And secondly, because it is mostly presented in the form of oracular statements, without supporting arguments. . . . Such a mode of writing serves no one well. In attempting to ride two horses at once (truth and beauty), it risks falling between them. In philosophy it is clarity and

> explicitness that matter above all. For only what is plainly stated can be reliably assessed for truth.[371]

This assessment of the *Tractatus* is unfortunately all too common of overly analytic interpretations, all of which, by and large, fail to grasp the essential importance that aesthetics plays in the communication of ideas. Carruthers, in an apparent dismissal of the "obscurity" of the *Tractatus*, attempts to do what Wittgenstein was perhaps incapable of doing. "In my own writing," Carruthers says, "I will try to be as open and straightforward as possible."[372] Such a stylistic methodology might indeed be well suited to the general scope and purpose of exegetical writing, but this cannot be used as a justification for dismissing the importance of aesthetics in Wittgenstein's work. This includes not only his genuine stylistic concerns about writing—which he repeatedly expressed in his notebooks—but also the conceptual apparatus of aesthetic explanation. "Writing in the right style is setting the carriage straight on the rails,"[373] Wittgenstein remarks, and sometimes the right style is more pertinent to the presentation of an idea than any other means of communication. One such example for Wittgenstein is that of Biblical Scripture, which is, in a certain sense, very unclear and full of historical inaccuracies. This, however, is completely beside the point for Wittgenstein. "Isn't it possible," he asks, "that it was essential in this case to 'tell a riddle'?"[374] What is important about Scripture for Wittgenstein is not the historical narrative which it tells. In fact, the narrative need "not be more than quite averagely historically plausible *just so that* this should not be taken as the essential, decisive thing. . . . What you are supposed to see cannot be

communicated even by the best and most accurate historian; and *therefore* a mediocre account suffices, is even to be preferred."[375]

A case could be made that something similar is applicable to Wittgenstein's philosophical prose. Not only is his style distinctive, it is also unusually hard to pin down. This is in part due, no doubt, to the sort of philosophical inquiry that he is attempting to conduct. "I find it important in philosophizing to keep changing my posture, not to stand for too long on *one* leg, so as not to get stiff."[376] It is no wonder than that Wittgenstein would favor an aphoristic style of writing which, more often than not, forgoes explanation or demonstration, because they tend to make one philosophically stiff and "systematic." This is of course reminiscent of Nietzsche who claimed to "mistrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity."[377] Similarly, Wittgenstein's aphoristic style is as much a way to avoid the stagnation of a systematic doctrine as it is a necessary means of expressing thoughts that could not be given voice by any other means. This was also, so it would seem, simply the only way in which Wittgenstein could structure his thoughts without artificiality. "If I am thinking about a topic just for myself and not with a view to writing a book, I jump about all around it; that is the only way of thinking that comes naturally to me. . . . I *squander* an unspeakable amount of effort making an arrangement of my thoughts which may have no value at all."[378]

With the above considerations in mind, there is still at least one undeniable difficulty when taking up an examination of Wittgenstein's aesthetics:

He published nothing on the subject during his lifetime aside from two somewhat cryptic remarks in the *Tractatus*. One of these appears in 4.003:

> Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical. Consequently we cannot give any answer to questions of this kind, but can only point out that they are nonsensical. Most of the propositions of philosophers arise from our failure to understand the logic of our language. (They belong to the same class as the question whether the good is more or less identical than the beautiful.) And it is not surprising that deepest problems are in fact *not* problems at all.[379]

Though it should come as no surprise that Wittgenstein thinks that statements like "the Good is more or less identical than the Beautiful" are nonsense, what is odd is that he will later assert in 6.421 that "Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same,"[380] which, by the light of his own philosophy, would seem to be a statement without sense. This is the paradoxical nature of Wittgenstein's philosophy, however, and is not only indicative of his attitude towards metaphysics, but aesthetics as well. He searched for a language devoid of metaphysical utterances, but in so doing, he could not refrain from speaking metaphysically. He wants to say that it is senseless to ask whether the Good is more or less identical to the Beautiful, but cannot stop himself from asserting that indeed they are. So, is the realm of the aesthetic for Wittgenstein limited only to senseless statements such as 6.421? Is the point to "tell a riddle?" Or, are we more successful in reaching the unsayable, and thereby the aesthetic and the ethical, when we abstain from speaking about them altogether?

These questions would be more problematic if this were all that Wittgenstein ever gave us on the topics of aesthetics and ethics. However, remarks on the good, beauty, art, music, poetry, literature, etc., are scattered throughout his *Nachlass*. Many, which do not clearly belong to any sustained work, are collected in English under the title of *Culture and Value*. These comments give us further insight into Wittgenstein's thoughts on aesthetics. By themselves they lack a cohesiveness that a more prolonged treatment would produce. We therefore must read these aggregated comments in light of his more robust philosophical works. In so doing, one begins to see the importance of the aesthetic and ethics in all aspects of Wittgenstein's work. The *Tractatus*, which on a cursory reading may seem to be solely on the subject matter of logic, takes on a completely different air. His later work also takes on an added dimension when seen as a book that is, at least in part, about the ethical and the aesthetic.

In his pre-*Tractatus* notebooks, Wittgenstein makes several entries of interest concerning art and aesthetics. In the vein of the mystical, around which much of his early thinking centers, he writes, "Aesthetically, the miracle is that the world exists. That there is what there is."[381] It would be misguided to see this statement as merely an avowal of aesthetic pleasure alone. The wonderment *at* existence, so indicative of the *Tractatus*, is for Wittgenstein the only possible metaphysical explanation *for* existence—and aesthetic experience is indicative of this. In the next entry, Wittgenstein goes on to ask, "Is it the essence of the artistic way of looking at things, that it looks at the world with a happy eye?"[382] In the *Tractatus* he remarks, "The world of the happy man is a different one from

that of the unhappy man."[383] And again in the *Notebooks* he says, "For there is certainly something in the conception that the end of art is the beautiful. And the beautiful *is* what makes happy."[384] How one looks at the world, whether it is with a happy or an unhappy eye, does not "alter the world, it can alter only the limits of the world, not the facts—not what can be expressed by means of language. In short, the effect must be that it becomes an altogether different world. It must, so to speak, wax and wane as a whole."[385] Thus, if such ways of looking change the limits of the world, then they change it metaphysically.

It is without a doubt that aesthetic contemplation for Wittgenstein is typified by viewing the world in a particular way. In a clarification of what he means by "ethics and aesthetics are one," he writes,

> The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*; and the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is the connexion between art and ethics. The usual way of looking at things sees objects as it were from the midst of them, the view *sub specie aeternitatis* from outside. In such a way that they have the world as background. . . . The thing seen *sub specie aeternitatis* is the thing seen together with the whole logical space.[386]

To see an object aesthetically, one must see it in the entirety of its context—that is, the entirety of its *metaphysical* context. "Good art is," Wittgenstein says, "a complete expression,"[387] which is exactly the reason why the propositions of aesthetics cannot properly be expressed in language. The logic of our language is incapable of a higher order, it cannot explain why it is, but only that it is—it cannot give a complete metaphysical picture of an object (and hence an aesthetic one), for it would have to be capable of showing itself as though it were from the

outside, which is exactly what Wittgenstein thinks language is incapable of doing. His aim, as he explains in the preface of the *Tractatus*,

> Is to draw a limit to thought, or rather—not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts: for in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e. we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought). It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be drawn, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense.[388]

Though we may not be able to "think the other side" of a limit, the fact that we can draw a limit at all to language would also denote—by way of a negative definition—what may not be spoken of in language. This, of course, does not mean that aesthetics becomes any less nonsensical as a result. It only means that we are capable of telling the difference between what can be said from what cannot. Even though a judgment of value will not find adequate expression in language, nevertheless, its sense will show itself in the fact that its sense may not be expressed in language.

For Wittgenstein, it is our subjective vantage point within the world that renders us incapable of thinking the other side of a limit. For a subjective viewer immersed in the world, it will appear as if there are no limits to the world just as "our visual field has no limits."[389] To see the limit would require that we see the other side of the limit, but language does not allow us do this, which is why "*the limits of my language* mean the limits of my world."[390] Again, as with his attitude towards metaphysics, Wittgenstein's reasoning becomes seemingly paradoxical with regards to aesthetics. For he not only states that in order to think a limit, we

would have to think the unthinkable, but also that "to view the world sub specie aeterni is to view it as a whole—a limited whole."[391] What is this sort of contemplation if it is not thinking the other side of a limit, or at least thinking *from* the other side? If the work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*, how is it that we can contemplate it at all if by so doing we should have to think what cannot be thought?

Part of the answer is, no doubt, that aesthetic experience for Wittgenstein is also typified by its mystical quality. A good work of art is also a "complete" work of art. Thus, when we view any given object as a work of art we are doing so as if it were from an eternal vantage point outside of the limits of the world. This is despite the fact that such a vantage is, strictly speaking, not one which we may occupy. "Feeling the world as a limited whole—it is this that is mystical."[392] In this sense then aesthetics and the mystical are related ways of viewing the world. This much may also be said of ethics for Wittgenstein. A great deal has been made of his assertion that "ethics and aesthetics are one and the same." Kathrin Stengel has noted that this dictum "has often been misunderstood as stating the ontological identity of ethics and aesthetics. To be blunt: this reading is simply wrong, both logically and grammatically."[393] Part of her reasoning centers on the translation that Pears and McGuinness make of Wittgenstein's original German phrase "Ethik und Aesthetik sind Eins." A more literal rendition of this final parenthetical statement of 6.421 is rendered by C. K. Ogden as "Ethics and æsthetics are one."[394] Stengel, in conjunction with Ogden's translation, suggests that the relationship between ethics and aesthetics for

Wittgenstein is "rather one of interdependence than of identity."[395] There is, according to Stengel, an ethical component to the aesthetic point of view in Wittgenstein's work, and vice versa. They are not "one and the same" ontologically, logically, or grammatically speaking, but the one does presuppose the other. "The interdependence of ethics and aesthetics," Stengel says, "is rooted in the fact that the ethical, as a way of understanding life in its absolute value, expresses itself in aesthetic form, while aesthetic form (i.e., style) expresses the ethical as an individual, yet universal, aspect of the artistic act."[396]

Michael Hodges has said that what Wittgenstein meant by "ethics and aesthetics are one" is that "the good life—the happy life—consists of an aesthetic apprehension and appreciation of the world in which will and idea are an essential unity. The metaphysical subject and the willing ethical subject are one and the same."[397] There seems to be some credibility to this interpretation, despite the fact that Hodges waffles between implying that ethics and aesthetics are separate but unified and that they are also ontologically indistinguishable. A strong case could be made that the "good life" for Wittgenstein is also the "happy life." "The happy life is good," he says, "The unhappy bad."[398] When we see the world with a "happy eye" we also see it beautifully. Therefore a happy life is also both good and beautiful, and an unhappy life is neither. What lesson are we meant to learn from such dictums if, strictly speaking, they are nonsense? What does it mean to be happy and why is a happy life also an ethical and aesthetic life? Wittgenstein himself has no definitive answer to offer us. When he asks himself "why should I live *happily*," his only response is that it "seems to me to be a tautological

question; the happy life seems to be justified, of itself, it seems that it *is* the only right life."[399] Thus there is really only one sort of ethical maxim that Wittgenstein can offer us. "It seems one can't say anything more than: Live happily!"[400] What this happy life consists in, however, is "in some sense deeply mysterious!"[401] For if we attempt to answer the question, "What is the objective mark of the happy, harmonious life?" the only answer we might give is "that there cannot be any such mark, that can be *described*. This mark cannot be a physical one but only a metaphysical one, a transcendental one."[402]

This final remark is an important one. The correct life, which is the good and the happy life, is not one which can be described in propositional language. It is therefore "transcendental" according to Wittgenstein's use. This means, as he states in the *Notebooks*, that "ethics does not treat of the world. Ethics must be a condition of the world, like logic."[403] It is important to take note of Schopenhauer's influence on Wittgenstein here, because ethics, like logic or aesthetics, "can only enter through the subject."[404] It is this "willing subject," which Wittgenstein sometimes refers to as the "metaphysical subject," that is the basis not only for the happy or unhappy world, but for the world in general. "As the subject is not a part of the world but a presupposition of its existence, so good and evil are predicates of the subject, not properties in the world."[405] Logic, ethics, and aesthetics, then, all collapse into the metaphysical subject. Not only does this seem to suggest that there could be no such thing as a world without a prerequisite subject, but it also suggests that the world must also necessarily be an ethical and aesthetic concern for the metaphysical subject. "Can there be a world

that is neither happy nor unhappy?"[406] Wittgenstein asks himself, albeit rhetorically. As far as Wittgenstein is concerned, the existence of the world (everything that is the case) is based on the existence of a metaphysical subject which transcends the world. This subject is also the "willing subject" in Schopenhauer's sense and it is this willing that makes the world either "happy" or "unhappy." There can ultimately be no such thing as a subject that stands in a value neutral relationship to the world, for there would then be nothing "transcendent" about the metaphysical subject. A subject that stood in a value-neutral relationship to the rest of the world would cease to be a subject altogether, in which case it would become completely objective. In other words, what differentiates the subject from the object is that the latter can be described via propositional language, the former cannot. The metaphysical subject resists this sort of description precisely because it stands in an ethical and aesthetic relationship with the world. If we subtract this from the subject than there is nothing left to distinguish it from any other object. As metaphysical subjects, we must suppose that the world is either happy or unhappy, good or bad, beautiful or ugly. If we do not, then there can be no such thing as "a world" at all.

The transcendent nature of ethics and aesthetics for Wittgenstein was a result of the intertwined relationship of logic, thought, and metaphysics. What is not logical cannot exist. Nor can we think or speak meaningfully about what is not logical. From this metaphysical position we are led to the inevitable conclusion that all ethical or aesthetic propositions—or any propositions that attempt to expresses any kind of value, for that matter—are senseless.

Wittgenstein's point in all of this is not to deride such value propositions however; far from it. For Wittgenstein, they were of the utmost importance and there can be no denying that we are quite capable of the sort of contemplation that can and does assign value to a world that is utterly devoid of it. A value proposition, strictly speaking, refers to nothing, insofar as there is nothing in the world which it might share the logical structure of representation with. Therefore, if there is to be such a thing as the "contemplation of values" it must be a mystical sort of experience that transcends the world of non-values. This sort of contemplation, then, is possible only because we are capable of viewing the world as if from the auspices of eternity.

The fact that we might not actually do so when we contemplate the meaning or value of life and existence is completely beside the point. What matters is that we are capable of imagining what it would be like to occupy a universal vantage—what Thomas Nagel has characterized as "the view from nowhere," or at least nowhere in particular. "While transcendence of one's own point of view in action," he says, "is the most important creative force in ethics . . . its results cannot completely subordinate the personal standpoint and its prereflective motives. The good, like the true, includes irreducibly subjective elements."[407] The problem of how to combine a subjective viewpoint with that of an objective one, without giving priority to one over the other, is one that Nagel ascribes a key importance to. This problem, as it relates to ethics, has an analogous problem in metaphysics. The difficulty there lies in "combining into some conception of a single world those features of reality that are revealed to

different perspectives at different levels of subjectivity or objectivity."[408] The gist of Nagel's point is that although the subjective and objective can sometimes conflict, we need not adopt one to the exclusion of the other. Nor are the terms of one necessarily reducible to terms of the other. It is something of a metaphysical prejudice that the subjective is considered antithetical to the objective and vice versa. Varying modes of inquiry might require varying degrees of each and there is no reason why we cannot assume that the subjective and objective can coexist.

These difficulties perhaps find no better expression than in the work of Kant. For Kant, the beautiful was that "which pleases universally without a concept."[409] All though in practice we might disagree quite strongly about what we deem to be beautiful, when we do make this judgment we do so *as if* it were universally valid for everyone. Indeed, when one is truly convinced that something is beautiful, one is usually quite incapable of understanding how anyone could disagree. Kant suggests something similar when he states that when someone "pronounces that something is beautiful, then he expects the very same satisfaction of others."[410] The validity of a universal judgment is thus characterized by a certain kind of "ought." It has the form "everyone ought to find this beautiful" and not "everyone does find this beautiful." Any particular disagreement that we might have concerning what we deem to be beautiful is quite beside the point. The only qualification that a disinterested judgment of taste requires is that it be made as if it were universally the case. There is, Kant says, "A claim to validity for everyone without the universality that pertains to objects, i.e., it must be combined with a claim to subjective universality."[411]

Unlike an objective universal judgment—which is universal logically speaking—a subjective universal judgment "does not rest on any concept."[412] There can therefore be no "inference at all to logical universal validity."[413] This is because aesthetic universal validity "does not pertain to the object at all . . . in its entire logical sphere, and yet it extends it over the whole sphere of those who judge."[414] Thus, categorically speaking, there can be no such thing as an objectively universal aesthetic judgment. "If one judges objects merely in accordance with concepts, then all representation of beauty is lost. Thus there can also be no rule in accordance with which someone could be compelled to acknowledge something as beautiful."[415] This subjective universality which pertains to determinations of beauty cannot be governed by rules simply because it would, by definition, no longer be concerned with beauty.

There is much in Wittgenstein's portrayal of aesthetic and ethical contemplation that is reminiscent of Kant, even if Wittgenstein arrived at his position by a somewhat different route. One of the most prominent similarities between the two is their insistence that aesthetic contemplation is transcendent. For Kant, a judgment of taste was universal and as such transcended all empirical experience. One does not need to verify that the judgment of others conforms with one's own because a judgment of taste calls for the universal conformity of everyone. It is not concerned with whether this conformity is empirically verifiable. It is also in this sense both pure and *a priori*. In other words, transcendence in Kant's sense lays the ground for the possibility of all judgments of taste in general. Wittgenstein's sense of transcendence is related but slightly

different. In the first place, Wittgenstein seems to hold the position that an aesthetic judgment is not universal in the sense that "everyone ought to find this beautiful." However, it is universal in the sense that the beautiful is what is seen from the view point of eternity. Kant's transcendental philosophy, on the other hand, sought to demonstrate that all of our experience was already predicated on our *a priori* faculties. Wittgenstein, too, ascribed logic to this kind of metaphysical place in his early philosophical system (see 6.13 of the *Tractatus*). The propositions of logic for Wittgenstein were not transcendental, but the fact that they were capable of mirroring the world was. This is to say that no proposition of logic is capable of representing how it is capable of representing anything in the first place. Logic in this sense is transcendental because it is prior to the possibility of their being a world at all and also because it is incapable of expressing its priority. Thus for Wittgenstein, there can be no "objective" conception of beauty in the sense that logic is utterly incapable of expressing any proposition of value. There is, in other words, no "hierarchy" of logic. This is, in some respects, remarkably similar to Kant, inasmuch as the universal validity of a judgment of taste is not at all dependent on the logical sphere of an object. If it was it would cease to be subjectively universal and would become objectively so. A judgment of taste therefore cannot be logical for Kant either.

The similarities between Kant and Wittgenstein have been noted by other scholars as well. Newton Garver has suggested that "there are striking differences between Kant and Wittgenstein in terminology, but when these are discounted it is difficult to discern any differences of doctrine."[416] In particular Garver regards

both Kant and Wittgenstein as critical philosophers, both of whom "disparage speculative philosophy,"[417] and therefore apply various metaphysical constraints on what philosophy can meaningfully accomplish. Broadly speaking this is no doubt true; and though Garver details the various epistemological "schemata" and "criteria" that Kant and Wittgenstein employ respectively, the critical methodologies of each have important implications for their ethical doctrines as well. Kant famously stated in the preface of the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that he must "abolish *knowledge*, to make room for *belief*."[418] We might similarly say that Wittgenstein had to limit logic in order to make room for value. Although Wittgenstein held no maxim directly comparable to that of the categorical imperative, if he were to give us one it might be something along the lines of "act according to a universal good will," which is of course not very far removed from the categorical imperative. After all, one of the primary aims of Kantian philosophy is to show that the categorical imperative is predicated on the *a priori* concept of an autonomous will. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* Kant suggests "that a good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition even of worthiness to be happy;"[419] a sentiment that Wittgenstein would likely have no objection to.

Wittgenstein, it will be recalled, saw a fundamental connection between what was good and what was happy. This is also, in a certain sense, the connection between the ethical and the aesthetic. This should come as no surprise, insofar as Kant's conception of the categorical imperative and disinterested judgments of taste are both predicated on a universal ought. In a

similar way, the ethical and the aesthetic for Wittgenstein are predicated on a universal vantage. Life, as seen from the eternal, is good, and the existence of the world—from the same point of view—is also beautiful. Just as Kant thought that "a good will is not good because of what it effects . . . it is good in itself,"[420] the argument could be made that Wittgenstein considered the good and happy life to be the only justifiable one to live and that such a life was possible only through the good-will of the metaphysical subject. There is also no reason why one ought to choose the good and beautiful life over one that it is not. It can only be metaphysically justified by the imperative "one ought to choose it." Wittgenstein's sense of ethical obligation is thus, like Kant's, undeniably deontological. "Everything seems to turn, so to speak, on *how* one wants."[421] Accordingly the will must be "first and foremost the bearer of good and evil."[422] Thus it is through the will that both the ethical and the aesthetic come into a world that is otherwise devoid of value. If we were incapable of willing we would also be incapable of seeing the world as either good or bad, beautiful or ugly, happy or unhappy. To illustrate the point Wittgenstein asks, "Can we conceive a being that isn't capable of Will at all, but only of Idea (of seeing, for example)? In some sense this seems impossible. But if it were possible then there could also be a world without ethics."[423]

Wittgenstein's views on ethics are further explicated in a popular lecture he gave on the topic on November 17, 1929 to the Heretics Society in Cambridge. The various contentions that he makes as regards the subject have much in common with those to be found in the *Notebooks* and the *Tractatus*. A few

statements, however, bear a mark more indicative of the *Investigations*. This is not at all surprising given the fact that this was something of a transitional period for Wittgenstein. *The Blue and Brown Books*,[424] which were produced from lectures Wittgenstein gave between 1933 and 1935, already contain many of the central tenets of the *Investigations*. There are also a few instances in this lecture where Wittgenstein's view of ethics seems to further overlap with that of Kant's.

Wittgenstein begins the lecture by adopting the definition of ethics that Moore used in *Principia Ethica*: ethics is "the general enquiry into what is good."[425] There is more than just this superficial similarity between Wittgenstein's "Lecture on Ethics" and Moore's *Principia*. This is despite the fact that Wittgenstein did not seem to think very highly of *Principia*, as he expressed to Russell in a letter from 1912.

> I have just been reading a part of Moore's Principia Ethica: . . . I do not like it at all. (Mind you, quite *apart* from disagreeing with most of it.) . . . Moore repeats himself dozens of times, what he says in 3 pages could – I believe – easily be expressed in half a page. *Unclear* statements don't get a bit clearer by being repeated!![426]

In some sense, this is no doubt true, though as is the case with *On Certainty*, Moore seems to have acted as something of a catalyst for Wittgenstein's thought. This assessment, by and large, would appear to be in tune with how Wittgenstein himself viewed his own ability to develop ideas. "I believe that my originality (if that is the right word) is an originality belonging to the soil rather than to the seed.

(Perhaps I have no seed of my own.) Sow a seed in my soil and it will grow differently than it would in any other soil."[427]

Despite his dislike for *Principia*, much of what Wittgenstein says about the senselessness of ethics is reminiscent of the "naturalistic fallacy" which Moore took so much care to detail in *Principia*. Moore's contention there is that the term "good" is a simple one, meaning that it cannot be defined. This is unlike a term such as "horse," which is comprised of a great many simple qualities which when taken together constitute its definition. The naturalistic fallacy occurs when we mistakenly confuse a simple term with a complex one. In the case of the good, the fallacy occurs when we assign it all sorts of various qualities, such as John Stuart Mill does when he says "that pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends."[428] Moore contends that Mill falls into the naturalistic fallacy by "using the words . . . 'desirable as an end' as absolutely and precisely equivalent to the words 'good as an end.'"[429] And according to Mill, the only thing desirable as an end is pleasure. Therefore, the only thing good for Mill is pleasure and pleasure alone. There is no doubt that Moore agrees that pleasure is good, but he categorically rejects the possibility that we can specifically define what good is.

This, it would seem, is something that Wittgenstein agrees with. Just as logic will not allow us to define what a "simple" is, it will not allow us to define what good is. Like logic, the good (in the ethical sense) is transcendent and beyond explication in significant language. This, however, is significantly different from "good" in what Wittgenstein calls the "trivial" or "relative" sense.

A trivial judgment of this sort is one that uses the term "good" in relation to a specific end. In other words, "The word good in the relative sense simply means coming up to a certain predetermined standard."[430] A statement such as this might be something like: "This is the right way you have to go if you want to get to Granchester in the shortest time."[431] Thus, if one's goal is to get Granchester as quickly as possible, the shortest route will also be the one that is "good" and the longest will be the one that is "bad." When the words "good" and "bad" are used thusly, they are not in any conceivable sense "ethical," they only make an assertion about the way things are. Thus Wittgenstein asserts,

> Every judgment of relative value is a mere statement of facts and can therefore be put in such a form that it loses all the appearance of a judgment of value. . . . Although all judgments of relative value can be shown to be mere statements of facts, no statement of fact can ever be, or imply, a judgment of absolute value.[432]

Like Kant, there is nothing about the mere logic of any given state of affairs that has the compelling force of an absolute judgment. "The *absolute good*, if it is a describable state of affairs, would be one which everybody, independent of his tastes and inclinations, would *necessarily* bring about or feel guilty for not bringing about."[433] But, Wittgenstein hastens to add, there is not, nor could there be, such a state of affairs that has "the coercive power of an absolute judge,"[434] as he calls it. No such state of affairs has the characteristic "ought" that is necessary of such an absolute judgment of value or a categorical imperative.

This is not to say, however, that we cannot have experiences of the absolute. Wittgenstein gives us two examples. The first of these is the

wonderment at existence. When we have an experience of this sort, we are "inclined to use such phrases as 'how extraordinary that anything should exist' or 'how extraordinary that the world should exist.'"[435] The second of these experiences is what Wittgenstein calls "the experience of feeling *absolutely* safe. I mean the state of mind in which one is inclined to say 'I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens.'"[436] One of the first things that one notices in the examples that Wittgenstein produces is a methodological procedure indicative of the *Investigations* in which various uses of a phrase or phrases are compared in order to draw out the family resemblances. When applied to an experience of the absolute it becomes readily apparent "that the verbal expression which we give to these experiences is nonsense!"[437] Taking the example of "wondering at existence" again, Wittgenstein suggests that it only makes sense to wonder at something when it is possible that one could imagine it otherwise. This does not apply to the wonderment at existence because we have no idea what it would "look like" for there to be nothing instead of something. We are left to wonder over what essentially amounts to a tautology—even though it is "just nonsense to say that one is wondering at a tautology."[438] Thus Wittgenstein is led inevitably to the conclusion that these verbal expressions, which "*seem*, prima facie, to be just *similes*,"[439] are all related to one another by way of a shared nonsensicalness. "I see now," Wittgenstein says, "That these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that that their nonsensicality was their very essence."[440]

This gives us further insight into what Wittgenstein might have possibly meant by "ethics and aesthetics are one." What is common to both the aesthetic and the ethical is their nonsensicality. This of course does not reduce the two to ontological equivalency, it only suggests that they share a similar characteristic. This could just as easily be said about logic, which Wittgenstein also considered to be transcendental. It does not follow, however, that logic is ontologically indistinguishable from ethics or aesthetics. It would seem, however, that Wittgenstein did consider ethics and aesthetics to be tautological. There is no reason to compel someone to act well. One simply ought to do it and that is all there is to the matter. Likewise, it makes no sense to marvel at the beauty of existence because one cannot imagine it otherwise. Nevertheless, one should still look at the world with a "happy eye." Both the ethical and the aesthetic are thus joined by the same sort "ought" in Wittgenstein's thought. There is, as B. R. Tilgham has noted, "an absolute and logically necessary character"[441] to Wittgenstein's sense of ethical and aesthetic judgments. Good is good, beauty is beauty and the world is whatever it is. Similar sentiments were also expressed by Roland Barthes in *S/Z*. "Beauty (unlike ugliness) cannot really be explained. . . . Like a god (and as empty), it can only say: *I am what I am*."[442] This of course tells us nothing of what beauty is. It is, as Barthes says, simply empty, and that it is all we can say about it. "Every direct predicates is denied it;" he goes on. "The only feasible predicates are either tautology . . . or simile."[443] Wittgenstein, too, likened statements of value to similes, but the problem with a simile is that it either leads us into an infinite regress of meaning, or it brings us back to a

tautology. "Thus, beauty is referred to an infinity of codes: *lovely as Venus?* But Venus lovely as what? As herself?"[444] This, it would seem, is the only way to halt the series of similes: "hide it, return it to silence, to the ineffable, to aphasia."[445] In other words, similes must come to an end somewhere, and when they do they must end in tautological silence.

Although Wittgenstein wrote relatively little on the topics of ethics and aesthetics, he did, nevertheless, manage to arrive at a fairly cohesive theory of how ethical and aesthetic judgments are possible given the constraints that his logic demands. When he altered his views about language in his later work, his views on aesthetics seem to also have changed accordingly—although the remarks about ethics and aesthetics are just as sparse in the *Investigations* as they are in the *Tractatus* (perhaps even sparser). Thankfully, Wittgenstein gave a series of lectures on aesthetics at Cambridge during the summer of 1938 which are characterized by a methodology much more akin to the *Investigations* than the *Tractatus*. It is also important to note that nothing which now comprises the record of these lectures was written by Wittgenstein himself. It was collected from the notes of students in attendance. These collected notes, however, are significantly similar to one another and to general thrust of Wittgenstein's philosophy to warrant the belief that they more-or-less reliably reflect a good deal of what Wittgenstein had to say in his lectures. Short of a verbatim dictation, it is as close to an accurate record as one could want.

Wittgenstein begins these lectures by claiming "the subject (Aesthetics) is very big and entirely misunderstood as far as I can see."[446] Part of Wittgenstein's

reasoning behind this assertion is that "'beautiful' . . . is an adjective, so you are inclined to say: 'This has a certain quality, that of being beautiful'."[447] This is as a result of the grammatical function of adjectives in general which can give us the erroneous impression that a particular quality is "possessed" by a particular thing. This assumption does not necessarily conform with how a word like beautiful is used in practice. It is therefore helpful, when considering words like "beautiful," "to ask how we were taught it. . . . If you ask yourself how a child learns 'beautiful', 'fine', etc., you find it learns them roughly as interjections."[448] Words like beautiful often play a fairly minimal role in aesthetic appreciation for Wittgenstein. We are lured into the concept of subject and predicate when thinking about expressions such as "this is beautiful" when in reality they occur in an "enormously complex situation . . . in which the expression itself has almost a negligible place."[449] We are thus accustomed to thinking about aesthetic expressions in terms of a primitive language-game instead of a complex one. Furthermore, interjections of approval, according to Wittgenstein, are of very little concern where aesthetic appreciation is concerned. "When aesthetic judgments are made, aesthetic adjectives such as 'beautiful' 'fine', etc., play hardly any role at all."[450] Take for example the critique of music. When discussing a musical piece, we might be inclined to say "'Look at this transition', or . . . 'The passage here is incoherent'. . . . The words you use are more akin to 'right and 'correct' . . . than to 'beautiful' and 'lovely'."[451] This is not to say that interjections do not enter into aesthetic appreciation at all. One can certainly be awe-struck by the beauty of something, but very often this expression by itself is

not enough to distinguish between someone who is in a position to make an aesthetic judgment from someone who cannot. "When we make an aesthetic judgment about a thing, we do not just gape at it and say 'Oh! How marvelous!' We distinguish between a person who knows what he is talking about and a person who doesn't."[452]

There are many ways in which we make this distinction but the use of aesthetic interjections alone is not one of them. If one were to listen to Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos*, one might certainly take note of their beauty. One might even be struck dumb with wonder upon hearing them, but if the only thing one was able to say about them was "how wonderful," then we would not consider the person who said such a thing to have "taste" or to be in a position to make an aesthetic judgment. If, however, one were to mention their historical prominence in the repertoire of Baroque music, for example, or to point out the degree of technical virtuosity involved in their performance, then we would certainly be more inclined to treat such a person as someone who was in a position to make aesthetic judgments. It is interesting to note that Wittgenstein's conception of aesthetic appreciation is strangely akin to his epistemological doctrine. Just as one must be in a position to demonstrate that one has a good basis for saying "I know such and such" one must also be in a similar position to demonstrate the ability to make an aesthetic judgment. In the former case, simply saying "I know" does not suffice for showing that it is true, just as in the latter case the statement "that is beautiful" is not a sufficient demonstration that one has the kind of "authority" required to make an aesthetic judgment. Aesthetic appreciation is, in

other words, part of a way of life and only has meaning within that context. It is therefore "not only difficult to describe what appreciation consists in, but impossible. To describe what it consists in we would have to describe the whole environment."[453] The idea of giving such an all-encompassing description is something that Wittgenstein continually rejected throughout his work. One can never depict the whole environment because the depiction—which is, in a certain sense, as much a part of the environment as that which it depicts—can nevertheless not depict itself. That would, of course, require a second-order metaphysics; and if we start down that path it will not be long before we begin to encounter the infinite regress that is so indicative of the problem of metaphysics.

The inability to precisely state what it is aesthetic appreciation consists in is one of the main themes of Wittgenstein's lectures on aesthetics. A second, but equally important, theme Wittgenstein addresses is what he refers to as a "science of aesthetics." The use of the term "science" in this phrase, it should be stressed, does not appear to coincide in any sense with the German word *Wissenschaft*, which of course translates into English as "science." The German word has a much broader sense than its English equivalent often connotes. In German, the term *Wissenschaft* can refer to a systematic study of any topic, whereas in English the word "science" has come to be almost inseparable from its association with the natural sciences—which is the epitome of the "scientific methodology" in the majority of the English speaking world. It is this conception of science in the English sense that Wittgenstein seems to have in mind when he refers to a "science of aesthetics," especially as this notion is related to psychology. This

idea is one that Wittgenstein flat out rejects. "People often say that aesthetics is a branch of psychology. The idea is that once we are more advanced, everything—all the mysteries of Art—will be understood by psychological experiments. Exceedingly stupid as the idea is, that is roughly it."[454] Wittgenstein's hostility to this notion is essentially bound up with what he sees as a confusion between the problems of science as compared to those of aesthetics. "Aesthetic questions have nothing to do with psychological experiments, but are answered in an entirely different way."[455]

The issue at the heart of this confusion is the belief that a causal explanation suffices as an answer to an aesthetic puzzle. We might suppose, for instance, that given enough time, neuropsychology might be able to identify the particular parts of the brain that are involved when making aesthetic judgments of certain kinds. An explanation of this sort might hold that the feeling of puzzlement we sometimes have when considering a work of art is something which is caused by certain chains of neurons firing, such that when they are strung along in the correct sequence, the experience of "aesthetic puzzlement" is produced in our minds. It would of course be naïve to suggest that there is not something like the above described process going on in our minds, but it would be equally naïve to suggest that a causal explanation of this sort is going to be of any use to us whatsoever when we are discussing the problems of aesthetics. The causal explanation that this interpretation offers us is simply not very well suited to this sort of application. Of course, because it is a causal explanation, we might even

> dream of predicting the reactions of human beings, say to works of art. If we imagine the dream realized, we'd not thereby have solved what we feel to be aesthetic puzzlements, although we may be able to predict that a certain line of poetry will, on a certain person, act in such and such a way. What we really want, to solve aesthetic puzzlements, is certain comparisons—grouping together of certain cases.[456]

David Novitz, in an article appearing in the collection of essays, *Wittgenstein, Aesthetics, and Philosophy*, has taken note of the apparent tensions that exist in Wittgenstein's lectures on aesthetics. "On the one hand," Novitz says of Wittgenstein,

> He emphasizes the role played by rules in our aesthetic response to a work of art; on the other, he contests the view that our aesthetic impressions and judgments can be explained in a law-like way. . . . And yet, if rules do figure prominently in our aesthetic responses, it is difficult to see why there should not be law-like, perhaps scientific, explanations of aesthetic judgment.[457]

Part of the difficulty that arises from this apparent conflict is bound up with what Wittgenstein means by "aesthetic appreciation," which is impossible to describe without also describing the culture within which an aesthetic judgment takes place. "The words we call expressions of aesthetic judgment play a very complicated rôle, but a very definite rôle, in what we call a culture of a period. To describe their use or to describe what you mean by a cultured taste, you have to describe a culture."[458] This implies that if aesthetic appreciation is bound up with a culture, then what it means to appreciate may have more or less circumscribed boundaries, depending on how it was used during a given period. One culture may have a more exacting use of appreciation, another, a more

nebulous one. In some sense then, a culture determines the rules by which aesthetic judgments are made. There is certainly no clear boundary between breaking the rule and following it, but in describing a culture we are also in some sense describing a form of life, part of which is composed by the game of aesthetic appreciation. Thus, "What we now call a cultured taste perhaps didn't exist in the Middle Ages. An entirely different game is played in different ages."[459] This of course does not mean that it is impossible to transgress the boundaries of a particular cultural epoch, for if it did the rules would never change and there would be no such thing as development in the arts. As Wittgenstein points out, for example, "You can say that every composer changed the rules, but the variation was very slight; not all the rules were changed. The music was still good by a great many of the old rules."[460]

Novitz question thus deserves some attention. If aesthetic appreciation is in some sense governed by rules, and, if there can be such a thing as following or not following the rules, then why does scientific explanation—which is an explanatory system as much predicated on rules as is the taste of a particular culture—give us an unsatisfactory account of aesthetic appreciation? In general, Novitz identifies aesthetic appreciation as in part, a function of what people want a work of art to consist in.

> The rules that reflect what people want have a certain social significance, and it is our grasp of this significance that gives us a socially informed understanding of the ways in which rules can be tweaked or transformed to good or bad aesthetic effect. It is this knowledge, this 'feeling for the rules', that informs aesthetic judgment. It is something that is learned by becoming acquainted

> with tradition and conventions that inform the culture of a period; not something that is natural to us.[461]

Novitz seems to be suggesting that just because both aesthetic appreciation and scientific explanation are in some sense rule-governed does not mean that the latter can supplant the former. Each is, so to speak, a kind of language-game, and each has its own standards that may or may not be applicable in other contexts. We do not, nor should we, expect that the rules of one game are of any use in another. If we use the rules of chess to play checkers we would no longer be playing checkers. A similar analogy may be made about psychology's relationship to aesthetics. If we apply the rules of psychological inquiry to aesthetic questions, we are not thereby doing aesthetics. It should thus come as no surprise that the questions of aesthetics remain unanswered by causal explanations. Psychology cannot solve the problems of aesthetics any more than aesthetics can do likewise for psychology. A problem has its home in a particular game and if we try to transplant it into a different one it becomes an entirely different problem.

The above example brings up an important point. It is no doubt obvious that language-games of varying sorts often come into conflict with one another. Part of the objection to a psychological explanation of aesthetics is that the former seeks to circumvent the latter thus making the language-game of aesthetics superfluous. There is thus an essential disagreement involved in the question as to what sort of explanation suffices where an aesthetic puzzle is concerned. How then to resolve these conflicts? A possible answer to this question is suggested by

Lyotard. "Philosophical discourse," he says, "Has as its rule to discover its rule: its *a priori* is what is at stake."[462] This is the issue that is very much at play in Wittgenstein's dismissal of psychological explanation in aesthetics. The object of philosophical discourse is to discover its rule—the metaphysical construct in which the discourse itself is made intelligible. When an aesthetic question is considered against the metaphysical backdrop of psychology, the question ceases to make sense all together. This, of course, is part of the rhetoric involved in the rejection of one explanation and the adoption of another. When we say that an aesthetic question feels out of place when considered in the context of psychology, we are in part suggesting that the question itself no longer has an aesthetic charm. It loses its luster, so to speak. The very thing that made the question interesting was the context in which it was posed to begin with. Thus, settling a dispute of this kind is about placing things in the correct context thereby making them seem at home. This feeling of correctness associated with these sorts of disputes is primarily aesthetic in nature. To say "it feels right" is to say "it feels beautiful."

There are no doubt instances where metaphysical disputes are simply irreconcilable. This is a point that Wittgenstein made in *On Certainty*. "Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and heretic."[463] This seems to be the only possible outcome that a dispute over fundamental principles can come to. If one refuses to see the world in a particular way then no amount of "evidence" will prevail in convincing one to a contrary point of view. Indeed, where metaphysics

is concerned, there is no such thing as being "convinced by the evidence." To see an axiom of metaphysics as correct is simply to see it as aesthetically preferable as compared to other possible axioms. While there is nothing that necessitates the adoption of any given metaphysical axiom, we must not forget that this freedom of choice all but ensures that disputes about which axioms to accept will occur.

Such disputes as are implicated in Wittgenstein's critique of certainty are dealt with much more extensively in Lyotard's *The Differend*. In many important respects, it is a book that overlaps with a good deal of Wittgenstein's own writing. This is especially true in regards to what Lyotard refers to as "phrases" and "regimens." A "phrase" for Lyotard is something akin to a basic "unit" of language, but unlike the notion of Wittgenstein's "simples" in the *Tractatus*, which has an "absolute" value in itself, Lyotard's phrases have more in common with Wittgenstein's later conception of meaning. A phrase, according to Lyotard, "Is constituted according to a set of rules (its regimen),"[464] and it is this regimen—which is similar in its scope to Wittgenstein's concept of the language-game—that gives a phrase its meaning. There is also no such thing as one single phrase regimen. Regimens can take on any number of given characteristics and can be governed by any number of different rules. Thus there can be a regimen of "reasoning, knowing, describing, recounting, questioning, showing, ordering, etc.,"[465] each of which may not necessarily be "translated from one into the other."[466] They can, however, be "linked one onto another in accordance with an end fixed by a genre of discourse."[467]

Another key feature of Lyotard's phrases is their multiplicity. "There are as many universes as there are phrases. And as many situations of instance as there are universes,"[468] he tells us. Of course, this multitude of possible phrases can come into conflict with one another, and when they do they result in what Lyotard refers to as the *différend*, which is "a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments."[469] A *différend* is distinguished from what Lyotard refers to as "litigation," which is a conflict which may be settled via recourse to a commonly accepted rule. Where a *différend* is concerned on the other hand, it is important to note that "one side's legitimacy does not imply the other's lack of legitimacy. However, applying a single rule of judgment to both in order to settle their differend as though it were merely litigation would wrong (at least) one of them (and both of them if neither side admits this rule)."[470]

There is thus a definite ethical dilemma involved in a dispute amongst phrases, one that is not easily solved without doing harm to one party or another. Each party may hold to any given number of irreconcilable phrases with no clear way of bridging the gap between them. We must endeavor to discover a method that allows us to link regimens without resorting to the subjectification involved in translating one regimen into another. Such a method "denies itself the possibility of settling, on the basis of its own rules, the differends it examines."[471] In so doing, Lyotard can no doubt be read as offering us a very poignant defense of our right to disagree, very much as William James did for belief. In a certain sense, the two are intimately related. The concept of the *différend* is inseparable

with what James described as our "right to believe at our own risk any hypothesis that is live enough to tempt our will."[472] If it were not for this assumed right—that various parties can hold irreconcilable beliefs—then there really could be no such thing as the *différend* at all. Likewise, implicit within the sense of James' "right to believe"—which in a manner of speaking is the aesthetic capacity to "accept" without "proof"—there is also an ethical imperative that accompanies this right which demands that we afford the same right to others. This is exactly the imperative the *différend* places on us. It denies the assumption that disputes must necessarily be settled, which is itself a way of settling disputes.

There is also a definite metaphysical implication within Lyotard's *différend*; for although he allows the possibility of irreconcilable difference between phrases, he does not allow for the possibility of there being no phrase at all. "What escapes doubt," he says, "is that there is at least one phase, no matter what it is. This cannot be denied without verifying it *ideo facto*. *There is no phrase* is a phrase. . . . *The phrase currently phrased as a phrase does not exist* is a phrase."[473] This assertion could just as well be extended to metaphysics. To deny metaphysics is to do metaphysics, and, as a result, the denial ends up contradicting itself. This is a point that Lyotard also acknowledges, but his solution to the difficulty is to suggest that "the phrase considered as occurrence escapes the logical paradoxes that self-referential propositions give rise to."[474] A phrase is not subject to self-reference because it is not a proposition within a regimen. A phrase simply is, it is not subject to a truth calculus like a proposition is. Rather, propositions are, according to Lyotard, "phrases under the logical

regimen and the cognitive regimen."[475] It is these regimens that sets the condition by which a proposition might either be true or false. Phrases cannot be either true or false apart from this regimen, but the regimen itself is predicated on any number of given phrases which themselves can never be subject to the rules of the regimen. A phrase must stand outside the regimen which means that it cannot be subject to the regimen. A phrase, therefore, "cannot be its own argument,"[476] for this would be to apply the propositional function outside of the context of the regimen in which it has any sense.

The problem of metaphysics, which has been variously described throughout this text, has been typified by two main tendencies. The first of these is the desire to do away with metaphysics and the resulting self-referential incoherence that follows from this position. The second of these tendencies is the desire for the indubitable, which if it could be discovered, would rid us of the need for metaphysics all together and thus the inconsistency in denying it. Reasons for thinking that both of these tendencies untenable have been given throughout. Lyotard, however, seems to put it especially well:

> The self-referentiality of a negative phrase prohibits a decision concerning its truth or falsehood . . . ; and the self-referentiality of an affirmative phrase allows any statement to be demonstrated. . . . But phrases can obey regimens other than the logical and the cognitive. They can have stakes other than the true. What prohibits a phrase from being a proposition does not prohibit it from being a phrase. That there are propositions presupposes that there are phrases. When we are surprised that there is something rather than nothing, we are surprised that there is a phrase or that there are phrases rather than no phrases.[477]

This latter statement of Lyotard's is a reiteration of Wittgenstein's own mysticism. Being surprised that there is something instead of nothing is also an aesthetic phenomenon. The wonderment at existence that is typified by this aesthetic-mystical tendency is first and foremost the expression of a metaphysical principle. This principle is the same that Nietzsche often expressed in his own philosophical work. "As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* to us,"[478] he wrote in *The Gay Science*. Not only is existence bearable as an aesthetic phenomenon, it is also justifiable only as an aesthetic phenomenon. The question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" can be answered only because we can give it an aesthetic basis. Furthermore, the basis on which existence is predicated depends on this aesthetic phenomenon for its constitution. Whatever existence is, it is inseparable from our description of it and how we choose to describe it will be contingent on our "metaphysics of art." We can give no reason why we ought to choose one mode of description as opposed to another. All we can say is that we choose one and not another. This is the only option that an empirical descriptivism allows us. An aesthetic justification of existence resides only in how we choose to describe.

Wittgenstein wrote in 1936 that there is a "queer resemblance between a philosophical investigation (perhaps especially in mathematics) and an aesthetic one."[479] This resemblance was something that he remarked on more than once. A related comment appears in *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. "A mathematician is always inventing new forms of description. Some, stimulated by practical needs, others, from aesthetic needs,—and yet others in a variety of

ways. . . . The mathematician is an inventor, not a discoverer."[480] The forms of description that a mathematician chooses are very much predicated on the needs that they fulfill. One of these, no doubt, is an aesthetic one, and mathematicians can be as much lured by the beauty of a proof as any other factor. This of course does not imply that the axioms around which a proof is constructed are themselves self-evidently true. They are only true insofar as they serve to accomplish some other end. Wittgenstein would also come to criticize the belief that arithmetic could be reduced to logic—which was a central tenet of Russell's philosophical work—on similar grounds. "But who says that arithmetic is logic, or what has to be done with logic to make it in some sense into a substructure for arithmetic? If we had e.g. been led to attempt this by aesthetic considerations, who says it can succeed?"[481] There is of course no guarantee that our aesthetic considerations will lead us to success, but then again what counts as "success" depends partly on how we differentiate between that and failure. In other words, the rule for determining this difference will depend inevitably on an aesthetic consideration, because what counts as a "success" and a "failure" will be predicated on the criterions which we are willing to accept and abide by. And thus, "'Anything – and nothing – is right.' – And this is the position in which, for example, someone finds himself in ethics or aesthetics when he looks for definitions that correspond to our concepts."[482]

What then can we learn from Wittgenstein's philosophy? The first lesson that we might heed is that metaphysics is simply unavoidable in philosophical inquiry. His attempts in the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* to rid his analysis of

metaphysical implications entirely always met with a self-referential incoherence. *On Certainty* frees us from this inconsistency by acknowledging that inquiry must come to an end somewhere—and where it does, we must simply accept our beliefs as true without being able to prove that they are. The second lesson that we might learn seems to have been implicit in Wittgenstein's philosophical writings since the very beginning. It is, broadly speaking, the mystical sentiment which is so strikingly present in his earlier philosophical works. In a certain sense, this gives us a way of resolving the problem of metaphysics. When we are faced with the decision of how we ought to describe existence we are always put in the position of "viewing it from afar." It is as if how we describe set the whole parameter of what there can be; and in so doing we are delimiting the whole of existence. Given the fact that we can produce no ultimate justification for how we describe we are always forced to admit that the only thing that stands at the bottom of all our estimations is a simple and indefinable aesthetic preference.

CHAPTER 5:
The Metaphysical Subject and the Work of Art

> One does not *find*, one does not *disclose* nothingness in the manner in which one can find, disclose a being. Nothingness is always an *elsewhere*.
>
> –JEAN-PAUL SARTRE, *Being and Nothingness*

> I have nothing to say and I am saying it.
>
> –JOHN CAGE, "Lecture on Nothing"

> In art it is hard to say anything as good as: saying nothing.
>
> –LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *Culture and Value*

One of the primary aims of this chapter is to suggest that art presents us with a difficult metaphysical insolubility which is derived from the very nature of metaphysics itself, and more specifically, the metaphysical subject. If metaphysics is the branch of philosophy which postulates axioms of truth and devises definitions based on those truths, it can do so only by way of the subject that postulates them as universal. That is to say, in other words, that all axiomatic truths are true only insofar as the metaphysical subject is willing to believe that they are true. This willingness to believe, however, is completely unpredicted on any conceivable self-evident or indubitable principle. In order to advance an axiom of truth from which we can derive definitions we must be willing to forgo proof. Indeed, it is through such an act of "faith" that the ability to provide proofs becomes possible in the first place. By nominating an axiom as "true," the metaphysical subject expects the acquiescence of everyone else. It is thus a judgment of taste, in Kant's sense, and takes the form of subjective universality. Consequently, we find that the metaphysical subject, through its claim to

universality finds that it, too, must possess the form of finality inherent to its judgment. Without this form, there would be no possibility of making aesthetic judgments of the sort required for establishing any axiom of truth. When we reflect, however, on what this metaphysical subject must truly be, we find that it is nothing: a Being-for-itself, to borrow Sartre's term. It does not exist inside the world because it is the limit of the world—the form of its finality.

Thus, the argument of this chapter will be threefold: one, all metaphysical axioms of truth are judgments of taste and hence possess the finality of form indicative of such judgments; two, because the metaphysical subject is the limit of the world, it does not exist in the world (and is consequently a kind of nothingness); and three, works of art provide us with the possibility of mystical experience by exhibiting the limit of the world from within the world. These assertions, however, bring up what is perhaps a larger issue for subjectivity. In suggesting that the metaphysical axioms possess a finality of form, and that the metaphysical subject substantiates such axioms based on the aesthetics of choice, it would appear that we are making a case for a metaphysics of being while denying the metaphysics of becoming any legitimacy. This inference we will explicitly deny. Instead, we will suggest that the metaphysical subject has the quality of being 'ethico-aesthetic.' That is to say, in other words, that the metaphysical subject maintains both an aesthetic and ethical component: the former is concerned with being and the latter is concerned with becoming. These two features of the ethico-aesthetic subject, are, as we will maintain, irreducible to one another. In aesthetics we discover a 'faith in being,' and in ethics we

discover the 'spirituality of becoming.' When combined we arrive at a sense of religion that upholds the necessity of both being and becoming. We will conclude by suggesting that works of art are also "religious" in this sense, insofar as they are constituted in the hybridity of being and becoming.

In fleshing these arguments out, we must first be careful to distinguish between the metaphysical subject—the philosophical I—and the I of the natural sciences, i.e., the human body, which is, according to Wittgenstein, "A part of the world among others, among animals, plants, stones etc., etc."[483] This, of course, seems to inevitably lead Wittgenstein to a quasi-Cartesian dualism in which the metaphysical subject is housed in the fragment of nature which is the human body. Wittgenstein, however, arrived at this dualism not through a process of eliminating doubt in order to arrive at a bedrock of certainty. Wittgenstein's approach is rather more Kantian in nature and produces a division more reminiscent to that which Kant made between the noumenal and phenomenal. This division in Wittgenstein, for instance, does not lead to any skepticism as to the existence of things outside the mind, for example. There is, however, a clear delineation in Wittgenstein between what is and what is not intelligible. That is to say, the human body can be explicated in natural terms according to various definitions which the metaphysical subject postulates as given. It is for this reason that the human body (as a subject of the natural sciences) is thinkable. The metaphysical subject itself, however, is subject to no such explication—it is the basis for explication and hence must be entirely unintelligible and therefore 'nonexistent.'

This point leads us to an equivalent problem regarding art. If art is to be thinkable, i.e., if it is to exist, it must be possible to frame it in definitional terms. It would have to be possible, in other words, to divine a metaphysics of art which could sufficiently limit the concept of art so as to make it intelligible. On the one hand, this is not a difficult task. History is replete with such metaphysical constructs. While a metaphysics of art provides the necessary construct in which art can be thought, it encounters the same dualistic divide that exists between the "natural" human body and the "supernatural" metaphysical subject. Thus, any theory of art, if it is to be intelligible, can only account for art as a "natural object." This, of course, can include any aspect of its existence within the world, such as its formal qualities or its ideological condition. Such properties are facts about the work of art that are perfectly explicable when situated within the definitional framework of a metaphysics of art. What metaphysics cannot account for, however, is art as a supernatural phenomenon. Metaphysics, while it is capable of defining the terms of art's inter-worldly intelligibility, is incapable of demonstrating how it is that these terms are capable of having intelligibility in the first place. To state the matter differently, we must differentiate the metaphysical work of art from its physical manifestation. Without this distinction, there is no way to conceive of the possibility of art as an exemplar of the mystical experience, which was for Wittgenstein, its most important feature.

This is not without some rather peculiar consequences, however. First, we must be willing to admit that there is an aspect of art that categorically resists definition and consequently the possibility of intelligibility. In fact, we must go

so far as to argue that even the sum total of every conceivable definition does not exhaust the possibility of art. Second, if there is some feature of art which does not lend itself to intelligibility we seem forced to the conclusion that in some sense it does not exist—a point that is bolstered by the fact that Wittgenstein considered existence and thought to be essentially one and the same. The work of art is thus a kind of nothingness. It exhibits for us the possibility of finality and hence intelligibility without which thought would be impossible. Art, as a "form" of non-intelligibility, presents the world to us as a limited, intelligible whole. Such a presentation, however, is not possible, strictly speaking, from within the boundaries of the world. Art, like the metaphysical subject, does not "exist" in the proper sense of the word. We cannot, therefore, apply any metaphysical limitation on either. Both are "absolutely free," which amounts to the same as "absolutely nothing."

Throughout the preceding chapters, we have paid a great deal of attention to the problem of metaphysics and its implications for Wittgenstein's philosophy, the main point of which has been to call attention to several key features of metaphysical inquiry. The first of these is that metaphysical propositions are primarily definitional in an *a priori* sense. They cannot be deduced from experience and are therefore not justified by experience. *A priori* principles "are the indispensable basis of the possibility of experience itself,"[484] as Kant tells us. This brings up the second feature of metaphysical inquiry which we must again take note of. One of the fundamental convictions that underlies Kant's metaphysics is the belief that

> in the judgments of pure reason, opinion has no place. For as they do not rest on empirical grounds, and as the sphere of pure reason is that of necessary truth and *a priori* cognition, the principle of connection in it requires universality and necessity, and consequently perfect certainty,—otherwise we should have no guide to the truth at all.[485]

The sort of absolute certainty that Kant desired for metaphysics is not possible in any strict sense. Metaphysics is what we use in order to confer the certainty of our knowledge, but the axioms of metaphysics themselves cannot have any such basis, for this would require us to have a second order metaphysical construct that gave the propositions of our first order metaphysics the weightiness of truth. From the fact that we can imagine space without objects but not objects, without space, it does not follow that "space is nothing else than the form of all phænomena of the external sense."[486] The only thing it demonstrates is that we are currently incapable of imaging it otherwise. At best, it is a statement of psychology (all claims to certainty are psychological). It does not prove that space is the sole condition "under which alone external intuition is possible."[487] It is not impossible to imagine discovering some new condition of external intuition although we may be quite incapable of imagining what that condition might be. Because it is always possible to imagine alternative metaphysical axioms, we cannot ascribe certainty to any of its tenets, whatever we take those to be.

Metaphysics can therefore not be about "knowledge." Metaphysics is what makes knowledge possible. As Wittgenstein tells us in *On Certainty*: "'I know' often means: I have the proper grounds for my statement,"[488] and it is metaphysics which supplies such a ground. It thus makes no sense to say that one can know

that an axiom of metaphysics is true without giving further metaphysical grounds on which to base the knowledge claim. One must simply abide by the realization that our knowledge cannot be ultimately and universally justified. This is one of the few points on which Kant was arguably in "error" as regards the nature of metaphysics, but this mistake is completely overshadowed by what he undoubtedly got right about metaphysical inquiry: its inescapability.

> That the human spirit will ever give up metaphysical researches is as little to be expected as that we should prefer to give up breathing altogether, in order to avoid inhaling impure air. There will, therefore, always be metaphysics in the world; nay, everyone, especially every reflective man, will have it and, for want of a recognized standard, will shape it for himself after his own pattern.[489]

But the question is, of course, what constitutes a recognized standard in metaphysics? Can there be such a thing at all? The answer is both yes and no. If by "recognized standard" we mean "commonly agreed upon," then yes, we can agree on any set of metaphysical principles we deem fit, but nothing compels us to. If, however, we use the phrase "recognized standard" as approximately equivalent in meaning to the phrase "objectively universal," then there is not, nor can there be, such a standard, whether it is recognized or not. The axioms of metaphysics can only be subjectively universal and are therefore only aesthetically universal and as such they do "not rest on any concept."[490] There can thus be no such thing as "any inference at all to logical universal validity"[491] where aesthetic judgments are concerned. The recognized standards of metaphysics, however, belong as much to the realm of aesthetics as do judgments

of taste. Even the laws of logic—which are themselves the paradigmatic exemplar of objective universality—are only apparently universal for everyone. Even the nearly universal assent of everyone that the principles of logic enjoy is not a demonstration of their objective universality.

What, then, is the link between this conception of metaphysics and the work of art? The first step in answering this question is to recall a different yet not unrelated question which Kant poses in the *Prolegomena*: "*How is nature itself possible?*"[492] The importance of this question for Kant cannot be overstated. It is, as he writes, "The highest possible point that a transcendental philosophy can ever reach."[493] There are two possible senses of "nature" this question addresses according to Kant: the material and the formal. Nature in the material sense is predicated on "the constitution of our sensibility, according to which it is in its special way affected by objects which are in themselves unknown to it and totally distinct from it."[494] Nature in the formal sense, which is to say, "The totality of the rules under which all appearances must come in order to be thought as connected in an experience,"[495] consists in those apparatuses *of* the understanding which make nature in the material sense legible *to* the understanding. The conclusion that Kant is forced to make from this is that the "laws of experience" amount to the same thing as the "laws of nature" and therefore the question, "How is nature itself possible?" is more-or-less equivalent to the question, "How is experience itself possible?"

Even today it must be admitted that metaphysics can scarcely attain to any higher question than the one Kant has already posed for us. "How is nature itself

possible?"—which in Kantian terms amounts to the same question as, "How is anything at all possible?"—is still the question with which metaphysics has got to grapple. The point bears repeating: The answer to this question need not be anything vaguely Kantian. The sort of answer that we are inclined to give is indicative of the sort of metaphysical suppositions we are willing to let guide the inquiry we are making. There is no objectively universal standard which demands that we adopt one metaphysical supposition to the exclusion of all others. Objectivity, despite Kant's claim otherwise, cannot both be the methodology and the aim of metaphysics without begging the question, a point which Karl Jaspers has made so excellently that it deserves to be quoted at length.

> The fundamental difficulty is that Kant, in striving to disclose the conditions of all objectivity, is compelled to operate within objective thinking itself, hence in a realm of objects which must not be treated as objects. He tries to understand the subject-object relationship in which we live as though it were possible to be outside it. He strives towards the limits of the existence of all being for us; standing at the limit, he endeavors to perceive the origin of the whole, but he must always remain within the limit. With his transcendental method he strives to transcend while remaining within the world. He thinks about thought. Yet he cannot do so from outside of thought, but only by thinking.[496]

The circularity involved in Kant's methodology which Jaspers draws our attention was also indicative of certain aspects of Wittgenstein's philosophy. It is, in short, one of the most difficult problems with which metaphysics has got to contend. How do we justify a principle of metaphysics without assuming the very principle that we are attempting to give credence to?

One of the ways we might achieve this end is by coming to the realization that metaphysical reasoning can never be all encompassing. While metaphysics is capable of dictating the boundaries of philosophical inquiry, it cannot do likewise for metaphysics itself. In other words, metaphysics cannot be used as a justification for metaphysics without falling into circular reasoning. What is beyond metaphysics—that is, the justification for metaphysics—is, and must forever be, a thing-in-itself. That is why, as Jaspers points out, "The 'thing in itself' is not a thing but a symbol at the limit of cognition, signifying the phenomenality of all knowing being."[497] The signification at the limit of cognition—which finds its terminus precisely where metaphysical justification cedes its claim of legitimacy to the unknowable—will never be an object of cognition. The realm of the noumenal, though it cannot be accessed by cognition, nevertheless, "is present in our freedom, in the Ideas, in the contemplation of the beautiful."[498] Even though the noumenal does not present itself to cognition as a phenomenal object, it still exhibits itself as the necessary ground on which the phenomenal is predicated. Put in Wittgenstein's terms, "What expresses *itself* in language, *we* cannot express by means of language. Propositions *show* the logical form of reality. They display it."[499]

In part, this is why Kant's third critique is the lynchpin of his metaphysics, inasmuch as the "purposiveness of nature" is "a special concept of the reflecting power of judgment, not of reason; for the end is not posited in the object at all, but strictly in the subject and indeed in its mere capacity for reflecting."[500] The concept of purposiveness, which is made possible by the reflecting power of

judgment, is what presents us with the possibility of a universal ground. This is precisely why a judgment of taste—which is both subjective and universal—is indispensable to metaphysics: the satisfaction inherent "in the beautiful must depend upon reflection on an object that leads to some sort of concept"[501] and therefore "must contain a ground of satisfaction for everyone."[502] It is the mechanism which allows us to bridge the gap between the subjective and the objective. Reflective judgments of taste not only contain the possibility of universal satisfaction, they also demand it. This in turn explains how it is possible to disagree about judgments of taste. In the first place, there must be some claim on which a disagreement must pivot. The claim must call for universal agreement, but not enforce it. It must embody "lawfulness without law and a subjective correspondence of the imagination to the understanding without an objective one."[503] If such a claim had the weight of a law it would not tolerate descent and would thus necessitate objective universality. This is why disagreement is not possible as regards judgments of universal objectivity; likewise in the case of the subjectively agreeable, but for the opposite reason. Because the subjectively agreeable makes no claim to universality of any kind, there can be no disagreement about it. In order for there to be such a thing as disagreement where judgments of taste are concerned three components are necessary: it must be based on pleasure (the beautiful); it must be subjective; and it must be universal.

This puts us in a position to make an analogy between judgments of taste and the axioms of metaphysics. To begin with, it must be admitted, *prima facie*,

that disagreements abound in metaphysics just as they do in aesthetics. There can thus be no such thing as a universally objective standard in metaphysics as long as the possibility of disagreement exists about what that standard ought to be. The very fact that disagreement is possible is an indication that metaphysics is itself predicated on the subjectively universal, which would further imply that any proposition of metaphysics is also based on pleasure—which we experience as beauty. In metaphysics, pleasure serves an aesthetic function that allows us to pick and choose our first principles as we see fit. Beauty is, therefore, an inseparable component of any metaphysics. It is what allows for the possibility of truth and falsehood in the first place. "In beauty we behold a radiant truth, but not the knowledge of any object,"[504] as Jaspers puts it. The radiant truth that beauty reveals is the condition of truth itself. That anything can be true is the truth of beauty; it is the supersensible condition on which judging is grounded. This is why, as Jaspers goes on, "Kant stresses the uncertainty of correct subsumption in judgments of taste. Here, where derivation ceases, where the feeling of pleasure is the only predicate of judgment, a new and fundamental responsibility arises: to perceive the supersensible through participation in the universally valid."[505] Derivation must terminate at some juncture, and when it does, there is no further justification to be given any judgment save an aesthetic one.

The benefit in subsuming metaphysics under the subjectively universal claim of aesthetics is that it allows us to escape the inherent circularity in Kant's method that Jaspers pointed out. It does, however, leave a particularly insidious problem untouched: essentialism, which can occur all too easily when we

misconstrue a subjectively universal judgment as universally objectively. This is not an altogether easy trap to avoid falling into, however. Once one has become convinced of the truth of a subjective universal judgment, it can be nigh on impossible to be convinced otherwise. Worse still, it can be extraordinarily difficult to resist the temptation to objectively universalize based on one's own subjective convictions. This is, one could argue, what allowed Kant to make the leap from the rationality of the self to the rationality of humanity. It also invites the conclusion, whether expressly stated or tacitly implied, that there is some essence in which humanity partakes. The assumption is, as Sartre explains in *Existentialism and Humanism*, that:

> Man possesses a human nature; that 'human nature,' which is the conception of human being, is found in every conception of Man. In Kant, the universality goes so far that the wild man of the woods, man in the state of nature, and the bourgeois are all contained in the same definition and have the same fundamental qualities.[506]

The objectifying implications of this are all but obvious. "Human," according to this conception, means "coming up to some predetermined standard." "The essence of man precedes that historic existence which we confront in experience,"[507] as Sartre puts it. The trouble is, of course, that by insisting on a human essence with which one has got to conform in order to qualify as human, we must seemingly disavow ourselves of our individual subjectivity—and more importantly, our *responsibility* for the act of self-creation which is at the very foundation of subjectivity. In order for there to be such a thing as a subjective universal judgment at all, there must first be a subject from which it can originate.

In order for there to be a subject, our existence must precede our essence. There can be no *a priori* definition of human essence. "Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man . . . is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself."[508]

Subjectivity, as Sartre conceived of it, implies two things primarily. "On the one hand, the freedom of the individual subject and, on the other hand, that man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity."[509] In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre makes it clear that the term "subjectivity" "does not mean here the belonging to a subject; . . . That is subjective which can not get out of itself."[510] This conception of subjectivity has two primary consequences. Firstly, it denies the possibility of an objectively universal judgment precisely because it would constitute a "passing beyond human subjectivity." Secondly, by so denying this possibility, we affirm the irreducible freedom that subjectivity embodies. When we attempt to apply an objectively universal judgment to the "reality" of individual subjectivity, we are not only decreeing that things could not be otherwise for the self, but in fact that they could not be different for anyone at all. Thus, the inherent implication involved in the idea of *a singular* human nature (as expressed by an objective universal judgment) is always in effect a denial of a fundamental freedom. When we advance the claim that there is a human reality in which we all commonly participate, and necessarily so, we have resorted to a kind of despotism—both of the self and of the other.

This of course raises a whole set of issues surrounding the nature of the self and subjectivity in general. Sartre is keen on rejecting any notion of subjectivity that would have the effect of fixing the self permanently in place (thus objectifying it). Whatever else the self is (or is not) it is first and foremost radically free. This freedom is something denied to the self of Descartes' *res cogitans*: Whatever else the self, is it must first and foremost be a thinking thing which reflects on its own thought as the very condition of its being. As Sartre observed in "The Transcendence of the Ego," however, this "reflecting consciousness does not take itself for an object when I effect the *Cogito*. What it affirms concerns the reflected consciousness. . . . The consciousness which says *I Think* is precisely not the consciousness which thinks. Or rather it is not *its own* thought which it posits by this thetic act."[511] Thus, as Sartre puts it in *Being and Nothingness*, "The first condition of all reflection is a pre-reflective *cogito*," which as he maintains, "Does not posit an object."[512] One might say in this sense that the ultimate effect, if not the ultimate aim, of Descartes' *Cogito* is to objectify subjectivity; to make it an object of knowledge, or more precisely stated, the foundation of knowledge. The subjectivity that the *Cogito* is meant to substantiate is one of absolute certitude. In fact, it never achieves this certitude because the act of reflection that revealed it is never "thought-in-itself" but only a mimetic approximation of it. "My *I*, in effect, is *no more certain for consciousness than the I of other men*. It is only more intimate."[513]

Sartre's point in all of this is rather simple, if somewhat cumbersomely put. "What the for-itself lacks is the self—or itself as in-itself."[514] Put in slightly

more prosaic language, the "self" in Sartre's terms is never a thing which has any fixed being. It is for-itself alone and is never in-itself. It never is anything save for what it might become and thus it is never really anything at all. Because it belongs to the "that which might be but has not yet come to be" it is a perpetual nothingness—the forever non-realized potential of the future. It is neither determined by past events nor present conditions. A being-in-itself, on the other hand, is determined fully by its being "*what it is*."[515] But the law of self-identity is not applicable to a Being-for-itself. It "is defined, on the contrary, as being what it is not and not being what it is."[516] This is also why Sartre was so inimical towards all Cartesian leaning conceptions of the ego: the *Cogito* "is indissolubly linked to being-in-itself."[517] It is, in other words, a refusal of freedom as the condition of human reality. "Thus the refusal of freedom can be conceived only as an attempt to apprehend oneself as being-in-itself."[518] Consequently, if we are to ascribe absolute freedom to being-for-itself, we cannot say that it is any one thing or another. In order for being-for-itself to be absolutely free it must be nothing at all, for to ascribe any attribute to it at all is to put a limitation on its freedom.

The fact that there is no essential quality around which the concept of the self can be permanently fixed does not absolve us of our responsibility for self-creation. Because each of us is radically free, we must also be radically responsible for choosing what we will become. Because we cannot cease choosing so long as we remain living, what we are—that is the sum of the choices we have made—will never be any one thing. We are, and must remain, a

perpetually unfinished project that not even death will complete. Life is simply a temporary suspension of the nothingness that is death. As Kojève puts it in his explication of the Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "Man is not a Being that *is* in an eternal identity to itself in Space, but a Nothingness that *nihilates* as Time in spatial Being, through the *negation* of this Being."[519] To understand Being as a "suspended nothingness" does present us with a profound aesthetic license, not only in terms of self-creation, but also in terms of the metaphysical capacity for creation in general. It allows us to view metaphysics as an essentially creative act. Because we start from nothing, there is nothing to necessitate one metaphysical construct over another. We simply choose between veritable plethora of possible metaphysical modes of description without being able to say why it is we have chosen one and not another. Without this choice, without the ability to say, "this and not that," there would be no possibility of value whatsoever. The subjective universal judgment, which is the form of value itself, must be predicated on nothingness. Meaning would not be possible without its nihilation.

The aesthetic importance of the choice was not something that Sartre overlooked. "To choose between this or that is at the same time to affirm the value of that which is chosen for we are unable ever to choose the worse. What we choose is always the better; and nothing can be better for us unless it is better for all."[520] When we assert that something is not only better for one, but better for all, we are of course passing a subjective universal judgment that calls for, but does not necessitate, the compliance of everyone. They do not enforce any

objective standard and in so doing leave every possibility open. This is to say that subjective universal judgments do not treat of Being-in-itself, for if they did there could be no disagreement concerning them. Thus aesthetic judgments and choice in general all stem from the same source: Being-for-itself, which as Jacques Hardré notes, "Is constantly fleeing towards the future. It is fluid and perfectly free. This Self is unceasingly being faced with the necessity of choosing and by its choice, of engaging itself in life."[521] Because the self cannot escape the inevitability of choice, it must continually engage itself in the aesthetic-metaphysical act of self-creation.

The question that subsequently arises is "Are there aesthetic principles *a priori* that necessitate one mode of self-creation over another?" By way of an analogy, Sartre poses some similar questions concerning the creation of works of art. "Does anyone reproach an artist when he paints a picture for not following rules established *a priori*? Does one ever ask what is the picture that he ought to paint?"[522] While one might very well respond that there are plenty of canonical stylistic conventions that could dictate the sort of painting an artist might make, the obvious retort would be to point out that the adherence to any such conventions is as much a matter of choice as is the use of yellow paint instead of blue. There is nothing that *necessitates* that an artist paint in any particular style. "There is no pre-defined picture for him to make," as Sartre puts it,

> The artist applies himself to the composition of a picture, and the picture that ought to be made is precisely that which he will have made. As everyone knows, there are no aesthetic values *a priori*, but there are values which will appear in due course in the coherence of the picture, in the relation between the will to create

> and the finished work; one cannot judge a painting until it is done.[523]

The work of art—like the constitution of the ego or the axioms of metaphysics—is not something which can be *a priori* justified. It will become whatever it will be come, and whatever it will become will be as a result of the choices involved in its creation and interpretation. The act of choosing is the *a priori* aesthetic function. Without it, there could be no aesthetic values whatsoever. If there were no aesthetic values there could be no axioms of metaphysics. Without the axioms of metaphysics we could not pose Kant's central question, "how is nature possible?"

In fact, it might be possible to substitute Kant's question for a similar one, "How is art possible?" This question, in a different form, might also be stated, "how is metaphysics possible?"; or still further, "how is value possible?" This is the one question which Sartre seemingly side-steps. Although he rightly acknowledges that there are no *a priori* aesthetic values, he does not directly address the question of how it is that value is possible in the first place. One cannot say anything about nature without first saying how it is one would like define the term, and one cannot define the term without choosing one set of axioms over another. Therefore, one cannot select any axiom without imparting value to the world. When we impart value to the world we make it as an artist would a work of art. In this sense, Sartre is quite justified in likening the act of self-creation to the creation of works of art. In fact, we might go so far as to

assert that metaphysics is first and foremost an artistic act which is predicated on the subjective inclination implicit in choice.

The problem with imparting value to a work of art—or nature in general, for that matter—is that it leaves the problem of meaning (which is also the problem of metaphysics) untouched. Insofar as it is the business of metaphysics to define the terms by which meaning is made, it cannot explain how it is that there can be such a thing as meaning in the first place. This, simply put, is what leads us into the vicious circle of justification on the one hand, or the chain of perpetually differed meaning on the other, both of which fail to answer the essential metaphysical question, "How is meaning possible?" Metaphysics, when it sets out to answer this question, must end in a *Tractarian* silence. How it is that meaning is possible is something that is and must remain deeply mysterious, but this not necessarily an undesirable position to find ourselves in. That meaning should be possible at all is perhaps the most meaningful fact imaginable. If one were to explain away the mystery one would also explain away the meaning. Likewise, if art is to have any meaning besides one that is axiomatically derivable, it must also be principally unexplainable. Metaphysics must always fail in answering the question "What is art?" in any absolute sense, and this failure is also the reason for art's existence in the first place. The values which it embodies are never finalizable. There is no one thing in which art consists. If something is to be art, its meaning cannot be fixed in place. Metaphysics is thus ill-suited to the explanation of art simply because it is indicative of the endeavor to fix meaning in place by way of axiomatic definitions. Art, if it is to be

anything, must be radically free from the purview of metaphysics. To treat it as anything else is to be guilty of the sort of Sartrean "bad faith" that reduces Being-for-itself to Being-in-itself.

Seen in this light—as a Being-for-itself—art presents us with several difficult metaphysical questions. In an echo of the Heraclitean "unity of opposites," Sartre describes Being-for-itself as a kind of "existence" that consists in its "non-existence."

> I can not truly define myself as *being* in a situation: first because I am not a positional consciousness of myself; second because I am my own nothingness. In this sense—and since I am what I am not and since I am not what I am—I can not even define myself as truly *being*. . . . Thus not only am I unable to know myself, but my very being escapes—although I *am* that very escape from my being—and I am absolutely nothing. There is nothing *there* but a pure nothingness encircling a certain objective ensemble and throwing it into relief outlined upon the world, but this ensemble is a real system, a disposition of means in view of an end.[524]

Art, as a Being-in-itself, is not subject to metaphysical valuation *a priori*. We can of course, as Sartre suggests, valuate a work of art after it is "completed," but we must of course remember that any such valuation we supply does not negate the possibility of further valuation. Consequently, the work of art is never ultimately "completed." The further one valuates a work of art, the further one alters it. Even if one were to supply every possible valuation of a work of art—be it historical, cultural, ideological, formal, etc.—would we thereby exhaust the possibility of its meaning? If we were to enumerate every conceivable fact about a work of art, complete with every conceivable interpretation, whether plausible

or outlandish, would this amassing of valuation finally bring the work of art to a state of eternal and unalterable completion? Will we have then divined the "definition" of the work of art? Supposing that we can go on valuating infinitely, what then?

These are the questions which will be of concern, in one form or another, for the remainder of this chapter. In other words, we will be considering the question of whether or not there can be such a thing as a metaphysical "definition" of art that exhaustively fixes that "concept" in place. In order to answer these questions we must first be willing to ask ourselves the question, "What is it that we expect a definition to accomplish?" This is a relatively unproblematic question to answer, at least provisionally. A definition is the process by which we demarcate meaning in the most general sense. It is, as the Oxford English Dictionary reminds us, a matter of "setting bounds or limits."[525] Setting limits is also—again in the most general sense—one of the primary jobs that metaphysics has to undertake. What we therefore want to know when ask for a definition of art is, "What are its limits?" The first thing to point out is that art has no limits, at least none that are *a priori*. Whatever limits a work of art has will be imposed by us after the fact of its creation. The limits themselves, however, are arbitrarily selected insofar as they cannot be justified *a priori*. One cannot justify a metaphysical claim without insinuating another unsubstantiated metaphysical claim and because all definitions rest on arbitrarily selected suppositions they can only be justified as an aesthetic phenomenon that permits us the freedom of choice. We are free to choose any metaphysical construct we see

fit when explaining the meaning of a work of art, and the definitions we select will be the very condition by which the meaning we are attempting to explicate will be possible. What makes meaning possible, in other words, are definitions which themselves cannot be objectively justified by any conceivable standard. A definition is an instance of a judgment of taste which is predicated on the finality of form which is indicative of subjective universality. There can thus be no justification for any definition because the demarcation of a limitation is predicated on an unfounded aesthetic claim. The finality of form that a definition enjoys is therefore nothing until it is manifested in such a choice.

While definitions are the means by which meaning is made possible, they have their limitations when it comes to the explication of art. Because the purpose of a definition is to delimit the infinite possibilities of Being-for-itself, we must fully acknowledge that any meaning which is predicated on a definition can never fully encompass Being-for-itself. Even if one were to amass every conceivable definition, one would not exhaust the possibility of Being-for-itself. This also includes art, which cannot in any ultimate sense be limited by any one definition or collection of definitions. Art is the form of the aesthetic function which allows us to give definitions in the first place. We cannot therefore "define" art without begging the question, "What is a definition if it is not a work of art?" Art, in a manner of speaking, is the form of giving definitions in general. This is not to say that "definitions" of art—however necessarily incomplete they might be—are not useful in many important respects. One cannot speak about art without delimiting it in some respect so as to make it suitable for discourse. No

discourse on art, however, can ever have the final say on what art is and what it does. Nor should we be too quick to conclude that because art cannot be given any ultimate boundary that this implies something akin to the "art and life" doctrine of art. Such a doctrine, which aims at a more inclusive conception of art, is as much a delimitation of the possibility of art as is any other definition. The statement, "everything is art," does not imply the infinitude of art. Quite to the contrary, such a statement denies that art can be a selectively applicable designation. Not even a claim so broad as "everything is art" can encompass the totality of art if art is a Being-for-itself which is radically free. That is to say, more to the point, that art is not anything at all. If every predicate is denied art—as a prerequisite of its freedom—then art is necessarily nothing. Nothingness, in other words, is the only conceivable condition of art that is not at the same time a delimitation of art.

We might parley the metaphysical difficulties outlined above into two broad and interconnected metaphysical questions: "What is the ontological difference between 'art' and 'not-art?'" and "What sort of 'definition of art' will allow us to make this distinction?" Part of the argument that this chapter aims to make is that there can be no satisfactory answer to the second question, and consequently, there can be no answer to the first one. If we are incapable of producing a satisfactory "definition" of art it seems to follow that there is likewise no conclusion to be drawn about art. What can we say about art if we cannot even structure the boundaries of our terms? Certainly, any number of provisional definitions can be given—and we will address a few—but it seems unlikely that

there can be any one definition that encompasses every imaginable instance of art. The obvious objection to this is simply to reject the assumption that we need an all-inclusive definition of art in order to have it at all. This is a fair enough objection, but the claim is not so much that we require a universal definition that satisfies every possible case. Rather, the claim is that every possible definition of art—whether it claims to be particular or universal—says nothing whatsoever about art. The "being" of art is consists in its being elsewhere; it is a metaphysical non-entity and as a result, language must necessarily fail in its description of it. This is not to say that the difficulty is an ekphrastic one either. It is a failure of language only insofar as it is a failure in metaphysics. By all rights, art should not exist and yet—quite obviously—it does. This is, in broad terms, the paradoxical consequence of Wittgenstein's mysticism. How can it be possible for art to exist when it seems to be precluded by the condition of its existence: nothingness? There is no resolution to this difficulty; language is inadequate to answering this question, let alone asking it. At most, one might say that whatever art is, it is a paradox, but even this is saying too much and gives the impression that there is something to be said about the matter when in fact there is not. Art belongs to the silence that we must pass over.

Some of the above difficulties, in one form or another, have been in philosophical play for a considerable amount of time. One could say that Plato's characterization of painting and poetry as a "third-order imitation" was an attempt to address the ontological status of various forms of artistic expressions. Gotthold Lessing, on the other hand, thought that the first law of art was "the law of

beauty."[526] All other considerations must be compatible with this law, "And, if compatible, must at least be subordinate to it."[527] This law even requires that the artist "pass over the ugly or to soften it. . . . In short, this concealment is a sacrifice that the artist has made to beauty."[528] Where the *Laocoön* statue is concerned, "The demands of beauty could not be reconciled with the pain in all its disfiguring violence, so it had to be reduced."[529] A "realistic" depiction of the *Laocoön Group* (fig. 1) would require the depiction of an untold amount of suffering and pain, which would presumably be evidenced on the faces of Laocoön and his sons. Doing so, however, would be an explicit violation of Lessing's first law, which demands the subordination of all artistic concerns to beauty. Laocoön and his sons are thus depicted as almost stoical in their expression, their faces tinged with only the slightest hint of the agony implicit in the narrative.

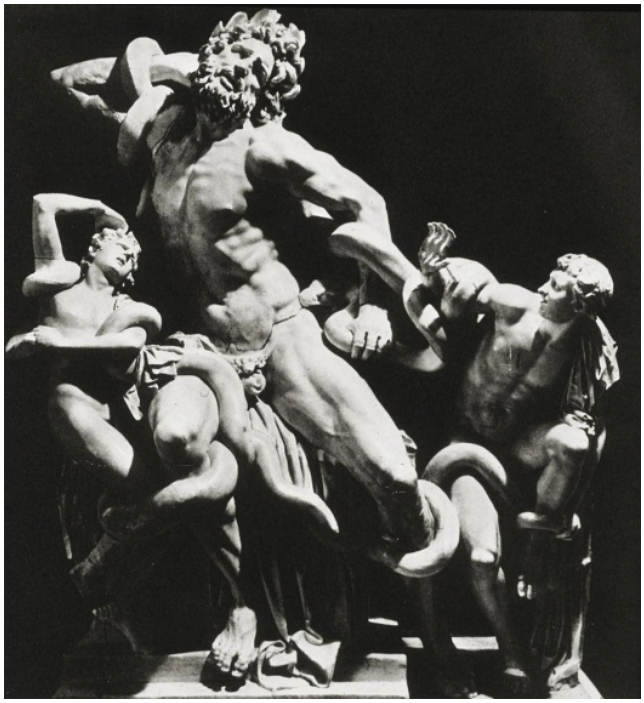

Figure 1. Agesander, *Laocoön Group*,
Plaster reconst. w/rt. arm of Laocoön
restored to orig. position, c. 50 B.C.

What Lessing is offering us is the basic requirements that an object must fulfill if it is to be considered a work of art, and in this regard, his first law really amounts to no more than a definition. As a definition it serves well enough; it accomplishes everything we expect a definition to accomplish, even though it does not exhaust every conceivable definition of art. No doubt it might seem a definition provisional to the viewpoint of an eighteenth century European, but nevertheless these kinds of definitions have some undeniable metaphysical consequences. To begin with, the very fact that Lessing's definition is provisional only points to a broader metaphysical implication: all definitions are provisional. Being provisional, however, is not itself an objection to a definition. The only objection that may be raised to a definition is an aesthetic one. Either we accept Lessing's law, or we do not. If we do, we seem bound to accept the metaphysical consequences of so doing—namely that the visual artist must, to put the matter as Wittgenstein might, pass over what is ugly in silence. There is also, of course, an ontological implication to Lessing's definition. While there is some difficulty involved in devising a means of distinguishing between what counts as beautiful and what counts as ugly, whatever means is employed to achieve this task must consequently put a limitation on what art can be in the ontological sense.

The law of beauty is, to be sure, entirely inadequate as a definition of art when measured against contemporary standards. But in Lessing's defense, it seems quite improbable that he could have come to any other conclusion given the

general intellectual atmosphere of the eighteenth century. It was, after all, "The great age of aesthetics," as Arthur Danto has said, "When apart from the sublime, the beautiful was the only aesthetic quality actively considered by artists and thinkers."[530] For the eighteenth century artist, there could be no such thing as art that did not in some sense fulfill this aesthetic requirement. Take the example that Danto gives: Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* (Fig. 2), which could not have come into existence as a work of art prior to the advent of Pop Art. Even though it is entirely possible that an object identical to Warhol's *Brillo Box* could have come into existence a century prior to when Warhol created it in 1964, such an object would "not have been the same work of art it was in 1964."[531] Not only would it have been a completely different work of art, "It is difficult to see how, in 1864, it could have been a work of art at all."[532] Historical circumstances, it may be concluded, are unavoidable when considering any definition of art. We may even go so far as to make the Hegelian claim that history inevitably puts a metaphysical constraint on the work of art. These historical constraints, of course, can and do vary considerably, but as Danto points out "it is the mark of the present period in the history of art that the concept of art implies no internal constraint on what works of art are, so that one no longer can tell if something is a work of art or not."[533]

Figure 2. Andy Warhol, *Brillo Box*,
Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink
on wood, 17 1/8 x 17 x 14", 1964, The
Museum of Modern Art.

This may be one way to interpret Hegel's concept of the end of art in light of contemporary historical contingencies. Danto's characterization of the present period in art history does appear to represent a certain kind of terminus to the further "development" of art. When anything in theory can be art, it would seem that we are faced with the very real possibility that nothing can be art at all. When the definition of art becomes sufficiently wide such that it fails to make any distinctions between what is art and what is not art, it becomes difficult to see how there can be any such thing as art at all. A definition of this sort is so indeterminate that it simply evaporates. The classical betrothal of art to beauty was at least sufficiently narrow enough to keep the *idea* of art from disappearing completely. After modernism had run its course, beauty could no longer be the sole determining factor for distinguishing art from non-art, and by the mid-

twentieth century it had fallen off the radar completely. Since the end of the twentieth century, beauty has seen something of a renaissance, but it is not, nor could it be, the central driving force behind every work of art, even if it is for some. The trick is to see beauty as one of many possible "embodied meanings" as Danto calls them. "We must endeavor to grasp the thought of the work, based on the way the work is organized."[534] While Danto's "definition" of art certainly is broad enough to encompass almost any conceivable case without becoming completely diffuse to the point of non-existence, what is perhaps most striking about it is its indebtedness to Hegel. When—in the introduction to his *Lectures on Fine Art*—he characterizes romantic poetry as "the universal art of the spirit which has become free in itself,"[535] he goes on to add that "at this highest stage, art now transcends itself, in that it forsakes the element of a reconciled embodiment of the spirit in sensuous form and passes over from the poetry of the imagination to the prose of thought."[536] Seen in a certain light, this characterization would come true, not only for romantic poetry, but for all art in general. Contemporary art is the inevitable outcome of Hegel's dialectic, though Hegel could in no way have foreseen it.

This brings to mind a few interesting correlates to Wittgenstein's philosophy. Transcendence, of course, was central to his conception of aesthetics. Any object, in and of itself, is not a work of art by the fact that it is whatever it is. If that were the case then it would necessarily follow that Warhol's *Brillo Box* could have been art at any time in history. To make such a claim would, no doubt, be patently absurd. There are more than historical contingencies at work

here, however. Wittgenstein would certainly not object to the fact that history has a hand in dictating the sorts of things that can be potentially seen as art, but by and large his characterization of art is dependent only on how one views an object, not that the object has any particular quality that inclines it towards being art. "A work of art forces us – as one might say – to see it in the right perspective but, in the absence of art, the object is just a fragment of nature like any other."[537] In order to see a thing as something other than a mere "fragment of nature" one must transcend nature and see it as if it were from afar. If, however, the object is in some sense antecedent to its being or not being a work of art then it would seem that there must be some other qualification to appeal to. This is something that Wittgenstein seems to offer us. "But it seems to me too that there is a way of capturing the world sub specie aeterni other than the through the work of the artist. Thought has such a way – so I believe – it is as though it flies above the world and leaves it as it is – observing it from above, in flight."[538]

What the artwork drives us to do, if we follow this line of reasoning, is to think in terms of the universal. In this sense, too, the art object becomes a kind of embodied meaning of the sort that Danto described (though one might object that it is only one variety of embodied meaning). The difficulty in this for Wittgenstein is that objects, by themselves, are incapable of having value. Whatever value they might have is dependent only on the metaphysical subject as a Being-for-itself. This of course leads us straight-away to Wittgenstein's mysticism, and it seems fair to characterize part of Wittgenstein's understanding of art in these terms. The obvious consequence of this approach, however, leads

us into silence. For both the early and the late Wittgenstein, language is simply incapable of expressing how it is that language can express anything. "The Limit of language is shown by its being impossible to describe the fact which corresponds to (is the translation of) a sentence, without simply repeating the sentence."[539] Language cannot express its foundation in any other terms save for tautologies. Strictly speaking, therefore, language says nothing about how it is possible for language to have meaning, a problem that works of art also face. In a certain sense, art says nothing and is categorically incapable of saying anything. In another sense, however, "One might say: art *shows* us the miracles of nature. It is based on the *concept* of the miracles of nature. (The blossom, just opening out. What is *marvelous* about it?) We say: 'Just look at it opening out!'"[540] Seeing a particular thing—a mere fragment of nature—as a work of art, then, is simply to see it as miraculous. Works of art should not exist, and yet they do. The uncanny quality of artistic experience is only heightened by the fact that our wonderment is predicated on a tautology only. "The work of art does not aim to convey *something else*, just itself."[541] Even if it did aim to convey something else, it would be completely incapable of doing so, yet this is what works of art actually seem to do. They try to convey something with nothing and in so doing they seem to capture a whole host of ineffable yet embodied meanings.

Many of these difficulties find expression in the work of Joseph Kosuth. "Art After Philosophy," which is undoubtedly his most famous essay, is fascinating in several respects. Most strikingly of all, perhaps, is the use that he makes of the analytic philosophical tradition to further his case that "the twentieth

century brought in a time which could be called 'the end of philosophy and the beginning of art.'"[542] He even goes so far as to suggest that "if one realizes the implications of Wittgenstein's thinking, and the thinking influenced by him and after him, 'Continental' philosophy need not seriously be considered here."[543] Kosuth's claim here is rather dubious, however. If one does understand the implications of Wittgenstein's thinking then one can no doubt see that there are many points on which Wittgenstein and the Continental tradition implicitly overlap. Moreover, the very title of Kosuth's essay, "Art After Philosophy," is clearly meant to suggest the superfluity of the philosophical debate—especially on the European continent—around the "work" of art. In part this is because conceptual art according to Kosuth has rendered the "work" irrelevant to the "art." "All art is finally conceptual."[544]

There is however, something of an unwitting connotation to the title of his essay, "Art After Philosophy," similar to that of Levine's *Fountain (after Marcel Duchamp)*—which is to say that "art after philosophy" implies an imitative relationship as well as a temporal one. Just as Levine's fountain can only function as a work of art when considered against Duchamp's, Kosuth's conceptualism only has a function when considered against the backdrop of analytic philosophy. Ironically, it is Kosuth's dependence on the analytic tradition that leads him to conclude: "Art's ability to exist . . . will remain viable by *not* assuming a philosophical stance."[545] This conclusion, however, smacks of the very same self-referential incoherence that befell the anti-metaphysical stance of the logical positivists. One wonders how Kosuth can make the claim that art

does not assume a philosophical stance without assuming a philosophical stance. "Art after philosophy" in this context implies "art as philosophy" and not "art for its own sake,"[546] as Kosuth intends. Such a doctrine is, of course, as much a part of philosophical discourse as is beauty. Even if Kosuth is correct—that art exists only as an end in itself—it would be impossible for art to express this fact without immediately contradicting it. In other words, art that is properly speaking "for its own sake" cannot also be "for the sake of the expression of its own sake." Although Kosuth suggests that the "work of art" is a contradiction in terms, the "idea of art" as "art in itself" is equally beholden to this objection.

Kosuth's "Art After Philosophy" is, perhaps more than anything else, an exercise in giving definitions. "The 'purest' definition of conceptual art would be that it is inquiry into the foundations of the concept 'art.'"[547] This definition, however, applies not only to conceptual art, but all art in general. "Artists question the nature of art by presenting new propositions as to art's nature."[548] Thus, as Kosuth claims, "If Pollock is important it is because he painted on loose canvas horizontally to the floor. What *isn't* important is that he later put those drippings over stretchers and hung them parallel to the wall."[549] It is the addition of a proposition to the concept of art that is important and not any object that may result from that proposition. "A work of art is a kind of *proposition* presented within the context of art as a comment on art."[550] In Pollock's case, what is of conceptual interest is the proposition, "dripped paint on loose canvas" and the fact that this proposition is presented in the cognitive context of the art condition, which, as far as Kosuth is concerned, is a tautology. "A work of art is a tautology

in that it is a presentation of the artist's intention, that is, he is saying that a particular work of art *is* art, which means, is a *definition* of art. Thus, that it is true *a priori*."[551] Kosuth's definition, while it tells us nothing about what art is in specific cases, is general enough to fit every conceivable case. In fact, it is true regardless of specific cases.

Despite the fact that Kosuth's definition cannot possibly be wrong, it does not therefore imply that it must necessarily be correct. First of all, the proposition "art is art" is true only insofar as we accept the law of self-identity as valid without exception. As is the case with Being-for-itself, there is some difficulty in substantiating the claim that art is identical to itself. If for the sake of argument we assume that art is indeed beholden to the law of self-identity, then the proposition "art is art"—as an invocation of this law—can be expressed more generally as "everything is what it is and not what it is not." In so doing, however, the "concept of art" seems to drop out of consideration. The point being that there is no "idea" of art inherent in the proposition "art is art." If a work of art is simply a proposition about art made within the context of art, the statement, "art is art" does not provide context any more than the statement "everything is what it is." The context of art needs to be provided by something other than a tautology, and what provides this context, suggests Kosuth, is the intention of the artist. "In the philosophical *tabula rasa* of art, 'if someone calls it art,' as Don Judd has said, 'it's art.'"[552]

This presents us with some difficulties, however. For starters, it removes the viewer completely from the process—and at the very least one might argue

that the concept of art is a constantly negotiated territory between artist and observer. This is not the most objectionable consequence of Kosuth's theory. If intent is all that is required to provide the context in which propositions about art can be made, in what sense can these propositions be analytic? From the statement, "art is art" it does not, of course, follow that there is any such thing as "art" only that art has to be whatever it is. If one states, "art is art" and intends this statement itself to be a comment about art, is the intent something that can be verified *a priori*? One might say that intent is always *a priori* for the person who intends, insofar as one does not need to look to experience to know that it is the case. On the other hand, however, in order to know that something is a work of art, one would have to look to the intentions of the artist who made it, in which case for the viewer the work of art is always a synthetic proposition because the statement, "this was intended as art by its creator," can only be confirmed via experience. This brings up a subsequent question, "is one's intent *a priori* for one's self?" After all, the statement "I intend this to be art" is not a tautology. And although the statement "whatever I intend to be art is art" is analytic, it does not assert anything about the intent itself or were it is directed towards. Attempting to phrase the argument in terms of a *modus ponens* will do us no better. "Whatever I intend to be art is art. I intend this to be art. Therefore, this is art." What is still at issue is the antecedent claim: "I intend this to be art." If it is not tautological then it is difficult to see how it could be *a priori* or analytic, in which case one must verify it through experience, even when the intent in question is one's own.

From the above considerations, it seems difficult to conclude that art is, in any sense, an analytic proposition. Nor does it seem plausible to contend that the only "object" of art is the "idea" of art without raising a few difficulties along with it. The first and most obvious thing to point out is the assumption that ideas are "immaterial." This of course depends entirely on what one means by "material." Regardless of what definition of material and immaterial one uses is completely beside the point because an idea is *always* conveyed in some physical medium. Even if one dismisses the material manifestation as simply a conveyance of the idea itself, why should we be so inclined to the belief that there is such a thing as an idea without a material manifestation? If there were such a thing as an idea in itself then it would also have to be possible to convey that idea in itself apart from a physical medium. This, however, we cannot do, and therefore there is no reason to assume that the "idea" of art is or can be separate from the "object" of art.

Kosuth's version of conceptualism and its division between the two not only smacks of a sort of Dualism reminiscent of Descartes, but the doctrine of what Benjamin Buchloh has called the "act of willful artistic declaration"[553] involved in the statement "This is art if I say it is." The problem with this seemingly innocent sounding pronouncement is its reliance on something very much like the concept of a private language that Wittgenstein took so much care to dismantle. Most suspect of all is the belief that the intention of the artist alone is all that is required in order for something to be called art. As Wittgenstein says in the *Investigations*, "An intention is embedded in a setting, in human customs

and institutions. If the technique of the game of chess did not exist, I could not intend to play a game of chess."[554] The same might be said of art—if it did not already exist as a human custom then the intent to make art would have no meaning whatsoever. This, however, seems to be the consequence of Kosuth's conceptualism. It implies that Warhol's *Brillo Box* could have been—at least in principle—a work of art at any point in history, so long as someone willfully declared it as such. Historical contingencies, however, seem to preclude this as a possibility. Thus, if Kosuth is correct, then, as Buchloh puts it, "artistic propositions constitute themselves in the negation of all referentiality, be it that of the historical context of the (artistic) sign or that of its social function and use."[555]

Intention alone does not, nor could it, provide this context. "Contextual determinacy implies logical constraints," Richard Sclafani reminds us, "And if there are such constraints, then it must be possible for someone to say 'It's Art' and be wrong. But what would 'being wrong' amount to for the conceptualist?"[556] At least for Kosuth, who considered intention and context to be the same thing, there can be no such thing as being wrong and therefore intention cannot suffice as a determining factor in deciding whether something is art. The act of willful artistic declaration cannot make something into a work of art. To do so it would have to be possible to say, "This is a work of art because I say so" and be wrong. If it is not possible to be wrong, to paraphrase Wittgenstein, then it is also not possible to be right, which only means that here we cannot talk about any meaningful definition of art. Or as Sclafani remarks,

"Without logical constraints on artmaking and arthood, the concepts 'artist' and 'work of art' are rendered vacuous."[557]

Figure 3. Joseph Kosuth, *Neon (Self-Defined)*, neon tubing; wire and transformer, 2 x 11, 1965, Exhibited at Tony Shafrazi Gallery, Fall 1990, Photographer: Larry Qualls.

Perhaps the best way to come to terms with some of the difficulties and contradictions that Kosuth's theoretical writing encounters is to examine how they play out in his works of art. Take *Neon (Self-Defined)* (Fig. 3) as a prime example—a typical piece from his proto-investigations period of 1965–66. Like all of his neon works of this period, this piece is self-reflexively tautological. The word "neon" is, not surprisingly, written in neon tubing, and as such is meant to be a description of its own materiality. It does not, in other words, tell us anything that we did not already know about the object in question. It simply states what it is and nothing more, and in so doing, it is meant to express the idea

that art is principally constituted by analytic propositions in the context of artistic intent. What is interesting about this piece, however, is not so much that it is tautological, but rather that is in some sense "partial." The word "neon" is not a complete description of the object itself. It describes only one component of it, leaving several characteristics—such as the glass tubing, the electrical wires, the electrical current that illuminates the gas, etc.—completely unmentioned. Kosuth, of course, does not imply that analytic propositions need be complete in order to be works of art, but the questions is begged: Can they ever? In short, the answer is no. Even when we enumerate what would appear to be an exhaustive list of all possible characteristics, the descriptions we provide are always threatened by a chain of subsequent descriptions *ad infinitum*. If we expanded the description of Kosuth's *Neon (Self-Described)* to include its various other attributes there is still the possibility of offering further elaborations on each particular term. The meaning of the word "neon," for example, may be described in terms of its molecular weight. Glass may be described in terms of its chemical composition. We could say "copper" instead of "electrical wire." Beyond the purely physical characteristics there are scores of historical and cultural associations to be drawn. Instead of "neon" one could say "gas used in commercial advertising," for instance. Even if we were to suppose that it was—at least in principle—possible to give a comprehensive description of Kosuth's artwork, this description would nevertheless not contain any definition of art. It would be a mere list of facts about the object, including the fact that this object is called "art" by some people. Of course, this fact alone does not constitute a criterion of art. There is, in other

words, no fact about a work of art that can distinguish it from any other fragment of nature. No matter how complete the description of a work appears to be, no matter how exhaustive the list of facts, the facts themselves will not encapsulate the work of art. If there is no fact in which art consists, if there is no definition to delimit its boundaries, art must be relegated to the realm of Being-for-itself. Because art does not consist in anything, there is nothing for it to be identical with.

The main benefit of thinking about art in the above terms is that it allows us to short circuit the tautological circle of self-reference that is implicit in Kosuth's approach. As a Being-in-itself, art is not disposed to the sort of analytic dissection that Kosuth wishes to make. If we could explain why it is logical inference holds true, we would have to have a second order logic to explain it. If we had such a second order, then we might soon wonder why the second-order explanation of the first-order one ought to hold true, and so on. This is of course one of the reasons why Wittgenstein made a delineation between showing and saying—to avoid an infinite regress. This is also why tautologies figured so prominently in Wittgenstein's logic. Although a tautology needs no explanation, it cannot give any either. It completely fails to explain how any fragment of nature can embody any meaning whatsoever besides a strictly formal one—i.e., one that is derived from the definition of the term itself. Such a definition is substantiated only by way of an aesthetic judgment and cannot be derived analytically. Being-for-itself, which is the bases for all aesthetic judgments,

cannot be predicated on definitions because it is the condition of the possibility of giving definitions.

Part of the problem with Kosuth's ruminations on art is that it treats the act of willful artistic declaration as fundamentally analytic. What is such an act if it is not a judgment of taste? The declaration, "this is art," calls for the universal recognition of everyone, but it does not necessitate it. It opens the space for negotiation, but it cannot decide the matter, one way or the other. While it is true that such a declaration is necessary in order to even begin thinking about a work of art, the declaration itself is not a definition of art. As a Being-for-itself, art is nothingness made manifest via the aesthetic function of choice. In this sense one could argue that Sartre's concept of Being-for-itself is strikingly similar to Wittgenstein's concept of the metaphysical subject. For Wittgenstein, the subjective will could not be a predicate of logic. It stands outside of all logical propositions and thus it must necessarily stand outside of the world as well. That is to say, much more directly, that the metaphysical subject does not, properly speaking, "exist." To view the world *sub specie aeternitatis*—which was for Wittgenstein a key component of artistic contemplation—is quite literally to view it from nowhere, from outside of existence. This is precisely the reason it is not possible to explain what it is a work of art consists in, for we would have to explain art in terms of nothingness. What it means for something to be a work of art simply cannot be explained. Indeed, many things that one *can* say about it end up coming out as tautologies, but this does not imply that art is tautological, only that language is an inadequate means of expressing why it is a work of art seems

to embody a meaning value that is logically not permissible. This too is where Wittgenstein and Kosuth divide on the matter. While both stress the importance of the subject, Kosuth does not seem to be bothered by the fact that intention does not explain what the work of art *is* any more than a tautology does. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, was only too aware that the willing, metaphysical subject is not an explanation; it is only a simile of sorts.

The self-imposed restrictions of Wittgenstein's logic would, as we have seen, force him to the conclusion that whatever value the world has must necessarily lie outside the world—a paradoxical sounding predicament. How is it possible to assign value to a work of art without spouting nonsense? Perhaps one cannot, but the effort itself is still worthwhile. In fact, it very well could be that the failure of reason to annunciate value is exactly where value lies. One may not be able to speak of that which cannot be spoken of, but one must nevertheless make the attempt. On this level, Kosuth's early analytic works fail. They stop short at what can meaningfully be said, and in so doing, end up saying nothing, least of all about the definition of art. What is artistic about Kosuth's works is precisely what cannot be put into an analytic proposition. They resist metaphysical categorization of any sort. There can be no definition of art, and hence no justification for it. The question "How is art possible when it is not possible for anything to be art?" is the question that art poses. That there can be such a thing as art at all is the paradox of art.

The play of the paradoxical is also, to a large extent, an important component of the work of John Cage. A number of his lectures and writings are

collected under the title *Silence*, and the majority of the works contained therein deal not only with his practice as a musician and conceptual artist, but with the duality and the inseparability involved in such concepts as "sound" and "silence." For instance, he both affirms the impossibility of silence: "Try as we may to make a silence, we cannot;"[558] and denies it: "What we re-quire is silence; but what silence requires is that I go on talking . . . and the words . . . help make the silences."[559] The tensions to which Cage is drawing our attention are also to be found in Wittgenstein's work. Literally speaking for Wittgenstein, whatever is, can also be meaningfully spoken of. There is, in other words, no way to speak about nothingness without simply spouting nonsense. The criterion for existence in the *Tractatus*, one might say, is a linguistic one. This condition, however, must nevertheless rely on its negation for its meaning. We must pass over "nothing" in "silence," but our silence, of course, is not a "representation" of nothing. It does not "capture" nothing the way that a word "captures" its reference. Most importantly, this is why it is impossible to say anything meaningful about art—it belongs to nothing and therefore the only thing we can say about it is nothing at all.

This is, in part, indicative of Cage's attitude towards art as well. "It is of the utmost importance not to make a thing but rather to make nothing," he says. "And how is this done? Done by making something which then goes in and reminds us of nothing."[560] There is perhaps no better exemplar of this attitude than Cage's most important—and controversial—composition: *4'33''*, which is both about silence and not about silence. It is a piece of music that instructs the

performers to not play their instruments for the total duration of four minutes and thirty-three seconds. And of course, what becomes immediately evident when one listens to *4'33"* is that the "silence" of the performers only serves to draw attention to all the other various "incidental" sounds of the surrounding environment. This piece is indicative, as Cage points out in a 1957 lecture to the Music Teachers National Association, a new music in which "nothing takes place but sounds: those that are notated and those that are not. Those that are not notated appear in the written music as silences, opening the doors of the music to the sounds that happen to be in the environment."[561]

One of the most important impetuses to Cage's composition was an experience he had at the anechoic chamber at Harvard University, which is designed to absorb sound and prevent it from echoing. One would assume, therefore, that the silence in it would be deafening. As Cage reiterates his experience,

> [I] heard two sounds, one high and one low. When I described them to the engineer in charge, he informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood in circulation. Until I die there will be sounds. And they will continue following my death. One need not fear about the future of music.

4'33" could be said to make much the same point. Not only does it blur the distinction between "music" and "mere sound," but it seems to rather poignantly demonstrate the fact that there is no such thing as silence at all. The work thus becomes about all the various incidental sounds that would otherwise be ignored.

This shift in attention, from a prearranged composition, to one that is based purely on whatever sounds might occur during a performance, is achieved through the silence of the performers. Thus, there is, as we can see, a constant back and forth between silence and sound in *4'33"*. What makes sound possible is silence.

Perhaps here it would be useful to make a distinction between two various ways in which we can interpret what we mean by "sound." On one account, we could say that sounds are simply vibrations in a medium that are perceptible to the faculty of hearing. Accordingly, there is never truly any such thing as silence because even in the absence of all other sound one will still hear the operation of one's body. On another account, we might point out that the whole concept of a sound in general is predicated on its being perceived, and if it is not perceived it is not a sound. Berkeley's point, that "to be is to be perceived," is useful here.

> There was an odor, that is, it was smelt; there was a sound, that is, it was heard; a colour or figure, and it was perceived by sight or touch. This is all that I can understand by these and the like expressions. For as to what is said of the absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived, that is to me perfectly unintelligible. Their *esse* is *percipi*, nor is it possible they should have any existence out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them.[562]

Based on this, one could say that while it is true that one's nervous and circulatory system are always causing vibrations which may be interpreted as sounds if heard, if they are not perceived then they do not exist as sounds. This is to say that a sound's existence is predicated on its being heard, only that under normal circumstances, one is simply not aware of the vibrations that one's nervous and

circulatory systems produce. It takes the absence of all other sounds—silence—in order for one to hear the sound of one's body in operation.

Perhaps one of the most interesting things that *4'33"* demonstrates is the impossibility of saying nothing without saying something, and vice versa. This "new music," as Cage says, is "not an attempt to understand something that is being said."[563] Rather, it is an expression of Cage's interest in sounds themselves, apart from the interpretation of their meaning. "*A sound does not view itself as thought, as ought, as needing another sound for its elucidation*."[564] It is only concerned "*with the performance of its characteristics*"[565] and is "*uninformed about history and theory*."[566] A sound, in other words, "*accomplishes nothing*."[567] It is whatever it happens to be. It has whatever pitch, duration, or timbre it happens to have. It says nothing, it means nothing, it is a tautology only—and yet Cage seems to be clearly suggesting that we can derive aesthetic pleasure from sounds themselves. "I haven't yet heard sounds that I didn't enjoy, except when they become too musical. I have trouble, I think, when music attempts to control me."[568] Part of Cage's issue with music is precisely the intentionality in the ordering of its sounds, and thus *4'33"* is an attempt to find a way "of writing music where the sounds are free of my intentions."[569] Of course, this does present a difficulty, as Cage acknowledges. "I frequently say that I don't have any purposes, and that I'm dealing with sounds, but that's obviously not the case. On the other hand it is. That is to say, I believe that by eliminating purpose, what I call *awareness* increases. Therefore my purpose is to remove purpose."[570]

Here, one could very well make a formalist critique of Cage and his discussion of "sounds in themselves." Douglas Kahn, for instance, in his article "John Cage: Silence and Silencing," points out that Cage's preoccupation with sounds in themselves is indicative of a broader disinterest towards the social and political implications that sounds can convey.

> Cage's own deafness amid all this inaudible sound, that is, his inability to hear the significance of sound, meant a depleted complexity of what could be heard in any *sound in itself*. Consequently, his elaboration of panaurality and sonic pervasiveness was compensatory: a space fulfilled by a dispersion of the density of the social and ecological. If he could not hear the world through a sound, then he would hear a world of sound.[571]

In some sense then, Cage's refusal to interpret sound as being anything other than sound has an unintended effect, namely that it "silences" sound by not letting it speak to its fullest capacity. Being indifferent to the various meanings of sounds does not, if Kahn is correct, allow sounds to speak for themselves. Rather, viewing sounds as "in themselves" amounts to silencing them—at least partly.

There are of course variants on this interpretation to be made. Noël Carroll, in "Cage and Philosophy," acknowledges Cage's insistence that sounds "neither say anything nor do they have a purpose."[572] By making use of Nelson Goodman's concept of "exemplification," the unintentional sounds of *4'33"* can be said to "function as samples, as symbols exemplifying certain properties."[573] They are, as Carroll puts it, "exemplifications of everyday noise—i.e., samples of everyday noise—indeed samples which within a certain musicological context are supposed to illustrate the latent potentials of noise."[574] This latent potential,

however, is only brought to the forefront of our attention because they are presented within the framework of a musical performance. In this context, one expects to listen intently and to dwell on the sounds that are presented in that context. "If one doubts the semantic content of Cage's noise, one need only recall the degree to which these works depend on affronting entrenched musical ideas."[575] There is no doubt that *4'33"* flies in the face of music as it is traditionally conceived. Then again, it must still operate on the idea of music, albeit broadly construed, in order to do so. Thus it seems that it is utterly impossible for *4'33"* to be meaningless in any absolute sense, and if not in an absolute sense, then it lacks meaning only insofar as the idea of meaning that Cage has in mind "is narrower than that countenanced by many contemporary philosophers of art."[576]

Taken in the above sense, there is no doubt that *4'33"* has a meaning—and a very significant one at that. Nevertheless, the question remains, do the sounds themselves have meaning? This is a more difficult question to answer. If they do have meaning, it was not, nor could it be because Cage intended them to. Each specific sound is a chance event not predicated on the intention of the artist. There is, of course, some sense in which we could say that these sounds are intentional, insofar as Cage intends *4'33"* to consist of whatever sounds happen to occur during its performance. The sounds themselves have no meaning save for the fact that Cage intends them to be listened to as music. Cage therefore is giving us a very different sense of intentionality than Kosuth is, but both present difficulties. Kosuth's belief that intention is the only context that art can have

certainly does not seem to hold much water. Cage on the other hand cannot assert that his work lacks intention because this assertion itself requires intention. The problem is only compounded because *4'33"* is pushing at the historical and theoretical boundaries of music, which is certainly one of Cage's intentions. As difficult as these problems are to resolve, they are bellied by what is perha, but both seemingly side-step the question of meaning altogether. Simply stating that meaning is a product of context not only fails to answer this question, it simply moves the difficulty up one level. If context provides meaning, how is it possible for it to do so? Of course explanation must come to an end somewhere. On the other side of explanation lies the work of art and thus there is no definition or explanation that will bridge this divide. Art poses one question before all others: "How is it possible for anything to be meaningful?" It is also a question which it passes over in silence. Art should not exist, but it does. Meaning should not exist, but it does. Cage sums it up beautifully when he says, "I'm on the side of keeping things mysterious, and I have never enjoyed understanding things. If I understand something, I have no further use for it."[577]

Keeping things mysterious is perhaps what art does best for us, and Cage's aversion to "understanding things" is, in some sense, indicative of this. The deep and almost mystical sense of wonderment that art seems capable of encapsulating resists easy explication in language. If it were possible to sensibly state what the meaning of a work of art consisted in we would also be able to understand it. Even if this was within the realm of possibility, we ought to consider the possibility that we would be better of remaining purposefully ignorant. Whatever

art is, it is *deeply mysterious*. To absolve ourselves of the responsibility for seeking an answer to a question which in principle has no answer is to negate the possibility of art in the first place. In a manner of speaking, the "meaning" of art consists in our inability to state what the meaning of art consists in absolutely. It is not as if our saying this makes art any less mysterious (and any more understood). One might say that the "essence" of art is in its nonsensicality. This is why all explanation of art in terms of natural law utterly fails to address the sense of wonder about existence that art inspires. To describe something in law-like terms is always indicative of the positivistic desire to strip the mystery from existence. It is the mysterious, however, that art gestures towards.

Perhaps an example from Wittgenstein's early work would help to illustrate the point more clearly. The criterion of meaning that Wittgenstein sets up in the *Tractatus* is based on a strict logical foundation—anything that can be meaningfully said will necessarily be logically coherent. A meaningful statement which abides by this logical syntax has a very circumscribed boundary such that there is nothing ambiguous or mysterious about it. This raises difficulties where questions of ethics and aesthetics are concerned (because they are anything but logically coherent). In his "Lecture on Ethics," Wittgenstein's acknowledges that an ethical judgment can never be reduced to a mere statement of facts, nor can a fact be used as the basis for any judgment of value. For a fact to "have value" it must always be considered in relation to a particular end. When we speak of "value" in this sense however, we find that it is analytically derived only. It is implicit in the fact itself—that is to say: it is tautological.

> There are no propositions which, in any absolute sense, are sublime. . . . And now I must say that if I contemplate what Ethics really would have to be if there were such a science, this result seems to me quite obvious. It seems to me obvious that nothing we could ever think or say should be the thing. . . . Our words used as we use them in science, are vessels capable only of containing and conveying meaning and sense, natural meaning and sense. Ethics, if it is anything, is supernatural and our words will only express facts.[578]

The supernatural quality that Wittgenstein attributed to ethics was also one that he gave to aesthetics. Strictly speaking therefore, neither ethics nor aesthetics belongs to the world. They do not "exist" in the same sense as other mere fragments of nature, such as tables, chairs, and lamps do. As a consequence of this, it is not possible to meaningfully speak about ethics or aesthetics because language is only capable of presenting that which exists (or might possibly exist). This is not to say that we cannot, however, see any given fragment of nature from an aesthetic point of view. To do so involves an extension of one's subjectivity into the universal in order to see a fragment of nature from under the auspices of eternity. In order to see an object as a work of art it must have, to use Kant's phrase, the "form of purposiveness,"[579] which is the sole basis by which we "can constitute the satisfaction that we judge, without a concept, to be universally communicable, and hence the determining ground of the judgment of taste."[580]

The universal communicability of a judgment of taste—the demand it makes for universal recognition—is precisely what it means to see the world as a "limited whole" in Wittgenstein's sense. To see the world as "contained," in other words, is to see it not only as the embodiment of a purpose, but also to see it

as "final," "complete," and hence "intelligible." The caveat for Wittgenstein is that such an experience of the world is, strictly speaking, not possible given our subjectivity. "The philosophical I is not the human being, not the human body or the human soul with the psychological properties, but the metaphysical subject, the boundary (not a part) of the world."[581] The limitation of the metaphysical subject—that is to say its "finality"—presupposes that the subject is incapable of transcending itself. Nevertheless, the subjective limitation of the world also presupposes a responsibility for the world. "What others in the world have told me about the world is a very small and incidental part of my experience of the world. I have to judge the world, to measure things."[582] We see then that the subject is both the limitation of the world (it is the condition of "sense" *in* the world) and the meaning of the world (it is the condition of the "sense" *of* the world). The metaphysical subject is thus faced with an impossible task. It must be both the limit and judge of the world. In order to accomplish the latter, it must negate the former, and vice versa. That is to say, the subject cannot be both the limit and judge of the world without inviting a contradiction. It is this dual and contradictory condition of the metaphysical subject that is the source of Wittgenstein's mysticism.

The metaphysical subject—which equates to the disinterested subject in Kant's terms and the nothingness of being in Sartre's—is a literal impossibility. Indeed it must be *impossible* if the experience of the mystical is to be *possible*. The very essence of mysticism is, in other words, *aporia*. The very fact that we are capable of experiencing the mystical already assumes its *a priori* foundation:

namely the metaphysical subject, our contemplation of which produces in us an experience of existence as enigmatic. Because this metaphysical subject is the limit of the world, it is also thereby the limit of thought and hence of language as well. We therefore cannot think about the metaphysical subject because *it is* the limit of thought. In order to do so we would have to step outside of this boundary, that is, to step outside of subjectivity, which is not possible to do. Because "Wittgenstein forbids *all being to the impossible*,"[583] as Alain Badiou points out in *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy*, the metaphysical subject does not, in any appreciable sense, exist.

The cause of Wittgenstein's mysticism hinges on what Badiou sees as a relatively narrow definition of thought. "Thought, indeed, is the proposition endowed with a sense, and the proposition with sense is the picture, or description, of a state of affairs. The result is a considerable extension of non-thought, which is unacceptable to the philosopher."[584] This extension of non-thought for Wittgenstein included, most notably, philosophy itself. Thus, Wittgenstein's strategic and antiphilosophical goal is "to subtract the real (what is higher, the mystical element) from thought, so as to entrust its care to the act which alone determines whether life is saintly and beautiful."[585] It is this antiphilosophical act which "consists in letting what there is show itself, insofar as 'what there is' is precisely what no true proposition can say."[586] And because no "true proposition" can say "what there is," determining its ethical and aesthetic value can likewise not be framed in terms of the propositional truth function.

According to Badiou, one of the key characteristics of Wittgenstein's antiphilosophical act is what he terms its "archiaesthetic" quality, which is not, as Badiou stresses, a matter of simply "substituting art for philosophy."[587] It is rather "a question of firmly establishing the laws of the sayable (of the thinkable), in order for the unsayable (the unthinkable, which is ultimately given only in the form of art) to be *situated* as the 'upper limit' of the sayable itself."[588] Art, taken in this sense—as the form of the unthinkable—is what allows the unthinkable to show itself in the world even though it must, strictly speaking, not be a part of the world. The work of art is the means by which the metaphysical subject molds the world from nothingness according to a limit which it grafts over nothingness. This is also why Sartre could equate the act of self-creation with that of artistic creation. The being of the subject is a nothingness given shape through the archiaesthetic act in which art is made manifest. To say it in less abstruse terms, art is the means by which the limit of the world is exhibited in the world. Art shows us the limit of meaning and thus can have no meaning itself. Whatever meaning it does have must transcend the limit of existence; it must stand on the other side of the limit.

From inside, the world can have no value. This is, in many important respects, one of the central positions of the whole *Tractatus*—a position that receives its clearest articulation in 6.41:

> The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: *in* it no value exists—and if it did exist, it would have no value.

> If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental.
>
> What makes it non-accidental cannot lie *within* the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental.
>
> It must lie outside the world.[589]

From this passage we can clearly see that Wittgenstein's "definition" of value pivots on the difference between what is necessary and what is accidental. Whatever is in the world is accidental but has no value and whatever has value is necessary but outside the world. As Badiou points out, this definition of value is predicated on Wittgenstein's "*two regimes of sense*."[590] The first of these belongs to that of the proposition. The proposition endowed with a sense is one which shares the same logical structure as a state of affairs, and thus a "proposition has sense from the moment it describes a state of affairs."[591] The regime of propositional sense, however, has no value: "All value detained by a proposition is devoid of any value whatsoever."[592] A proposition with a sense can only describe a state of affairs which happens to be true. This regime of sense, therefore, is completely accidental. Anything that can be true can also be false; it is simply a matter of happenstance that any possible state of affairs is either true or false. When a proposition attempts to express a value as if it were a state of affairs, it ends up expressing nothing, for there is nothing there for it depict. "If a proposition has no sense," Wittgenstein writes, "Nothing corresponds to it, since it does not designate a thing (a truth-value) which might have properties called 'false' or 'true.'"[593]

The second regime of sense that Badiou points to is the "sense of the world" which is "*entirely separated from the truth* (because it has nothing to do with what is the case)."[594] This regime of sense, unlike the first, has a value. Hence, Badiou terms it "sense-value" (as opposed to "sense-truth") and "excludes the contingency that marks the eventality of the world. What is in the world is accidental, and its sense is without value, but the sense of the world, which has value, must be 'non-accidental,' which requires that it 'lie outside the world.'"[595] By insisting on the other-worldly quality of value and the intra-worldly quality of truth, Wittgenstein is in effect making the claim that truth has no value and value no truth. For Badiou, this divorce of truth and value is one of the most contentious points in Wittgenstein's philosophy. According to Badiou, "The idea that truths, apparently contingent, are enveloped by a necessary sense . . . is *the exact theoretical definition of religious faith*. . . . And the unprecedented novelty of the antiphilosophical act would in the end only be a return to this ancient belief from which the whole philosophical effort was meant to extirpate us."[596]

Wittgenstein's seeming derision of truth is one that goes against the grain of Badiou's philosophy in general, especially in regards to one of the most central components of his philosophy: generic procedures. There are four such procedures according to Badiou: art, love, politics, and science, each of which is a source of truth. These procedures all crystallize "concepts to such a point that it is almost impossible to give an image of it."[597] The being of truth, Badiou says, is that of a generic multiple, which also makes it unpresentable, although "it can be demonstrated that it may be thought."[598] In the main, however, this doctrine is

not all that different from Wittgenstein's, for whom truth and thought were intimately related. The sense-truth of a proposition is stated by the proposition. The sense-value of a proposition, however, is shown by the proposition. Or, to put it as Wittgenstein does, "A proposition *shows* its sense. A proposition *shows* how things stand if it is true. And it *says that* they do so stand."[599] Put another way, a proposition can state that it is true, but it cannot state how it is possible for it to be true. It merely exhibits this truth without any explanation as to how there can be truth in the first place.

For Badiou, truth is not a matter of knowledge; one does not "know" a truth. Rather, in Badiou's own words, "Truth is always that which makes a hole in a knowledge."[600] Such a concept of truth is, as Badiou readily acknowledges, antithetical to that of modern philosophy which treats truth as a function of representational accuracy (as it surely is in the *Tractatus*). Contrary to this tradition, Badiou makes a crucial distinction between truth and knowledge. "A truth is, first of all, something new. What transmits, what repeats, we shall call *knowledge*."[601] This presents us with a philosophical difficulty; namely, how do we account for the novelty of truths? How do we explain the "problem of its appearance and its 'becoming'"?[602] Badiou's answer is this: "For a truth to affirm its newness, there must be a *supplement*. This supplement is committed to chance. It is unpredictable, incalculable. It is beyond what is. I call it an event. A truth thus appears in its newness, because an eventual supplement interrupts repetition."[603]

We might point out immediately that a clear symmetry exists here between Badiou's definition of truth and Wittgenstein's: both are predicated on chance. Despite his apparent dislike of Wittgenstein's two regimes of sense, Badiou's differentiation between truth and knowledge carries an undeniably similar consequence.

> An event is linked to the notion of the *undecidable*. Take the statement: 'This event belongs to the situation.' If it is possible to decide, using the rules of established knowledge, whether this statement is true or false, then the so-called event is not an event. Its occurrence would be calculable within the situation. Nothing would permit us to say: here begins a truth.[604]

To explain an event in terms of established knowledge is to deny that it is a truth. Explanation, in other words, is not a condition under which the occurrence of a truth can happen. Truths are, and must be, "undecidable"—their "existence" hangs on it. Although Wittgenstein used the term "truth" as a designation of fidelity between a state of affairs and the proposition that stands for it, the fidelity itself is not something that a proposition can picture. There can be no "proposition" of truth that pictures the truth of truth. This sense of truth—the sense of the world as opposed to the sense of the proposition—is the only one of any value for Wittgenstein. Just as Badiou claims that an event is not an event if it can be decided according to the rules of established knowledge, Wittgenstein holds that a value is not a value if it is put in the form of a proposition.

The undecidability of truth is undoubtedly one of the central tenets of Badiou's philosophical corpus, and it has important aesthetic implications for

metaphysics. "For Badiou," Gabriel Riera points out, "The consequence of undecidability is that decisions become imperative. Undecidability, therefore, should not be understood as a barrier, but as a necessary path to encounter the new."[605] This "encounter with the new" that the novelty of truth precipitates fulcrums on a seemingly impossible task: deciding the undecidable. "On the basis of the undecidability of an event's belonging to a situation a *wager* has to be made. This is why a truth begins with an *axiom of truth*. It begins with a groundless decision – the decision to *say* that the event has taken place."[606] This wager of Badiou's, it cannot be stressed enough, is one which, for all intents and purposes, is a subjective universal judgment. To decide the undeciabilty of an event, to say that "it has occurred," is a function of aesthetic predisposition, what Badiou terms "an absolutely pure choice."[607] An axiom of truth is decided by way of a declaration, "this and not that." It cannot, as Badiou insists, be an object of knowledge because it is the predicate of knowledge. It is through this act, which really amounts to nothing more than a "leap of faith," that the metaphysical subject is constituted.

> The undecidability of the event includes the appearance of a *subject* of the event. Such a subject is constituted by an utterance in the form of a wager. This utterance is as follows: 'This event has taken place, it is something which I can neither evaluate, nor demonstrate, but to which I shall be faithful.' To begin with, a subject is what fixes an undecidable event, because he or she takes the chance of deciding upon it.[608]

The metaphysical subject, by way of its fixing an undecidable event in place, also fixes itself in place. Before this aesthetic judgment takes place, there

is no metaphysical subject. "For Badiou the subject is not," Riera writes, "A universal or given category, neither a transcendental nor empirical subject. Subjectivization . . . only takes place in the wake of an event."[609] This point is undoubtedly true if what we have in mind is a Kantian transcendental subject that exists prior to an event of truth. There may be, however, good reason to characterize Badiou's subject as universal and transcendent after such an event has taken place, especially when we consider the fact that the insertion of the subject in the world is the transcendental condition of truth and fidelity to it. As J. D. Dewsbury has remarked, "Fidelity quivers into being, being driven by an intense faith on the part of the subject. . . . The event only works if this faith, this embrace, is there, and that in being there it persuades others."[610] This persuasion—rhetoric in the broadest sense—is the mechanism which convinces others to make the same leap of faith. It is also therefore a subjective judgment of taste because it demands the universal acquiescence of everyone based solely on the aesthetic act involved in deciding an undecidable. Thus the subject may not be universal or transcendental prior to this event, but the decision, once made, makes it so.

I would like to dwell here on the undecidability of the metaphysical subject in terms of its ethical implications, specifically, we might say, as an "open-ended commandment." Call it the "imperative of freedom," if you like. The necessity for this kind of meditation is made all the more pertinent due to the difficulty we encounter when dealing with the problem of disinterest. On the face of it, the very idea of a disinterested, metaphysical subject seems to imply the

possibility that the subject is something pre-determined and fixed and place. This characterization of subjectivity we will most vehemently deny because it is an explicit violation of the imperative of freedom, which regards every principle of metaphysics as both subjective and open to revision. It is, in this sense, that the metaphysical subject is a primarily ethico-aesthetic creature, because it regards no choice as necessarily self-evident or fundamentally forbidden for all eternity.

The consequence of this, however, is that the metaphysical subject is an entity which is constantly under the duress of revision. As such, we must come to terms with the fact that we have no privileged access whatsoever to the self. This is a point that Nietzsche readily makes in the preface of the *Genealogy of Morals*.

> "Who are we, really?" And we recount the twelve tremulous strokes of our experience, our life, our being, but unfortunately count wrong. The sad truth is that we remain necessarily strangers to ourselves, we don't understand our own substance, we *must* mistake ourselves; the axiom, "Each man is farthest from himself," will hold for us to all eternity. Of ourselves we are not "knowers".[611]

There is no knowing ourselves simply because there is no essence for us to become acquainted with. We are farthest from ourselves because there is nothing which constitutes the self in finality prior to archiaesthetic choice. The only "finality" the metaphysical subject possesses is that of freedom. The only "unalterable" principle which it abides by is: "Everything is alterable." Since there is no facticity from which we may start, no truth in existence save for the truth that we invent, our ethical imperative can thus be expressed as follows: never treat any metaphysical finality as finalizable in perpetuity.

What we are suggesting, then, is that the metaphysical subject is, and must be, a thing-in-itself. Indeed, it must be a thing outside the world, because it is the basis on which the possibility of their being a world is predicated. We can therefore have no knowledge of the self because knowledge itself is grounded on that which is beyond knowledge. "I have therefore," as Kant concludes, "No knowledge of myself as I am, but merely as I appear to myself. The consciousness of self is thus very far from a knowledge of self."[612] While we will not detract from Kant on this point, it does suggest what will be an important line of inquiry for us going forward: Why pursue self-knowledge at all if we can have no hope of attaining it? What possible value can a pursuit doomed to failure have for us? As is usually the case, however, the questions we ask already betray the answers we seek, and it is no different in this instance. For the chief worth of an impossible task is in its impossibility. Its value is in the setting of a goal so absolutely out of reach that there is no prospect of its ever being attained. In this sense we could characterize the quest for self-knowledge as "purposive without purpose" since it presupposes no end with which it must comport. It is also in this sense that we are accustomed to speak of the "beauty of life" as exhibiting "the form of purposiveness . . . without representation of an end."[613]

This brings us to a point of contention, however. If we regard this quest for self-knowledge as fundamentally process oriented, that is to say, as extending and developing towards no definite end over an indefinite period of time, then we cannot construe time as a universal, *a priori* form of intuition, such as Kant did. We cannot, in other words, conceive of time as the necessary and unalterable

"form of the internal sense, that is, of the intuitions of self and of our internal state."[614] For Kant, the self of which we are conscious, as structured by this form of internal sense, must be a static one. Our experience of the self as existing in time is thus unalterable because the form of our intuition is unalterable. Even though we may not be able to know the self as it truly is apart from the forms of intuition, i.e., as a thing-in-itself, our consciousness of the self is always filtered through time as a universal form of intuition.

It is, then, to Hegel we must turn. For we owe it to his discovery that there could be such a thing as *a priori* forms of intuition that were not universally accessible to the self, but were revealed to consciousness according to the progression of time. Even the concept of time itself must be regarded as a form of intuition that alters during the course of history's unfolding. The self, as such, cannot be properly said to "exist" in universal time, for as Hegel claims, "Only the totality of Spirit is in Time, and the 'shapes', which are 'shapes' of the totality of *Spirit*, display themselves in a temporal succession; for only the whole has true actuality."[615] Consequently, self-consciousness—which was for Kant part and parcel of the transcendental forms of intuition—cannot appear to us except in partial shapes of the totality of Spirit. The "self-consciousness" of Kant is, in Hegel's terms, only a partial consciousness of self. Actual self-consciousness, that is, absolute consciousness which takes itself as object, can only occur after Spirit has revealed itself through the due course of time. It is only then that the "shape of self-consciousness" as "*thinking* consciousness *in general*"[616] can reveal itself.

What we are here making allusion to, as should be all too evident, is what Hegel termed the "Philosophy of History," which "means nothing but the *thoughtful consideration of it*."[617] This does not mean, as Hegel is quick add, that "Thought must be subordinate to what is given, to the realities of fact."[618] To approach the Philosophy of History in such a fashion would be "to force it onto conformity with a tyrannous idea, and to construe it, as the phrase is, '*a priori*.'"[619] It is, therefore, not the proper business of the Philosophy of History to take under examination thought as it is constrained by *a priori* principles of the understanding. To do so would be to repeat Kant's mistake. Rather, "The only Thought which Philosophy brings with it to the contemplation of History, is the simple conception of *Reason*; that Reason is the Sovereign of the World; that the history of the world, therefore, presents us with a rational process."[620] Reason, according to Hegel's usage, refers to "that by which and in which all reality has its being and substance."[621] Summarily speaking, then, we understand the Philosophy of History as the thoughtful consideration of the Reason for History's unfolding, and more importantly, that for the sake of which History unfolds as it does. Without positing such an *end* of History—that is to say, without supposing that History aims towards some ultimate goal—we are incapable of understanding the Reason of History; for to understand the reason for something is also to understand what it is finally for.

This "what it is finally for," the "final aim of this progression" is, as Hegel says, "The development of the one universal Spirit, which . . . elevates and completes itself to a self-comprehending *totality*."[622] The attainment of the

Absolute, in which, "everything is the same,"[623] posits the end of History, or more precisely: the end of History as a dialectical becoming. Insofar as it is through difference that History progresses towards the Absolute, to realize the absolute means to actualize non-difference, to negate, once and for all, the possibility of difference. Thus, the end of history can mean nothing other than the end of difference, because in the Absolute, everything is the same. In order to obtain this absolute self-sameness, however, we must presuppose—along with the tautological—the contradictory as well. What we require, in other words, is the antithesis of the absolutely self-same, namely the concept of antithesis itself. "This absolute Notion of the difference must be represented and understood purely as inner difference, a repulsion of the selfsame, as selfsame, from itself. . . . We have to think pure change, or *think antithesis within the antithesis itself*, or *contradiction*."[624] Without this ability to think the opposite of the Absolute, we would be incapable of realizing it, and since the Absolute is what is Rational, and the Rational is what is Real, the absolute self-same must presupposes absolute difference as the vehicle of actualizing self-consciousness. Becoming, in other words, is only possible given this fundamental antithesis between tautology and contradiction. This "bifurcation of the simple," as Hegel calls it, is thus "the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked out to its end, is it actual."[625]

It is from Hegel, then, that we can begin to grasp at the possibility of self-knowledge through the process of becoming what we are—a process that is, as it

were, for itself alone and realizes no other end save for that which it presupposes: Absolute self-knowledge. Within this "Hegelian presupposed" we find, what Jean-Luc Nancy has called, "The reality of sense," which is nothing other than "the subject in which and *as* which the real comes to posit itself as such, comes to be known by a knowing and grasping self."[626] This is, to be sure, a far cry from the supposed universality which Kant afforded his conception of subjectivity, and because of which, we are forever denied entrance into the circle of our own self-becoming. Since we are, according to Kant, rational creatures whose universal, *a priori* faculties of the understanding precludes the possibility of knowing the self in itself, we are barred, by the very transcendental nature of these faculties, from the one path that would allow us to reach this absolute for-itself, i.e., the path of self-becoming, by which we come to know ourselves as free. "It is ultimately with Kant," as Nancy notes, "That freedom as something inconceivable, the inconceivable *as* freedom, originates."[627] This does not imply, however, that freedom can be conceived, for as Nancy hastens to add, freedom "is not conceiving, but receiving: welcoming and upholding an order."[628]

What we therefore mean by the "undecidability" of the metaphysical subject is roughly equivalent to this "receptivity of freedom." It is not, nor can it be, a conception, because the very notion of a conception already betrays the exercise of an aesthetic choice, which "welcomes and upholds" an order. Indeed, such an upholding of order is the germ from which every conception sprouts. Freedom, however, does not, properly speaking, "belong" to the metaphysical subject. It is not, as Nancy writes, "Given as a property or as a right. Freedom is

nothing given: it is the negation of the given, including this given that would be a 'free subject' defined only by determined rights and liberties."[629] Freedom, here understood as the "negation of the given," is the cure for every dogmatism. It is, as it were, the exact antithesis of every self-evident truth of metaphysics. The problem of metaphysics is, in all instances, an expression of the desire, on the part of the metaphysical subject, for "something given." Ultimately, however, this desire is never gratified because the metaphysical subject is always faced with an obstacle too difficult to overcome: its own freedom, i.e., the negation of every given.

What Nancy's notion of freedom offers us, then, is another way of expressing the fundamental aesthetic choice of the metaphysical subject. When we say, as we have, that "everything can be otherwise than it is," we have simply repeated, in slightly different words, what Nancy has already said about freedom: "nothing is given." We are therefore thrust headlong into the crisis at the center of the problem of metaphysics. If nothing is given, then there can be no preset principle of metaphysics which does not in some sense already beg the question of its own certainty. The "first principle" of metaphysics is therefore that of "metaphysical indeterminacy," which we can state as follows: no principle of metaphysics is given, and thus no principle of metaphysics has any more claim to truth than any other. At this point, the problem of metaphysics, which has always concerned itself with the search for absolute certainty, transforms itself into the problem of aesthetics, which, in the wake of the problem of metaphysics, must concern itself with deciding an undecidable. This decision, which is not made

according to any precept, finds no justification other than the fact that it could have been otherwise. In other words, the basis of every possible decision is always rooted in the negation of the given, namely freedom, which recognizes no decision as either necessary or forbidden. It is through freedom that we come to understand the maxim: every possibility is open. It is through aesthetics, however, that we come understand how it is possible to select amongst the infinitude of choices. "The greatness of Thought," as Nancy says, "Is in the simplicity of the decision that turns itself toward naked manifestation."[630]

The non-determinacy of freedom thus leads us, through the exercise of aesthetic choice, towards the naked manifestation. It provides us, in other words, the *raison d'être* for why things are the way they are. That which we are willing to make manifest is, in the end, that which we are most inclined to find beautiful, and as such, the ultimate aesthetic criterion is manifestation without substantiation. From here, however, we are immediately thrust into ethical half of the ethico-aesthetic subject, which concerns itself, above all else, with duty. That is to say, in other words, that the ethical duty of the metaphysical subject subsists in the obligation to posit reasons for aesthetic choices, which are themselves without reason. It is, therefore, a rather impossible duty to fulfill because it must seek for the basis of a baseless aesthetic choice which is immanent in the very world itself. Thus, as Nancy writes, "The world that knows itself to be immanent is, at the same time, the world that knows itself to be unconditionally obliged to give sufficient reason for itself."[631]

On this point, however, Nancy identifies a fundamental difference between Kant and Hegel's treatment of the question of duty.

> Kant maintains this necessity within the order of an ought-to-be, in which the reason for the world is infinitely separated from itself. . . Hegel, on the other hand, posits that this "duty" itself, the "thought" alone of this duty, of its separation and infinity, has already of itself, in opening time and dividing substance, given rise to the subject.[632]

While it is no doubt true that both Kant and Hegel consider duty an indispensable component of subjectivity, the division between the two, as Nancy makes abundantly clear, is dependent on the trajectory this duty takes. For Kant, subjectivity is a "being infinitely separated" from the reason for the world. Since we have no hope of ever bridging this infinite separation via the limited faculties of human cognition, our duty towards the "reason for the world" must take the form of faith. Conversely, for Hegel, subjectivity is a movement out of and back into the infinite. In the mere thought of the infinitely separated reason for the world we have already discovered the reason for the world: thought thinking itself. Upon reflection we discover that thought is itself both "infinitely separated" from the world and immanent in it, and although this thought originates out of itself, it can only become itself be moving towards itself. Duty, in the Hegelian sense, is therefore a question of spirituality rather than faith. Whereas faith postulates self-knowledge as situated on an infinitely distant and unreachable horizon, spirituality recognizes that self-knowledge does not consist in attaining the absolute *per se*, it consists in the movement towards it.

This fundamental opposition between Kant and Hegel, which manifests itself in the gap between faith and spirituality, could, in the end, turn out to be

irreconcilable. In faith we find being, and in spirituality we find becoming, and it is by no means clear how it might be possible to cohesively incorporate the two without doing disservice to one or the other. It is precisely in this *differend*, however, that the very "essence" of the ethico-aesthetic subject reveals itself. In faith we find the aesthetic, and in spirituality we find the ethical, and while each is, in some sense, beholden to the other, the important point is that neither can be reduced to the other. What we discover in the ethico-aesthetic subject, then, is not some unified and undifferentiated whole, but an entity split in two, conjoined by a hyphen which holds together two otherwise insoluble halves. The effect of this hyphenation, we must hasten to add, is not to adjudicate difference. The hyphen, as it were, is a symbolic stand-in for what amounts to an irrevocable alienation. It does not, therefore, denote a thing, but a relation. It is a middle-term only, which signifies the *differend*, and we should not, therefore, treat the intermediation of the hyphen as a resolution which negates the fundamental discord between faith and spirituality, being and becoming, aesthetics and ethics. The naked truth which confronts the subject is, in the last, the recognition that, as Lyotard puts it, "No litigation could neutralize this differend, that would be human, all too human."[633]

Part of the "solution," then, is to realize that, strictly speaking, there is no "solution" that would be, in any appreciable sense of the word, "human." In order to litigate the *differend* between faith and spirituality, it would be necessary to decide the matter *sub specie aeternitatis*. To do so, however, we would have to assume the position of the disinterested, metaphysical subject, which is precisely

what the injunction of spirituality denies us. Thus, any litigation that gave the appearance of ultimate reconciliation would fail to do so, simply by disregarding the mandate of spirituality which categorically denies the possibility of transcendental litigation. Conversely, however, any arbitration which was predicated solely on the dictates of spirituality would only succeed in subsuming the *differend* under its own conditions, so as to give the appearance of settlement when in fact there was only subjugation. It would seem, then, that the only possible way forward out of this conundrum is to maintain the necessity of both faith and spirituality without dissolving the *differend*, which is itself the source this conundrum. What we will suggest, therefore, is a way of describing the ethico-aesthetic subject which upholds the metaphysics of faith without sacrificing the human, all too human, movement of spirituality. In order to accomplish this task, we must first postulate a means of incorporating being and becoming that does not seek a fundamental reconciliation between the two, but rather seeks to preserve it as a basis for "religion," properly understood as the heterogeneous blend of faith and spirituality.

Since it denies the possibility of litigating the *differend*, we could call such a religion a "hermeneutics of suspicion," insofar as it is antithetical to the dogma of all transcendental litigation. We fall under the spell of such dogma anytime we allow ourselves to be *convinced* of the supremacy of faith over spirituality, or spirituality over faith. The irreducibility of one to the other also means that the power of one over the other is checked. Religion, when conceived as the irreconcilable struggle between faith and spirituality for the sole dominion of

subjectivity, is, as Nietzsche already warned us, a "dangerous game." For on the one hand, the development of spirituality demands that "whoever allows room in himself again for religious feeling these days must allow it grow: he cannot do otherwise."[634] On the other hand, it is the growth of spirituality itself that causes one's judgment and feeling to become "befogged, overcast with religious shadows."[635] We must, therefore, be on our guard, for as Nietzsche observed all too keenly, "There is not enough religion in the world even to destroy religions."[636]

It is possible, however, that Nietzsche may have already given us the beginning of an answer, especially when we read him as attempting to incorporate both being and becoming as the two bifurcated halves of one conception of subjectivity. It may seem strange to suggest this at first, especially in light of what Nietzsche called the "Egyptianism" of philosophers, whose

> hatred of the very idea of becoming lead them to think they confer *honour* on a thing when they isolate it from its historical relations, *sub specie æterni*,—when they make a mummy out of it. . . . For them death, change, and age, just as well as production and growth, are objections,—refutations even. What is, does not *become*; what becomes, *is* not.[637]

Despite Nietzsche's obvious disdain for those philosophers who would denounce becoming outright, there are no good reasons to suppose that this forces us into a wholesale rejection of being. To do so would be to dogmatically adopt what Nietzsche believed was the fundamentally erroneous belief of metaphysicians: "THE BELIEF IN THE ANTITHESES OF VALUES."[638] Such a belief was, for Nietzsche, one amongst many "provisional perspectives, besides being probably made from some corner, perhaps from below – 'frog perspectives,' as it were."[639]

To reject the possibility of being, therefore, simply by maintaining that it is precluded by becoming only perpetuates the unwarranted adherence to the antithesis of values.

Given this dismissal on Nietzsche's part, it should come as no surprise that he allowed himself the possibility of cohabitating two perspectives which are normally treated as polar opposites. After all, the ability to assume a plurality of perspective was, as far as he was concerned, a virtue and not a vice. So, in addition to those instances where we can read Nietzsche as lampooning philosophical Egyptianism, we can also find just as many which advocate a kind of subjective disinterestedness that is much more in keeping with a metaphysics of being. Take, as an example, this excerpt from the preface to *The Anti-Christ*: "When it comes to spiritual matters, you need to be honest to the point of hardness. . . . You need to be used to living on mountains – to seeing the miserable, ephemeral little gossip of politics and national self-interest *beneath* you. . . . You need to become indifferent."[640]

This sort of 'indifference' towards what is 'beneath oneself' is, to be sure, a theme that is often expressed in different ways throughout the corpus of Nietzsche's writings. What is interesting to note, however, is just how frequently the metaphor of 'looking down from a mountain' is repeated by Nietzsche. For instance, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he writes, "Whoever climbs the highest mountains laughs at all tragic plays and tragic seriousness."[641] Perhaps one reason why Nietzsche was so fond of this metaphor was because it allowed him a way of giving expression to a kind of disinterestedness that was not eternal. It is

always possible, and indeed inevitable, to come down from the lofty heights of mountain tops to the lowlands of the valley. Both are but provisional perspectives, and neither can lay claim to truth in any ultimate sense.

Where Nietzsche's view of subjectivity is concerned, then, we cannot give precedence, one way or the other, to being or becoming. To insist that one—and only one—of these is the ultimate feature of subjectivity would be an outright rejection of perspectivism, which does not exclude either as a possibility *a priori*. Whatever subjectivity consist in, it must include, to put it in Zarathustra's words, "Some wandering and mountain climbing: in the end, one experiences only oneself. . . . What returns, what finally comes home to me, is my own self."[642] In short, a theory of subjectivity that does not include both being and becoming is one that is completely inadequate for Nietzsche. It is only as wanderers and mountain climbers that we can tread the path of subjectivity, and it is a path that leads both away from and back into the self. The essential point to bear in mind is that this journey from becoming to being, and being to becoming, is never one that arrives at any ultimate destination. It is always a matter of becoming *towards* being, and being *towards* becoming, and never a matter of settling on one or the other as the ultimate condition of subjectivity.

Perhaps Nietzsche's clearest articulation of the interplay between being and becoming can be found in §270 of *The Gay Science*, in which he appropriates the well-known maxim from Pindar: "*What does your conscience say?* – 'You should become who you are.'"[643] This decree, however, should strikes us, and rightly so, as something of an impossible task. Either one is who one is, or one

will become who one will become. One cannot "become what one is" without inviting an apparent contradiction. This, however, is precisely the point. It is only by framing subjectivity in such paradoxical terms that we maintain the *differend* between being and becoming, and hence faith and spirituality. We would also do well to remember that Nietzsche expresses this mandate of subjectivity in blatantly ethical terms. The commandment: "become who you are," is no mere suppositional imperative. It is one which the conscience demands categorical adherence to. A denial of this imperative would be to repudiate one's duty as an ethical subject that is not bound by any presupposition of being.

The observance of this directive is, as it were, the primary way in which we engage in the spiritual movement of becoming, which is nothing other than the development and expression of freedom. However essential this point may be, though, we cannot ignore the fact that it concerns only the first half of the ethico-aesthetic subject. The second component of subjectivity that we must still concern ourselves with is the aesthetics of being. This condition of subjectivity is, unlike the ethics of becoming, not concerned with freedom, but rather with law-making. This is a point that Nietzsche seems to hint at in §335 of *The Gay Science*.

> We, however, want to *become who we are* – human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves! To that end we must become the best students and discoverers of everything lawful and necessary in the world: we must become *physicists* in order to be creators in this sense – while hitherto all valuations and ideals have been built on *ignorance* of physics or in *contradiction* to it. So, long live physics! And even more long live what *compels* us to it – our honesty![644]

While this passage makes it clear that the ethics of becoming is, for Nietzsche, predicated on the kind of honesty which recognizes that the self is never finalized in perpetuity, it also draws our attention to that task of the physicist that Nietzsche found so admirable: the discovery of everything lawful and necessary in the world. Not, we must hasten to add, in any eternal or inalterable sense that those terms might unfortunately connote. If one thing is abundantly obvious from even a cursory observation of the history of physics, it is that its laws have been, and always will be, subject to revision. This does not mean, however, that they are any less necessary for us as aesthetic subjects. We create ourselves only insofar as we give laws to ourselves.

To be aesthetic in this sense means to give one's self a finality of form. This form is always, without exception, open to the possibility of revision, but this fact in itself does not deny it the status of finality. That is to say, in other words, that every finality of form is alterable through the movement of becoming. Nevertheless, we become what we are only by aiming towards such finality. We cannot become anything unless that becoming is in some sense purposeful. Without the spirituality of becoming, the faith of being is stagnant and lame. Without the faith of being, the spirituality of becoming is purposeless and blind. Thus, "religion," properly understood in terms of the *differend* between faith and spirituality, is never expressed in any dogmatism that would seek to annul this *differend*. It is for this reason, therefore, that religion finds its perfect expression in the truths of art. For inasmuch as art produces truths, it does so by way of an act—on the part of the metaphysical subject—that fixes the conditions of meaning

and knowledge in place. The truths of art, however, must always remain under the jurisdiction of future revision, and as such, they cannot be the timeless foundation of any inter-worldly meaning.

Such truths are the predicates of the possibility of meaning. If art were a matter of "knowledge" it would have no value whatsoever. That is not to say that the truths of art do not produce knowledge, but the knowledge itself is not art. Art is an eruption of truth into the world and cannot be justified by a knowledge claim. Such a claim would require an axiom of truth on which to be based, which is what the truths of art were supposed to furnish us with in the first place. A doctrine of art does not treat of art itself—i.e., its truths—it only treats of the knowledge that art produces. The truths of art, however, are not subject to the conditions of knowledge. There is nothing that necessitates their truth save for the willingness of the metaphysical subject to believe in them—to see them as substantiations of the universal in the particular. The truths of art are exhibitions of the transcendent in earthly form. There is, of course, nothing about that earthly form itself that allows us to see art as the emblematic of the mystical. It is through the sheer aesthetic act of belief that the work of art can become possible. Without this it is nothing but a mere fragment of nature, bereft of any value and devoid of any meaning. If art is to give us a "sense of the world," it can do so only from outside the world. This of course means that inside the world, art does not "exist." Thus, there can be no "definition" of art, for if there were, this would imply the possibility that art could be "finalized" according to an objective "law of nature."

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[164] Plato, *Republic* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004), 321–322.
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[166] Ibid., 87. If written today, this passage no doubt would be taken as a quip against deconstruction.
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[183] Ibid., 36.
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[199] Ibid., 15.
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[201] Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. J. E. C. Welldon (London: Macmillan and Co., 1883), x.
[202] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 235.
[203] Newton Garver, *This Complicated Form of Life: Essays on Wittgenstein* (Chicago: Open Court, 1994), 242–243.
[204] The only occurrence of *Lebensformen* occurs in §345 of *Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment* (previously known as Part II of the *Investigations*). "What has to be accepted, the given, is – one might say – *forms of life*." Though this passage is important in regards to Wittgenstein's conception of certainty (which will be discussed more fully in chapter three), Garver, on page 251 of *This Complicated Form of Life*, seems to treat the use of the plural as an aberration. "Wittgenstein's wording suggests that he may be presenting the idea tentatively rather than with conviction." This is a convenient account as far as Garver's argument is concerned, but there is little textual evidence, one way or the other, that would indicate whether Wittgenstein was tentatively using *Lebensformen* or not. There is therefore no reason to consider it as a deviation from his more regular use of *Lebensform*.
[205] Garver, *This Complicated Form of Life*, 246.
[206] Ibid., 248.
[207] Ibid., 246.
[208] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 16.
[209] Ibid., 50.
[210] Garver, *This Complicated Form of Life*, 240.
[211] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 25.
[212] Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 3.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Ibid., 7.
[215] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 95.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Ibid., 65.
[218] Ibid., 95–96.
[219] Ibid., 99.
[220] It is related to the rule following paradox because we would require a criterion of correctness when judging the similarities between past and present sensations.
[221] The rule following paradox leads naturally into the critique of certainty insofar as the lack of accord or discord between past and present sensations does not entitle us to be either correct or incorrect. In other words, the calculus of truth functions does not apply in such situations.
[222] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 106.
[223] John W. Cook, "Wittgenstein on Privacy," *The Philosophical Review* 74, no. 3 (July 1965): 312.
[224] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 109.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid., 33.
[227] Ibid., 32.
[228] Ibid., 33.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Vintage Books ed. (New York: Random House, Inc., 1968), 306.
[231] Ibid., 277.
[232] Ibid., 266.

[233] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 288.
[234] Linda L. Williams, *Nietzsche's Mirror: The World as Will to Power* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 3.
[235] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy & The Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 179.
[236] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (Lexington KY: SoHo Books, 2010), 13.
[237] Robert Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 85. Pippin here seems to be using the term "metaphysics" synonymously with "ontology," which is certainly within the realm of its traditional use. It does not, however, encompass the broader sense of "first philosophy" as a set of "axiomatic" principles.
[238] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 54.
[239] Ibid.
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[241] Ibid.
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[245] Michael N. Forster, *Wittgenstein on the Arbitrariness of Grammar* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 7.
[246] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 46.
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the editor's introduction to that text it is noted that the preference for "purposiveness" as opposed to "finality" is to avoid the connotation of "conclusiveness" that the ordinary English use of the latter word can sometimes imply (xlviii). This is a connotation that we would do well not to forget entirely, however. The "finality of form" which the object of a judgment of taste exhibits is a function of the disinterested and autonomous subject, whose subjective rationality is itself the "form of finality" in the conclusive sense.

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[634] Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 87.
[635] Ibid.
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