

Learning how to go on...

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I

Learning is a difficult concept. It rarely comes into proper focus in discussions of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Wittgenstein exploits the difficulties in understanding learning in familiar ways. He uses examples of learning and its potential deviances to get us to think hard about about what it is to understand the meaning of a word, what it is to grasp the regularity of word use in linguistic practice. But most readings of Wittgenstein fail to take the measure of what is really hard about learning.

Sceptical readings of the rule-following passages treat the learning of the meaning of a word as a process fraught with pitfalls that threaten to throw the process off course at any moment and reveal that the very idea that there is a course to the process vacuous. Alternatively, readings that treat these passages as an extended reductio ad absurdum are prone to take the difficulty with learning as conditional on the assumption targetted by the reductio. Hence, although learning might be rendered impossible if we assume that grasp of meaning is based on interpretation, once we rid ourselves of that assumption, we can acquiesce in a continued and unproblematic model of learning as a form of training that provides initiation into shared practices of language use.

There is, I think, no doubt, that the rule-following passages are working as a reductio, not as a sceptical deconstruction of our understanding of meaning. Here's one piece of evidence in favour of this that leads us straight into the issues on which I want to concentrate. The intuitive appeal of the sceptical reading of the rule-following passages is the way it makes play with the thought that when the teacher offers instruction to the pupil regarding the meaning of a word, what they say falls short of expressing what they know. This means that there is a gap between what they say and what the pupil needs to grasp if they are to understand the word's

meaning. And it is that gap that is exploited by the sceptic, for anything that the teacher adds by way of further explanation of what they say produces a regress rather than a move that closes down the gap between what they say and what the pupil needs to grasp. But that imagery of a gap to be exploited by the sceptical regress of hypotheses about word meaning is clearly denied by Wittgenstein once the paradox of the argument is resolved.

Howsoever we understand the resolution offered, it is clear that there is a resolution of the paradox in §201. It is clear that a formulation of the target assumption is the idea that grasp of meaning is based on interpretation. What is less clear is the content of the alternative that holds that 'there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not an interpretation*'. We know that the alternative is not a form of explanation of meaning, something that could be specified in words, for that would be like an interpretation (§209). So the alternative is some sort of activity, it is a grasping of a technique, a way of using the word. But it need not matter for now that we agree precisely how we are to take that alternative. I'll return to that below. What does matter is that once an alternative is on the table, the idea of the gap between what the teacher offers and what the pupil needs to know is rejected. The rejection is clear a few passages later when Wittgenstein explicitly raises the issue of how he thinks we teach someone words for which they have not yet got the concepts:

...if a person has not yet got the *concepts*, I shall teach him to use the words by means of *examples* and by *practice*.— And when I do this I do not communicate less to him than I know myself. (§208a)

I shall call the claim made in the final sentence of §208a, the disclosure thesis. It is the claim that what the teacher offers in instruction can be a disclosure to the pupil of what they know.<sup>1</sup> Of course, if the paradox of the rule-following argument had not been resolved at §201, the disclosure could be a disclosure of ignorance, but given the position of this remark I think it is clear that Wittgenstein is affirming that the process of learning and instruction is in order. There is nothing to stop the teacher

providing an instruction in which, because they are able to disclose what they know, the pupil is able on that basis to grasp what they need to grasp to understand the word. None of this is to say what it is that the pupil grasps, nor what they need to grasp. The disclosure thesis as expressed in §208 does not as such say what is disclosed, beyond whatever it is that the teacher knows, and it does not specify what it is that the pupil needs to grasp. The disclosure thesis simply makes the point that, freed of the assumption(s) that had made teaching someone the meaning of a word look so paradoxical, we are now free to treat teaching and learning as in order – they are no longer under threat. What I want to understand is what this point amounts to and what it tells us about the nature of learning.

## II

Here's the central issue that I want to get into focus about the disclosure thesis. As it is formulated in §208, Wittgenstein's account of learning makes two claims: (i) pupils learn, they go through a developmental process of acquiring concepts; (ii) teachers instruct pupils in their learning by disclosing what they know. What is puzzling about the concept of learning is showing how both these claims can be true. The puzzle is a version of what Fodor calls the paradox of learning. In order for the teacher to disclose what they know to the pupil, the pupil must have some capacity for receiving what is disclosed. But any capacity for receiving the teacher's disclosure would be a capacity that granted understanding of what is disclosed. But for that to take place, the pupil would already need to have a capacity for understanding the content of what the teacher discloses. Now, if what the teacher discloses is understanding of a concept, the pupil must already understand the concept prior to being able to receive what the teacher discloses. In that case, there can be no learning of a new concept, for the pupil would need prior grasp of the concept in order to be able to take in what the teacher discloses in teaching. If the teaching relationship is one of disclosure,

there is then no such thing as acquiring new concepts. In short, the very idea of teaching by disclosure threatens the thesis that there can be learning of new concepts.

Clearly, if the disclosure thesis was a thesis about the disclosure of theoretical propositional knowledge, it would be difficult to see how or why the thesis should be endorsed given the development of the rule-following argument earlier in the text, for to disclose such knowledge would be to offer something that could in principle be the content of an explanation or definition. The use of examples and practice, rather than simply words, indicates that what is disclosed is, one might say, a form of know-how, a technique of activities and these things are disclosed by training. What training exploits and shapes is the background of techniques, the context of activity that shapes the use of words.

That, I think, is a common way of taking Wittgenstein whether or not the account of techniques is given in the spirit of a description or as core to an explanatory account of learning.<sup>2</sup> It is, however, quite unclear what the 'background' is, what kind of activities make it up and how they relate to full-blown grasp of concepts. This paper is an exploration of what the background has to be like for learning to be possible and the disclosure thesis true. I shall argue that the puzzle about learning is a real puzzle and that it cannot be made to go away by the simple expedient of taking the disclosure thesis to apply to the disclosure of techniques, rather than theoretical knowledge.

Of course, if the puzzle cannot be exorcised by providing descriptions of training, one option is to endorse quietism about learning. This is the response that says that there is no account of learning, no explanation of what is involved in moving from a lack of a concept to concept possession. This just happens; perhaps it is part of our natural history, but there is no account of it. That is how we are.

But this seems flatly mistaken and contrary to what Wittgenstein says. For example, Wittgenstein's remarks against giving explanations do not rule out

explanatory accounts of learning. What he says in §209 is not that we cannot give an explanation of learning; he denies that we can give a deeper explanation of how meaning reaches beyond examples. But that is really just the point that there is no explanation or definition (*eklarung*), i.e., something that puts into words how meaning reaches beyond examples. And therefore, there is no teaching by explanation that states how meaning reaches beyond examples. That is just the point that we do not teach new concepts by explicit instruction; it is a reminder of the point from §201 that we do not grasp the meaning by interpretation. Also, it is important to note that Wittgenstein describes, briefly, the learning process. He says,

...I shall shew him the same colours, the same lengths, the same shapes, I shall make him find them and produce them, and so on...And also to continue progressions. And so, for example, when given: ...to go on:..... .. .

I do it, he does it after me; and I influence him by expressions of agreement, rejection, expectation, encouragement. I let him go his way, or hold him back; and so on. (§208 b,c)

This is not a complete description, but it is a description all the same. It is a description that picks out ingredients to learning and note how the description of the teacher/pupil interchange in §208c presupposes that the pupil already has a 'way to go', a direction that can be influenced by rejection, encouragement, etc. The pupil is being brought into line and we need to understand what it is to have this sort of exchange with a pupil.

Furthermore, even if quietism is in order about explanations of meaning, it is not clear why there cannot be an illuminating description of learning, perhaps one that gives more detail than Wittgenstein sketches. But the puzzle about learning affects descriptions of learning just as much as attempts at explanatory accounts of learning. As I shall argue, the descriptive account of learning is either prey to the same puzzle about learning as most everyone else, or it is banal.

Wittgenstein accepts that learning can involve taking a pupil from a position where they lack a concept to one in which they possess it. This is a remarkable achievement, it is the achievement that occurs repeatedly over the trajectory that human infants travel in language acquisition. It seems plain to ask what it is about a subject that equips them with the capacity to go through this developmental process. Quietism says that there is nothing worth saying to this. The impulse to quietism is clear. If you take the question about the pupil's equipment that enables conceptual development as legitimate it can seem that we face the following bind. The question is: What has the pupil got that enables concept acquisition? If you answer that question with too little, no learning will ever take place. Empiricist accounts of learning radically underdetermine the learning process. If you grant the pupil too much, again no learning will take place, for you will find that you have granted the pupil a prior grasp of the very concept whose learning you were hoping to account for. Fodor exploits the radical underdetermination of the empiricist/behaviourist option in order to argue for the latter option – a nativism about concepts. But that is the view that there is no such thing as learning. And apart from the fact that Wittgenstein says there is such a thing as learning, nativism is also the target of his jibe at §32 when he says we can read Augustine as treating language learning as second language learning.<sup>3</sup>

So, faced with this bind it can then seem natural to endorse, and assume that Wittgenstein endorsed, a quietism about learning. But that means that the obvious question to raise about learning, namely,

What does a pupil bring to learning that enables them to acquire a new concept?

cannot be answered other than with the bland, 'they bring a capacity to learn.' And this does not seem satisfactory, even as a description.

The bind here seems to come down to having to make a choice between nativism about concepts and quietism. Wittgenstein denies the former and so, given his

undoubted quietist tendencies, it can seem natural to take him as a quietist on learning. I find quietism as the least satisfactory element of Wittgenstein's later philosophy generally and in this instance in particular. So what I want to explore is how Wittgenstein could accommodate both the disclosure thesis and the idea that learning takes place without resorting to a quietist – 'this stuff happens.' First, let's be clear that there is a puzzle about the disclosure thesis in the company of the thesis that learning happens, even if you are tempted by quietism.

### III

It might be thought that the disclosure thesis only looks problematic when interpreted in too cognitivist a spirit as if the disclosure in §208a were a manifesting of discrete packages of knowledge – the teacher reveals their 'knowing the meaning of "game" package', or their 'knowing the meaning of "rule" package'. And then we realise that what is offered in what they say and in the examples they deploy does not amount to the 'knowing the meaning of "so-and-so" package'. But it need not be like that. Let's be clear how the learning paradox arises in Fodor's preferred way of putting things before seeing how the paradox still applies no matter how charitably one takes the disclosure thesis.

Fodor formulates the paradox of learning in terms of the experiences required in order to learn a new concept, for intuitively concepts are learnt on the basis of experience. For this to work, we need an account of how experience can contribute to concept possession without begging the question. It is difficult to see how this can be achieved, for it is plausible to think that experience can only contribute to concept learning if experience renders the appropriate class of items salient. But then how else can experience render a class of items salient for a subject without that subject already possessing a way of collecting the class together? And what is it to have a

way of collecting a class of items together, if it is not a concept, a representation of the class within some system of representations?<sup>4</sup>

Now, the point that needs examining is the idea that this argument only poses a problem for the disclosure thesis if the latter is construed in too cognitivist a manner, as if we take the point of that thesis to be that the teacher discloses knowledge to the pupil where what they disclose is their possession of a representation within a system of representations. If we do not think of knowledge of a concept modelled in terms of possession of a representation within a system of representations, but think of it more in terms of a technique or competency for using a word, something whose manifestation is itself extended in time, then the paradox will go away. That is a natural thought to have and it is, I suspect, the reason that learning rarely receives extended discussion by Wittgenstein commentators.<sup>5</sup> The thought is that the puzzle about learning evaporates because the work in explaining how novel concepts are acquired is simply off-loaded onto the description of the 'background' of techniques. I don't think this works.

A description of the learning activity and of the capacities that the pupil brings to learning that enable concept acquisition will still fall foul of the dichotomy exploited by Fodor in arguing against theories of learning. The dichotomy between empiricist and rationalist explanations of learning is not avoided by saying there will be no explanations of learning, only descriptions. For sure, Fodor's version of the paradox employs a model in which one's discrimination of the extension of a concept is driven by one's possession of an internal representation within an internal mental system of representation. And his argument says that no-one could learn a concept without first having the means to discriminate the extension of the concept as salient within experience. What it is to make such discrimination is explained by possession of the internal representation, so you cannot make such discriminations without first possessing the concept. Hence concepts are innate. But the thrust of this argument against the possibility of learning remains in place when we strip out Fodor's

explanatory role for concepts, construed as nodes within an inner system of representation.

Let us assume that the job is not to explain the pupil's discrimination of the extension of the concept, but simply to describe the abilities, the techniques, by which they apply words to groups of things. Still, if we describe the pupil's initial capacities too thinly we will describe them short of the capacities necessary for concept possession. Describe them too thickly and we describe them in a way that gives the lie to the idea that concept acquisition takes place.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps, you might think, we can get a descriptive account of learning that would permit quietism by giving sufficient detail in the description of the development of capacities to avoid the empiricist underdetermination. But the descriptive approach that logs the developmental trajectory of skills/capacities fails no better in making sense of learning.

If there is such a thing as concept learning, then there must be a situation that in the abstract has the following characteristics: the pupil already has some techniques for grouping things and for applying words to those groupings and there are groupings of things and words for those groupings that are alien to the pupil. They have no technique for making the latter groupings and they have no words for applying to such groupings. Call these the target groupings and target techniques. Those groupings for which they have techniques we can call the base set. Now, if the target groupings were discriminable by iteration and addition of techniques from the base set then we would get a description of the learning of the target concepts, but only on the admission that the groupings they name were not really novel and the learning involved was not really a learning of novel concepts. For, on the supposition just made, the target concept is definable in terms of base concepts and so could have been learnt, and indeed defined, in terms of composition from the base concepts. Note also, if such a description of learning were applicable, then there would be no need for examples and practice in teaching the meaning of a word; in

principle, the learning could be discharged explicitly by repeated iterations upon the base set of groupings. Such iteration could work in one of two ways. The iteration could be thought of as an iteration of techniques in using words and in that case, there is no real concept learning with the target techniques for they are definable in terms of the base techniques. Alternatively, the iteration could be an iteration of words for the base techniques and then not only is there no real concept learning, but this iteration shows that examples are now redundant, explanation alone would suffice.

So, suppose that the target groupings and target concepts cannot be so defined. That is to say, there is, as Wittgenstein allows, genuine learning of concepts. It proceeds by example and practice. Our aim now is to describe this process, not to explain it, but simply to lay it out for all to see as something that happens. But what happens? We have a subject, the pupil, with techniques for grouping some sets of things together and applying words to them, but without such techniques for the target set. The target set is a novel set for this pupil and the ability to group it and to name that group will contribute to their acquiring a novel concept. We know that we cannot teach the pupil by explicit definition, for the novel concept occupies a grammatical space that does not yet exist for this pupil just as the grouping of items occupies a space within the range of saliences that they discriminate that is not yet available for them. So how do we teach them the new techniques? If we say that we teach them by example and by practice, then we have provided no purchase for these descriptive tags. We cannot simply provide an instance of the target grouping and say, 'Look at these!' for an ostensive definition can be variously interpreted in every case. But you might say, we don't expect the pupil to *interpret* the example, that was the lesson we learnt at §201. That's right, but what do we expect the pupil to do with the example? It cannot be that they practise a technique of grouping, for at this point they lack the technique for grouping such saliences. They have no conceptual purchase on the grouping conceived as an item in an inner code for

representing the grouping, but they also have no technique of grouping with respect to the target group, for that is why there is such a thing as genuine learning.<sup>7</sup>

Having 'gone descriptive' we are still stuck for an account of what is going on. The only candidate description of the process and the pupil is: learning happens, the pupil is a learner. In the face of the remarkable achievement of concept acquisition, the fact that certain sorts of subjects seem to be remarkable in their ability to acquire a way of grouping things and naming those groupings that produces language, all the quietist can do is agree – we are remarkable. And if pressed to say what it is that singles out those remarkable creatures from those that lack the ability to learn, there is nothing but silence.

The problem then with the paradox of learning is not the explanatory role of concepts, but more simply the puzzle of how we get something out of nothing. Boldly calling the whole process a process of 'training' is a fudge.<sup>8</sup> Simply thinking that it is a process not to be explained, but only described, *sotto voce* as the quietist would have it, is also a fudge, for there is no form of description to pick out the techniques that the pupil has not yet got but which they somehow need to deploy as the teacher presents to them an example of the novel grouping. Whichever way you cut it, with explanatory pretensions or descriptive homilies, it is fundamentally unclear what is meant to be going on when a pupil undergoes genuine learning and the teacher discloses what they know.

And it is no response here to throw up one's hands in despair and say that we're being asked for the impossible. It might seem that the somewhat melodramatic formulation – how we get something out of nothing – is an invitation to see the puzzle about learning as an instance of the big drama of getting the realm of reasons out of the resources of the realm of law. For sure, we can provide an account of conditioning, we know how that can produce new responses from a subject; but that is the route to radical underdetermination. We might agree with McDowell that crossing the line from the realm of law to the realm of norms is not an advisable

route. But the current issue is not that big one.<sup>9</sup> The current issue is about how a subject with limited normative techniques acquires new ones, where the new ones are not definable in terms of any combination of the present holdings. That looks like a 'something out of nothing', but only, I suspect, because we are prone to treat the subject as too ill-equipped in the first place.<sup>10</sup>

Wittgenstein allows that concept acquisition takes place and he appears to endorse quietism. Something has to give. I suggest it is the quietism that needs adjusting. In the remainder of this essay I want to explore Wittgenstein's account of learning. Whether that account is explanatory or descriptive does not need to be settled in order to motivate the need to understand Wittgenstein's account. There are, however, large methodological issues in the background of this topic. As a matter of interpretation, I find it useful to take at face value the title of the *Philosophical Investigations*. I suspect we force the text and expect too much of Wittgenstein if we assume that he had a settled opinion on all the matters he discusses in this text, let alone throughout his later writings. Often enough, he offers precisely what he says he offers: investigations, where these are new beginnings, but not necessarily new endings to philosophical enquiry. The issue about learning is one such issue where I think it better to read him as offering a discussion that opens a space where a position may be developed, rather than a discussion that seals off the scope for further thought and enquiry.

#### IV

The puzzle about learning occupies a central position in Wittgenstein's text, for understanding learning requires that we take a view on how we understand the notion of techniques and of the background. There are a number of places where learning is explicitly discussed, but the central issue is reflected also in a number of related themes. Learning is clearly central to the opening sections on early language

learning, although the discussion there is brief and the disclosure thesis does not appear; the discussion is too early and fragmentary.<sup>11</sup> The disclosure thesis is important in the discussion of family resemblance. Note how in §69 there is the appearance of the threat of a gap between what the teacher says and what the pupil needs to grasp. Wittgenstein describes the teaching of the word 'game' and says,

I imagine that we should describe *games* to him, and we might add: "This *and similar things* are called 'games'". And do we know any more about it ourselves? Is it only other people whom we cannot tell exactly what a game is? – But this is not ignorance. (§69)

The thought briefly raised here before being rejected is, I take it, the worry that the teacher fails to disclose what they know. It is the worry that the lack of a canonical definition of games and the need to resort to the 'this and similar things' locution illustrates an inability of the teacher to disclose what they know. The reason for the supposed inability appears different in this case to the later case with arithmetical rules, for it derives from the family resemblance nature of the concept rather than its applicability in determining an infinite series. This difference should not, however, be overstated. The appeal to the 'this and similar things' locution is an appeal to the way that the applicability of the word 'game' extends to new cases in ways that cannot be specified in terms of a finite set of necessary and sufficient conditions, but the work of the 'this and similar things' locution is not really much different from the 'and so on...' that appears when we teach someone how to add. In both cases, it seems central to the teaching that having given some examples we then indicate that the applicability of the term extends from the cases illustrated, that its use goes on. And it is that inability to articulate how the application of the word goes on that makes the ideas of family resemblance and of a meaning for 'add 2' look unstated and, indeed, not disclosable when teaching the concept. The appeal to 'this and similar things' is really just a way of making clear that the uses of the word employed in

teaching are only examples, elements of a practice that extends to other cases whose similarity has not been explicitly stated. The similarity is in the background.

But the worry about non-disclosability is denied at §69, for the use of the 'this and similar things' locution is not a form of ignorance, either in terms of leaving the pupil ignorant of what we as teachers know, or as a short-changed expression of our knowledge to ourselves. When we explain the meaning of 'game' to someone by giving examples and a description and then saying 'this and similar things...' what we disclose is what we know. The disclosure thesis is stated clearly just a few passages later at §75:

Isn't my knowledge, my concept of a game, completely expressed in explanations that I could give? That is, in my describing examples of various kinds of game; shewing how all sorts of other games can be constructed on the analogy of these; saying that I should scarcely include this or this among games; and so on.

And note Wittgenstein's own meta-use of the 'and so on' locution here in reassuring us that we do not shortchange our pupils when we teach them words.

The phenomenon is also related to the phenomenon of knowing how to go on in 'setting out' with a sentence, e.g. §§336, 337 and the 'funny' word order of German and Latin. In all these cases we want to say that we knew where the sentence was going; it is something that is not hidden to us, or to others. At its most general, understanding the disclosure thesis involves making sense of the key concept of use so as to permit genuine learning and disclosure. When we disclose in teaching, we show the pupil enough so that they know how to go on.

Knowing how to go on is, of course, central to Wittgenstein's core thesis that the meaning of a word is its use, where this is an extended activity and something we should not assume to be fully coded in the linguistic symbol. But treating this extended activity, this 'surround', as something unproblematically described, e.g., in the process of a grammatical investigation, does not help account for learning.

Learning takes place when we disclose this 'surround' to those who have no familiarity with it.<sup>12</sup> For sure, the word 'game' does not, as it were, reveal its meaning in itself, but only in its use and the know-how of use is the background in virtue of which the examples disclose what the teacher knows. The puzzle regarding learning is, stated generally, the puzzle how a subject who lacks grasp of a use can nevertheless have that use disclosed to them by the teacher. And the point is not just that the full extent of that use is not, as it were, visible in the fragment on display. The point is not that there is a 'bit of a pattern' and it is not clear how it continues. The point is that for the pupil who stands to gain a new concept there is not even a 'bit of a pattern.' We cannot even say that the pupil has, as it were, a gap where the concept goes, for that still leaves them with an antecedent grasp of the concept's grammar. The puzzle is how we make the first step in finding a pattern at all, let alone one that goes this way rather than that. I want to sketch some thoughts on this first step.

## V

What is special about the concept of use is the very notion of a pattern, a normative grouping of things and activities in response to things. One of the simplest elements of this is, I think, the following idea: one treats an instance as bearing on an earlier (different) instance. At a minimum, that means that one moderates one's behaviour with respect to one instance in response to the other. That is what makes one thing an instance of something similar to the other, the fact that one correctly takes one's behaviour with respect to one to bear on one's behaviour with respect to the other. One holds one's activity with respect to one thing to account for how it goes with the other. Put very simply, 'use' concerns the way activity hangs together over time by how one holds oneself to account like this.

Now, I have characterised that in individualistic terms, deliberately so. The general form of the puzzle about learning concerns how much we grant the pupil in order to make them a suitable subject for disclosure. Fodor says we should give them a mind, where that means possession of a LOT and no learning takes places. What I want to suggest is a weaker sense of giving them a mind: give them the capacity to regularise their activity, to generate patterns; to be pattern makers not pattern takers. This requires an agency in techniques, but not the specific techniques for this or that concept (we avoid nativism), but an agency in the general techniques of making order. What does that mean?

It means that the pupil needs a grasp of their activity having consequences and of being apt for moderation in the light of those consequences. That requires some notion of self-policing – self-legislation – but these need not necessarily be conceived as conceptually structured. The pupil needs some capacity to manage activity for its consequences, but this need not require a facility for managing in generalisable structures. It might manifest this capacity in a singular awareness of how this activity bears on that.

The adult puts labels on some activities and if the child mimics that label then this too is something they do and it too has consequences, chiefly in what the adult does. What the adult does is part of a generalisable pattern. The truth behind the idea of social norms to language is, I suspect, just this: the consequences of activity that matter in getting language going are the social consequences of simple linguistic doings. But for those consequences to be ones in the light of which the infant moderates their behaviour, the infant must already be a subject who has the capacity to moderate behaviour in the light of its consequences. They must already be a simple norm-maker holding their actions to account for their consequences. And young children do this, in the first instance by moderating their behaviour to manage the form of their emotional lives.<sup>13</sup>

This exercise of techniques is individualistic. Williams comes close to this when she says, 'we recognise regularities...only to the extent that we can regularize our own behaviour' and finds the same point in Pears: 'We discover the regularities in nature's behaviour only by first establishing regularities in our own behaviour'.<sup>14</sup> I think Pears' formulation is right, but if so, there is no need for the social practice account of normativity that Williams offers.<sup>15</sup> The exercise of techniques exploits a form of activity, a moderation of behaviour, that is not necessarily conceptually structured. Acting in this way is a bedrock form of activity. It is an acting that does not answer to the space of reasons. It is an acting blindly, without reason (§§211, 217, 219). But it is an acting, a way of holding oneself to account for what one does, a binding of life together over time, even if not with conceptual ties.

Now, suppose that one wanted to explain learning a new concept in terms of the way the pupil sees how, in the teacher's examples, one activity is being held to bear on another? That is to say, they see that acting thus-and-so with respect to one thing bears on how one manages acting thus-and-so with respect to another. This requires a directedness to activity; it makes the pupil's activity a potentially managed activity, one that is ripe for management so that acting with respect to one thing moderates the acting with respect to the other. But this means that there is some structure, albeit modest, to the pupil's activity, a structure or form to the potential for moderation. Now, if this form is a conceptual form, then we are stuck with the puzzle about learning again, for it is a conceptual form that they are supposed to acquire on the basis of the teacher's examples; they are not meant to deploy it in their responsiveness to the examples. But why we should we assume that wherever there is a form to activity that form must be conceptual?

Of course, there can be all sorts of 'forms' to activity that are not conceptual, the point of the above question is restricted in the following sense. By 'form' I mean a structure to activity that is exploited by the subject in managing their actions. By 'form' I mean a structure of the subject's directedness. I could say, at this point, that

by a 'form' I mean a 'purpose' but the word has to remain in scare quotes else we read too much into it. So, the question now is this: why should we assume that a form to a subject's activity by which they moderate action and hold one activity to bear on another has to be a conceptual form? This moderation requires some notion of management of activities, but it is not necessary to take this idea of a management of activities (a directedness to activity) as requiring the sort of generality of moderation that applies to conceptually informed moderation. Think of the way that, e.g. a baker's apprentice first learns to make discriminations of different appearances and textures of dough through their acting upon it. They acquire discriminations of texture, appearance, feel that enable them to generate salient groupings. And I do not mean simply that discriminations are coded that generate experiences of groupings – I do not mean that discriminations are done for them by their cognitive machinery; I mean that they make discriminations, they direct their activities with the dough, moderating the kneeding etc. The form of such activities does not need to be a conceptual form, even if there is a form that they moderate and deploy in managing what they do.

In general the point here is simply this: the pupil undertakes some activity  $\alpha$  in order to satisfy some goal  $\gamma$ . But even if the goal is conceptually circumscribed (and it need not be)  $\alpha$  is not conceptually managed and it is certainly not conceptualised under whatever concept, if there is one, that picks out the goal  $\gamma$ . For a more complex example, think of how the piano pupil moderates her playing, adjusting finger speed, timings, lightness of touch, etc. in order to produce a sound for a phrase that pleases their tutor. The moderation of elements of dynamics that produce the goal need not be conceptually available to the pupil at all, but in adjusting these elements the pupil makes patterns in their activity. They manage what they do, but the management is not derived from the goal, whether that be pleasing the tutor or simply producing an effect that pleases themselves. Of course,

the activity is, in a sense, driven by or motivated by the goal, but the point is that the goal does not provide a conceptual purchase on, or shape for the activity. You can have a detailed conceptual goal of pleasing the tutor, of wanting to play the phrase just the way they did, and still fail to produce the activity because you fail to focus on, attend to the right elements of action and manage them accordingly. In order to undertake this management, the pupil needs to be able to focus and direct their actions. They do this by attending to the way that what they do approaches the production of the goal, but there is no good theoretical reason why such attention need be a conceptually structured attention. Indeed, there is good reason for thinking it is not.<sup>16</sup> If it is not, then we have, in general outline, a notion of there being activities and forms of activities that can properly be said to be bedrock, but without being a bedrock of mere conditioned stimuli-responses. We have activities, directed behaviour, that are undertaken by the subject who, in so doing, contributes to the form of these basic activities – like the builders who have no language but still forms of activities upon blocks, pillars, slabs and beams that can be directed and tuned by the teacher who offers words as labels for the objects of those activities. And the words provide new activities – saying, activities that not only bind a use over time, but also now provide a generality to action. The idea of management requires a sense in which the patterns of our doings are, in part, *our* patterns. We are pattern makers in this, not just pattern users. That, I suggest, is the real import of the notion that there can be a ‘track that I lay down in language’ (*RFM*, III, §30, pp.165-6).

At heart, the above individualism amounts to this: learning happens because the pupil already has a mind although not in the sense that Fodor encourages, a repository of innate concepts. The pupil already has a mind, for they are already ‘going-on’; they are already binding their activities over time. We teach them by tuning and shaping the ‘going-on’ that is already in place. And this is then why Wittgenstein says:

I want to say: an education quite different from ours might also be the foundation for quite different concepts

and,

For here life would run on differently (*Zettel* §§387,388)

Compare also,

With different training the same ostensive teaching of these words would have effected a quite different understanding. (§6c)

Indeed, such a model of teaching by tuning the 'going-on' already in place then explains the possibility of the arbitrariness of grammar, while also making it clear that from where we are, with our accustomed ways of going-on, we can make no sense of the alternative forms that could have come about had we been trained differently, had our original 'goings-on' been deflected elsewhere than where we now find them.<sup>17</sup>

## VI

Our problem was to make sense of the disclosure thesis in the light of genuine learning of new concepts. The disclosure thesis in §208 applies to communicating something that had seemed, in the set up of the rule-following discussion, deeply puzzling, namely how we convey to someone a grasp of a rule with infinite extension. The disclosure thesis applies to grasp of such rules, for as the section proceeds Wittgenstein emphasises the distinction between the use of 'and so on...' where it is an abbreviation and those uses in which it is not. It is clear from the context that the non-abbreviated use of the phrase is a candidate for falling under the domain of the disclosure thesis, the phrase 'and so on...' is one of the concepts that can be taught by the use of examples in which we disclose what we know (208b, 208e). When the teacher explains the concept of a rule or regularity and says that words are to be used in such-and-such ways and gives some examples and then says, 'and so on...'

where that is not an abbreviation, then that can count as disclosure. The voice that had played sceptic earlier in the text would not have accepted this bold disclosure, but now, on pain of being driven to paradox, it is offered as unproblematic. What has happened to make this so unproblematic?

What has changed and what we have learnt is, I suggest, the acceptance of a notion of the pupil as a subject who goes-on. This is an individualistic notion; it requires an individualistic account of the source of order.<sup>18</sup> On this reading, the disclosure thesis is no longer puzzling and it is compatible with the acceptance of genuine learning. Disclosure is not a disclosure of propositional knowledge, let alone the fanciful idea that somehow our words alone manage to disclose our meaning. It is, of course, simply the view that we disclose what we know by our words used in the context of our doings, our goings-on. We show the pupil how we use words – then there is no gap between what we know and what we say in the context of how we go-on.

How is this use of the 'context of our doings' the way we 'go-on' immune to the puzzle about learning? Why have I not slipped back into a therapeutic description of learning? The descriptive reading sees disclosure as only available to those subjects who already occupy the relevant particular context of activity that, along with the words, provides the disclosure in what the teacher says. On this reading there is negligible sense to the idea that real learning takes place, for the bulk of the work of the disclosure is carried by the prior occupation of the context of activity that, with the words, discloses the teacher's knowledge. All that is missing is the appropriate form of words to attach to the context of activity. On this reading concept learning looks dangerously close to Fodor's model of concept learning: there is none, there is only learning of labels for ways of seeing, behaving, etc., that are innate.

But that is not Wittgenstein's description. Recall what he says in §208c:

I do it, he does it after me; and I influence him....I let him go his way, or hold him back; and so on.

The pupil is already going-on his way and that way might be in line with mine so that he does the same as me after me, but it might not. I might need to hold him back, influence him. But for these prods and constraints to work, the pupil must already be on the move; he must already be going-on. The context of activity that enables disclosure cannot therefore be the particular context of activity that shapes the use of the target word, for that is one of the things that the pupil has to learn. They are party to the general context of being a subject who goes-on, a subject who holds themselves to account for what they do and moderates and manages that doing by focussing on, attending to things and making an order in their doings. They are already 'on the move', looking for patterns, putting their lives in patterns, putting them in order. They manage their activities, but not necessarily with the generality of conceptually informed management. They are pattern makers, but not yet conceptual pattern makers. That is to say, they hold what they do with one instance to bear on what they do with another, but without taking this relation as a generalisable one. It is a kind of acting blindly.

If this is anywhere near right, we can now see why training is such a richer concept than mere conditioning. The move that takes place in learning is not a bridging of the great divide between conditioning within the realm of causes to entry to the space of reasons. The move is from an order making, a going-on, that gets trained and generalised as new activities are introduced – the activities of attaching noises to our actions and these go-on and on too. Training is then, in Wittgenstein, potentially much more than conditioning. It is not a 'brute training' as Baker and Hacker call it.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Wittgenstein's discussion of training in the *Brown Book* already suggests that he thinks of the trainee as equipped with more than a responsiveness to conditioning and yet less than a prior grasp of concepts.<sup>20</sup>

The problem about learning is that if we grant the pupil too much, learning is impossible. If we grant them too much, learning is redundant. My suggestion is that we should give neither too little or too much. But there is something remarkable

about the learner and we have to grant them quite a lot. The formulation I prefer is this:

We grant the pupil a capacity to join in pattern making

Why say this? Because the joining in is a joining in an activity that makes grammar and the patterns of word use; it emphasises the activity of the individual in contributing to linguistic practice; it's more than immersion in a practice, more than a mere *bildung*. It is not a joining in when you join in a game whose grammar you already know. It is a joining in when you join in a playing where we make up the rules as we go along, where we jointly and individually hold the game together over time in our going-on.

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<sup>1</sup> 'can be' a full disclosure, not 'is', for of course the teacher may not be very good at teaching, at picking the telling example, etc.

<sup>2</sup> See Meredith Williams, 'The Etiology of the Obvious' in *Wittgenstein in America*, eds. McCarthy & Stidd, Oxford : Clarendon Press, 2001, 62-89 for the latter. I want to acknowledge a considerable debt to Williams, for she is one of the few Wittgenstein scholars to worry seriously about how learning works in his texts. I end up disagreeing pretty profoundly with her reading, although in this 2001 essay she comes closer than in her earlier work to making moves that obviate the need for the point on which I fundamentally disagree: her claim that Wittgenstein endorses a social practice account of norms and a social account of mind.

<sup>3</sup> It's not just Fodor, see also Paul Bloom, *How Children Learn the Meaning of Words*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000, also his ....lectures at Johns Hopkins Fall, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Fodor's argument for the paradox of learning (there is none!) goes back to Fodor, J. (1975) *The Language of Thought*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, see the discussion around p.95. See my (2008) 'Conceptual development and the paradox of learning', *Journal of Philosophy of Education* **42**, in press for one way of beginning a response to Fodor's paradox.

<sup>5</sup> The exception is Meredith Williams.

<sup>6</sup> This dichotomy is clear in Meredith Williams' reading of Wittgenstein on learning, in which the techniques of the pupil are characterised in terms of a natural teleology and only the techniques of the teacher are characterised normatively in terms of membership of a social practice. This leaves it a mystery how the former set of techniques provide a basis for development into the latter. See M. Williams, *Wittgenstein, Mind and Meaning*, London: Routledge, 1999, especially essays 4 & 7.

<sup>7</sup> Could we distinguish between techniques for groupings things and finding them salient and techniques for acting upon those groupings, for example, by using words for them? We could, but that is now to revert to the traditional empiricist framework that first distinguishes a sensational content, perhaps with sense-data?, and has a facility for applying words to this grouping. But that just multiplies the issues. It does not solve them, for it offers no account of how the former grouping skills are acquired and then runs the risk of having words applied in the first instance to the sensational content/sense-data rather than the group of objects. This is just the familiar empiricist problematic and hardly a serious contender in interpretation of Wittgenstein.

<sup>8</sup> See J. Fodor & E. Lepore, 'Brandom Beleaguered', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LXXIV No.3 (2007): 'Wittgenstein suggests that first language learning is somehow a matter of "training"; but he says nothing intelligible about how training could lead to learning in a creature that does not already have a mind.' p.684. Actually, I think this is both unfair and inaccurate on Wittgenstein, although it might be both fair and accurate as a remark about many of Wittgenstein's commentators.

<sup>9</sup> Although see Meredith Williams' work on Wittgenstein on learning that does, I fear, end up taking that route. This is because of the bifurcation of capacities she allows between pupil and teacher. She is explicit that the capacities of the pupil are the capacities for a teleologically shaped responsiveness; normative capacities are found only in the social practice inhabited by the teacher. The pupil therefore starts outwith the domain of normative capacities, they start in Sellars' space of causes, not the space of reasons and it is left a mystery what their ticket is for entry to the latter.

<sup>10</sup> Fodor & Lepore say learning requires that the pupil already has a mind. I am going to agree, but offer a different account of what sort of mind they need in order to be the sort of subject to whom a teacher can disclose the meaning of words.

<sup>11</sup> See my 'What's doing: activity, naming and Wittgenstein's response to Augustine?', in *Cambridge Companion to the Philosophical Investigations*, Ed. A. Ahmed, C.U.P. forthcoming 2008/09 for discussion of the opening sections on Augustine and the early stages of first language learning.

<sup>12</sup> McGinn, for example, follows Baker & Hacker in the priority she gives to the notion of a grammatical investigation, a descriptive methodology that provides insight into the working of language and makes the problems that had prompted philosophical theorising resolve and, thereby, take away the need for a theoretical or metaphysical account of language. But descriptions that appeal to the 'surround' ( a favourite word in McGinn's book on the *Investigations*) do not make the problem about learning go away.

<sup>13</sup> I take that claim from Peter Hobson's work, cf. Hobson, *The Cradle of Thought*, London: Macmillan, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Op cit p.73. The Pears is volume 2 *False Prison*, p.371. See also Williams' approving quote of RFM pp.165-6: 'I want to say that the *must* correspondes to a track which I lay down in language.', Williams op. cit. p.78.

<sup>15</sup> What surprises me about Williams' 2001 essay is the fact that although there are plenty of references to social practices, it is unclear that they have any real argumentative role left in her account of learning. She gives them the role she always gave them, but the approving quote of Pears and other similar remarks really leave no work for the social practice account of norms.

<sup>16</sup> Think of the role of attention in J. Campbell, *Reference and Consciousness*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> It is a delicate matter to get the scope for arbitrariness right and I have little to say on this point here. It should, however, be noted, that the formulation provided in which teaching works by tuning the pupil's antecedent 'goings-on' is not necessarily a licence for a rampant arbitrariness thesis, for the even the antecedent 'goings-on' are bound by the way the individual's activities are rooted in the natural environment. This provides an externalism, an environmental embeddedness that constrains the opportunities for radical arbitrariness,

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though to what degree precisely this might be so is a matter that must wait on another occasion.

<sup>18</sup> The way this requires individualism rather than a social account of normative order is treated in my 'Judgement, individualism and the source of order' for *Social Reason*, conference Queen's, Ontario....

<sup>19</sup> Baker & Hacker say, 'With language learners such as we, explanation has a pedagogical role only after brute training has laid the foundations of elementary linguistic skills.' (1980: p.71). They then reference *Zettel* §419. But the 'brute' is not in Wittgenstein. *Zettel* §419 has: 'Any explanation has its foundation in training. (Educators ought to remember this.)'

<sup>20</sup> See *Brown Book*, p.90 where Wittgenstein makes clear that he is thinking about training quite sophisticated animal subjects such as dogs, for he explicitly contrasts them with cats.