

Beginning with §1

1.1 Starting with Augustine

One of the hardest things is the beginning. Wittgenstein opens with a quotation from Augustine's *Confessions*. Two questions seem to be unavoidable: (i) Why use Augustine? (ii) What is the role of the Augustine passage in the structure of Wittgenstein's opening remarks? The second question is key. Once we can answer that, the first question mostly takes care of itself. The second question has received different answers since the *Investigations* was published, but most readings give an answer that fits within the following broad schematic:

A Augustine gives voice to a model of what it is for language to have meaning and what it is to learn language meaning and that model is then the object of critique by Wittgenstein.

Baker and Hacker present Wittgenstein as using Augustine to bring into focus an underlying model of linguistic meaning that they call the "Augustinian Conception." They see this as foundational to most extant philosophy of language. They then present Wittgenstein as arguing against this conception and thereby undermining the philosophy of language.

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This provides, in passing, an answer to question (i): Augustine is used, rather than a more recent author, because this reveals the profundity of the critique that Wittgenstein is about to launch. He is setting out to critique something that is so basic to theorizing about linguistic meaning and language acquisition that it can be sourced in the autobiography of a fourth-century monk. Hacker is now less persuaded that the Augustinian conception is quite so dominant in the structure of Wittgenstein's text, but he still holds, as do most commentators, that the *Investigations* opens by criticizing something.¹ Furthermore, Augustine is the source for what is being critiqued. It is the idea that the book opens with a critique of something that is, I think, the fundamental mistake. I shall present the case for denying **A** and, more importantly for denying that the opening sections of the *Investigations* are a critique of something, regardless or where it is sourced.

I start by providing a detailed commentary on the first two sections of the *Investigations*. Patience is key in this territory. Whatever assumptions we make in reading the beginning will shape what we think happens next. There is an enormous amount at stake. I think it is important to try to step back from the interpretations found in the main commentaries and concentrate, in the first instance, on the text. I shall then lay out the basic structure most commentators ascribe to the text and sketch out the main points on which I disagree.

Whether or not it is Augustine or something drawn from Augustine, most commentators take Wittgenstein to be critiquing something, furthermore, something fundamental to the very enterprise of the philosophy of language. And the criticism is organized so that it develops into the critique of ostensive definition. The discussion of ostensive definition does not start until §27, so the idea that it is, somehow, implicated at the very beginning is, at best, contentious and stands in need of clear textual support. Some commentators take it as implicitly in the frame from the beginning (Hacker, 1975; Stern, 2004). Some are a little more guarded, although, if ostensive definition is taken as part of the Augustinian Conception and that is supposed to be under critique from the start, then one must assume that ostensive definition is also implicitly under critique (McGinn, 2013). Williams does not have ostensive definition under critique at the beginning, but she does see the early discussion as setting out a view about language learning that is subject to a bootstrapping problem. It is that problem that she wants to solve with her account of the master/novice relationship. Her account

of that relationship is of a piece with what she thinks is problematic with ostensive definition. So, although her reading is in many respects different to many others, she still shares the conception of the opening sections as setting out problems or ideas that stand in need of critique. To get a handle on whether the book opens with a critique we need to determine what Augustine says and what Wittgenstein says in the first section.

Augustine is describing language learning. More specifically, he describes learning the names of things. It is useful to distinguish three parts to the Augustine passage that Wittgenstein quotes. The first part is the claim about grasping that grown-ups name things by making sounds and turning towards things. This is the first sentence of the quotation:

When grown-ups named some object and at the same time turned towards it, I perceived this, and I grasped that the thing was signified by the sound they uttered, since they meant to point *it* out.

Part 2 is the next two sentences that comprise the bulk of the quotation. These sentences explain how the young Augustine “grasped that the thing was signified.” I’ll come back to part 2 shortly. Part 3 is the final sentence that expresses the result of finding out that sounds can signify things – it enables Augustine to express his wishes:

And once I got my tongue around these signs, I used them to express my wishes.

For the moment, I concentrate on parts 1 and 3. What status should we accord such remarks? As many people have observed, *prima facie*, Augustine’s remarks are unremarkable. It seems banal to say that language learning involves learning the names of things and that, once equipped with language, one can then ask for things! Of course, one thing that makes this seem unremarkable is the scope of such remarks. If taken as something that goes on in language learning, it is unremarkable. If taken as constituting the *essence* of language, it is more contentious. Augustine does not say that the naming of objects and the expression of desire is the essence of language. Indeed, such a claim is questionable in the light of what Augustine says in part 2 of the passage. But before saying any more about Augustine, let us look at what Wittgenstein takes from the Augustine quote.

1.2 Three Things in Section 1

Wittgenstein does three things in §1: he provides a summary of claims about meaning taken from Augustine's words in a two-step distillation (1a); he notes that the claims provided in (1a) treat all words as nouns or assumes that other categories of words provide no real challenge (1b); he provides an example of language use that appears to run quite counter to the claims he has summarized (1c). I start with the two-step distillation from Augustine's passage.

Wittgenstein says that Augustine gives us a "particular picture of the essence of human language" although this remark is qualified with "it seems to me." The picture that Wittgenstein suggests is given by Augustine's words is that

words in language name objects – sentences are combinations of such names
(1a)

The second distillation comes in Wittgenstein's extraction from this picture. The picture provides the roots of the idea:

Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands. (1a)

The first distillation – the Augustinian Picture – provides an instance of the idea that there is such a thing as the essence of language: it takes naming as the essence of language. The second distillation provides an instance of the detail of a theory of naming: the meaning of a name is the object for which it stands. It is the second distillation that has become known as the Augustinian Conception. One could endorse the Augustinian Picture and deny the Augustinian Conception if, for example, one provided a different theory of names. It is important to be clear on the relations between the Augustinian Picture, the Augustinian Conception and the underlying idea that language has an essence.

The first thing that Wittgenstein extracts – the picture in which words name objects – is already an imposition on Augustine. For sure, the only type of word that Augustine mentions is the category of names, as Wittgenstein himself notes (1b). But even if it is right to assume that Augustine holds that all words are names, this leaves untouched a range of issues about how names work, what their meaning is and how their

having meaning does or does not influence or get influenced by issues concerning their combination into complex structures like sentences. The first distillation is, therefore, neutral on a range of substantive philosophical issues. This is not, however, to say that it is banal, for the first distillation is a picture of the *essence* of language. Even if the view that all words are names is neutral with respect to issues about how names get meaning, how we learn their meaning, what the relative significance is of the role of names and the role of the combinatorial structures into which they fit to form sentences, and so on, nevertheless, the Augustinian Picture makes plausible a very basic assumption that can seem to underpin much philosophical theory about language: there is such a thing as the essence of language. So this very first move to the Augustinian Picture is a move that manifests the idea of a general theory of language, a theory that states the essence of language.

The idea of a general theory of language is the idea that there is such a thing as the essence of language. It is a natural development of this to suppose that if there is an essence of language, there is a theoretical enterprise to articulate that essence. Such a theory might take any number of forms depending on what is taken to be the essence of language. The Augustinian Picture provides a model for such a theory in which all words are treated as names. This is a model that has clear historical precedent in Russell's work and in Wittgenstein's own early work. The Augustinian Picture is one model of what a general theory of language might look like. Clearly, one might object to such a model while still holding to the enterprise of providing a general theory of language.

Similarly, the Augustinian Conception is one instance of the model of a theory of language in which all words are names, for the Augustinian Conception provides an account of the meaning of names: the meaning of a name is the object for which it stands. This is referentialism. Other theories of names are available. So one might object to the referentialism of the Augustinian Conception but still endorse the idea that all words are names and thereby also subscribe to the idea of a general theory of language. One might think, for example, that referentialism only applies to certain categories of names and that for others a different theory of naming is required. Or one might think that referentialism is true of no names but some alternative theory is.

There is a hierarchy of theoretical options at stake here. At the most general there is the idea of a general theory of language – language has an essence and it is the job of a philosophical theory of language to articulate

that essence. Next there is the level at which one finds models of the essence of language. The Augustinian Picture can be taken as providing one such model – all words are names and sentences are combinations of names. Finally, there is the detailed theory of how the essential elements of language work. So, if all words are names, a theory of naming would be an instance of a theory of this third level. The Augustinian Conception provides an example of a third level theory – referentialism.

Clearly, a critique of a third level theory such as referentialism does not, of itself, critique the second level thesis that all words are names, let alone the first level thesis that there is an essence to language. Criticizing referentialism might undermine one's confidence in pursuit of a second level theory and indeed the very idea that language has an essence. But matters cannot be straightforward and the connections between the levels are potentially subtle and complex.

Wittgenstein is standardly read as critiquing the Augustinian Conception and, in so doing, undermining the whole edifice of philosophical theories of language, or at least critiquing the opening resources for philosophical theorizing and thereby undermining philosophical theories of language.² Some commentators have noted that, given the significance of the critique that is supposed to be on offer, his arguments are quite slight if not naively formulated.³ It matters that we consider the potential foci for critique. The two main candidates are the very idea of the essence of language and the Augustinian Conception.

The idea that there is an essence to language is a very abstract idea. I suggest that it is this idea alone that Wittgenstein critiques. It is what he calls, at the end of §1, the "philosophical conception." He does not criticize the idea that words are names (many are), nor does he deny that for some cases the meaning of a name is the object for which it stands. In so far as these second and third level claims are criticized it is only ever in so far as they are offered as part of a theory of the essence of language. I will suggest that it is not the specific details of the Augustinian Picture and the Augustinian Conception that Wittgenstein critiques, it is only ever the idea of a theory of the essence of language.

Suppose, for the moment, that Wittgenstein's only object of critique is the idea of a general theory of the essence of language. If that is right, Augustine is not there to embody a specific theory of the essence of language – for example, referentialism – so that Augustinian theory can be critiqued. Rather, Augustine is there for he provides a description of language and language learning that is innocent and in order as it is, even

if that includes, for some words, the idea that their meaning is their respective object. What is critiqued is the attempt to impose a general theory upon Augustine's description. More specifically the language of the builders in §2 is not an example of an Augustinian language to be criticized; it is an illustration of how you can make the idea of naming work for a limited language. In so doing, you achieve no more than getting that limited case right. But what you say of that limited case is okay. It is not mistaken.⁴ What is being examined in the move from §1 to §2 is not the failings of the Augustinian Conception. If anything, what is being critiqued is the philosophical conception that tries to impose a theoretical imposition upon the naming practices of simple languages. The rationale for §2 is, if you like, the thought that we should start with something simpler than Augustine and see if the philosophical conception gets a hold on this very simple language. The conclusion is, surely, that it does not. The move is from the banalities of Augustine's description to the beginnings of theorizing in the light of the philosophical conception (the very idea of an essence of language). It is a move that stalls at the first hurdle. The trajectory of the opening sections is exploratory, not critical. It is exploring how to set out in giving an account of language.⁵ It is not Augustine that is in error, it is the move motivated by the "philosophical conception" to impose a theoretical regimentation upon a description of language use and learning that is, in itself, banal. The error is not Augustine's, it is ours if we succumb to the impulse to think that Augustine's words give us a picture of the essence of language. The error lies with the first moves of philosophy in forcing the banal data into the straight-jacket of the philosophical conception rather than examining the use of words in context. And note, examining the use of words in context is an idea that fits quite well with Augustine's own description. But this means that it is not the details of a specific instance of a philosophical conception that is under critical scrutiny at this stage, it is not the specifics of the "Augustinian Conception."

One further point needs elaborating before proceeding. What is a theory of the essence of language? If this is the target of Wittgenstein's critical remarks, we need a clearer identification of what is at stake. In general, a theory that stated the essence of language would offer a claim about what sorts of things made up language and also a way of providing, for each such element, an account of what it is for it to be meaningful. That is to say, a theory of the essence of language should be able to identify the elements of language and provide an account of the meaning of all such elements.

The Augustinian Picture is an example of the former: the elements of language are names. The Augustinian Conception is an example of the latter: the meaning of a name is the object for which it stands. But there might be other theories of the elements of language and other theories of the meaning of such elements. So how can we fix the idea of a theory of the essence of language without having examples of a theory to criticize? One might think that one can criticize the general idea only by criticizing the specific example and thereby one might think that the Augustinian Picture and the Augustinian Conception must be under critique for how else could Wittgenstein criticize the general idea? But that is too quick. The matter is not that simple.

Any general theory will need to catalog the elements of language. Such a catalog might be unitary (all words are names) or it might allow a diverse classification of types of words. Furthermore, any such general theory would need to provide, for all words, whether unitary or diverse in its catalog, an account of what it is for the word to have meaning. But that means that the target of the general idea of a theory of the essence of language can be identified in the following way. Anything that counted as a theory of the essence of language would need to provide a catalog of the different types of words and, having done so, provide for each word an instance of the schema:

the meaning of *w* is ...

That amounts to the idea that a general theory of the essence of language ought to be able to state, for each word (given its position in the general catalog) its meaning. We might, following a remark of Wittgenstein's in §1, call this the "philosophical conception" of meaning. It is the conception that expects a theory that will, for each word, deliver an instance of the above schema. I shall refer to this philosophical conception as the idea of a canonical articulation of word meaning.⁶ That's what a general theory of the essence of language tries to provide – a canonical articulation of meaning for each element of language. That's the thought that meaning can be theorized in a theory of the essence of language. It is an identifiable target for critique. It is also, I suggest, a regular target of Wittgenstein's investigations. Indeed, contrary to the specifics of the Augustinian Conception, the philosophical conception is the only clearly identifiable target in the opening sections. That, at any rate, is what I now want to argue.

1.3 Names are Fundamental

Augustine provides a description of language learning and language use. Wittgenstein offers a first extraction or distillation from the description. The first distillation amounts to the pair of claims

- (1) words name objects

and

- (2) sentences are combinations of names.

Augustine does not say anything that explicitly commits him to (2), but it is reasonable to hold that if (1) applies to all words, (2) must be the case. Of course, to accept this is to say nothing about how names are combined to form sentences. Without some account of the methods of combination and of how combination exploits the fact that words are names we lack any clear catalog for the essence of language. Furthermore, thus far, nothing has been said about what it is for (1) to be true and certainly nothing has been said to say how words get to name object. As it stands, (1) is just the thought that the naming relation (whatever it is and howsoever it is brought about) is fundamental.

To say, whether on Augustine's behalf or as an extraction from his words, that naming is fundamental is not yet to say much at all. It is simply to say that the category of names is basic and that the naming relation is the most basic semantic relation that there is. The first important issue concerns the relationship between the first distillation and endorsement of (1) and the second distillation the heart of which is the claim,

- (3) the meaning of a word is the object for which it stands.

(3) is an expression of a referentialist theory of meaning – the meaning of a word is the object for which it stands and if (3) applies to all words, then that is to endorse a general referentialism.⁷ On one reading of the idea that names are fundamental, (3) plausibly follows from (1). Suppose the meaning of the claim that names are fundamental amounts to this:

Names are fundamental (strong sense): there is nothing to be said, or explained, or revealed in any way whatsoever about the meaning of a word other than to provide an experience of the object it names.

The strong sense of the thesis that names are fundamental captures the thought that there is no explanation, whether in words or any other way, of what the naming relation is. A tempting extra thought at this point (and it is important that it is an extra thought) would be to add that when there is no explanation of word meaning available, all that is left is to point at the object and say the word. That is to say, the extra thought is that ostension is a primitive method of assigning meaning. We do not explain word meaning, but a word's meaning is assigned in the basic act of pointing at the object and saying the word. This extra thought provides us with a thesis, the discussion of which will occupy a large part of this present study. The thesis is that ostension is a fundamental method of assigning meaning. Again, to say that it is fundamental is to rule out that there is any explanation of how the meaning relation is established; it is achieved by the mechanism of ostension and that this is so is a basic primitive fact about how language connects with the world. If naming is fundamental in this sense, it is plausible to go on to endorse the determination thesis that reference determines grammar, for ostension provides the basic contact between word and thing that determines use of the word.

Whatever other theses might separate most of the main commentators on Wittgenstein, they all agree that in the opening sections of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein is criticizing the idea of ostensive definition as a fundamental explanation of meaning.⁸ None of these commentators provide clarification of what a "fundamental" explanation of meaning is nor what such an explanation requires of the act of ostension. As I show, it matters enormously what we mean by ostensive definition and how that might be different to ostension as such. I treat these matters in the next chapter, but most of the first part of this book is concerned with arguing that Wittgenstein never critiques the idea of ostensive definition as a fundamental account of meaning. It matters therefore that we be clear exactly how and where the notion of ostension gets into the picture in Wittgenstein's text.

Contrast a modest sense of the idea that names are fundamental:

Names are fundamental (modest sense): whatever explanation is given of meaning, the meaning of compound expressions must be given as a function of the meaning of their parts; names are the parts of compound expressions.

The modest sense of the thesis that names are fundamental amounts to the thesis of the compositionality of meaning – the meaning of complex expressions is a function of the meaning of their parts. But this does

not mean that no account can be given of the meaning of the parts and, importantly, it does not rule out that in giving an account of the meaning of the parts one might account for their meaning in terms of how they contribute to the meaning of complex expressions. In short, the modest sense of “fundamental” does not commit us to the strong sense. In contrast, if “fundamental” is taken in the strong sense, then it does seem plausible to think that (1) entails (3).

What does Augustine say? It might be thought that there is clear evidence that Augustine endorses the strong sense of the thesis that names are fundamental, for he says that he grasps that the thing is signified by the sound since the elders “meant to point *it* out.” It is possible that this is implicitly an endorsement by Augustine of the idea that ostension is a primitive, the primitive means by which the meaning of names is established. It is possible that Wittgenstein intends us to be tempted to think this too. But that conclusion is only warranted if Augustine says nothing else by way of explanation of how he grasped that the elders were signifying things by the words they uttered and thereby that Wittgenstein has a place for ostension to figure as a target of critique. But neither of these obtain. Wittgenstein has no place for ostension as a target and Augustine says a very great deal about how he grasped that the elders’ words signified things. Most of what Augustine says is *prima facie* incompatible with the endorsement of (3).

Here is what Augustine says in the central part of the passage that Wittgenstein quotes; it is the passage in which Augustine explains how he grasps that the thing pointed out is signified by the elders’ words:

This, however, I gathered from their gestures, the natural language of all peoples, the language that by means of facial expression and the play of eyes, of the movements of the limbs and the tone of voice, *shows*⁹ the affections of the soul when it desires, or clings to, or rejects, or recoils from, something. In this way, little by little, I learnt to understand what things the words, which I heard uttered in their respective places in various sentences, signified.

This is a rich passage, but here are two obvious things going on. First, Augustine says that pointing to things occurs in a rich context of gestures, a natural language in which we show to others how things are with us. Second, the words whose significance Augustine grasps are used in “their respective places” within sentences. This is a further sense of context,

concerned with the word's position within sentences. Anscombe had translated this as "...their proper places..." That is, perhaps, not quite justified by the German "...ihren bestimmten Stellen in verschiedenen Sätzen..." but "firm" or "definite" would not be out of place. The important point is that the position in a sentence is a position in which the word fits, it is the place that is suited for relevant words to figure. But this means that the child hearing these words and recognizing what they stand for is doing this, in part, due to their ability to hear these words with a sense of how they fit, both in the sense of fit within a context of behavior and fit in the context of complex expressions.

The upshot of the central part of the Augustine passage is that there is, *prima facie*, a clear answer to the question: How does the young Augustine grasp that names stand for things? The answer is that Augustine grasps the naming relation by realizing that names operate within a context that is specifiable in two distinct dimensions – the context of gestures (literally, what we do with words) and the context of their place in larger linguistic units. On this view there is no room for the idea that ostension is primitive. The idea that ostension is primitive – that it provides the fundamental method of assigning meaning – is the idea that it is by the encounter with the object produced by ostension that a meaning is established for a word. But this is not what Augustine says. He says that pointing matters, but he places pointing in a rich context, a context of "the natural language of all peoples." Furthermore, he requires that words are heard in their respective places in sentences. Augustine's description might be wrong, but if it is wrong it is not because it is the simplistic view in which ostension provides some sort of bold primitive encounter with an object that enables the learner to grasp the object as the word's meaning. Augustine's description has pointing work in a rich context. This context includes the behavioral surround in which words are used and it includes a sufficiently rich grasp of something approximating a sense of the systematicity of word use to provide content to the idea that one can hear a word fit in its proper place in sentences.

This notion of a sense of fit is potentially of great interest. There are two assumptions that need identifying about how this notion of fit is commonly conceived. First, it is plausible to assume that for the ability to hear the way a word fits in its linguistic surround, one must have some sense of place or position within larger linguistic structures. Second, it is plausible to think that this sense of place or position within a structure requires a sense of the rules governing such positions. If a sense of place or position

is required to enable grasp of what it is for a word to mean an object then ostension cannot be primitive. The ability to respond appropriately to ostension presupposes some grasp of structure. Endorsing the first assumption means that ostension cannot be primitive. The ability to respond to ostensions requires a grasp of place or position.

It would, however, be premature to assume that the second assumption is licit, to insist that the structure one has to grasp is restricted to linguistic structure conceived as a rule-governed structure. That is to say, the idea that Augustine claims that one must have some sense of a word's fit in structure need not amount to requiring that one have a grasp of rules governing such structure. We should refrain from assuming that a sense of fit always requires a sense of rules.¹⁰ Nothing thus far commits Augustine to that and nothing thus far commits Wittgenstein down the road of taking the sense of fit as presupposing grasp of rules. It is a major theoretical issue whether the idea of a sense of fit/appropriateness to word use has to be grounded in grasp of a rule. I return to this matter in some detail in Chapter 4.

For now it is enough to note the following: whatever the sense of fit or appropriateness is that is at play in Augustine's idea that the child hears words in their "respective" places, it requires something more than just ostension to make sense of this ability. It might involve ostension plus a grasp of the rules that govern structure. Alternatively, it might involve ostension accompanied by a sense of fit where that sense of fit expresses something worth calling a primitive sense of normativity – "primitive" because it is not rule-governed.¹¹ Either way, there is some notion of a sense of structure/fit that provides ostension with the wherewithal to deliver a meaningful experience of word use. So, either way, ostension is not primitive.

Whatever the nature of the structure appealed to by Augustine, pointing cannot be the source for our grasp of meaning, for it only works in the context of a grasp of structures including, perhaps, rule-governed linguistic structures. It would appear that it is the appeal to structure that does the work, not the pointing. On the reading that has structure as rule-governed linguistic structure, Augustine is not saying anything that contradicts Wittgenstein's own use of the idea of ostensive definition as a way of explaining the meaning of a word to those who already understand a significant amount of linguistic structure. Alternatively, there is a reading that has pointing presuppose grasp of a weaker sense of structure. On this alternative reading, structure is whatever is required to provide the learner

with a sense of fit or appropriateness of word use, and where the notion of “fit” is, for the moment, left as a placeholder. This alternative reading leaves open the possibility that the structure required for learning by pointing is less than the fully-fledged structure of language. On this reading, Augustine is agreeing with the model that I shall argue that Wittgenstein endorses. So, either way, what Augustine is saying is in line with Wittgenstein.

What then, is Wittgenstein doing in §1? Kenny pointed out the richness of Augustine’s conception of meaning as reflected in the passage that Wittgenstein quotes and took Wittgenstein’s use of the passage as indicative of Wittgenstein’s poor scholarship!¹² Baker and Hacker take it that Augustine is used as an expository device to enable Wittgenstein to present the ideas that he is critiquing as almost universal and certainly very long-standing. Both of these approaches assume that Wittgenstein is critiquing a model of language, a model in which referentialism as part of an essentialist theory of language is key and for which ostension is a fundamental method in explaining meaning. But the text does not fit happily with either approach. There is an alternative.

Perhaps Wittgenstein is not critiquing a position, let alone a fundamental universal basic set of assumptions that underpin most philosophy of language. Perhaps he is investigating or exploring the very first moves we make in trying to understand the thing that sets us apart from other animals – our grasp of language.¹³ The moves Wittgenstein is investigating are basic ones, but it is not at all clear that he is critiquing those moves, let alone critiquing a clearly identifiable position. Furthermore, the idea that Wittgenstein got Augustine wrong or failed to realize the richness of Augustine’s ideas and the way that they foreshadow some of his own great insights is, I think, simply clumsy. Once we drop the idea that the *Philosophical Investigations* opens with an outline of an erroneous theory of language that Wittgenstein then criticizes, we can begin to make space for the thought that Augustine is there because, unlike most of the writers who came after him, he at least got very little wrong. Augustine gives us the bare opening moves in doing the philosophy of language, not its fundamental errors. The only error is the move that tries to impose a theory of the essence of language upon the data of Augustine’s description. That is not to say that no theorizing can be provided, and it is not to say that it is never right to say that a word is a name or that its meaning is its object. It is, however, to say that such claims, if they have any role, will only be part of a body of piecemeal reflections that illuminate how

language works but does not provide a theory of the essence of language. That, at any rate, is what I want to suggest.

Put simply, §1 does not provide a target. It gives a banal description that we are tempted to regiment with a philosophical theory of the essence of language – the philosophical conception. But that philosophical conception is not at play in the simple example of a primitive language – §2. In §2 Wittgenstein is providing a simpler example than Augustine’s to see if the philosophical conception applies. He is not criticizing the §2 language; it’s a simpler model from which to investigate what moves are appropriate in beginning to do the philosophy of language.

1.4 The Wide Angle View

Let us step back from the details of Wittgenstein’s opening words and sketch in the territory that we need to have in view if we are to make sense of what is going on in the *Philosophical Investigations*. I start with the contrast between the Augustinian picture and the Augustinian conception. The former is the pair of claims that Wittgenstein extracts in his first distillation from Augustine. These are:

- (1) words name objects

and

- (2) sentences are combinations of names.

As already noted, endorsing (1) is neutral with respect to the issue of how words name objects and endorsing (2) is neutral with respect to the issue of how names are combined to form sentences. So the Augustinian picture lacks the wherewithal to make much of a target for critique; there is little on offer thus far to provide content to the mistake being promulgated by this picture. There is, however, a meta-theoretical claim already in view in the Augustinian picture that provides a recurrent target for Wittgenstein’s investigations. Even though (1) and (2) are largely neutral with respect to the specifics of naming and sentence construction, endorsing them seems to amount to endorsing the idea that there is such a thing as a theory of language, a theory that captures the essence of language. It is as a picture of the essence of language that the Augustinian Picture is problematic. That is how Wittgenstein introduces it.

The point of (1) is that it is a claim about *all* words. It has significance when taken as a remark about the essence of words. One might object to (1) on the basis that it ignores important differences between categories of words. This objection is already in place in Wittgenstein's opening observations on the Augustine quote (1b) and recurs throughout the opening sections (§§10–15, 23, 27). But what is the force of this objection? One might object to (1) because one thinks it provides too simplistic a regimentation of language. You might think we need a more sophisticated theory that acknowledges distinctions between different categories of words. Having got a more sophisticated theory one might then proceed to replace (1) with a series of claims, one for each type of word. That, however, does not seem to be Wittgenstein's way of proceeding.

In §2 Wittgenstein provides a primitive idea of names. The builders' language has words for types of objects. Wittgenstein does not deny that the words of language-game §2 are names. In §3 he simply notes that the idea that words are names – (1) – only works for a limited primitive language. That is what he says in §3. But in providing the §2 language Wittgenstein says nothing about what it is for a word to be a name. He does not say what the naming relation consists in, nor does he say yet how names are learnt. So the §2 language takes the use of words as names as, thus far, unproblematic, but he observes that a language with only names is a very limited language. Did Augustine have a theory of names? Arguably not. He has a rich description, but to impose a theory of naming upon that description is, as already noted, problematic. At the point of §§2–3, Wittgenstein has no theory of names, neither as a theory in the frame for critique nor on offer as something he is endorsing. However, it is important to note that when he gets to §6, he proceeds much more slowly and leaves room for an enquiry of the form: if some words are names, how are they learnt and how do they work?

Having developed a simple language along the lines of Augustine's description (§§2–9) Wittgenstein notes that we can describe the uses of words in the language in a similar way. The language has words for objects, words for numbers, the demonstrative expressions "there" and "this." We could explain all these words by using versions of the common form in (1) by saying things like " 'slab' names slab" and "a," "b," and so on, name numbers, and so on. But Wittgenstein notes,

...making the descriptions of the uses of these words similar in this way cannot make the uses themselves any more like one another...they are absolutely unlike. (§10d)

At this stage, Wittgenstein is not ruling out the possibility of a sophisticated theory of language that succeeded in logging all the distinct types of words and producing, for each case, the relevant variations on (1) cataloging the different things that different types of words name. The tone and mode of writing suggests, however, that the diversity of types of words (§11) and types of sentences (§23) undermines the very idea of a regimented theory of language. That is to say, the tone suggests that it is the very idea of a theory of the essence of language that provides a canonical articulation of word meaning that is under scrutiny. Regardless of whether (1) applies to all words, it is the meta-theoretical claim that seems to be under critical scrutiny in Wittgenstein's investigation, namely the very idea that there is such a thing as a theoretically identifiable essence of language, no matter how nuanced it might need to be to mark the distinctions between different categories of words. It is that meta-thesis that becomes the running thread to Wittgenstein's remarks. Much later Wittgenstein will provide the famous formulation that seems to reject the meta-thesis:

For a *large* class of cases of the employment of the word "meaning" – though not for *all* – this word can be explained in this way: the meaning of a word is its use in the language. (§43)

The appeal to use here needs scrutiny, but the likeliest point of the word is to signal the ordinary practices of linguistic activity as contrasted with the attempt to provide a theoretical statement of meaning, something that would enable us to specify the meaning of a word by providing the relevant instance of the schema,

the meaning of *w* is ...

And, of course, the use of the word "use" here in §43 echoes the use in the opening fiction of the shopkeeper in §1:

But what is the meaning of the word "five"? – No such thing was in question here, only how the word "five" is used. (1c)

I suggest then that the Augustinian picture gives us something that is neutral with regard to the specifics of a theory of language but which is, arguably, committed to the idea that there is such a thing as theory of language.

Furthermore, language-game §2 does not provide a specific theory of language, it does not provide a theoretical regimentation for scrutiny or critique. At most, it provides an example of a language for which you might say it has an essence, for all words are names. But it does not provide as yet an account of naming. It certainly is not an ostensive account of naming. All that is on offer here is the point that a language the essence of which is naming would seem to be a very simple language, much simpler than even quite simple early human languages.

1.5 From the Augustinian Conception to Language Games

As it stands, the Augustinian picture is not yet detailed enough to warrant critique; it is unclear where one would start in objecting to it. For sure, one might take the view that the very idea of a theoretical account of linguistic meaning is mistaken, but to have a clear basis for that view one needs some details to probe, one needs the specifics the assessment of which provides the case. It is the Augustinian conception that provides such details.

Baker and Hacker characterize the Augustinian conception as comprising the three claims of Wittgenstein's second distillation from Augustine:

- | | |
|----|---|
| AC | (a) every word has a meaning |
| | (b) the meaning is correlated with the word |
| | (c) the meaning of a word is the object it stands for |

The key thesis is AC(c). This is referentialism. AC(a) and (b) are important in so far as they endorse an implicit reification of meaning. The meaning of a word is a something or other, something to be articulated, described or talked about. It is an item in virtue of which the word (sound, ink mark, syntactic device of some form or another) gets to have semantic power. AC (a) and (b) make it tempting, though not obligatory, to think of meaning as a special something or other that enables otherwise inert syntactic objects like ink marks on the page to have meaning. They make it very tempting to think that for all words there will be a suitable item to be identified, the specification of which will enable completion of the schema,

the meaning of *w* is ...

That line of thought becomes irresistible once AC (c) is on offer, for this now provides a clear and obvious identification of the meaning.

Referentialism about meaning is a theoretical option and one that is both initially plausible and endorsed by many philosophers. Baker and Hacker identify three further theses associated with AC. The first, and for current purposes, the most important is the claim that ostensive definition is the fundamental method of assigning meaning to words. I shall list this as the fourth element of the AC:¹⁴

- (d) ostensive definition is the fundamental method of assigning meaning to a word.

A very great deal hangs on how we understand (d) and in the next chapter I will review the way Wittgenstein understands the concept of “ostensive definition” and the role he allows for ostension. For the moment, it is enough to note that nearly every commentator on the *Investigations* takes Wittgenstein to be arguing against (d). Furthermore, because (d) is such a natural thesis to endorse if one endorses (c), then they are, *ipso facto*, construing Wittgenstein as arguing against referentialism. (d) is the natural complement to (c).

Suppose (c) is true. If referentialism exhausts the account of the meaning of a word there is nothing to be said by way of explaining a word’s meaning. If the meaning is the object, then it is not *the way in which the object is picked out* and it is not *the way the object is correlated to the word*, or *the way the object is perceived or experienced as correlated with the object*. Such formulations would provide something to be known, something to be grasped about the word’s meaning. But if the meaning is simply the object itself, then it becomes difficult to see what could constitute assigning an object as the meaning of a word other than by ostensively providing an encounter with the object in the presence of an utterance of the word. More needs to be said about the nature of that encounter, but for present purposes, enough has been said to show why it is natural to endorse (d) if one has endorsed (c). Accordingly, a critique of ostensive definition would be expected to form a large part of a critique of the underlying referentialism.

There are two other theses that Baker and Hacker associate with the Augustinian conception, although curiously in both cases they say they are linked with Augustine’s “picture,” not the Augustinian conception. The two theses are that children can think prior to learning a language and

that the essential function of sentences is to describe how things are. Taking their formulation, these are,

- (e) the child can think, i.e. talk to itself (in the language of thought, as it were), before it learns its mother tongue from its parents.

and,

- (f) the essential function of sentences is to describe how things are.

Note that the formulation of (e) is quite specific and articulates much more than can be taken from Augustine's own words. There is no doubt that Augustine's description of language learning has the child thinking, for he presents the learning of what the elders are doing with words as a working out, a process of some sort of ratiocination that exploits the child's understanding of a rich array of information. And the final sentence is naturally read as implying that the child had an array of wishes in place just waiting for the acquisition of the signs by which they could be expressed. Even that last point does not quite support the formulation of (e) that Baker and Hacker provide, for a child might have wishes prior to language, but that does not mean that their wishes have just the shape, structure and connection that they exhibit once the child has a language with which to express and, perhaps, understand itself. Nevertheless, what does seem incontrovertible is that, whatever the details, Augustine's description of the child learning language is a description of a subject with a mind with a good deal of cognitive architecture prior to the acquisition of language. And Wittgenstein himself (§32) suggests that Augustine's model of language learning looks more like second-language learning rather than first-language learning. Clearly, if the cognitive architecture that Augustine presupposes for the child is language-like in structure, that would be a model of language learning as second-language learning. That is a problematic model.¹⁵ It is a version of mentalism, by which I mean the thesis that grammar is determined, in part, by the architecture of the mind. It is, however, a particularly empty and fruitless version of mentalism. Mentalism as such need not be empty or fruitless. If the natural architecture of the mind is less than that of the structure of language, there is scope for genuine explanatory content to the claim that first language learning draws upon the natural architecture of the mind. On that view mentalism would be a substantive thesis. One of the striking theses that I shall

promote is that Wittgenstein endorses (or, at least, leaves space for) mentalism as a substantive thesis.¹⁶

What I want to concentrate on, however, is (d) and, thereby, (c). The issue I want to explore thoroughly is whether Wittgenstein criticizes the idea of ostensive definition as a fundamental method of assigning meaning to words. It is the standard view that this is what he does. And most people who hold this also hold that in criticizing this view he is criticizing something that he has found in Augustine. Both of these claims are, I think, demonstrably false. Reading the *Investigations* without starting with the assumption that the text is a focused onslaught on the underlying assumptions of post-war late twentieth-century philosophy of language, reveals that the opening structure is nothing like as straightforward as the standard reading has it. Before turning to the details concerning ostensive definition, I want to examine the transition from §1 to §2 and put that transition in the context of the first seven sections.

Here is a tempting first thought about the transition from §1–§2. §1 provides a model of language meaning which is then tested with the example of the builders in §2. The role of the primitive language described in §2 is to offer a criticism of the model found in §1. This criticism is expressed in §3 where the limitations of the model from §1 are revealed by the restricted application of that model in the very limited circumstances of the §2 language.¹⁷ This sketch of the opening structure is fraught with difficulties.

Section 1 closes with Wittgenstein's interlocutor asking for the meaning of the word "five." Wittgenstein's reply was that no such thing was in question in describing the language of the shopkeeper. Assume for the moment that this opposition is the opposition between the philosopher looking for a theoretical statement of the meaning of a word and Wittgenstein's rejection of the urge to provide such statements. In place of a theoretical statement of meaning, he offers us the description of how the word is used. The stand-off at this stage is then between theoretical statements about meaning and descriptions of use. Section 2 opens with a reference to this philosophical notion of meaning and I take this to refer to the urge to provide a theoretical account of the meaning of a word. When Wittgenstein says,

That philosophical notion of meaning is at home in a primitive idea of the way language functions (§2a)

we should not assume that the "primitive idea of the way language functions" is Augustine's. Augustine gives us a description of language

learning. That description supports two distillations. The first of these is, arguably, intrinsic to Augustine's description, but it is hardly a philosophical notion of meaning, for the Augustinian Picture ((1) & (2)) is philosophically neutral. It is the Augustinian Conception that packs a philosophical punch, but that clearly comprises much more than Augustine says and is incompatible with Augustine's own words. The idea of a "primitive idea of the way language functions" is then converted to that of an idea of a language "more primitive than ours" as the home for the philosophical notion of meaning. So, as we turn to the second paragraph of §2 and the example of the builder and assistant, what is this example meant to exemplify? Most people take §2 as showing the limitations of the model of language found in §1.¹⁸ For that to be the case, the example needs to exemplify the model of language under critique. The natural candidate for that would then be the "philosophical notion of meaning" that has its place in a primitive idea of how language works. And if the model under critique is Augustine's, then the primitive idea in question had better be Augustine's. But none of this hangs together in the right way for this to be what is going on.

Section 2b starts with Wittgenstein asking us to imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right. The first key question concerns what he means by the "description given by Augustine." Here are three candidates for what he means: he might mean the description given by the whole of the Augustine quote in §1; he might mean the Augustinian Picture; he might mean the Augustinian Conception. The last candidate – the Augustinian Conception – would provide a candidate for a philosophical conception, for it embodies referentialism as a thesis about meaning and arguably also commits us to ostensive definition as the basic method for assigning meaning to words. It is, however, difficult to make sense of how this philosophical conception is instantiated in the language of §2. For one thing, there is nothing in the description of the builders' language that suggests that referentialism as a theoretical option is being illustrated. For sure, in some sense, the meaning of the words of that language – "block," "pillar," "slab" and "beam" is the corresponding object, for they are names. The words are names for types of building stones. No doubt also, that if one were to ask the builder what "block" means, he would point to a block. Except, of course, one cannot ask the builder that, for there are no other words in the language (2). Furthermore, the way the words are used in the practice of building is as much as a request or order for an action – the delivery of the appropriate stone. So, it

is plausible to say that the language in (2) contains names, but whether that is enough to say that the example endorses referentialism, let alone referentialism as an object of critique, is contentious.

Further, there are no sentences in the §2 language; there are no compound linguistic strings, just the four one word utterances. And even if one thought that these utterances were elliptical expressions for sentences, the sentences are hardly descriptions that express how things are with the world.¹⁹ Of course, these words are plausibly taken as referring to different types of object. They are names for types of things, but that does not make them words the meaning of which is the object for which it stands. The words are not used simply to stand for objects. At best, we might allow that the words of language §2 can stand for things, including types of things, but at most this makes the language of §2 exemplify Augustine's description in the sense of the whole description found in the §1 quotation, not a theoretical derivation from that description. Referentialism is not part of this language for which Augustine's description is right. At most, the first part of the Augustinian Picture is manifest in language-game §2 – words are names, but even this is not criticized as such. The observation at §3 is that providing an example of such essentialism works only by providing a very limited example of a language.

Another way of fixing what is happening here is to concentrate on the closing of §1. The voice of the philosophical conception of meaning is the voice that asks,

But what is the meaning of the word "five"?

to which Wittgenstein responds,

No such thing was in question here, only how the word "five" is used.

So what is at stake in the voice that articulates the urge for a philosophical conception of meaning? The most straightforward reading of this is that this is a voice that expects the above question to be answered. That is to say, if nothing else, the philosophical conception of meaning is a conception that expects for any given word, that there will be an account of its meaning that can be obtained by completing the schema:

the meaning of *w* is ...

where what completes the schema is something that is fully expressible. The caveat that the instantiation of the schema is fully expressible is not, itself, fully articulate, but the thought here is that there should be, for every word, a fully expressible instantiation of the schema that provides a canonical articulation of the word's meaning. So, to complete the schema with the phrase, "...its use in language" does not count as a contribution to the philosophical conception.

If that is the philosophical conception of meaning, it commits us at least to the idea that there is such a thing as the essence of language, the idea that there is something that should be fully expressible about the meaning of a word. That naturally suggests the idea of some sort of theory, an account of meaning that would deliver, for any given word, a statement of the word's meaning. Now that idea is suggested by the Augustinian Picture, but it is still not part of Augustine's description even if that description can give us a picture of the essence of language. And although the philosophical conception of meaning is a precondition for the claims that constitute the Augustinian Conception, the latter is just one way of filling out the philosophical conception. It is the move from Augustine's description to the Augustinian Picture that is the first step in philosophical theorizing about language. It is that move that is, I suggest, being scrutinized in these opening investigations. It is the move that takes us from Augustine's description into the two distillations that Wittgenstein drew in §1. And even if it is those distillations that provide a target for critique, that does not mean that it is one or other of those distillations that is being portrayed in §2. Indeed, as noted, it is awkward to suppose that the language of §2 embodies those distillations. It is far more likely that if anything is under critique (perhaps better, simply to say "scrutiny") it is the move from the banalities of Augustine's description to the attempt to begin a theorization of language via the distillations. What is in focus at the end of §1 is no more than the philosophical conception. It is then this that is scrutinized by constructing a primitive language that fits Augustine's description.

I suggest then that what is being illustrated with the example in §2 is no more than a primitive language for which Augustine's description is true. If that is right, then this is not and, indeed, cannot yet be something for critique, for Augustine's description is the data from which theorizing and the temptation to move to a philosophical conception emerges, where the

latter is the move to a position in which we can formulate, for any given word, a statement of the form,

the meaning of *w* is ...

So, on this reading, what §2 provides is a primitive language for which Augustine's description is right. Words are names, they are learnt by people pointing at things and saying the word. That, as an element of Augustine's description, is banal until we add the account of what makes such learning and word use possible. Augustine's description suggests this takes place in a varied context of activity and word use and that is precisely what seems to be on offer in §2. Even the thought that §2 illustrates the Augustinian Picture as a model of the essence of language is premature. For sure, all the words of §2 language are names, but nothing much hangs on that until we have an account of what names are, how they work and how they are learnt. Those matters are not addressed. Language-game §2 is more like an extension of Augustine's description; it provides data yet to be mined, rather than an erroneous theory to be critiqued.

Wittgenstein's own description of this primitive language is quite clear. The builders are at work building a structure. The assistant, B, has to pass stones to A in the order in which A needs them. And Wittgenstein says that it is "for this purpose" that they make use of the language containing the four words "block," "pillar," "slab" and "beam." He says, "A calls them out; B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call." It is quite clear that this primitive language is embedded in the context of a moderately rich behavior. The builder A has need of stones in the right order and by using these words gets the assistant to deliver the appropriate item. The utterances are like requests or perhaps orders for a certain action, the delivery of a certain type of item. None of this sounds like the Augustinian Conception. It does, however, sound like Augustine's description. There is a rich context of behavior in the builders' example, behavior that is purposeful. There is a shared activity in which the actors have roles that warrant labeling as "builder" and "assistant." I think Wittgenstein is doing what he says he is doing. He is considering a very simple language for which Augustine's description fits and seeing whether it makes sense to move on from that and start to do philosophy in the mode of the idea whose roots one might find in the picture we are tempted to take from Augustine's description. That is the beginning of the move

from a description that is benign to the philosophical conception that is problematic. It is not Augustine that is being criticized, it is not even yet the Augustinian Conception; rather, Wittgenstein is investigating the first moves in starting to do a philosophy of language. But this is not to say that the §2 example is itself an instance of doing the philosophy of language, let alone doing it under the influence of the Augustinian Conception. As noted above, it seems quite clear that it is not a language that fits that conception. It is an example that is, given the context of the description, just like Augustine's description – it is benign. It is what we might be tempted to say about it that is problematic. If we say it supports essentialism (the Augustinian Picture) then that is what §3 debunks. But that is not to debunk language-game §2, for that is okay as it is as a primitive use of words in a primitive context of purposeful activity. There is no clear case for saying either that Augustine was tempted to make such moves or that Wittgenstein thought he was.

It is important to recall the dialogic character of the text. Wittgenstein invites us into conversation and investigation. Is he teasing us by the way he uses Augustine? I think not. I think he is trying to get us to see that the benign opening description by Augustine is fine *as a description*, but that once we try to find underlying ideas rooted in that description, it all becomes much more complicated if not impossible. At this stage, all that Wittgenstein's riposte in §3 amounts to is the pointing out of the limited scope of the idea that words are names. This is an idea that Augustine seems to endorse but one that it is difficult to follow through even in the case of very simple languages. At this stage, Wittgenstein is not targeting a philosophical conception but the first beginnings of the birth of a philosophical conception. A consequence of this is that by killing off at birth the attempt to find a philosophical conception that embodies the theses identified with the Augustinian Conception, Wittgenstein will have no need to critique ostensive definition. But that fits the text exactly, for as I show in the next chapter, there is nowhere that Wittgenstein critiques ostensive definition as a fundamental assignment of meaning to words.

But let us pursue the development of the text a little further. I am suggesting that the builders' language in §2 is not an object for critique. There is nothing wrong with the language as described.²⁰ It is a bona fide language and, in the terms in which it is described, a language that could be learnt just as Wittgenstein, following Augustine, describes it being learnt. In the very first sections, all that is being probed is the philosophical conception in the form of the Augustinian Picture that words name objects.²¹

Augustine seems to think that words name objects, but does not subscribe to the philosophical thesis that the meaning of a name is the object, for he allows a rich account of how the relationship between name and object is established and that account seems, *prima facie*, incompatible with referentialism. Without the philosophical account of the Augustinian Conception, it is unclear what, if anything, follows from the claim that words name objects. The first distillation is too imprecise, but even so it becomes strained to hold that all words name objects. That is the point of the riposte in §§3 and 4. But none of this is to hold that there is anything wrong with §2 language as described.

In §5, it is the example from §1 that is referenced as problematic, for there is so much going on in that example that

The general concept of the meaning of a word surrounds the working of language with a haze which makes clear vision impossible. (§5a)

That is why we need examples of primitive language so that we can see the use clearly and recognize the role of use in an account of meaning rather than rushing to formulate theorems of the form

the meaning of *w* is ...

Further evidence that Wittgenstein is happy to endorse the §2 language as a *bona fide* language and is not critiquing it or how it works flows from the closing remark of §5. Having emphasized again the utility of primitive languages to enable a clear view of meaning, Wittgenstein says,

A child uses such primitive forms of language when he learns to talk. Here the teaching of language is not explaining, but training. (§5b)

The distinction between explanation and training is pivotal here and throughout Wittgenstein's text, especially in §6.²² But note this, there is no reason for supposing that Augustine's description in the passage quoted in §1 is a description of language learning by explanation rather than training. The passage is neutral with regard to that distinction. Augustine refers to a rich context of activities in which the learning of names works, but what he says does not commit him to holding that word learning is achieved by explanation rather than by training. For sure, the sophistication of the prior mental equipment of the infant suggests that he has the

resources to treat the learning encounter with the elders as an explanation of meaning, if the context of “the natural language of all peoples” is taken as something for which the infant has some sort of proto-theoretical representation. But that is a massive imposition upon Augustine and it would be just as natural to treat the ability to respond to gestures as the basis for training. There is simply not enough in Augustine’s own words to determine the right model here. It is, however, clear to Wittgenstein that the right model is training, not explanation.

Having raised the explanation/training distinction in §5, Wittgenstein deploys it again in §6. Discussion of that deployment can be delayed until Chapter 2 where it is critical in assessing Wittgenstein’s attitude to ostensive definition, but note what he says in §7 with the distinction between explanation and training in place and the idea that it is training that matters for language learning. Here are the first two paragraphs of §7 in full:

In the practice of the use of language (2) one party calls out the words, the other acts on them. However in instruction in the language the following process will occur: the learner *names* the objects; that is, he utters the word when the teacher points at the stone. – Indeed, there will be an even simpler exercise: the pupil repeats the words after the teacher – both of these being speech-like processes.

We can also think of the whole process of using words in (2) as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these games “*language-games*” and will sometimes speak of a primitive language as a language-game.

This section is famous for the introduction of the concept of a language-game, but there is much else that is important here. The first thing to note is the distinction in §7a between practice in the use of language and instruction in language. In practice, a word is said and the other acts on it. In practice then, the use of the word is to instigate action. If knowing the meaning is knowing the use, then in practice with language (2), the meaning of the word is not the object. In training with the word, the word is used in a different way. Here the learner names the object, saying the word when the teacher points at the object. That suggests that in training the meaning is the object, but that is only because the training is a preparatory activity to the acquired practice of using the word to obtain delivery of the right building material. As noted, if we were able to ask the builder what “block” means, no doubt he would point to the stone. But we

cannot ask this. He lacks the resources for understanding the question. And even if he did point to the stone as the meaning, that does not mean that we have an example of a view about meaning in which the word's object is the meaning and that meaning is the theoretical basis for the practice or use of the word. The discussion of the builders in §2 does not include the training activity in which the pupil repeats the word after the teacher's pointing. But if it did, on the evidence of §7, Wittgenstein would surely allow such a response without that impugning the point of §2 as it appears: in the use of the language, one party calls out the words and the other acts on them. Word use is found in the activity of building, not merely in the pointing and repetition. In §2 we simply have an example of the language in practice. The same applies to Augustine's description of language in §1: there is no training in that example, just the observation by the child of the practice of language use. Wittgenstein also notes an even simpler use of the word than training, when the pupil repeats the word after the teacher, (§7). All these cases are speech-like processes. And, most important of all, Wittgenstein treats all of these cases as games, as language-games. So, training is a game.

If the idea of a game is to do some work, then training involves trainees with the ability to play. Quite what that means is not clear, but it is suggestive of the idea that it requires abilities more than simply the ability to have behavior reinforced by reward; it suggests training involves more than simple S-R conditioning. I return to this point in Chapter 2. Second, the idea of a game in which the learner repeats words after the teacher is represented as a description of something that happens in language learning. It is not something that is being critiqued or even denied, it is a positive offering of how it is in learning words. The description here is of a piece with other examples in Wittgenstein's writings.²³ Third, Wittgenstein speaks of activities that are not yet fully language-user activities, they are language-learner activities. He distinguishes two processes, one involving pointing by the teacher and one not, which are both "speech-like processes." He allows these as "language-games" even though they are differentiated from the use of words by speakers who are masters of the language. The term "language-game" is being explicitly introduced to cover a range of activities. The extent of that range is often remarked on for, as he concludes in §7d, he will also call the "whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven, a 'language-game.'" That is important, for it shows the richness of the items that the phrase covers. For now, the point I want to stress is the range of use for

the concept of a language-game in, as it were, the opposite direction: it applies to activities in which one is trained into language but where one's use of words is less than the fully-fledged grasp of their grammar, for it is a use that is grounded in activities that do not include grasp of linguistic structures sufficient to enable grasp of the concept of names and the use of demonstratives. The pupil playing the game of learning, cannot yet ask questions like, "What is the name of this?" "What is this called?" and "What is this?"

The fact that Wittgenstein's description of the primitive language in §2 fits within the compass of a range of texts in which he deploys similar languages and descriptions of the learning of such languages in ways that are positive, not critical, reinforces my central point about the §2 language. This is not an object for critique. It is data for investigation. What would be critiqued would be the attempt to use such examples as a platform for a philosophical conception of meaning, for example one that endorsed the Augustinian Conception. But §2 language does not fit that; it satisfies at most Augustine's description which is just what Wittgenstein says.

My central suggestion about the way the text moves from §1 to §2 is that the arc of the text is positive and exploratory rather than negative and critical. Most commentators take the latter view; they see the text as introducing a model of language learning and critiquing it. In contrast, I take the text to be providing a description of language learning and tentatively exploring it and doing so in a way that is wary of and resistant to the urge to theorize meaning in the manner of the philosophical conception. The latter is the view that meaning is theorizable to the extent that there is, for all words, a fully expressible instance of the schema

the meaning of *w* is ...

Of course, if the description of language learning being explored by Wittgenstein requires ostensive definition to fill the role of fundamental assignment of meaning to words, if this passage and those immediately after it are evidence of ostensive definition coming under critique, then my suggestion that Wittgenstein's text has at best an investigative exploratory arc would look fragile. But, as I show in the next chapter, Wittgenstein nowhere criticizes ostensive definition as a fundamental assignment of meaning to words.

Notes

1. See Hacker's comment in Baker and Hacker (2005) p. xv. where he says that the emphasis on the Augustinian Conception was overstated, although he still sees it as a "leitmotif" running through much of the text. But many still endorse the idea that something approximating what Baker and Hacker identified is the target, whether they take Augustine as the target, the Augustinian picture or the Augustinian conception. See McGinn (2013) esp Chapter 2; Child (2011) pp. 88–92; Glock (1996) p. 41, Ahmed (2010), Chapter 3, Williams (2013) p. 2. Others like Fogelin (1976/87) and Stern (2004) are less convinced that there is a clear theoretical target to Wittgenstein's critique, see Stern (2004) pp. 71ff for good discussion of this. But they still see the opening as critical in spirit, an interrogation of the sources of philosophizing rather than a critique of its results, see Fogelin (1976/87) p. 110. See also Goldfarb (1983). Despite agreeing with the consensus that Wittgenstein opens with a "diagnostic critique of the Augustinian picture," Williams is one of the few commentators to take seriously the developmental issues at stake in the opening paragraphs, see her discussion of the distinction between explanation, teaching and training (2011). Although welcome, this move is part of a larger strategy of providing a broadly communitarian account of the master/novice relation. Although she has always seen accounting for the teacher/pupil relationship as inviting a significant bootstrapping problem (I agree, she sees this as one of a series of problems to be solved by a communitarian account of "normative similarity." Apart from the point that the issue about normativity is much more contentious than she allows, I think the communitarian approach is fundamentally ill-conceived. This is a project that is continuous with Williams' earlier insightful discussions of Wittgenstein on learning (1984). More on this in Chapter 4.
2. Baker and Hacker (1980/2005) pp.1–28; McGinn (2013) pp. 35–77, Stern (2004) Chapter 4, Fogelin (1976/87) pp. 107–143; Child (2010) pp. 87–94.
3. See Stern (2004) p. 82 for the charge that the positions Wittgenstein attacks are "remarkably naïve." See Child (2010) pp. 87–94 for discussion of the options available to orthodox referentialism to respond to the "disarmingly simple" critique that Wittgenstein offers against referentialism.
4. As I shall show, §2 language does not include referentialism as a target for critique.
5. I say "account" because it is yet to be settled whether an account of language includes only description or can include theoretical and explanatory moves. I think Wittgenstein allows the latter, but that point needs to be established, hence the neutral "account" at this stage.
6. Cf Pears (2006) p. 25 who takes the idea of a theory of meaning as a theory, "like a theory of any other activity, that can be expressed in words." Pears takes this as the target of the *reductio* argument in the rule-following considerations.

7. On Baker and Hacker's influential reading, referentialism is a key part of the Augustinian conception and one of Wittgenstein's targets in the opening sections. Even though Stern (2004) is skeptical that the text works in such a linear trajectory as Baker and Hacker have it, he also finds referentialism as a target. Child (2010) has Wittgenstein critiquing referentialism although Child notes that the argument is sketchy.
8. Classics here are Hacker (1975) and Baker and Hacker (1980/2005), p. 2 where the idea of ostensive definition constituting the foundations of language is identified as the fourth element of the Augustinian Conception. Later commentators, regardless of what they make of the Augustinian Conception, follow Baker and Hacker in finding ostensive definition a target of Wittgenstein's opening discussion. See, for example: Stern (2004): "one of the leading themes of the opening sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* is an attack on the idea that ostensive definition provides the point of departure for an understanding of the relationship between words and the world," p.110, cf. also p.17 "One of the principal approaches under discussion in §§1–38 is the view that ostensive definition – explaining a word's meaning by pointing at an object – is the basis of meaning"; Fogelin (1976/1987): "if we take ostensive definition as the *fundamental* method of assigning meanings to words, we have failed to realize that the activity of giving an ostensive definition makes sense only within the context of a previously established linguistic framework" p.118. McGinn (2013) is slightly more nuanced in her approach, but she still sees the criticism of ostensive definition in §§27 ff. as part of a larger critique of Augustine's picture of language, see p. 64. Glock (1996) p. 41 follows Baker and Hacker in having ostensive definition as one of the five defining theses of the Augustinian Conception. Williams (2010) sees Wittgenstein's critique of ostensive definition as providing the first example of Wittgenstein's treatment of the problem of normative similarity, see p.77 ff. None of these authors clarify what is meant by treating ostensive definition as "fundamental," although Fogelin's emphasis seems to suggest that he means it in what I have called the strong sense.
9. In the fourth edition, Hacker and Schulte have "indicates" here where previously Anscombe had "expresses." The difference is slight but could be misleading. I have given the slightly more neutral "shows." The use of "indicates" is potentially misleading, for it can suggest the idea of representation, as if the gestures that Augustine is speaking of represent or stand for various states and conditions of the mind, where the notion of representation accommodates the possibility that what represents (in this case the behavior) can occur without that which it represents (the state of mind). This sense of represents has the behavior providing defeasible indication of the mind, rather than direct indication. The German "*anzeigen*" is more like show in the sense of "to give recognition," or to make someone aware of something; it suggests a more direct notion, hence Anscombe's "expresses." In English, "indicate" can be

used to signal a direct showing of something, or it can be used to suggest a more indirect showing that perhaps only hints at the thing indicated, a showing that falls short of delivering the indicated item. In German that is the difference between *anzeigen* and *andeuten*. Anscombe's translation is not warranted given the German, but its sense is not so far from the meaning of "anzeigen" as "indicates" might suggest if that is heard in the indirect sense which, in German, would have been rendered with "andeuten." Here is the key point: the German *anzeigen* does not rule out the possibility that the natural gestures reveal our state of mind rather than simply stand for or represent or give defeasible evidence for the state of mind. That is to say, there is a way of reading Augustine at this point that provides a revelatory status for natural gestures: they reveal how things are for us in our minds, our mental state is revealed in or shown in ("expressed in" was Anscombe's version) our natural gestures. This is an important idea and, arguably, one of the key ideas to understanding Wittgenstein's account of the relation between mind and body. The translation offered by Hacker and Schulte can leave this option hidden given the elasticity of the English word "indicates."

10. Keeping these things separate is key to how we understand whatever notion of normativity we think applies to linguistic regularity and it is critical for acknowledging the space for what Ginsborg (2011) identifies as the concept of primitive normativity.
11. This is the sense of "primitive" that Ginsborg advocates in her theory of primitive normativity, *op. cit.*
12. Kenny (1973), Fogelin (1976/1987) also queries Wittgenstein's scholarship on this point.
13. Goldfarb (1983) was one of the first to offer the idea of a more exploratory reading of the opening sections. Stern's (2004) welcome emphasis on the dialogic structure of the text pushes in this direction although Stern still sees the opening sections as offering a critique of referentialism and of ostensive definition, see detailed references in footnote 8. Fogelin (2009) endorses the idea that Wittgenstein is exploring the very first moves that start the philosophy of language, but then takes the exploration to offer the negative result that all such moves should be excised by the therapy of a defactoist description of language use.
14. Baker and Hacker (1980/2005) p. 2. They say that Wittgenstein implicitly in PI (§6) and explicitly in the *Big Typescript* and *The Principles of Linguistic Philosophy* endorses this claim about ostensive definition. I treat §6 at length below; the references to the *Big Typescript* and *The Principles of Linguistic Philosophy* are poor evidence for (d), for much hangs on how the adjective "fundamental" is taken in the passages they quote. It's notable that the textual evidence for this is cited as "implicitly (PI§6)" and the *Big Typescript* p. 25. Given that PI §6 is explicitly not talking about ostensive definition, this is a curious basis for taking ostensive definition as an element to the

- conception that is allegedly being subjected to criticism. The text at *Big Typescript* p. 25 uses “fundamental” in the context of the remark that Augustine takes names as the basic or core function of language. In that context, he says that “explanations of the form ... ‘this is...’ are fundamental.” But that doesn’t mean that such explanations are fundamental in the sense of reaching outside language; it just means that explanations of naming are the basic explanation. It’s curious that Wittgenstein, of all people, should have his banal commonplace use of a phrase misconstrued as a theoretically loaded use. I return to the issue about “fundamental” below, see Chapter 2.
15. It is, however, a model championed by Fodor, see Fodor (1975) and see Fodor and Lepore (2007) for an excellent critique of Brandom’s inferentialism with pithy sideswipes at Wittgenstein along the way. Their criticism of Wittgenstein’s use of “training” to account for language learning misses the sophistication of Wittgenstein’s own position, but picks up real problems for many of his commentators.
 16. Given earlier comments, this is not to deny the autonomy of grammar, unless that concept is taken in Baker and Hacker’s sense rather than Wittgenstein’s, cf. Chapter 3 below.
 17. Stern (2004) p.11 calls this an argument, dubbed the “method of section 2.” The phrase is, of course, Wittgenstein’s, but whether it refers to an argument, let alone a critique is much less clear. Stern’s model of the “method of section 2” three-stage argument is that first we get a formulation of a thesis, then an example of that thesis in operation, followed by the deflationary observation that the example is limited in application.
 18. For example, Stern (2004), Baker and Hacker (1980/2005); Ahmed (2010); Williams (2013).
 19. So item (f) from the Augustinian Conception is not in the frame here.
 20. Unless it’s not really a language, for that option see Rhees (1970) p.76, Brandom (2000), p.14; Goldfarb (1983), see Williams (2013) for further discussion.
 21. Strictly speaking, what I have dubbed the “philosophical conception” is potentially stronger than the Augustinian Picture. The latter states that words are names. Without a further account of how the naming relation works, that does not commit us to the idea that for all words it should be possible to provide a completion of the meaning schema. The Augustinian Picture could itself be banal if one gave a varied and complex account of how naming works. But if that were so, very little content is left to the Augustinian Picture and one might wonder why anyone would advocate it in the absence of an expectation that its development would answer to the philosophical conception.
 22. I defer detailed discussion of §6 to the next chapter where it is critical in assessing Wittgenstein’s attitude to ostensive definition.
 23. Cf. the passage in WLC32–35 with mother and child playing with bricks, p.102; also BB pp. 77, 81. I discuss these further in the next chapter.