The Blue Book on Solipsism and the uses of 'I'
A Dialectical Reading

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resumo Este artigo defende uma leitura dialética dos lembretes gramaticais de Wittgenstein acerca dos usos do pronome de primeira pessoa no *Livro Azul*. Contra uma visão "não-referencial" bastante comum, que trata esses lembretes como tentativas diretas de bloquear resultados metafísicos substanciais, a leitura aqui proposta enfatizará sua função terapêutica, tomando-os como partes de um processo dialético que tem por fim revelar as fontes de algumas tentações filosóficas, entre elas particularmente o solipsismo, com o intuito de enfraquecer seu fascínio.

palavras-chave Wittgenstein; Solipsismo; Primeira pessoa; Privacidade; Subjetividade; Identidade pessoal

> What the solipsist wants is not a notation in which the ego has a monopoly, but one in which the ego vanishes.
> Ludwig Wittgenstein[1]

1. Introduction

From his earliest recorded philosophical reflections Wittgenstein was interested in the connection between the temptation to embrace some form of solipsism and certain confusions concerning the grammar of the first person pronoun[2]; eventually, he also came to believe that the joint treatment of those issues would be an effective – perhaps *the* most effec-

tive – way of blocking some of the major sources of philosophical confusion arising in the analysis of language in general, particularly that portion of language used to talk about our 'personal experiences'.

One of the most sustained and detailed analyses of these issues occurs in *The Blue Book*[3]. Among the claims advanced in that analysis one shall find some of the most surprisingly counter-intuitive, as well as some of the most remarkably trivial in all of his writings. To the first category belong the claim that the pronoun 'I' does not refer to anything – be it a body, a soul or a person[4]; regarding the second category, an example is the claim that 'In "I have pain", "I" is not a demonstrative pronoun'[5]. As it often happens with Wittgenstein's writings, those claims pose a difficult challenge for the reader, who might find herself unable to grasp their meaning or relevance. It will be part of my task here to show that an important source of that difficulty might lie in the reader's own failure to take notice of the peculiar nature of Wittgenstein's philosophical prose, and accordingly engage in the process of self-examination and self-criticism that he set up for them – and, before them, for his students[6].

A striking illustration of the approach I am aiming at is the widespread opinion that Wittgenstein would have been one of the first philosophers willing to question a central assumption of the traditional view of subjectivity[7], viz., that the first person pronoun has a *referential* role in 'self-ascriptive'[8] statements employing psychological predicates in the present tense of the indicative mood[9]. Let us call that view the 'non-referential view'. Despite finding *prima facie* strong textual support, I take it that the non-referential view unduly simplifies Wittgenstein's stance on the issue of the grammar of the first person, leading to a number of exegetical and philosophical misunderstandings whose culmination is the attempt to extract from his remarks a straightforward refutation of positions such as dualism, behaviourism, idealism or solipsism[10] – i.e., some of the views which, precisely in Wittgenstein's eyes, were to count among the most strongly tempting ones in philosophy.

By taking Wittgenstein's grammatical reminders concerning the ordinary use of the first person pronoun as direct attempts at blocking some substantial metaphysical results, the supporters of the non-referential view miss the therapeutic character of his argumentative strategy. That is the main reason why I think it is (still) crucial to analyse those reminders in

their proper contexts, as parts of a *dialectical process*[11] of gradual overcoming of some philosophical temptations – particularly, for our current purposes, the solipsistic one. Accordingly, and with a view to supplying a more detailed picture of his treatment of the first person pronoun, as well as to lay bare some of the main problems faced by the non-referential view, the analysis below will follow as closely as possible the textual development of Wittgenstein's argumentation in the particular context provided by the *Blue Book*. Starting in section 2, we will follow Wittgenstein's diagnosis of an important source of the solipsistic temptation – which might incline one to try to revise ordinary language, proposing 'new notations' devised to satisfy certain 'metaphysical cravings' – arising from a confused view of the nature of our personal experiences, particularly pains. Section 3 presents some further sources of that temptation, as well as Wittgenstein's main 'corrective move', consisting in assembling grammatical reminders about the use of the phrase 'the same person' as well as proper names. Section 4 deals with a picture which underlies the solipsistic temptations analyzed up to that point, namely that of a special object, the 'mind', as being the ultimate referent of the first person pronoun; we then will follow Wittgenstein's attempt to clarify 'the peculiar grammar of the word "I"' by means of a series of (negative) reminders aiming to show that 'I', in the sorts of usages which are central for the solipsistic argument, simply does not refer. Section 5 sums up the results of the analysis.

2. 'I can't feel his pain': a first route to solipsism

Wittgenstein begins to direct our attention to the questions which will lead to the analysis of solipsism presenting a 'temptation' which, according to him, arises '[w]hen we think about the relation of the objects surrounding us to our personal experiences of them' (BB: 45); that temptation, he continues, might lead one to say that 'personal experiences are the material of which reality consists':

> When we think in this way we seem to lose our firm hold on the objects surrounding us. And instead we are left with a lot of separate personal experiences of different individuals. These personal

experiences again seem vague and seem to be in constant flux. Our language seems not to have been made to describe them. We are tempted to think that in order to clear up such matters philosophically our ordinary language is too coarse, that we need a more subtle one. We seem to have made a discovery – which I could describe by saying that the ground on which we stood and which appeared to be firm and reliable was found to be boggy and unsafe. – That is, this happens when we philosophize; for as soon as we revert to the standpoint of common sense this *general* uncertainty disappears. (BB: 45)

The central claim of that passage can be construed as a conditional whose antecedent contains (something like) a bound variable: *if* we assume a certain picture x of the relation between the 'objects surrounding us' and 'our personal experiences' – one which implies that our experiences would be 'vague' and 'in constant flux' – *then* our analysis would end up leading to a kind of feeling of loss from the 'firm hold' on those objects. That feeling, I take it, might in turn prompt a whole range of distinct attitudes, according to one's philosophical frame of mind. Thus, to stick to the ends of that range, if one has an idealistic or solipsistic bend, the inclination would be to conclude that our personal experiences simply are the *only* reality there is; yet, for someone with realistic qualms, that conclusion would be obviously unacceptable, hence the inclination to take another route, seeking for (yet another) philosophical theory allowing one to revert that situation by providing some guarantee against metaphysical and / or epistemological separation from the "external" reality.

In order to clear up the philosophical trouble referred in that passage Wittgenstein offers 'a kind of parable'[12], comparing it with the difficulty generated when 'popular scientists' present their discoveries by stating that, contrary to common sense beliefs, the floor on which we stand is not solid, since it consists only of tiny particles in a mostly empty space. Now that claim is very likely to generate perplexity – since, on the one hand, 'of course we know that the floor is solid, or that, if it isn't solid, this may be due to the wood being rotten but not to its being composed of electrons'; on the other hand, however, 'even if the particles were as big as grains of sand, and as close together as these are in a sandheap, the floor would not be solid if it were composed of them in the sense in which a

sandheap is composed of grains' (ibid.). That whole perplexity, according to Wittgenstein, is based on a misunderstanding created by a *mis*application of the picture of the 'thinly filled space' – which was, N.B., originally meant to 'explain the very phenomenon of solidity' (ibid.). The problem, one might say, arises from the conflation of two kinds of descriptions – two different 'language-games' – used to talk about the floor, only in one of which (namely, ordinary language) clear rules are available to employ the concept of 'solidity'.

The moral Wittgenstein extracts from that 'parable' is that our original puzzle about the nature of personal experiences arises from an analogous mistake, amounting to a conflation between two different language-games, only in one of which (viz., 'everyday use') the words 'flux', 'vagueness', and so on, have clear rules of employment – in particular, clear *antitheses* (see BB: 45-46). As in the case of the 'popular scientists', the way out of such perplexities involves getting clear about the grammar (the sense or meaning) of everyday statements, in order to avoid such kind of conflation.

In the remainder of the book Wittgenstein will point out a number of interconnected puzzles which arise in the investigation of 'personal experience', showing, in each case, that if we strictly follow through their implications, we will end up adopting one of the philosophical attitudes belonging to the range mentioned above. Also, for each detected puzzle, there will be an attempt to bring us (or, what comes to the same, the philosopher in each of us) back to the 'standpoint of common sense', thus (supposedly) dissolving the philosophical motivation to revise ordinary language, replacing a 'subtler' one for it – which is how realists and idealists and solipsists alike would interpret their respective proposals.

Let's take a closer look at one example – a passage structured in a very characteristic way, enacting a dialectical exchange among what I shall call Wittgenstein's 'interlocutory voices'[13]:

[i] There is a temptation for me to say that only my own experience is real: "I know that *I* see, hear, feel pains, etc., but not that anyone else does. I can't know this, because I am I and they are they. / [ii] On the other hand I feel ashamed to say to anyone that my experience is the only real one; and I know that he will reply that he could say exactly the same thing about his experience. This seems to lead to a silly

> quibble. [iii] Also I am told: "If you pity someone for having pains, surely you must at least *believe* that he has pains". [iv] But how can I even *believe* this? How can these words make sense to me? How could I even have come by the idea of another's experience if there is no possibility of any evidence for it? (BB: 46)

Here is my take on the dialectic of the passage above: (i) Wittgenstein expresses a philosophical – in this case, solipsistic – temptation; (ii) he indicates the paradoxical situation which would arise if one – here: the philosopher under the spell of solipsistic inclinations – were to try to express his view to a non-philosophical interlocutor; (iii) he then presents a philosophical – in this case: realistic – reply (yet another temptation); finally, (iv) he, on the guise of his solipsistic interlocutory voice, reverts to the initial stance with renewed conviction, given that the realistic reply did not even seem to *make sense* to him.

The next passage takes that exchange a little further, and adds a new voice to the exchange:

> [v] But wasn't this a queer question to ask? *Can't* I believe that someone else has pains? Is it not quite easy to believe this? – [vi] Is it an answer to say that things are as they appear to common sense? – [vii] Again, needless to say, we don't feel these difficulties in ordinary life. Nor is it true to say that we feel them when we scrutinize our experiences by introspection, or make scientific investigations about them. But somehow, when we look at them in a certain way, our expression is liable to get into a tangle. It seems to us as though we had either the wrong pieces, or not enough of them, to put together our jigsaw puzzle. But they are all there, only all mixed up; and there is a further analogy between the jig-saw puzzle and our case: It's no use trying to apply force in fitting pieces together. All we should do is to look at them carefully and arrange them. (BB: 46)

Step (v) in this imaginary conversation – amounting rather to a piece of internal monologue – might be described as a self-questioning moment in the philosopher's reflection, one which is clearly motivated, as in the case of step (ii) above, by a confrontation with common sense beliefs (and is precisely *not* motivated by a realistic philosopher's reply (iii)). Step (vi),

coming after a pause for reflection marked by the use of the long dash, seems to be a question directly addressed to the reader, which is not exactly answered afterwards (more on this in a moment). Then finally, after another pause, we get to step (vii), whose originating voice does not seem to be any of the former ones, as if it came from above or beyond the dispute. (To say that the latter voice would be Wittgenstein's own – or anyway a more authentic one – would be misleadingly biased; after all, why should we suppose that the former voices are not, or not as characteristically, Wittgenstein's? And if they are not, what is the point of the identification? That said, I shall continue using the name 'Wittgenstein' to refer simply to the author of the book we are reading – someone who is all and none of the "interlocutors" he creates[14].)

What the latter "voice" in the passage recommends, in order to get us out of the trouble faced by the solipsistic philosopher, is a grammatical rearrangement. Wittgenstein's first attempt at rearrangement in this context involves distinguishing two kinds of propositions, or descriptions, namely: (a) the ones referring to 'facts in the material world', in particular 'physical objects'[15], and (b) the ones 'describing personal experiences' which would be 'independent of both physical and physiological facts'[16]. The point of presenting such a distinction is to remind us that, provided that we keep employing each of the descriptions in its normal, everyday contexts – including, N.B., introspection and scientific investigations – no (special) difficulty should arise; the trouble only shows up in the peculiar context of *philosophical* investigation about the relation between the objects referred to by propositions of group (a), and the psychological experiences referred to by those of group (b). Now precisely because of the peculiarity of the context in which that trouble arises, it is of no use, in trying to (dis)solve it, to offer a list of 'common sense beliefs'; from the perspective of the puzzled philosopher, the very fact that we should actually hold such beliefs is just part of the (supposed) problem, not its solution.

In fact, Wittgenstein's opinion about the philosopher's doubt – about, i.e., the very *sense* of ascribing 'personal experiences' (such as pains) to other people – is even more radical: it is not only that recounting common sense beliefs would not (dis)solve it, but neither would it be (dis)solved by the (dogmatic) replies coming from a 'realist' or 'common sense philosopher' – who according to Wittgenstein should not be

confused with 'the common sense man', who would in turn be 'as far from realism as from idealism'[17]. The trouble with the realist is that he simply *skips* the (N.B.) real difficulties seen by adversaries such as the solipsist. There is, according to Wittgenstein, a 'troublesome feature in our grammar which the realist does not notice', but the solipsist does (BB: 48). Such is the difference between (at least) two uses of propositions of the form 'A has x', illustrated as follows:

> "A has a gold tooth" means that the tooth is in A's mouth. This may account for the fact that I am not able to see it. Now the case of his toothache, of which I say that I am not able to feel it because it is in his mouth, is not analogous to the case of the gold tooth. It is the apparent analogy, and again the lack of analogy, between these cases which causes our trouble. (BB: 49)

The lack of analogy between the sentences 'A has a gold tooth' and 'A has a toothache' shows itself more clearly when we compare them with two different, yet related sentences, viz.: (i) 'We can't have (haven't as a rule) pains in another person's tooth' and (ii) 'I can't feel his pain'[18]. The last sentence, Wittgenstein has it, is meant to express a *metaphysical* impossibility, which should not be confused with the (merely) *empirical* impossibility expressed by the first one, in which 'the word "can't" is used in the same way as in the proposition "An iron nail can't scratch glass" '[19]. In other words, (i) describes only a (contingent) fact about the way our pains are experienced, and it is conceivable that such a description, similarly to the empirical law forbidding nail scratches in the glass, could be revised if (empirical) conditions changed; as Wittgenstein himself puts: 'We could write this in the form "experience teaches that an iron nail *doesn't* scratch glass", thus doing away with the "can't" ' (ibid.). And in fact, Wittgenstein strategy in the sequence consists precisely in arguing that we can easily imagine some such changes, so that at the end of the process, the opposite possibility – having pains in another people's tooth (or body) – shows itself to be as intelligible as the one from which we started[20]. The main point of that exercise, we shall recall, is to indicate the *empirical* status of proposition (i), thus allowing us to better understand the solipsist's motivation to emphasize – against his realist interlocutor – the special, i.e., *metaphysical* status of the impossibility described by

proposition (ii), which (apparently) no possible or imaginable situation would make one feel inclined to revise. That is precisely what Wittgenstein emphasizes by reminding us that the solipsist could say: 'I may have toothache in another man's tooth, but not *his* toothache'[21].

The upshot of that analysis is that, against the 'commonsense philosopher's' assumptions, the propositions "A has a gold tooth" and "A has toothache" are *not* used analogously. Hence, up to this point in the exchange, the achievement of grammatical (re)arrangement has favoured the solipsistic interlocutory voice. But this is just the beginning of the path which will eventually lead to some radical implications of the solipsistic position. The real trouble has to do with the revisionary attitude that a solipsist might be inclined to take concerning the kind of 'metaphysical impossibility' just identified. Given that, in complete agreement with ordinary language, he perceives that there is a profound difference in the status of the propositions mentioned above, and given that their (superficial) grammatical form sometimes conceals that difference – leading to the kind of innocuous and pointless claims made by the 'commonsense philosopher' – the solipsist would like to propose a 'new notation', capable of presenting in its very *form* the difference of content between those propositions – so that, for example, it would only *make sense* to say of *my* experience that it is *real*.

The ultimate motivation for proposing that (or any other) 'new notation' is, according to Wittgenstein, a sort of 'craving of the metaphysician which our ordinary language does not fulfill'[22] – in this case: expressing more conspicuously the differences which the solipsist deems relevant. Now, however multiple the philosophical motivations may be to tempt one to embrace a 'solipsistic notation', it is important not to confuse that revisionary proposal with a disagreement about the very *facts* being described by each notation[23]. Yet the problem is that the solipsist, or the revisionist philosopher in general, 'is not aware that he is objecting to a convention'[24]. Wittgenstein clarifies that claim by means of a new metaphor, comparing the solipsist's attitude with that of a person who 'sees a way of dividing the country different from the one used on the ordinary map':

> He feels tempted, say, to use the name "Devonshire" not for the county with its conventional boundary, but for a region differently bounded.

> He could express this by saying: "Isn't it absurd to make *this* a county,
> to draw the boundaries *here*?" But what he says is: "The *real*
> Devonshire is this". We could answer: "What you want is only a new
> notation, and by a new notation no facts of geography are changed". It
> is true, however, that we may be irresistibly attracted or repelled by a
> notation. (BB: 57)

Now, as a new cartographic notation does not alter geographical facts, so
a new notation to describe personal experiences (such as pains) does not
alter any facts concerning those experiences. Hence, notwithstanding the
solipsist's favoured self-interpretation of his own stance, his disagreement
with the ordinary language speaker 'is not founded on a more subtle
knowledge of fact'[25]. What is, then, the true motivation for his revision-
ary proposals? That is not a simple question. There is an enormous vari-
ety of apparent analogies and disanalogies, of pictures and associations
underlying our linguistic practices, and many of them can mislead us – or
'the philosopher' – in the task of getting clear about a determined region
of ordinary language. That makes the investigation of the sources of
philosophical confusion a matter of creativity (of imagining, i.e., recog-
nizable ways in which one might feel 'irresistibly attracted or repelled by
a notation'), together with a careful comparison with our ordinary prac-
tices (in order to evaluate the point of those 'new notations', by putting
them under "stress tests", so to speak). As Wittgenstein himself warns:

> It is important that you should understand that the idea of an analogy
> being misleading is nothing sharply defined. […] It is, in most cases,
> impossible to show an exact point where an analogy begins to mislead
> us. [...] The cases in which particularly we wish to say that someone is
> misled by a form of expression are those in which we would say: "he
> wouldn't talk as he does if he were aware of this difference in the
> grammar of such-and-such words, or if he were aware of this other
> possibility of expression" and so on. (BB: 28)

Read against the backdrop of the preceding analysis, the methodological
lesson presented in the passage above might be formulated somewhat like
this: let us take note of grammatical differences; if we do that well, our
remaining problems – including our inclination to misuse analogies, to

misapply pictures, and to revise ordinary language – will take care of themselves. But there is no simple recipe for that procedure, no predetermined limit for its ending, and nothing can guarantee *a priori* that it has gone far enough – resulting, e.g., in a definitive cure for the solipsist's confusions. In a well known passage Wittgenstein describes his own procedure as that of 'erect[ing] signposts' in order to help people avoid 'wrong turnings' in the 'immense network' which is our language (1980: 18). In what follows I shall present some (further) 'signposts' erected by him in order to prevent the wrong turnings that might lead the solipsist to feel dissatisfied with ordinary language – and, consequently, to feel inclined to revise it, proposing notations devised to satisfy his 'metaphysical cravings'.

3. When language goes on holiday: some further routes to solipsism

According to Wittgenstein, '[s]ometimes the most satisfying' expression of the solipsistic thesis is this: 'When anything is seen (really *seen*), it is always I who see it'[26]. Wittgenstein's line of criticism against this rather puzzling formulation turns to the conditions for the use of the pronoun 'I': 'What should strike us about this expression is the phrase "always I". Always *who*? – For, queer enough, I don't mean: "always L.W." '[27]. In reply to that question, Wittgenstein reminds us that our use of the phrase 'the same person', as well as our use of proper names, are 'based on the fact that many characteristics which we use as the criteria for identity coincide in the vast majority of cases'[28]. Amongst such characteristics are, e.g., physical appearance, behaviour and memories. It is because these and other *facts* concerning people are relatively persistent that we use names to refer to them[29]. In order to underline this point, Wittgenstein suggests another conceptual "stress test", consisting in a set of three language-games presenting 'different "geometries" we would be inclined to use if facts were different'[30]. Since I believe the cases speak for themselves, I shall only describe them briefly without making further comments:

  • Case 1: all human bodies look alike, but different sets of psychological characteristics seem to "change their habitation among these bodies"[31]. Grammatical upshot: we would be probably more

inclined to give names to the sets of characteristics themselves than to the bodies[32].

• Case 2: human beings have "two characters" – their shape, size and behaviour "periodically undergo a complete change". Upshot: we should be inclined to give two names to each individual, perhaps talking of a pair of persons in each body.

• Case 3: human beings have two (non-overlapping) sets of memories, one activated on even days and the other activated on odd days (as an aid to our imagination Wittgenstein further suggests that we could think of alternating appearances on odd and even days[33]). Upshot: to talk of "two persons inhabiting the same body" would be neither right nor wrong – the *ordinary* use of "person" depends on ordinary circumstances, and if this changes, we are free to choose among many new projections, based on different kinds of analogy with the old use.

The main purpose of assembling these grammatical reminders above, concerning different uses of the concept of personal identity, is to indicate a problem with the solipsist's thesis, in that none of the characteristics listed so far – constancy in physical appearance, behaviour or memories – seems to be relevant to determine the kind of identity envisaged when he tries to state his position by saying that 'When anything is seen (really *seen*), it is always I who see it' – after all, I do not always see parts of my body when I see something else, and it does not matter for determining the content of my visual experience if my memories and / or behaviour are the same as before. In fact, the pronoun 'I' seems completely superfluous and even alien to that formulation.

Given that result, if the solipsist still wants to defend his position, he has to find a better suited expression for his main thesis. Wittgenstein offers a further candidate in the following passage:

When I think about it a little longer I see that what I wished to say was: "Always when anything is seen, something is seen". I.e., that of which I said it continued during all the experiences of seeing was not any particular entity "I", but the experience of seeing itself. (BB: 63)

The passage above presents the motivation which may lead the solipsist to (ultimately) exclude 'the I', or the subject of experience completely

from consideration, focusing instead on contents of the experience itself – a move which is reminiscent of David Hume's (so-called) 'bundle theory of the self', as well as of Lichtenberg's proposal that we write 'It thinks' (*Es denkt*), like in 'It rains'. The reasoning behind that reformulation seems to be as follows: first, given the grammatical (or, if you will, metaphysical) constraints imposed by the solipsist in order to express the peculiarity of first person experience, there is no possible way of doing that while satisfying the (ordinary) conditions for personal identity; hence, either one gives up the initial task, or the 'I' has to be dropped; now, given the person he is, our solipsist would be rather inclined to choose the latter option; and yet, he still needs to present some element or other which would be shared by all cases of visual experience, since otherwise there would be no point in treating them homogeneously as cases of that kind of peculiar first person experience he wants to express; but all that remains to play that role now is the experience itself – to employ Peter Hacker's apt (and concise) Schopenhauerian formulation: 'What is unique is experience; the world is idea'[34].

The problem with that position – as Hume himself perhaps realized[35] – is that it entails a kind of 'inversion of priorities' relative to our actual use of language, generating a conception which is ultimately unsustainable; after all, the region of our ordinary language which is responsible for the talk about 'personal experiences' seems to be so structured that the identity of those experiences depends on the identity of the subjects who 'have' them[36]; now, if the subject is to be dropped, what could the alternative criterion for that identity be?

Thus, the solipsist is depicted as someone who borrows some concepts from their native home, i.e., ordinary language, taking into account (some of) their conditions of use, yet ultimately neglecting them, even making them impossible to satisfy, thus ending up unable to give any clear sense to the signs he employs in order to (try to) express his position. The main result of this enacted exchange with a solipsistic interlocutory voice is to remove a number of *prima facie* motivations for the latter's proposal of 'new notations'[37]. Yet, by reaching this conclusion, Wittgenstein emphasizes once more that there is no problem at all, at least in principle, with the mere attempt to offer such alternative notations:

> There is [...] no objection to adopting a symbolism in which [e.g.] a
> certain person always or temporarily holds an exceptional place. And
> therefore, if I utter the sentence "Only I really see", it is conceivable
> that my fellow creatures thereupon will arrange their notation so as to
> fall in with me by saying "so-and-so is really seen" instead of "L. W.
> sees so-and-so", etc., etc. What, however, is wrong, is to think that I can
> *justify* this choice of notation. When I said, from my heart, that only I
> see, I was also inclined to say that by "I" I didn't really mean L. W. [...].
> I could almost say that by "I" I mean something which just now
> inhabits L. W., something which the others can't see. (I meant my
> mind, but could only point to it via my body.) There is nothing wrong
> in suggesting that the others should give me an exceptional place in
> their notation; but the justification which I wish to give for it: that this
> body is now the seat of that which really lives – is senseless. For
> admittedly this is not to state anything which in the ordinary sense is a
> matter of experience. (And don't think that it is an experiential
> proposition which only I can know because only I am in the position
> to have the particular experience.) (BB: 66)

Besides recalling that there is no *a priori* problem involved in the propos-
al of new notations, the passage above also presents the general picture
which seems to underlie all the (solipsistic) manoeuvres analysed up to
this point – that of a special object, the 'mind', as being the real, or ulti-
mate referent of the first person pronoun. In Wittgenstein's own words:
'the idea that the real I lives in my body is connected with the peculiar
grammar of the word "I", and the misunderstandings this grammar is
liable to give rise to'[38]. In order to indicate such misunderstandings he
proceeds to a detailed analysis of the grammar of the first person
pronoun, which will be the subject of the next section.

4. '"I" does not refer': the peculiar grammar of the first person

The first step in Wittgenstein's new attempt at grammatical rearrange-
ment is calling attention to a distinction which became well known – in

fact, I shall suggest, perhaps a bit overstressed – in secondary literature, namely, that between two uses of the word 'I'. The distinction is introduced in the following passage:

> There are two different cases in the use of the word "I" (or "my") which I might call "the use as object" and "the use as subject". Examples of the first kind of use are these: "My arm is broken", "I have grown six inches", "I have a bump on my forehead", "The wind blows my hair about". Examples of the second kind are: "*I* see so-and-so", "*I* hear so-and-so", "*I* try to lift my arm", "*I* think it will rain", "*I* have toothache". One can point to the difference between these two categories by saying: The cases of the first category involve the recognition of a particular person, and there is in these cases the possibility of an error, or as I should rather put it: The possibility of an error has been provided for. [...] It is possible that, say in an accident, I should feel a pain in my arm, see a broken arm at my side, and think it is mine, when really it is my neighbour's. [...] On the other hand, there is no question of recognizing a person when I say I have toothache. To ask "are *you* sure that it's you who have pains?" would be nonsensical. Now, when in this case no error is possible, it is because the move which we might be inclined to think of as an error, a 'bad move', is no move of the game at all. (BB: 66-67)

For obvious reasons, it is the last use of the word 'I' – its 'use as subject' – which will be the main focus of Wittgenstein's analysis in the remainder of the book. In pursuing that analysis, he presents four main claims, as follows:

> 1. 'To say "I have pain" is no more a statement *about* a particular person than moaning is' (BB: 67);
> 2. 'The word "I" does not mean the same as "L.W.", even if I am L.W.' (BB: 67);
> 3. '[The word "I" does not] mean the same as the expression "the person who is now speaking"' (BB: 67);
> 4. 'In [propositions such as] "I have pain", "I" is not a demonstrative pronoun' (BB: 68).

The four claims above, as well as the arguments supporting each of them, are intimately connected in the text. Note, however, that in none of them

Wittgenstein offers a *positive* characterization of the use of first person pronoun, limiting himself instead to describing analogies and disanalogies between *some uses* of that pronoun and the uses of other words in our language, therefore helping us achieve a perspicuous view of the grammar of those words in some more or less interconnected language-games. The central aim of that process is, once again, to indicate *grammatical differences*, which in turn can be used to make conspicuous the confusions involved in the characterizations offered by his imagined interlocutor, thus hopefully helping to set him free of certain pictures which are commonly assumed in the philosophical treatment of the first person pronoun. In this sense, Wittgenstein's aims are rather modest, and one shall be careful not to leap too quickly from his (essentially negative) results to the (rather substantial) conclusion that he would be offering an "alternative account", or a "definition" of *the* use of 'I' – say, a non-referential one. (I shall return to the point of this warning below.) In order to achieve such aims, Wittgenstein's analysis will be again structured dialectically, alternately presenting some theses about the use of the pronoun 'I' that naturally (if tacitly) suggest themselves when we reflect about the grammar of the statements in which it is employed, and diagnosing the problems involved in each of those theses.

In order to justify claim (1) Wittgenstein indicates some grammatical differences between propositions ascribing pains in first and third person, as they are normally employed in ordinary language. According to Wittgenstein, '[t]he difference between the propositions "I have pain" and "he has pain" is not that of "L.W. has pain" and "Smith has pain". Rather, it corresponds to the difference between moaning and saying that someone moans'[39]. Some light can be shed upon the latter claim by reminding ourselves of the role of language-games in Wittgenstein analysis – in particular that

> [w]hen we look at such simple forms of language the mental mist which seems to enshroud our ordinary use of language disappears. We see activities, reactions, which are clear-cut and transparent. On the other hand we recognize in these simple processes forms of language not separated by a break from our more complicated ones. We see that we can build up the complicated forms from the primitive ones by gradually adding new forms. (BB: 17)

Now, by indicating the proximity between propositions expressing pain in first person and such instinctive pain behaviour as moaning, Wittgenstein is precisely moving along the lines presented in the passage above, indicating a 'primitive form of language' from which we can 'build up' our own, more complicated vocabulary for the expression of pains[40]. In the 'primitive' level of reactive behaviour, it is manifest that the expression of pains does not involve recognizing a person as its condition. The person moaning in pain is (of course!) not stating something *about* herself – she is not *describing* her own state, in the sense in which another person could do it[41]. Again, in normal conditions, she obviously does not need to observe her own *behaviour*, or to make any kind of *inference*, or to gather any kind of *evidence* in order to moan: she simply reacts, in an instinctive and natural way, to whatever has hurt her. By the same token, and given that the more complicated forms of language that we use to express pains can be recognized as belonging to the same "family" to which that kind of instinctive behaviour belongs, in that they are 'not separated by a break', the conclusion seems to be that, *even in the case of ordinary language* (of our *actual* language-games), expressions of pain in first person are not statements about a person; they belong in different (grammatical) shelves.

Now, it is precisely because of that grammatical peculiarity that the analysis of the 'use as subject' of first person pronoun (in expressive sentences) becomes so important in the settlement of accounts with the solipsist temptation. Given that such use does without the satisfaction of any conditions for the use of names, or for the recognition of a person as being such-and-such, the solipsist – and not only him – may feel inclined to imagine a set of somewhat analogous conditions, e.g., some kind of introspective access to the content of personal experiences, such as pains. Wittgenstein presents that point as follows:

> We feel then that in the cases in which "I" is used as subject, we don't use it because we recognize a particular person by his bodily characteristics; and this creates the illusion that we use this word to refer to something bodiless, which, however, has its seat in our body. In fact *this* seems to be the real ego, the one of which it was said, "Cogito, ergo sum". (BB: 69)

Against the illusion presented above, Wittgenstein attempts to dissipate the 'mental mist' surrounding the use of our *actual* expressive language-games by inventing a more primitive form of expressive language-game in which individuals simply *react* to pains with natural and instinctive behaviour, thus presenting us 'activities, reactions, which are clear-cut and transparent' and diverting our (the solipsist's) attention from the picture of 'internal processes'[42].

Of course the strategy illustrated above – that of comparing linguistic expressions of pain with instinctive behaviour, such as moaning – is open to many criticisms, and it is a source of much controversy even among Wittgenstein's followers, some of whom are willing (while some are not) to grant that such an analysis would show that the use of 'I' is not intended to *refer* to the person who says 'I am in pain'. Yet Wittgenstein has anticipated those reactions. Having presented this first defence of claim (1), he immediately points out, in the voice of an interlocutor, an objection that runs along these lines: ' "But surely the word 'I' in the mouth of a man refers to the man who says it; it points to himself; and very often a man who says it actually points to himself with his finger" '[43]. As a reply he observes that:

> It was quite superfluous to point to himself. He might just as well only have raised his hand. It would be wrong to say that when someone points to the sun with his hand, he is pointing both to the sun and himself because it is *he* who points; on the other hand, he may by pointing attract attention both to the sun and to himself. (BB: 67)

What is the point of such a reply? In order to answer that question we need first get clear about the parallel Wittgenstein draws between the case of the subject employing 'I' (in the situation presented above by his interlocutor) and the subject who, in the last passage, points to the sun. As I understand that parallel, its purpose is to show that, as the former subject *can* point to himself when saying 'I…', so the latter *can* call attention to himself when pointing to the sun – only that is *generally* not the case, i.e., that is neither the primary function of the pronoun 'I', nor of the ostensive gesture of pointing to an object. In fact, one might say that the primary function of the ostensive gesture is precisely the opposite, namely, to call attention *to the object*; now, if that gesture is to succeed, of

course the other persons involved in this piece of communication have to react appropriately, which means, among other things, that they shall take the speaker as the (provisional) centre or point of origin of an (*ad hoc*) indexical system. Consequently, it would be simply *wrong*, in the vast majority of (ordinary) cases, to take the speaker's ostensive gesture as an attempt to call attention to himself – e.g., by looking at his *hand* instead of looking where his hand is pointing to. Yet none of this prevents that, in some specific (extraordinary) cases, a speaker should use the ostensive gesture also to call attention to himself – e.g., when he points toward the sun, but, given that all his interlocutors are looking at a different direction (i.e., away from where he stands), he has to shout something (maybe something about the sun), thus calling their attention first to himself and then to that star.

By the same token, in some specific cases – say, that of a student shout-ing 'I!' in a classroom, answering to a call – a referential analysis would seem correct. However, as indicated previously, in most cases, particularly in the case of the subject shouting 'I am in pain!', that analysis would be simply false, in that there is no need at all for the subject to recognize himself as being such-and-such a person in order to cry that out. (It is worth noting that Wittgenstein does not need to deny that there are simi-larities between, say, the self-referential and the expressive uses of 'I'; his aim is simply to indicate *one essential difference* between the language-games in which that pronoun occurs, so as to prevent a hasty assimilation of all the sorts of use to a rather narrow paradigm, which is that of reference. Our challenge is not to lose track of such differences, as we are prone to when in the grip of the philosophical 'craving for generality'[44].)

Now the main problem with the assimilation to the paradigm of reference is not so much its *falsity*, but rather the fact that such assimila-tion might be the tip of an iceberg of serious philosophical confusions. When we are dealing with statements in which 'I' is used 'as object', the referential analysis seems to work seamlessly, in that the subject who utters / thinks such statements intends to refer to a particular *object* that we too can perceive, recognize, and so on. However, if one tries to gener-alize, applying it to *all* first person statements, including the ones in which the 'I' is used 'as subject', one may (correctly) notice that in such cases the intended object of reference is not necessarily the *body* of the

subject; hence, the temptation may arise to seek for some *other* kind of referent, such as the mind, soul, and so on[45]. It is, therefore, with the ultimate aim of loosening the grip of *that* kind of picture upon the reader that Wittgenstein finds it important to highlight the grammatical differences we have been tracking so far.

Having criticized the thesis contained in claim (1) Wittgenstein turns to the theses contained in claims (2) and (3) – namely, that 'I' means the same as 'L. W.', or as 'the person who is now speaking'. Against those assimilations, his main contention will be that the first person pronoun (in its 'use as subject') and the words 'L. W.', and 'the person who is now speaking' are 'different instruments in our language'[46]. Again, that does not mean that the latter phrases simply *cannot* be used in similar ways to that pronoun in some contexts: it is conceivable that in some special circumstances someone could shout, e.g., 'N. N. is in pain!' (think of a little child, or a Tarzan-like human being) or even 'the person who is now speaking is in pain!' (think of a character in Saramago's *Blindness*), behaving as people normally do when they feel pain; yet, if we were to react to those utterances similarly to the way we react to people shouting 'I am in pain', in ordinary circumstances, we would precisely not be understanding them according to the paradigm of reference – as if they were intending to *refer to a particular person*, to *speak about* him or her – but rather as if listening to something akin to a moan. In this sense, the same rule would apply to such a speaker as the one applying to a person who cries out in pain – namely, that he or she '*doesn't choose the mouth which says it*'[47].

As the preceding considerations shall suggest, I take it that Wittgenstein's purpose in presenting claims (2) and (3) is simply to show that, *in their primary uses*, sentences employing the first person pronoun 'as subject' are the ones we (normally) take, even in the absence of any particular accompanying circumstances, as genuine expressions of 'personal experiences'; in other words, they are (fallible) *criteria* for such ascriptions[48]. Yet there is no indication that such an analysis should be extended to the *totality* of 'language-games' for the use of 'I'[49]. As I noted, Wittgenstein is not trying to achieve a *definition* of the use of 'I', in the sense of a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for *the* use (or *the* 'use as subject') of that pronoun. He is, rather, describing some uses which are particularly relevant for his therapeutic purposes, particularly, that of loosening the

grip of certain pictures which underlie (and forcefully suggest) particular philosophical analyses of the first person pronoun, leading to rather narrow, even monolithic views of its grammar, such as the assimilations to the paradigm of reference.

Moreover, let me recall that Wittgenstein introduced the distinction between two uses of 'I' by listing examples – of a set of sentences concerning *physical* characteristics of the speaker (the 'use as object'), and another set of sentences concerning his/her *psychological* characteristics (the 'use as subject'). Yet one might wonder if that dichotomy was really supposed to exhaust the uses of 'I', with no space being left for intermediate or composite cases. Is it not surprising that cases such as that of personal identity and the use of proper names – 'I am such-and-such a person', 'I am N. N.' – both of which had been mentioned previously in the analysis, should be left out precisely at the juncture where Wittgenstein lists his examples of the two uses of 'I'? Would not those cases be recalcitrant to the dichotomy 'as object' / 'as subject'? And if they are, wouldn't they provide us with enough reasons to reject Wittgenstein's whole analysis?

The answer, I submit, is negative. According to the reading here proposed, the dichotomy he presents is by no means intended to exhaust the description of the uses of first person pronoun; it amounts, rather, to a presentation of two extremities of a *range* of uses, between which there may lie an indefinite number of intermediate cases, such as, e.g., that of a student shouting '*I*!' in response to the calling of her name in a classroom, or the cases of personal identity and the use of proper names ('I am such-and-such a person', 'I am N. N.') mentioned above. Nowhere Wittgenstein denies the possibility or legitimacy of such intermediate or composed uses: they are simply not relevant for his immediate, therapeutic aims. Paradigmatic cases of the 'use as subject', on the contrary, are of interest, because they are responsible for some of the most serious philosophical distortions in the analysis of the grammar of the first person pronoun, ultimately capable of leading one to feel inclined toward some form of solipsism; and paradigmatic cases of the 'use as object' are equally of interest, because they provide a clear counterpoint, and also serve to indicate the fundamental flaw in analyses which intend to assimilate all the uses of 'I' to the referential model.

With those considerations in mind let us go back to the attempt to elucidate the differences between pain utterances in first and third person. In the sequence of the passages we have been analysing Wittgenstein remarks the following, regarding that difference:

> All this comes to saying that the person of whom we say "he has pain" is, by the rules of the game, the person who cries, contorts his face, etc. The place of the pain – as we have said – may be in another person's body. If, in saying "I", I point to my own body, I model the use of the word "I" on that of the demonstrative "this person" or "he". [...] In "I have pain", "I" is not a demonstrative pronoun. (BB: 67–68)

The last sentence above presents our claim (4): that the pronoun 'I', *in sentences such as 'I have pain'*, does not function as a demonstrative. To understand the point of that thesis, it shall be useful to investigate with more detail what Wittgenstein means when he talks about modelling the use of 'I' on that of demonstrative expressions. Let's start thinking about the analogy presented in the suppressed part of the passage just quoted – the case of a mathematical proof concerning the sum of the internal angles of a triangle. Look at the following diagram:
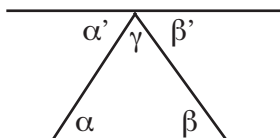
The notion which is relevant to draw the intended analogy with the case of first-person pronoun is 'equality.' According to Wittgenstein, that notion is employed in one way when we say, regarding the diagram above, that $\alpha = \alpha'$ and $\beta = \beta'$, and in another way when we say that $\gamma = \gamma$. Now, to assimilate the pronoun 'I' to a demonstrative, such as 'this person' or 'he', would be 'somewhat analogous' to assimilate the two equalities above. The point of the analogy seems to be as follows: in the case of the equalities $\alpha = \alpha'$ and $\beta = \beta'$ we actually compare *two things* – namely, two angles – and say they are equal; yet in the case of $\gamma = \gamma$, one might say that we are facing a sort of degenerated equality (i.e., self-identity), since no *two* elements are being

compared. Something analogous would apply to the case of someone using 'I' while pointing to her own body: in their primary and strict (i.e., non-anaphoric) uses, indexicals like 'he' / 'she' and 'this / that person' need to be supplemented with ostensive gestures in order to be correctly understood; but, as we noticed above, understanding ostensive gestures involves, in its turn, looking at the person who makes a (demonstrative) statement, taking he or she as the centre in an *ad hoc* coordinate system. Given such conditions, in the case of a subject employing 'I' while pointing to him/herself, what we have is (at best) a degenerate kind of ostension – one in which the centre points to itself, so to speak. In such a case, it may be correct to say that the pronoun 'I' is being used as a (degenerated) demonstrative, but only to the extent in which one might say that $\gamma = \gamma$ is a (degenerated) case of equality. There is no problem in principle with that possibility; on the contrary: as degenerated equality is useful for the construction of a mathematical proof, so the use of degenerate ostension may be useful (and legitimate) in some cases. (Think of the following situation: I want to draw the attention of a friend to myself, in a context where there is too much noise and people talking everywhere, say in a party; I then shout my friend's name; she hears my scream, yet is unable to determine where – hence, whom – it comes from; in such a case, shouting 'I!' – or, more likely, 'Hey, it's me!' – while pointing to my own *body* would seem to be the best way of achieving my initial aim).

Once again, the main lesson I would like to draw from those brief considerations is negative, namely that Wittgenstein is not defending that 'I' simply *is not* a demonstrative: stones may well serve as hammers from time to time; words have the uses we put them to in concrete situations, for certain specific purposes. Wittgenstein's suggestion seems to be rather simpler, even trivial, namely that, in some of its primary uses, such as the one paradigmatically represented by cases in which someone says 'I am in pain', the first-person pronoun does not, as a matter of (grammatical) fact, function as a demonstrative. Yet that triviality is not useless; in its original context, it has a particular (dialectical) purpose, which is that of avoiding the hasty assimilation to a rather narrow grammatical paradigm, motivated by a lack of attention to grammatical differences, and it is in

order to avoid that mistake that it becomes useful to present cases in which the move would be conspicuously inappropriate.

Unsurprisingly, the interlocutory voice expresses dissatisfaction with that negative result, claiming that 'surely the word "I" in "I have pain" serves to distinguish me from other people, because it is by the sign "I" that I distinguish saying that I have pain from saying that one of the others has'[50]. In reply to that claim Wittgenstein proposes the following (rather remarkable) language-game:

> Imagine a language in which, instead of "I found nobody in the room", one said "I found Mr. Nobody in the room". Imagine the philosophical problems which would arise out of such a convention. Some philosophers brought up in this language would probably feel that they didn't like the similarity of the expressions "Mr. Nobody" and "Mr. Smith". When we feel that we wish to abolish the "I" in "I have pain", one may say that we tend to make the verbal expression of pain similar to the expression by moaning. – We are inclined to forget that it is the particular use of a word only which gives the word its meaning. (BB: 69)

It is difficult to understand the point of that analogy unless one analyses it against the broader backdrop of the criticism of solipsism. Read that way, what the analogy seems to indicate is that, in our ordinary language, there is a similarity between the use of 'I' in sentences such as 'I am in pain' (the 'use as subject'), and the use of 'I' in cases in which we actually identify a person, or even a particular body, in order to make our utterance (the 'use as object'); that similarity, in turn, can either tempt one to assimilate both cases to the latter model, and, accordingly, always to seek for a referent for the term 'I' to stand for, or to simply drop the (supposedly) problematic use of 'I', thus proposing a new notation, in which, e.g., one would say simply 'there is pain'. Now that would be a revisionist proposal similar to the one a philosopher grown up in the language presented in the passage above would probably make by arguing that we should simply drop the phrase 'Mr. Nobody', in order not to conflate it with the phrase 'Mr. Smith', thus (supposedly) escaping the temptation to imagine that there is some hidden entity in the room when we say that Mr. Nobody is in the

room. If we went on saying simply 'there is pain', instead of 'I'm in pain', we would stop thinking – so thinks the interlocutor – that there is some kind of hidden referent of the pronoun 'I'.

And here we arrive at an opposite (but congenial) attitude to the ones presented earlier. Both the proposal to assimilate all the uses of 'I' to grammatical paradigms primarily applicable to the 'use as object', and the proposal to drop that pronoun from our language – in order to stick to what is supposedly peculiar in our personal experiences, thereby removing the surface similarities with expressions used to talk about the experiences of *other* subjects – stem from the same deep philosophical roots, among which are the craving for a *single* explanation which would account for all uses of certain concept and the assumption that if there is a noun there *must* be a referent.

5. Conclusions

The (negative) results of this analysis seem to me quite straightforward: first, Wittgenstein does not advocate a 'non-referential view' of the grammar of the first person in the *Blue Book*; to defend that would be like saying that stones do not serve to nail because they are not hammers (a conclusion which some philosophers could perhaps draw from their armchairs, while examining the conditions of possibility of carpentry). Second, Wittgenstein also does not argue that the first-person pronoun has *two uses* – one 'as object' and other 'as subject'; those are only two extremities of a *range* of uses – two rather different members of a *family*, if you like[51] – the indication of which was useful for diagnosing the congenial errors of several monolithic accounts of the role of that pronoun. Between those two extremities there is an enormous variety of other possible and more or less overlapping uses, whose "identity" depends on the requirements of the concrete linguistic context in which they are employed, and, in particular, on our concrete interests and purposes in each case. Finally (and more positively), the fundamental lesson of this whole analysis is *methodological*, namely that one shall strive to pay attention to *differences* between the various uses of certain concepts – such as the pronoun 'I' – rather than try to fit them all in a single,

narrow bin, whatever that be – e.g., reference, demonstration, description, expression, etc.

That, by the way, is precisely the lesson drawn by Wittgenstein in an earlier passage of the book, with which I would like to bring this reading to a close:

> [S]ome of the greatest achievements in philosophy could only be compared with taking up some books which seemed to belong together, and putting them on different shelves; nothing more being final about their positions than that they no longer lie side by side. The onlooker who doesn't know the difficulty of the task might well think in such a case that nothing at all had been achieved. – The difficulty in philosophy is to say no more than we know. E.g., to see that when we have put two books together in their right order we have not thereby put them in their final places. (BB: 44-45)

Philosophy, or at least the activity carried on in Wittgenstein's texts, is always provisional. That shall explain, at least in part, why his (post-Tractarian) writings never end up – and, as far as I know, were never *intended* to end up – with a proper, structurally distinguishable conclusion, as if to mark that the "last word" is only *contingently* so, and that the invitation is always open to keep the conversation going.

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[1] 2001: 22.

[2] At least as early as 1916, in the course of a continuous stream of remarks dealing with solipsism – which would be latter incorporated almost without change in section 5.6 of the *Tractatus* – Wittgenstein had already written that 'The I, the I is what is deeply mysterious!' (1984: 80). (See Sluga (1996: 320) for a helpful analysis of the development of Wittgenstein's views on the grammar of first person.).

[3] 1958; here after referred as 'BB'.

[4] See e.g. BB: 69-70: "We feel then that in the cases in which "I" is used as subject, *we don't use it because we recognize a particular person by his bodily characteristics*; and this creates *the illusion that we use this word to refer to something bodiless* [...]" (my emphases).
[5] BB: 68.

[6] The work we know as *The Blue Book* is a selection of notes dictated by Wittgenstein to some of his pupils at Cambridge in the intervals of the lectures delivered in the academic year

1933-34. Bouwsma (1961) offers a very helpful account of the context in which those notes originated, as well as an analysis of the methodology exemplified by them which I found congenial with my own reading.

[7] I mean this phrase in a deliberately broad sense, so as to cover both the analysis of traditional metaphysical questions about the nature of 'the self' as the analysis of the grammar of the pronoun 'I' in first person statements. Echoing a claim made by Wittgenstein in the *Blue Book*, one might perhaps say that his treatment of the grammar of first person is one of the 'heirs' of what used to be called 'philosophy of the subject' (see BB: 28).

[8] That phrase is employed here due to its prominence in the philosophical literature; for the time being, I shall set aside the question about whether it is legitimate to use it in the context of Wittgenstein's philosophy – after all, one of his main contentions seems to be precisely that (presumptive) 'self-ascriptive' statements have an *expressive* function, which is very different from the role of *bona fide*, third person statements describing actions, mental states, events and attitudes of other subjects. I shall come back to that issue below.

[9] In an essay which is seminal for this discussion, Elizabeth Anscombe (1994) explores some of Wittgenstein's claims (especially those presented in the *Blue Book* and in *Philosophical Investigations* §§ 398-411), and offers a series of connected arguments defending the thesis that 'I' is not a referential expression, or else 'Descartes was right about what the referent was' (Descartes view being, by Anscombe's lights anyway, that the reference of 'I' cannot be a person) – which implies that the following definition is incorrect: ' "I" is the word that a person uses to talk about herself' (ibid: 142). Basically the same view is held by many other interpreters, among whom figure Norman Malcolm (1995), Anthony Kenny (1984) and Peter Hacker (1990: ch. 4 & 1997: ch. VIII).

[10] Hacker, for instance, explicitly ascribes a 'detailed refutation of solipsism and idealism' to (later) Wittgenstein (1997: 81).

[11] I am working with a contrast between a "substantial" reading of Wittgenstein's text, which sees it as designed to contribute to the attainment of some sort of theoretical (say metaphysical) knowledge about reality by answering *bona fide* philosophical questions, and a "dialectical" reading, which takes as the central objective of the text to give voice to or enact a number of different views, which are then put into conversation, thus allowing the reader to be alternately tempted by metaphysical questions, urged to uncover the sources of those temptations, and ultimately be freed from their fascination, achieving that kind of "peace" that Wittgenstein talks about in various contexts (e.g., PI §133). The main inspiration for this approach was an early essay of Stanley Cavell's (1976 [first published in 1962]), where he distinguishes two main "voices" in Wittgenstein's (mature) writings, namely: (i) the voice of temptation, which prompts the reader to theorize or philosophize, and (ii) the voice of correctness, which aims to return the reader to ordinary life – in particular, to ordinary linguistic practices. (In a latter essay Cavell re-dubs the pair of voices, calling them 'the voices of melancholy and merriment, or of metaphysics and the ordinary' (1996: 270).) As it will become clear, I tend to distinguish among different inflections of those two voices – after all, one might be tempted by a number of different philosophical views, and accordingly might need to be 'corrected', i.e., brought back to ordinary life, by different means.

[12] BB: 45.

[13] See footnote 11.

[14] Interestingly, on Cavell's reading none of the "voices" in Wittgenstein's writings is to be taken as expressing the writer's own real or final views; instead, Cavell construes them as expressing opposing trains of argument, which form part of a larger dialectical exchange in which they ultimately (and hopefully) cancel each other out. On this reading, the aim of Wittgenstein's enacted dialogues is not to lead the reader to accept any particular philosophical view, but rather to help us overcome the temptations originally leading us to seek – even crave – for them. (Hence, I would add, to attain unassertiveness, the state in which one is (at last) able to refuse to take sides in the philosophical dispute, thus achieving Tractarian *Befriedigung* (cf. 6.53): the state described in the Investigations as that in which 'the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear' (§ 133).)

[15] BB: 46.

[16] BB: 47.

[17] BB: 48.

[18] BB: 49.

[19] BB: 49.

[20] To accomplish such results, Wittgenstein presents a finely detailed analysis of the criteria for pain location (see BB: 49-57), which I shall not reconstruct here. As I read it, the main contention of that analysis is the following: *generally*, when one has a pain in some part of one's body, there is a coincidence or correlation among certain sensory experiences, i.e., visual, tactile, kinaesthetic, audible, and so on. So, for example, when a sharp object hurts my arm, I can (simultaneously) *see* my arm being pricked, *feel* the prick, *determine* (by means of kinaesthetic awareness) which is the position of my pricked arm, and so on. However, in some special cases those experiences do not coincide – the most radical case perhaps being that of so called 'phantom pains', in which one can feel (e.g.) pain in one's (phantom) leg, thus having all the tactile and kinaesthetic experiences normally associated with that feeling, but without the corresponding visual data. What cases like these show is that our concept of 'pain' (or, to stick to Wittgenstein's specific example, 'toothache') is sufficiently complex and indeterminate so that we can imagine, with no great difficulties, extended uses, or projections.

[21] BB: 53.

[22] BB: 55; see also 59.

[23] See BB: 59.

[24] BB: 57.

[25] BB: 59.

[26] BB: 61.

[27] BB: 61.

[28] BB: 61.

[29] Compare *Philosophical Investigations* §415: 'What we are supplying are really remarks on the natural history of human beings…'.

[30] BB: 61.

[31] BB: 61.

[32] The Clone Army portrayed in the series *Star Wars* offers an interesting further case for comparison: since there is no difference in physical or psychological characteristics among the clones, there is no need to use proper names for distinguishing among them – their commanders live well simply calling them 'clones', 'soldiers', or whatever. That might bring home the point, explicitly made by Wittgenstein in some contexts, that our concepts – including that of personal identity – are expressions of our interests, hence, that they can be simply dropped out if those interests suitably change.

[33] See BB: 62.

[34] 1997: 241.

[35] See *Treatise of Human Nature*, Appendix i.

[36] That is precisely the point of Peter Strawson's argument in chapter 3 of *Individuals* (see 1959: chapter 1).

[37] A number of further such attempts receive Wittgenstein's attention in the sequence of the text (see BB: 66 ss.), yet I shall leave them aside, hoping that the preceding reconstruction is representative enough.

[38] BB: 66.

[39] See BB: 68.

[40] One has to be careful not to take that too literally, as if Wittgenstein was proposing (or assuming) a "genetic" or "evolutionary" account of the development of human language. As a matter of empirical or scientific fact, it may seem indeed very likely that such an account would prove true; yet, as I read Wittgenstein, that would be simply beside his (methodological) point, which is defending the philosophical relevance of paying attention to natural or instinctive human reactions, as they show up in real *or* invented language-games, in order to get clear about our own, actually more complex and sophisticated linguistic practices; those reactions, to borrow from Joachim Schulte's apt formulation, are 'the point of intersection of acting and speaking, of conduct and use of language' (1993: 18). One might say: to indicate such an intersection is to go as deep as philosophical analysis can get – only that would be misleading, since it suggests a picture of "layers" to be "dug"; what it means is that it would be pointless, from the perspective of someone seeking grammatical elucidation, to try to "get beyond" that point by finding some (empirical) justification(s) for our language-games; as Wittgenstein reminds us in On Certainty, '[a] language-game [...] is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). / It is there – like our life' (1969: §559). (See also Wittgenstein 1980b: §916 & 1980c: §453 – "The primitive language game we originally learned needs no justification'.)

[41] See *Philosophical Investigations* § 407.

[42] Of course, one shall not expect that such a procedure would at once eliminate the appeal of the picture under analysis; after all, people can be tempted to apply it even in the case of moans emitted by non-human animals (which, N.B., have been traditionally used as paradigmatic examples of creatures guided by instinctive – and, at least by some philosophical lights, *non*expressive –behaviour), by imagining those animals "internally" having the same (or similar) experiences we humans have. This is again to remind that Wittgenstein aims here are rather modest, in that he is attacking (only) *one* of the sources of that picture – the one which departs from the analysis of the first-person pronoun in its use 'as subject.'

[43] BB: 67.

[44] See BB: 17. It may help comparing that with Wittgenstein's claims in the following passage, where the philosophical 'craving for generality' is illustrated by the search of a single definition for the concept of 'number':

If, e.g., someone tries to explain the concept of number and tells us that such and such a definition will not do or is clumsy because it only applies to, say, finite cardinals I should answer that the mere fact that he could have given such a limited definition makes this definition extremely important to us. (Elegance is *not* what we are trying for.) For why should what finite and transfinite numbers have in common be more interesting to us than what distinguishes them? Or rather, I should not have said "why should it be more interesting to us?" – it isn't; and this characterizes our way of thinking. (BB: 18-19)

Read the passage above replacing the reference to the 'I' for the reference to numbers, and – I submit – you shall get the essence of what Wittgenstein has to say about the use of that pronoun: the 'referential view' (or analysis) of the 'I' may be "more elegant", but it is not elegance that we (should) seek; rather, what we are most in need of, in order to free ourselves from grammatical and philosophical confusions, is a subtler and more nuanced understanding of the various forms and circumstances in which we employ the first person pronoun in our ordinary language.

[45] Strawson's strategy of taking the notion of 'person' as primitive (relatively to 'body' and 'mind') is designed to avoid just that kind of move (see 1959: chapter 3). Yet, provided that one is aware of the *variety* of different roles that first person statements play in our language-games, the very motivation for that kind of (a bit strained) solution might seem to fade away.

[46] BB: 67.

[47] BB: 68. That remark may sound enigmatic; its point is, I take it, to call our attention once again to the *expressive* character of natural human behaviour, including linguistic behaviour. Intuitively, it seems clear that if we were to realize from the behaviour of a person saying that she is in pain – regardless of using 'I', 'N. N.', or 'the person that is now speaking' as a prefix to her utterance – a deliberate attempt to 'choose the mouth which says it', that is, some kind of artificiality in the formulation or even in the *tone* of her exclamation, we would be rather inclined to distrust her, to think she is dissimulating, and hence would probably not react to her case as we normally do when faced with *bona fide* pain behaviour, i.e., pitying, trying to assist, etc. Again, a comparison with Strawson's approach in 'Freedom and Resentment' (1974) may help to clarify that point.

[48] In order to bring that point home, it may help to think about the case of a subject suffering from retrograde amnesia – someone like Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce), the main character of the film *Memento* (2000) – who by no means possesses the capacity to use a proper name or a description to identify him/herself as such-and-such a person, but still can use the first person pronoun to express (e.g.) pain, thus enabling other persons to understand his/her situation and react appropriately.

[49] It is well known that Wittgenstein recurrently reminds his reader, especially in the *Blue Book*, that, when faced with questions about whether it makes sense to say that a term 'x' has the meaning y (e.g., whether 'I' can be used referentially or not), the only sensible attitude is to imagine concrete contexts of the proposed or intended use – "stress test" situations, as I have been calling them. The suggestion behind that reminder is that there is no *intrinsic* characteristic to the use of words that would hinder (or legitimize) *a priori* certain uses (or senses). It is only in view of concrete language-games, inherited or invented, that we can hope to arrive at such conclusions. It is therefore surprising that so many readers of the *Blue Book* should suffer of so severe a lack of imagination as to conclude that (in Wittgenstein's view), 'I' simply does not (ever) refer – hence, that *any* statement purporting to use it referentially must be *(a priori!)* nonsensical.

[50] BB: 68-69.

[51] See BB: 17.

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