

The Magic Prism: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language

INTRODUCTION

(draft)

The late 20th century witnessed a revolution in the philosophy of language, the *direct reference* revolution. One of the magical things about this revolution is its relative invisibility; it is easy to miss. For many – both players and observers – something considerably less dramatic is at issue. They see direct reference as something more like an elaboration – albeit with considerable revision – of the insights of our teachers, Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell.

These players and observers are not wrong: direct reference, as it's been developed by advocates and criticized by neo-Fregeans and neo-Russellians, shares much of the fathers' fundamental outlook on language and its philosophical study. Nevertheless, there is subversion humming beneath the surface. The direct reference literature – conservative as it's been – repeatedly verges on questions that are genuinely fundamental; it edges up to disagreements about the basics.

My aim in this book is to engage the Frege-Russell tradition¹ at such a fundamental level. To make things manageable I'll focus on Frege; Russell will appear when his differences with Frege make a difference. The perspective on language I'll develop here radically rejects the tradition's² individualism as well as its "thought orientation," its prioritizing thought over language. In place of these tendencies, I will emphasize linguistic practice, a social phenomenon. The reference

¹ In Chapter 2, I motivate the idea that there is something substantial to which Frege and Russell are both committed, something with which my version of direct reference takes strong issue. This is the "cognitive fix requirement" of which I will say more directly.

of words — focal in late 20th century philosophy of language and in this book — is not to be grounded in the mind’s grasp of the things it thinks about. Quite the contrary, one of the ways we become equipped to think about things is by having words that, as our practices go, stand for things. Linguistic practice, a social phenomenon, thus becomes pivotal. And the philosophy of language takes on an anthropological bent; its quarry is our linguistic practice.

This book has been many years in the making. During the mid-80s it became apparent to me that I was thinking about these matters very differently than my direct reference colleagues, not to speak of the neo-traditionalists. I had already written a dissertation³ and published a number of papers on the subject.⁴ But I wished to elaborate my overall conception in a way that only a book-length treatment would allow. I believed, moreover, that my approach had something different to say about a number of crucial questions that seemed at once overworked and inadequately understood, for example, about belief and the other “propositional attitudes.” My outlook also had implications for more general, less explored questions, for example, that of the explanatory adequacy of direct reference as opposed to the Fregean approach.

Much in my current outlook reflects the profound influence of Wittgenstein. For years I avoided Wittgenstein’s work almost entirely. I was systemically allergic to the jargon and the idiosyncratic, perhaps indulgent, style of exposition; I couldn’t bear talk of language games, forms of life, meaning as use, and the rest. But as I explain in Chapter 5, I eventually made contact with Wittgenstein and the experience was transforming. Wittgenstein helped me to understand more deeply what it was that I found troubling about traditional ways in the philosophy of language. And Wittgenstein’s thought suggested ways forward.

² I see the Frege-Russell tradition in the philosophy of language as in many ways reflecting the broader tradition of modern philosophy. See Chapter 3 for more on this matter.

³ *What Propositions Could Not Be*, City University of New York, 1976.

⁴ Collected in *Has Semantics Rested On A Mistake?, and Other Essays*, Stanford University Press (1995).

Given these remarks, it is important that I explain Wittgenstein's ideas as I make use of them. This I promise to do. Wittgenstein does not show up *in propria persona* until Chapter 5, but there I will attempt to say as clearly as I can what I want to take from his work. And why I think Wittgenstein's insights ought to be focal in our reflections on language and thought, and even, surprisingly, in the development of direct reference.

In this Introduction, I'll provide a way into my project through the notion of a proposition. As I've said, the contrast with Frege will loom large, and since my Frege may not be yours, I'll also remark on the topic of interpretation in the history of philosophy. I'll conclude with a sketch of what's to come.

1. Propositions

Since my undergraduate days, I've been taken with the notion of a proposition. What are propositions? Many writers in the early 20th century and before use the term synonymously with "declarative sentence" – Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein all employ this usage at least part of the time. But occasionally for some of those same writers – and increasingly this has become the practice – propositions are not the sentences themselves but more abstract things that sentences express, or that we express by uttering sentences. And it has become common to speak of propositions as the *contents* of our sentences.^{5,6}

Propositions are pivotal in this book. Focusing on propositions in this Introduction will allow me to provide a preliminary contrast between direct reference and traditional philosophy of language. In my 1976 dissertation, I was

⁵ The metaphor of *containment* – *content* is what is contained – has indeed often hardened, or deadened, to the point that philosophers are no longer conscious of anything metaphorical here. (Or, if it's really hardened, there is nothing metaphorical left.) It's a fact, they assume, that sentences have contents. It seems important to me, on the contrary, to keep before our minds that *content*-talk is, or at least begins, in metaphor. I will return to this at various points throughout the book.

moving away from Frege – my candidate for the foremost advocate of the tradition⁷ – specifically away from Frege’s conception of *thoughts* – his own terminology for propositions. My sense that something very different was needed was confirmed when shortly thereafter I began to read David Kaplan’s work. Where I had a rough sense, Kaplan elaborated a theoretical idea – the *singular proposition* – a radically non-Fregean take on propositions that quickly became direct reference orthodoxy.

Attention to propositions will also allow me to underscore what is distinctive about my outlook. For in the end – by the end of this book – contrary to what I would have guessed early in the project, propositions turn out to have no significant role in my story. Indeed, I am probably farther from those who theorize in terms of propositions – even those of direct reference stripe – than the latter are from their Fregean antagonists.

To start at the beginning, early along, as an undergraduate and then a graduate student, I was ambivalent about propositions. On one hand, it seemed that talk of what we assert, the thoughts we express, the contents of our sentences, ought to be unproblematic. After all, we say things, express our thoughts.

At the same time, propositions seemed quite problematic. The most forceful problem, early along concerned the fact that propositions are abstract entities, as are numbers, sets, and the like. It seemed innocent enough to speak about *what someone said*. But it was troubling that such plain talk seemed to involve commitment to a realm other than the natural world – if such an additional realm is indeed the home of abstracta. This didn’t seem quite a good enough reason to stop speaking of things asserted. But it certainly gave one pause.

⁶ Propositions are also said to be the objects of the propositional attitudes. More on this in the first chapter, and especially in Chapters 8 and 9, where I elaborate my own view of the attitudes.

⁷ I follow Wittgenstein here. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, and earlier in the *Blue and Brown Books*, Frege is both respected and criticized in just such terms.

Some of the literature's most well known problems about propositions were difficult for me to appreciate; they had little force for me. Here's an example: Quine frowned upon propositions for, as he liked to say, their identity conditions are unclear: In many cases, it's hard to say whether two sentences express precisely the same thing or not. This sounds right;⁸ but how exactly does it lead to denying propositions? Lots of other, relatively uncontroversial, sorts of things probably suffer from the same malady – ships, people, mountains, and the like. Quine's point, I supposed, was somehow a consequence of something more deeply buried in his overall outlook. But I didn't quite see what that was. And certainly I didn't see why it went without saying.

My interest in propositions led me in graduate school to Richard Cartwright's classic paper "Propositions." I had been told that Cartwright advanced a theory of propositions. I had no idea what such a theory might look like, but the promise of this virtual pot of gold was enough to keep me going for quite a while. In the end, Cartwright's paper was indeed a goldmine, but the advertised theory failed to materialize. Not that Cartwright himself advertised any such thing. Pondering Cartwright's incisive thought on the matter was helpful in all sorts of ways, and led me to Frege.

I called my dissertation *What Propositions Could Not Be*; it was largely a series of applications of Benacerraf's central form of argument in "What Numbers Could Not Be."⁹ I advanced nothing I like a theory of propositions. But I did argue that various contenders would not do, most notably Frege's candidate for propositions –

⁸ Although the problem mentioned seems not merely about criteria of identity but about something arguably more serious, our inability to make discriminating judgments. Even if in practice we could make such judgments with confidence, it's still another thing to sort out the criteria to which we appeal.

⁹ The stimulation was provided by Cartwright. He dismisses a related kind of argument, and it seemed to me that he did so prematurely. This led to Benacerraf, who develops the form of argument with great care. Benacerraf's paper is widely anthologized. It appeared originally in *Philosophical Review*...

his *thoughts* – the senses of sentences.¹⁰ And there was a positive side – what I called above a rough sense – one that, as I was happily to learn, found resonance in the work of people like Keith Donnellan, David Kaplan, Saul Kripke, Ruth Marcus, and John Perry.

At the time of my dissertation writing, however, most of their work was largely either not yet widely available or formulated in an idiom that made it difficult for me to appreciate. Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*, for example, was in circulation when I began my dissertation, and I knew people who with considerable excitement heard the original lectures. But I couldn't for the life of me see what *rigid designation*, Kripke's notion concerning referential stability across possible worlds, had to do with the issues of concern to me.

Donnellan's work was different. I had studied it with great interest. It seemed immediately relevant, even motivated by concerns with which I felt considerable sympathy. That was no trivial matter. Among the philosophers with whom I had contact, Quine exerted something of a dominating influence. And so Donnellan's taking seriously many of the very things for which Quineans had little use was like fresh air.

My interest in propositions and my developing sense that Frege's sense-reference picture was inadequate, led me in my dissertation to what we now call, following David Kaplan, *direct reference*. Indexical expressions – unambiguous words like 'I', 'she', 'that', 'here', 'now' the references of which vary with context – were, I argued, devices of reference but did not fit Frege's model. We do not associate them with anything like Fregean senses;¹¹ they are instead like pointing devices.

And if indexicals had no associated Fregean senses, then the propositions that we assert by the use of such expressions fail to contain such senses. When I say, "She is a famous novelist," it is not the *sense* of 'she' but the *reference* that figures in what

¹⁰ Frege's view is that thoughts were the senses of sentences that were "complete in every respect." See Frege's essay, "The Thought."

I assert. Nor is it only indexicals that violate Frege's strictures. If Donnellan is correct, even definite descriptions, at least when they function "referentially," do so as well. This was exciting: Definite descriptions, Frege's own paradigm referring expression, don't fit his model.

There is a famous dispute between Frege and Russell on the nature of propositions about which I will say more in the first two chapters. Frege – his is the classical idea – saw propositions as thoroughly conceptual entities, constituted by senses. Russell, no friend of senses, saw propositional constituents as the references of linguistic expressions, particulars or universals. Kaplan, arguing for the inadequacy of Frege's explication, reintroduced Russell's idea and dubbed the propositions *singular propositions*.

It was in the direction of this idea that I was headed in my dissertation, or so it seemed when I first read Kaplan. But Kaplan's idea – abstract entities that contain ordered constituents – is much more theoretically refined than anything I had in mind. My idea was less clear, more picturesque: the referent, and not any sort of concept or sense, "figures in" what is asserted. As I now see it, my more intuitive formulation has a certain virtue: it accommodates views, like my present one, in which propositions play no role. For to say that the referent is what figures in what was asserted may come to no more than saying that the predicate is applied directly to the referent.¹²

As I've said, by the end of this book propositions no longer figure in my way of explaining or developing direct reference. This development is very gradual. The book begins with the perspectives of Frege and Russell, for whom propositions – the contents of our utterances and thoughts – are philosophically central. By the middle of the book, however, we (hopefully including the reader) find ourselves increasingly aware of the metaphorical character of "content" talk. This should not

¹¹ I argue in Chapter 5 that views like Kaplan's and John Perry's share too much of Frege's picture. To anticipate my discussion, Kaplan's *characters*, while they admittedly differ in some respects from Fregean senses, function in many ways just like senses.

by itself make one skeptical about *content*. But it may – and here it will – prompt the question of precisely what work *content* is doing in the philosophy of language (and mind). Even in the end, I don't want to deny the utility of the metaphor – no doubt it's convenient to speak, for example, of the single thing that speakers of different languages can assert. The question, though, is whether the metaphor – or its remains in a philosophical theory of content – does any serious and needed explanatory work.¹³

2. My Frege and Yours

Here is a story from David Kaplan: In the course of lecturing in Oxford on direct reference and Frege, he was told that Frege held no such views (as the one's Kaplan attributed to him) and not only that but had Frege held such views, he would be right. Kaplan was joking, in part, about a recent trend in historical scholarship. I'll address this trend in its more general aspect, and then return to Frege.

Here's an example of the trend: there are a number of recent thought-provoking interpretations of Kant's ethical outlook that emphasize continuity with Aristotle. This contrasts with a more extreme reading of Kant – arguably based on a

¹² I don't claim theoretical refinement for this formulation either. But it does get at a fundamental intuition, and it does so without talk of content or the like.

¹³ Perhaps the first chink in the armor is suspicion about the idea of cognitive content that figures prominently in Frege's explanation of the classical puzzle about informative identities. Direct reference advocates, under Frege's influence, tried to refashion the idea of cognitive content so as to make it kosher. All manner of Frege-style explanations of informativeness ensue. But there is, or so I argue, a much simpler way, one that involves no idea of cognitive content.

But cognitive content is one thing, semantic content – propositions – is quite another. Frege, as I read him, identified the two, but as you will see in Chapter 6, the direct reference work of Kaplan and Perry make it seem natural to distinguish these sorts of contents. (This distinction between cognitive and semantic content has worked it's way in the literature into new readings of Frege and new Frege-inspired views.) Even if one goes with my rejection, in Chapter 6, of cognitive contents, one has not yet rejected propositions, as I do later in the book. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say, not that I reject propositions, as that I do not rely on them in my account of the relevant phenomena.

naïve reading of some of the relevant texts. The more extreme rendition emphasizes Kant's contention that the moral worth of an action is a function of its motivating intentions and of the extent to which the undertaking involves fighting inclination. Historical scholarship aside, the more extreme reading is philosophically interesting for it embodies a radical alternative to Aristotle. If such a Kant didn't exist he would be worth inventing, if just for the questions raised and the contrasts provided. In what follows, for brevity I'll sometimes refer to my hypothetical Kant as "Kant."

Indeed, to say that Aristotle and (my hypothetical) Kant are opposed, even dramatically so, is to understate their differences. Indeed, they look at things so differently that it's no longer easy to play them off against one another, as we could if they shared a philosophical project and differed merely doctrinally. Their projects display a kind of light incommensurability.¹⁴ Where Aristotle conducts a largely empirical study of human flourishing, Kant explores *a priori* the theoretical underpinnings of those duties incumbent on any rational being. For Aristotle the fundamental ethical question is not that of our obligations qua rational agents but rather our living well as intelligent, social organisms. For Kant, duty is the fundamental notion; much of what is involved in living well is not of specifically moral concern.

The trend I mentioned – seeing historical continuities where others see fundamental disagreement – may result in a more nuanced understanding of major figures. Yet one needs to be careful not to lose insight in (possibly) gaining accuracy. However one ultimately interprets Kant (or, as we will see, Frege), it is important to explore the radically divergent conceptions that reflect themselves in the (arguably) naïve interpretations.

To bring the interpretative trend home, the Frege you will meet here is a more extreme character than often portrayed in recent literature. Where I see stark contrast with Wittgenstein, others see continuity. My reading is admittedly selective,

¹⁴ "Light," by contrast with the sort of incommensurability of which Kuhn appeared to speak in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn's notion appeared to involve conceptual

especially attentive to Frege's later, more philosophical papers like "On Sense and Reference" and "The Thought." It is, however, based upon what I hope is a naïve and plain approach to that material. And, whether or not I have him right, my Frege can certainly be recognized in later Fregeans – the view is certainly in the air. Nor is it only a matter of his later admirers; I would argue that Wittgenstein, in *Philosophical Investigations*, sees Frege as the foremost advocate for traditional philosophy.

Of course there may be much to be said for the recent continuity-emphasizing interpretive work. At the same time, I would be surprised if my reading fails to represent a strand in the actual Frege's thought. In any case, my Frege – even if fictional – is a very useful character to have around. In what follows, I'll refer to him simply as "Frege." Joking aside, for purposes of my project here I remain agnostic on the admittedly important question of the best overall interpretation of Frege's thought.

My reconstruction of the debate in the philosophy of language is thus doubly controversial. There is my reading of Frege as well as my take on direct reference as revolutionary. The latter has a prescriptive aspect; I'm pushing the direct reference literature in a certain direction. I thus not only highlight the differences between Frege and his recent critics; I will seek to widen the gap where this is suggested by the natural flow of the ideas.¹⁵ I do this because of my interest in a radical alternative, radical enough to involve (light) incommensurability. My direct reference advocate, as you will see, plays Aristotle to Frege's Kant. The respective philosophical projects are strikingly different.

My prescription aside, direct reference literature has often intimated deep disagreement with the tradition. This disagreement shares in the magic invisibility mentioned at the beginning of this Introduction: the divergence can be easy to miss,

differences that were so radical as to preclude formulating the theses of one theory in the vocabulary of the other.

¹⁵ Such focus on larger issues underlying the direct reference critique decreases the temptation to revert to traditional modes of thought when the going gets rough. As we will see, it gets rough for the anti-Fregean when one turns to the topics of Chapter 6 through 9, the puzzles that for Frege and Russell were at the heart of our subject.

to misidentify as of merely local significance, a matter of detail. There is a clue to disagreement over fundamentals, one that deserves considerably more attention than usually afforded: talk at cross purposes. Such talk is characteristic of certain philosophic debates. It's sometimes positively striking in ethical discussions between Kantians and Aristotelians. It's perhaps even more arresting – or more so to me at least – in the debate between direct reference advocates and Fregeans, as I'll comment on below and more extensively in Chapter 6. Instead of minimizing the significance of such failed communication, instead of trying to paraphrase the opponents so as to maximize conceptual contact, we might seize on such talk as revealing clues to possibly gaping underlying differences. For when philosopher's projects – and not only their theoretical proposals – differ significantly one can expect considerable talk at cross purposes.

3. What's to Come

Here then is the sketch. Chapter 1 introduces the reader – who I do not assume is a specialist in the philosophy of language¹⁶ – to Frege's outlook. Chapter 2 takes one deeper into the traditional picture, in part by playing Russell off Frege, in part by studying what their much noted fellowship consists in. Here I introduce one of the pivotal notions in what's to come – an idea that goes to the heart of traditional thinking – what I call the cognitive fix idea: the reference of a word is grounded in the mind's grasp of the item in question. This idea suggests a requirement that is endorsed – in one way or another – by Frege and Russell, and their many followers (even, alas, many direct reference brothers and sisters): the use of a linguistic expression to refer to an item requires that the speaker be cognitively or epistemically prepared to individuate the referent.

In Chapter 3 I adumbrate two large scale pictures of language and thought that set the tone for what is to follow. One of the pictures is traditional, Cartesian-inspired. Somewhere near its heart is the idea that thought is prior to language – in

any number of respects I set out. The other picture is my own; it emphasizes social practice and in many ways turns the tables on the Cartesian-inspired picture.

In Chapter 4 my radical anti-Fregean rejects, on roughly empirical grounds, what is at the very heart of the Fregean outlook, the cognitive fix idea. The Fregean is incredulous; not at his opponent's challenge concerning actual practice, about which the Fregean can admit that he owes an answer. He is incredulous at the radical suggestion that reference can be cognitively unmediated. For him, this raises the question of the very intelligibility of the anti-Fregean position. The question of the coherence of what is on my view the core idea of direct reference – cognitively unmediated reference – is the topic of this chapter.

Chapter 5 further explores the fundamental disagreement. Both Fregeans and opponents seek to render intelligible the phenomenon of name reference. As Fregeans sometimes urge, however, only their approach gets so far as to explain the name-referent connection, to get beneath our practices.¹⁷ A tendentious Fregean might say that direct reference fails to articulate a semantic theory, an explanatory account of the connection between words and things.

I'll argue that on the contrary, the Fregean "explanation" – like positing a god to explain the existence of the universe – is bogus. Even worse, there is no explanatory space between a name and a referent, no room, or need, for the sort of explanation the Fregean offers. The Fregean account is not only empirically inadequate, as I'll argue in Chapters 3 and 4. Its explanatory project is illusory. The proper task for philosophical semantics is a more surface-level characterization of practice: what, as our practices go, links up name and referent?

Thus in Chapter 5, the debate gets even more polarized. And views about the character of the semantical project – the task of philosophical work on meaning and

¹⁶ Specialists may wish to glance at the first chapter and skip to the second.

¹⁷ As I explain in Chapter 5, the version of anti-Fregeanism that attempts an externalist (e.g., a causal) explanation of reference is another thing. Such a view indeed attempts to provide an explanation of what the Fregean (thinks he) explains. From a Fregean point of view, the attempt does not succeed, and from my point of view, elaborated in Chapter 5, there is nothing to explain.

reference – are beginning to diverge (as they will further in later chapters), despite a mutual interest in the name-referent connection.

I said above that talk at cross-purposes was conspicuous in the literature I'm exploring.¹⁸ Here's what I meant: Anti-Fregeans – like Kripke in *Naming and Necessity* – portray the traditionalist as missing the boat on actual linguistic practice, no trivial matter. On the other side – and this will be my emphasis in Chapters 6-9 – traditionalists see the anti-Fregeans as insensitive to what is for them at the very heart of the philosophical study of language, the puzzles concerning the “cognitive significance” of language. The most famous of these is of course Frege's puzzle about informative identity sentences, elaborated in Chapter 1.

This difference of focus and emphasis – actual practice vs. the puzzles – has sometimes been noted. But I want to underscore it as another great divide, right up there with the cognitive fix requirement, and with the question of the propriety of a Frege-style explanation of reference that attempts to get behind or beneath our practices. Indeed, while I emphasize these other great divides in earlier chapters, what gets pride of place in the literature as well as in oral discussion are the puzzles. The focus of the Chapter 6 is the informative identity puzzle; Chapter 7 will explore empty names, that is, names that lack reference. In Chapters 8 and 9, I turn to sentences that report belief and the other “propositional attitudes.” Chapter 10 concludes the book with a look at what has become of propositions, a central topic at the beginning.

Attention to the puzzles in Chapters 6-9 will extend our sense of what is at issue. We will need to see why at least early in the debate, direct reference advocates often seemed to place relatively little weight on the puzzles.¹⁹ Was this just

¹⁸ This is striking especially – perhaps only – when one studies early stages of the debate. I've suggested above and I'll argue in the book that such cross-talk provides a handle on the fundamental issues at stake. This is a virtue that is lost in later, more “cooperative” discussions. Indeed, these later discussions, I'll argue, tend to share in the sterility of “Gettierology.” (I allude to some of the developments in the post-Gettier epistemological literature on the analysis of knowledge.) But more of this later.

¹⁹ Kripke, for example, in *Naming and Necessity*. Early in the First Lecture, Kripke mentions a number of considerations that “seem conclusive in favor of the view of Frege and

inattention, or avoidance , or – as I’ll suggest – are there methodological and substantive reasons for supposing that the puzzles don’t belong at center stage?

Given my idea that the roots of the debate go deeper than often realized, it is natural that I carefully attend to the actual instances of talk at cross purposes, and so to the famous puzzles. But there is another reason for extended discussion of the puzzles. In Chapter 3, I’ll make something like a campaign promise:

To overthrow a paradigm. . . requires more than the presentation of problematic data (from actual practice), even if that data can be seen as pointing to a different fundamental conception. The received view, after all, presumably has its own intuitive motivation, a range of examples or considerations that have made it seem attractive and natural. Before the revolutionary can rest, then, he needs to take seriously the considerations that motivate his opponents’ view, data that may well be difficult to accommodate on the new picture. . . . If my preferred account cannot accommodate such phenomena in a natural, organic fashion, if epicyclical sophistication is required (or, what seems just as bad, biting the bullet and settling for relatively unintuitive judgments dictated by theory), this will count heavily against my approach.

The Fregean is able to provide relatively natural solutions to the puzzles. This, more than anything else, is what fortifies Frege’s picture, what makes it seem attractive, straightforward, unstrained. Whether or not the puzzles deserve the role traditionalists have given them, the phenomena in question surely need

Russell,” prominently including some of the puzzles. But he concludes that even though he doesn’t have anything like adequate solutions on behalf of the contrary Millian view he prefers, “it’s pretty certain that the view of Frege and Russell is false.” (Pp. 28-29) If puzzles play the role of experiments, Kripke’s remark is strange indeed.

accommodation. And as I say in the quotation, the accommodation had better be natural; it had better be coherent with one's overall picture.

What emerged from my study of the puzzles was not what I expected or sought. Struggling with the puzzles over the years led me to think that if one really effects the sort of gestalt switch that I'm advocating – if one, for example, really begins to think of reference as not requiring cognitive mediation – the phenomena that were formally seen to be puzzling look very different. They fall into place requiring no special explanation at all. So in the end I want to dispel the sense that there are puzzling phenomena here, things that shouldn't be as they appear to be, the sense that we are faced with several ideas that seem at once correct and incompatible.

To use the jargon, my account does not seek to provide solutions to the classical puzzles. It seeks rather to dissolve them. Talk of dissolving puzzles has Wittgensteinian resonance. I certainly don't mind this. At the same time, it's important to me that I did not set out to dissolve puzzles, to provide Wittgensteinian therapy. Nor are my conclusions a matter of applying some sort of general therapeutic idea or technique. It is best not to come to putative puzzles, here or elsewhere, with the thought that somehow they must be dissolved. The question is how best – most naturally – to think about the phenomena that are alleged to be puzzling. Dissolution, if and when it occurs, amounts to the recognition that the intellectual cramp was not intrinsic to the example, but was a product of unnecessary assumptions brought to it.

The tendency in Wittgenstein's thought is to suppose – I like to think of it as a hypothesis or conjecture – that many if not all classical philosophical puzzles are products of inadequate conceptions of the relevant domains, of unnecessary and misleading assumptions brought to the alleged puzzle cases. This, needless to say, does not encourage ignoring the puzzles, taking a dismissive attitude. Puzzles turn out to be crucial, as Russell taught. But contrary to Russell, they do not play the role of experiments. They are rather symptoms that announce an inadequate underlying

picture. The idea is not to leave the picture in place and to use theoretical ingenuity to devise a way out. The underlying picture is what needs our attention.²⁰

²⁰ Wittgenstein likened the matter to psychotherapy, a useful likeness I think. As long as one does not begin with the assumption that puzzling phenomena need to be dissolved.