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UNTERSUCHUNGEN

PHILOSOPHICAL  
INVESTIGATIONS

LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

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1. Cum ipsi (maiores homines) appellabant rem aliquam, et cum secundum eam vocem corpus ad aliquid movebant, videbam, et tenebam hoc ab eis vocari rem illam, quod sonabant, cum eam vellent ostendere. Hoc autem eos velle ex motu corporis aperiebatur: tamquam verbis naturalibus omnium gentium, quae fiunt vultu et nutu oculorum, ceterorumque membrorum actu, et sonitu vocis indicante affectionem animi in petendis, habendis, rejiciendis, fugiendisve rebus. Ita verba in variis sententiis locis suis posita, et crebro audita, quarum rerum signa essent, paulatim colligebam, measque jam voluntates, edomito in eis signis ore, per haec enuntiabam. (Augustine, *Confessions*, I. 8.)<sup>1</sup>

These words, it seems to me, give us a particular picture of the essence of human language. It is this: the words in language name objects — sentences are combinations of such names. — In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.

Augustine does not mention any difference between kinds of word. Someone who describes the learning of language in this way is, I believe, thinking primarily of nouns like “table”, “chair”, “bread”, and of people’s names, and only secondarily of the names of certain actions and properties; and of the remaining kinds of word as something that will take care of itself.

\* Now think of the following use of language: I send someone shopping. I give him a slip of paper marked “five red apples”. He takes the slip to |3| the shopkeeper, who opens the drawer marked “apples”; then

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\* <sup>1</sup> When grown-ups named some object and at the same time turned towards it, I perceived this, and I grasped that the thing was signified by the sound they uttered, since they meant to point *it* out. This, however, I gathered from their gestures, the natural language of all peoples, the language that by means of facial expression and the play of eyes, of the movements of the limbs and the tone of voice, indicates the affections of the soul when it desires, or clings to, or rejects, or recoils from, something. In this way, little by little, I learnt to understand what things the words, which I heard uttered in their respective places in various sentences, signified. And once I got my tongue around these signs, I used them to express my wishes.

he looks up the word “red” in a chart and finds a colour sample next to it; then he says the series of elementary number-words — I assume that he knows them by heart — up to the word “five”, and for each number-word he takes an apple of the same colour as the sample out of the drawer. — It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words. — “But how does he know where and how he is to look up the word ‘red’ and what he is to do with the word ‘five’?” — Well, I assume that he *acts* as I have described. Explanations come to an end somewhere. — But what is the meaning of the word “five”? — No such thing was in question here, only how the word “five” is used.

2. That philosophical notion of meaning is at home in a primitive idea of the way language functions. But one might instead say that it is the idea of a language more primitive than ours.

Let us imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right: the language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass him the stones and to do so in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they make use of a language consisting of the words “block”, “pillar”, “slab”, “beam”. A calls them out; B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call. — Conceive of this as a complete primitive language.

3. Augustine, we might say, does describe a system of communication; only not everything that we call language is this system. And one has to say this in several cases where the question arises “Will that description do or not?” The answer is: “Yes, it will, but only for this narrowly circumscribed area, not for the whole of what you were purporting to describe.”

It is as if someone were to say, “Playing a game consists in moving objects about on a surface according to certain rules . . .” — and we replied: You seem to be thinking of board-games, but they are not all the games there are. You can rectify your explanation by expressly restricting it to those games.

4. Imagine a script in which letters were used for sounds, but also for signs of emphasis and punctuation. (A script can be conceived as a language for describing sound-patterns.) Now imagine someone construing that script as if there were just a |4| correspondence of letters to

sounds and as if the letters did not also have completely different functions. Augustine's conception of language is like such an over-simple conception of the script.

5. If one looks at the example in §1, one can perhaps get an idea of how much the general concept of the meaning of a word surrounds the working of language with a haze which makes clear vision impossible. — It disperses the fog if we study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of use in which one can clearly survey the purpose and functioning of the words.

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

6. We could imagine that the language of §2 was the *whole* language of A and B, even the whole language of a tribe. The children are brought up to perform *these* actions, to use *these* words as they do so, and to react in *this* way to the words of others.

An important part of the training will consist in the teacher's pointing to the objects, directing the child's attention to them, and at the same time uttering a word; for instance, the word "slab" as he displays that shape. (I do not want to call this "ostensive explanation" or "definition", because the child cannot as yet *ask* what the name is. I'll call it "ostensive teaching of words". — I say that it will form an important part of the training, because it is so with human beings; not because it could not be imagined otherwise.) This ostensive teaching of words can be said to establish an associative connection between word and thing. But what does this mean? Well, it may mean various things; but one very likely thinks first of all that a picture of the object comes before the child's mind when it hears the word. But now, if this does happen — is it the purpose of the word? — Yes, it *may* be the purpose. — I can imagine such a use of words (of sequences of sounds). (Uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination.) But in the language of §2 it is *not* the purpose of the words to evoke images. (It may, of course, be discovered that it helps to attain the actual purpose.)

But if this is the effect of the ostensive teaching, am I to say that it effects an understanding of the word? Doesn't someone who acts on the call "Slab!" in such-and-such a way understand it? — No doubt it

was the ostensive teaching that helped to bring this about; but only together with a particular [5] kind of instruction. With different instruction the same ostensive teaching of these words would have effected a quite different understanding.

“I set the brake up by connecting up rod and lever.” — Yes, given the whole of the rest of the mechanism. Only in conjunction with that is it a brake-lever, and separated from its support it is not even a lever; it may be anything, or nothing.

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

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

And the processes of naming the stones and of repeating words after someone might also be called language-games. Think of certain uses that are made of words in games like ring-a-ring-a-roses.

I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven, a “language-game”.

8. Let us now look at an expansion of language (2). Besides the four words “block”, “pillar”, etc., let it contain a sequence of words used as the shopkeeper in (1) uses number-words (it may be the series of letters of the alphabet); further, let it contain two words which may as well be “there” and “this” (because that roughly indicates their purpose), which are used in connection with a pointing gesture; and finally a number of colour samples. A gives an order like “d-slab-there”. At the same time he shows the assistant a colour sample, and when he utters the word “there” he points to a place on the building site. From the stock of slabs, B takes one for each letter of the alphabet up to “d”, of the same colour as the sample, and brings them to the place A indicates. — On other occasions A gives the order “this-there”. At “this” he points at a building stone. And so on.

9. When a child learns this language, he has to learn the series of number-words *a, b, c, . . .* by heart. And he has to learn their use. — Will this training include ostensive teaching of the words? — Well, people [6] will, for example, point to slabs and count: “*a, b, c slabs*”. — Something more like the ostensive teaching of the words “*block*”, “*pillar*”, etc. would be the ostensive teaching of number-words that serve not to count but to signify groups of objects that can be taken in at a glance. Children do learn the use of the first five or six elementary number-words in this way.

Are “*there*” and “*this*” also taught ostensively? — Imagine how one might perhaps teach their use. One will point at places and things, but in this case the pointing occurs in the *use* of the words too and not merely in learning the use. —

10. Now what do the words of this language *signify*? — How is what they signify supposed to come out other than in the kind of use they have? And we have already described that. So the expression “*This word signifies that*” would have to become a part of our description. In other words, the description ought to take the form: “*The word . . . signifies . . .*”

Well, one can abbreviate the description of the use of the word “*slab*” by saying that this word signifies this object. This will be done if, for example, it is merely a matter of removing the misunderstanding that the word “*slab*” refers to the building stone that we in fact call “*block*” — but the kind of ‘*referring*’ this is, that is to say, the rest of the use of these words, is already known.

Equally one may say that the signs “*a*”, “*b*”, etc. signify numbers: when, for example, this removes the misunderstanding that “*a*”, “*b*”, “*c*” play the part actually played in the language by “*block*”, “*slab*”, “*pillar*”. And one may also say that “*c*” signifies this number and not that one; if, for example, this serves to explain that the letters are to be used in the order *a, b, c, d, etc.*, and not in the order *a, b, d, c*.

But making the descriptions of the uses of these words similar in this way cannot make the uses themselves any more like one another! For, as we see, they are absolutely unlike.

11. Think of the tools in a toolbox: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails and screws. — The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects. (And in both cases there are similarities.)

\* Of course, what confuses us is the uniform appearance of words when we hear them in speech, or see them written or in print. For their *use* is not that obvious. Especially when we are doing philosophy! [7]

12. It is like looking into the cabin of a locomotive. There are handles there, all looking more or less alike. (This stands to reason, since they are all supposed to be handled.) But one is the handle of a crank, which can be moved continuously (it regulates the opening of a valve); another is the handle of a switch, which has only two operative positions: it is either off or on; a third is the handle of a brake-lever, the harder one pulls on it, the harder the braking; a fourth, the handle of a pump: it has an effect only so long as it is moved to and fro.

13. If we say, “Every word in the language signifies something”, we have so far said nothing *whatever*; unless we explain exactly *what* distinction we wish to make. (It might be, of course, that we wanted to distinguish the words of language (8) from words ‘without meaning’ such as occur in Lewis Carroll’s poems, or words like “Tra-la-la” in a song.)

14. Suppose someone said, “*All* tools serve to modify something. So, a hammer modifies the position of a nail, a saw the shape of a board, and so on.” — And what is modified by a rule, a glue-pot and nails? — “Our knowledge of a thing’s length, the temperature of the glue, and the solidity of a box.” — Would anything be gained by this assimilation of expressions? —

15. The word “signify” is perhaps most straightforwardly applied when the name is actually a mark on the object signified. Suppose that the tools A uses in building bear certain marks. When A shows his assistant such a mark, the assistant brings the tool that has that mark on it.

In this way, and in more or less similar ways, a name signifies a thing, and is given to a thing. — When philosophizing, it will often prove useful to say to ourselves: naming something is rather like attaching a name tag to a thing.

16. What about the colour samples that A shows to B: are they part of the *language*? Well, it is as you please. They do not belong to

spoken language; yet when I say to someone, “Pronounce the word ‘the’”, you will also count the second “‘the’” as part of the sentence. Yet it has a role just like that of a colour sample in language-game (8); that is, it is a sample of what the other is meant to say.

It is most natural, and causes least confusion, if we count the samples as tools of the language.

\* ((Remark on the reflexive pronoun “*this* proposition”.) ) |8|

17. We could say: In language (8) we have different *kinds of word*. For the functions of the word “slab” and the word “block” are more alike than those of “slab” and “d”. But how we group words into kinds will depend on the aim of the classification — and on our own inclination.

Think of the different points of view according to which one can classify tools into kinds of tools. Or chess pieces into kinds of chess pieces.

18. Don’t let it bother you that languages (2) and (8) consist only of orders. If you want to say that they are therefore incomplete, ask yourself whether our own language is complete — whether it was so before the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus were incorporated in to it; for these are, so to speak, suburbs of our language. (And how many houses or streets does it take before a town begins to be a town?) Our language can be regarded as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, of houses with extensions from various periods, and all this surrounded by a multitude of new suburbs with straight and regular streets and uniform houses.

\* 19. It is easy to imagine a language consisting only of orders and reports in battle. — Or a language consisting only of questions and expressions for answering Yes and No — and countless other things. — And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.

But what about this: is the call “Slab!” in example (2) a sentence or a word? — If a word, surely it has not the same meaning as the like-sounding word of our ordinary language, for in §2 it is a call. But if a sentence, it is surely not the elliptical sentence “Slab!” of our language. — As far as the first question goes, you can call “Slab!” a word and also a sentence; perhaps it could aptly be called a ‘degenerate sentence’ (as one speaks of a degenerate hyperbola); in fact it is our ‘elliptical’

sentence. — But that is surely only a shortened form of the sentence “Bring me a slab”, and there is no such sentence in example (2). — But why shouldn’t I conversely have called the sentence “Bring me a slab” a *lengthening* of the sentence “Slab!”? — Because anyone who calls out “Slab!” really means “Bring me a slab”. — But how do you do this: how do you *mean* that while *saying* “Slab!”? Do you say the unshortened sentence to yourself? And why should I translate the call “Slab!” into a different expression in order to say [9] what someone means by it? And if they mean the same thing, why shouldn’t I say, “When he says ‘Slab!’ he means ‘Slab!’”? Again, why shouldn’t you be able to mean “Slab!”, if you can mean “Bring me the slab!”? — But when I call out “Slab!”, then what I want is *that he should bring me a slab!* — Certainly, but does ‘wanting this’ consist in thinking in some form or other a different sentence from the one you utter? —

- \* 20. But now it looks as if when someone says “Bring me a slab”, he could mean this expression as one long word corresponding indeed to the single word “Slab!” — Then can one mean it sometimes as one word, and sometimes as four? And how does one usually mean it? — I think we’ll be inclined to say: we mean the sentence as one consisting of *four* words when we use it in contrast to other sentences such as “*Hand* me a slab”, “Bring *him* a slab”, “Bring *two* slabs”, etc.; that is, in contrast with sentences containing the words of our command in other combinations. — But what does using one sentence in contrast to others consist in? Does one have the others in mind at the same time? *All* of them? And *while* one is saying the one sentence, or before, or afterwards? — No! Even if such an explanation rather tempts us, we need only think for a moment of what actually happens in order to see that we are on the wrong track here. We say that we use the command in contrast with other sentences because *our language* contains the possibility of those other sentences. Someone who did not understand our language, a foreigner, who had fairly often heard someone giving the order “Bring me a slab!”, might believe that this whole sequence of sounds was one word corresponding perhaps to the word for “building stone” in his language. If he himself had then given this order, perhaps he would have pronounced it differently, and we’d say: he pronounces it so oddly because he takes it for a single word. — But then is there not also something different going on in him when he pronounces it — something corresponding to the fact that he conceives the sentence as a single word? — The same thing may go on in him, or

something different. What goes on in you when you give such an order? Are you conscious of its consisting of four words *while* you are uttering it? Of course you *know* this language — which contains those other sentences as well — but is this knowing something that ‘*happens*’ while you are uttering the sentence? — And I have conceded that the foreigner, who conceives the sentence differently, will probably also pronounce it differently; but what we call his wrong conception does not *have* to lie in anything that accompanies the utterance of the command. [10]

\* The sentence is ‘elliptical’, not because it leaves out something that we mean when we utter it, but because it is shortened — in comparison with a particular paradigm of our grammar. — Of course someone might object here: “You grant that the shortened and the unshortened sentence have the same sense. — What is this sense, then? Isn’t there a verbal expression for this sense?” — But doesn’t their having the same sense consist in their having the same *use*? — (In Russian one says “Stone red” instead of “The stone is red”. Does the sense they grasp lack the copula? Or do they add the copula *in thought*?)

21. Imagine a language-game in which A asks, and B reports, the number of slabs or blocks in a pile, or the colours and shapes of the building stones that are stacked in such-and-such a place. — Such a report might run: “Five slabs.” Now what is the difference between the report or assertion “Five slabs” and the order “Five slabs!”? — Well, it is the part which uttering these words plays in the language-game. But the tone of voice in which they are uttered is likely to be different too, as are the facial expression and some other things. But we could also imagine the tone’s being the same — for an order and a report can be spoken in a *variety* of tones of voice and with various facial expressions — the difference being only in the use that is made of these words. (Of course, we might also use the words “assertion” and “command” to signify a grammatical form of a sentence and a particular intonation; just as we would call the sentence “Isn’t the weather glorious to-day?” a question, although it is used as an assertion.) We could imagine a language in which *all* assertions had the form and tone of rhetorical questions; or every command had the form of the question “Would you like to . . .?”. Perhaps it will then be said: “What he says has the form of a question but is really a command” — that is, has the function of a command in linguistic practice. (Similarly, one says “You will do this” not as a prophecy, but as a command. What makes it the one or the other?)

- \* 22. Frege's opinion that every assertion contains an assumption, which is the thing that is asserted, really rests on the possibility, found in our language, of writing every assertoric sentence in the form "It is asserted that such-and-such is the case". — But "that such-and-such is the case" is *not* a sentence in our language — it is not yet a *move* in the language-game. And if I write, not "It is asserted that . . .", but "It is asserted: such-and-such is the case", the words "It is asserted" simply become superfluous.

We might very well also write every assertion in the form of a [11] question followed by an affirmative expression; for instance, "Is it raining? Yes!" Would this show that every assertion contained a question?

Of course, one has the right to use an assertion sign in contrast with a question-mark: for example, or if one wants to distinguish an assertion from a fiction or an assumption. It is a mistake only if one thinks that the assertion consists of two acts, entertaining and asserting (assigning a truth-value, or something of the kind), and that in performing these acts we follow the sentence sign by sign roughly as we sing from sheet music. Reading the written sentence loudly or softly is indeed comparable to singing from sheet music, but '*meaning*' (thinking) the sentence that is read is not.

- \* The Fregean assertion sign marks the *beginning of a sentence*. So its function is like that of the full stop. It distinguishes the whole period from a clause *within* the period. If I hear someone say "it's raining", but do not know whether I have heard the beginning and end of the period, then so far this sentence fails to convey anything to me.

- \* Imagine a picture representing a boxer in a particular fighting stance. Well, this picture can be used to tell someone how he should stand, should hold himself; or how he should not hold himself; or how a particular man did stand in such-and-such a place; and so on. One might (using the language of chemistry) call this picture a sentence-radical. Frege probably conceived of the "assumption" along these lines. [p. 11 n.]

23. But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question and command? — There are *countless* kinds; countless different kinds of use of all the things we call "signs", "words", "sentences". And this diversity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and

others become obsolete and get forgotten. (We can get a *rough picture* of this from the changes in mathematics.)

The word “language-*game*” is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.

Consider the variety of language-games in the following examples, and in others:

- Giving orders, and acting on them —
- Describing an object by its appearance, or by its measurements —
- Constructing an object from a description (a drawing) —
- Reporting an event —
- Speculating about the event — [12]
- Forming and testing a hypothesis —
- Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams —
- Making up a story; and reading one —
- Acting in a play —
- Singing rounds —
- Guessing riddles —
- Cracking a joke; telling one —
- Solving a problem in applied arithmetic —
- Translating from one language into another —
- Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.

— It is interesting to compare the diversity of the tools of language and of the ways they are used, the diversity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language. (This includes the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.)

24. Someone who does not bear in mind the variety of language-games will perhaps be inclined to ask questions like: “What is a question?” — Is it a way of stating that I do not know such-and-such, or that I wish the other person would tell me . . . ? Or is it a description of my mental state of uncertainty? — And is the cry “Help!” such a description?

Remember how many different kinds of thing are called “description”: description of a body’s position by means of its co-ordinates,

description of a facial expression, description of a sensation of touch, of a mood.

Of course, it is possible to substitute for the usual form of a question the form of a statement or description: “I want to know whether . . .” or “I am in doubt whether . . .” — but this does not bring the different language-games any closer together.

The significance of such possibilities of transformation, for example, of turning all assertoric sentences into sentences beginning with the prefix “I think” or “I believe” (and thus, as it were, into descriptions of *my* inner life) will become clearer in another place. (Solipsism.)

- \* 25. It is sometimes said: animals do not talk because they lack the mental abilities. And this means: “They do not think, and that is why they do not talk.” But — they simply do not talk. Or better: they do not use language — if we disregard the most primitive forms of language. — Giving orders, asking questions, telling stories, having a chat, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing.

26. One thinks that learning language consists in giving names to objects. For example, to human beings, to shapes, to colours, to pains, to |13| moods, to numbers, etc. To repeat — naming is something like attaching a name tag to a thing. One can call this a preparation for the use of a word. But *what* is it a preparation *for*?

27. “We name things and then we can talk about them: can refer to them in talk.” — As if what we did next were given with the mere act of naming. As if there were only one thing called “talking about things”. Whereas in fact we do the most various things with our sentences. Think just of exclamations, with their completely different functions.

Water!  
 Away!  
 Ow!  
 Help!  
 Splendid!  
 No!

Are you still inclined to call these words “names of objects”?

In languages (2) and (8), there was no such thing as asking something's name. This, with its correlate, ostensive explanation, is, we might say, a language-game in its own right. That is really to say: we are brought up, trained, to ask "What is that called?" — upon which the name is given. And there is also a language-game of inventing a name for something, that is, of saying "This is called . . ." and then using the new name. (So, for example, children give names to their dolls and then talk about them and to them. Consider in this connection how singular is the use of a person's name to *call* him!)

28. Now, one can ostensibly define a person's name, the name of a colour, the name of a material, a number-word, the name of a point of the compass, and so on. The definition of the number two, "That is called 'two'" — pointing to two nuts — is perfectly exact. — But how can the number two be defined like that? The person one gives the definition to doesn't know *what* it is that one wants to call "two"; he will suppose that "two" is the name given to *this* group of nuts! — He *may* suppose this; but perhaps he does not. He might make the opposite mistake: when I want to assign a name to this group of nuts, he might take it to be the name of a number. And he might equally well take a person's name, which I explain ostensively, as that of a colour, of a race, or even of a point [14] of the compass. That is to say, an ostensive definition can be variously interpreted in *any* case.

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Could one explain the word "red" by pointing to something that was *not red*? That would be as if one had to explain the word "modest" to someone whose English was poor, and one pointed to an arrogant man and said "That man is *not* modest". That it is ambiguous is no argument against such a form of explanation. Any explanation can be misunderstood.

But one might well ask: are we still to call this an "explanation"? — For, of course, it plays a different role in the calculus from what we ordinarily call an "ostensive explanation" of the word "red", even if it has the same practical consequences, the same *effect* on the learner. [p. 14 n.]

29. Perhaps someone will say, “two” can be ostensively defined only in *this* way: “This *number* is called ‘two’.” For the word “number” here shows what *place* in language, in grammar, we assign to the word. But this means that the word “number” must be explained before that ostensive definition can be understood. — The word “number” in the definition does indeed indicate this place — the post at which we station the word. And we can prevent misunderstandings by saying “This *colour* is called so-and-so”, “This *length* is called so-and-so”, and so on. That is to say, misunderstandings are sometimes averted in this way. But does one have to take the words “colour” and “length” in just *this* way? — Well, we’ll just have to explain them. Explain, then, by means of other words! And what about the last explanation in this chain? (Don’t say: “There isn’t a ‘last’ explanation.” That is just as if you were to say: “There isn’t a last house in this road; one can always build an additional one.”)

Whether the word “number” is necessary in an ostensive definition of “two” depends on whether without this word the other person takes the definition otherwise than I wish. And that will depend on the circumstances under which it is given, and on the person I give it to.

And how he ‘takes’ the explanation shows itself in how he uses the word explained.

30. So, one could say: an ostensive definition explains the use — the meaning — of a word if the role the word is supposed to play in the language is already clear. So if I know that someone means to explain a colour-word to me, the ostensive explanation “That is called ‘sepia’ ” will enable me to understand the word. — And one can say this, as long as [15] one does not forget that now all sorts of questions are tied up with the words “to know” or “to be clear”.

One has already to know (or be able to do) something before one can ask what something is called. But what does one have to know?

31. When one shows someone the king in chess and says “This is the king”, one does not thereby explain to him the use of this piece — unless he already knows the rules of the game except for this last point: the shape of the king. One can imagine his having learnt the rules of the game without ever having been shown an actual piece. The shape of the chess piece corresponds here to the sound or shape of a word.

However, one can also imagine someone’s having learnt the game without ever learning or formulating rules. He might have learnt quite

simple board-games first, by watching, and have progressed to more and more complicated ones. He too might be given the explanation “This is the king” — if, for instance, he were being shown chess pieces of a shape unfamiliar to him. This explanation again informs him of the use of the piece only because, as we might say, the place for it was already prepared. In other words, we’ll say that it informs him of the use only if the place is already prepared. And in that case it is so, not because the person to whom we give the explanation already knows rules, but because, in another sense, he has already mastered a game.

Consider this further case: I am explaining chess to someone; and I begin by pointing to a chess piece and saying “This is the king; it can move in this-and-this way”, and so on. — In this case we shall say: the words “This is the king” (or “This is called ‘the king’”) are an explanation of a word only if the learner already ‘knows what a piece in a game is’. That is, if, for example, he has already played other games, or has watched ‘with understanding’ how other people play — *and similar things*. Only then will he, while learning the game, be able to ask relevantly, “What is this called?” — that is, this chess piece.

We may say: it only makes sense for someone to ask what something is called if he already knows how to make use of the name.

We can, after all, imagine the person who is asked replying: “Decide what to call it yourself” — and now the one who asked would himself be answerable for everything.

32. Someone coming into a foreign country will sometimes learn the language of the inhabitants from ostensive explanations that they give him; and he will often have to *guess* how to interpret these explanations; and sometimes he will guess right, sometimes wrong.

And now, I think, we can say: Augustine describes the learning [16] of human language as if the child came into a foreign country and did not understand the language of the country; that is, as if he already had a language, only not this one. Or again, as if the child could already *think*, only not yet speak. And “think” would here mean something like “talk to himself”.

33. But what if someone objected: “It is not true that one must already be master of a language-game in order to understand an ostensive definition: rather, one need only — obviously — know (or guess) what the person giving the explanation is pointing at. That is, whether, for example, at the shape of the object, or its colour, or the number and so on.” — And what does ‘pointing at the shape’, ‘pointing at the colour’,